

## THE ADVENTURES OF THE WING

### THE ROOT OF EVIL

ANGRY YELLS RENT THE AIR, causing the feathered folk to quickly shut their doors and windows. Only the slightly braver shopkeepers left their wares out and doors open, although their eyes did fearfully roam in the general direction of the outburst. The poorer districts of the capital were not heavily patrolled by the guards, and the criminals preyed upon the more helpless individuals who were known to give the least resistance, or the ones with no weapons at their disposal.

The screams grew louder in volume and, suddenly, the sound of another voice joined the terrified shouts.

“You are lying to me, old man!” The large black rooster pulled the old shopkeeper up off of his feet, pushing him roughly against the stone wall of his humble shop. “Where is the gold?” he demanded harshly.

The older rooster attempted to speak but could only choke unintelligibly, causing the ruffian to let him fall onto the hard ground with a distinct thud.

From the ground the old rooster coughed out. “Please believe me! That is all I have!” His pain-filled eyes pleaded for mercy to the one standing angrily above him.

“You will tell me where your gold is or die!” He punctuated his words by pulling a gleaming dagger from its scabbard at his side.

The old rooster’s eyes widened in terror at the sight of the fearsome blade, but before he could open his mouth a voice spoke from behind his abuser.

“You’ve been avoiding me.”

The skin on the criminal’s face blanched slightly in fear

as he slowly turned to face the speaker, who was a large black and white rooster with a black mask covering half his face around the eyes and upper beak, and a matching black cape. “I haven’t been avoiding you, Wing.”

“I went to all that trouble putting up those flyers for you to meet me, and you never showed.” The Wing stood up straight from where he had been leaning against a nearby house and took a step into the narrow street. “I suppose it’s been all the thieving and pillaging you’ve been busy doing.”

“A rooster’s gotta make a livin’,” the thief retorted defiantly.

“It must be hard for cowardly thieves, such as yourself, to survive without preying upon the helpless individuals who have an occupation that benefits society.”

The black rooster’s face registered puzzlement as he attempted to digest the Wing’s sentence. “What?”

The Wing spoke very slowly, making sure the ruffian heard every word. “Lazy. Thief. Rob. Hardworking. Rooster.”

The thief’s eyes grew wide with rage as he swiftly dropped his dagger and yanked his sword out of its sheath. “Nobody talks to me like that! Not even the Wing!”

“Aha! So maybe we’re not so cowardly after all!” the Wing complimented heartily as he blocked the thief’s first lunge with his own sword and easily leaned to the side to allow the second attempt to slice harmlessly by his right side. “Maybe we’re not so talented, either.”

“You stop that!” the ruffian shouted furiously, his eyes slightly red around the edges.

“So basically you’re a thug with no talent with a blade, which explains—” the Wing glanced around the rooster to view the old shopkeeper, who was watching from where he lay on the ground “—your choice of victims.” He lunged at the thief, hitting the rooster on the side of his face with the flat of his sword, which gained him an angry

snarl. Wing sent the old shopkeeper a grin. “No offence, Sir. I’m sure you were quite the fighter in your youth.”

The old rooster managed a smile in return.

Now thoroughly incensed with rage, the thief swung his sword at the lithe, caped rooster only to be disappointed again when his sword was deflected and he received yet another swift dash on the side of his face for his efforts.

“The shoe is on the other foot tonight, is it not?” the Wing offered with a chuckle. “Perhaps if you find your way out of prison you can discover another old and decrepit individual, since those seem to be the only ones you can best with a blade.”

“Ahhhhh!” the thief yelled as he ran toward the Wing, his sword held viciously in front of him, intending to run the glib rooster through.

Wing stepped quickly to the side, allowing the bandit to sweep by him, and watched as he crashed headfirst into the stone wall of the adjacent house.

“How disappointing,” he sighed mournfully, as the body of the criminal fell to the ground in an unconscious heap.

Turning to help the groaning shopkeeper to his feet, he asked, “Are you well, my friend?”

“Nothing’s wrong with me that some rest and quiet won’t fix,” the old rooster muttered with a flinch as he gingerly tested his wing for any breaks. “I thought I was dead there for a minute. Would have been, too, if you hadn’t come along.” He gazed up at the Wing and his eyes bespoke the gratefulness that welled up in his voice. “You are a kind rooster to fight for the likes of us poor folk. I thank you.”

“Has he robbed you before? I will match what was stolen from you if you will give me the amount.”

Before the Wing could reach for the money the old rooster quickly stopped him. “He has stolen nothing from

me, for I had nothing to give him.” His eyes became fiery as he said with annoyance, “The king has already taken what little money I had.”

The Wing’s earnest gaze became incredulous. “The king took your money? Did he come himself?”

“No, he sent his thievin’ palace guards to take it from me,” the old rooster’s voice trembled with anger as he recalled the smirking faces of the guards as they took his hard-earned gold. “I pay my taxes, but they insisted that my money was the king’s.”

“I see,” the Wing mused thoughtfully. “Did they have any proof of what they claimed?”

The rooster nodded sadly. “They had a letter with the signet of the king himself on it.”

This piece of information was indeed important. He pulled his money pouch from where it was tied to his belt and dropped it at the shopkeeper’s feet. “I insist that you take this. As for me, I intend to put these imposters where they belong and stop this shameful extortion.”

And with those words he swiftly disappeared around the corner away from the astonished old rooster.

\* \* \*

The king’s court was abuzz with noise as John stepped inside to await the king’s grand entrance. As the military advisor for the realm he held an important position, but it was not a position that brought him into a close personal relationship with King Dude. The one closest to the king was Friedrich—or Freddie, as most called him. A rooster from a rich and notable family, he had a pleasant countenance and mottled grey plumage that he kept perfectly groomed at all times. He was also the head chancellor to the king, which gave him more power than anyone in the room.

The room suddenly became quiet as King Dude made his entrance and sat on his throne with a flourish. Queen Mercy followed him and quietly sat down with no theatrics or overly dramatic display of self-importance. Freddie stepped close to the king, making sure he was easily accessible.

“This session will begin now,” the king stated magnanimously.

John quickly stepped forward, eager to address the court with the disturbance from the night before. “I have learned through sources in the city that there are individuals stealing from citizens in the name of the king.”

The king considered his words gravely. “Who are these individuals you speak of? And how dare they use my name at all, let alone for such a despicable act?”

“They are guards in your very palace, your eminence,” John explained, “And they are not only doing this in your name, but they have a written command with your signet on it.”

“That is preposterous!” Freddie cried indignantly. “How would palace guards gain the king's signet for even a short amount of time? It is impossible.”

The queen suddenly spoke when it appeared that her husband was puzzled by the conflicting opinions, one from an unknown advisor and the other from his trusted chancellor. “Perhaps it would be best to hear from the source and gain the knowledge first hand, my lord. Maybe that will shine light on this situation.”

“Yes,” the king muttered, sending his wife a frown of displeasure at her quietly spoken words, obviously not at all happy with her input. Turning his attention abruptly back to John, he ordered, “Give the name of this source to my chancellor, Friedrich, and he will ascertain whether this matter is worth investigating or not.” At Freddie's nod of approval the king turned to give John a dismissive wave of his wing.

John gave the king a bow of respect before melting back into the crowd. He was not pleased with the outcome of his speech, and it was clear, when he sent an inquisitive glance toward the queen, that neither was she.

\* \* \*

Late that night the old shopkeeper was awakened out of a deep sleep by insistent pounding upon his door. With his body still aching from the beating he had received a mere day ago it took him quite a bit longer to reach it than before, but before he could reach the wooden door it burst open with a crash.

His eyes widened in alarm as he beheld the viciously grinning palace guards. He remembered their faces all too well. "What are you doing here? You already took all of my money!" His voice shook with fear as well as anger.

"We're here for you this time, old man," one replied with a laugh into the astonished rooster's face.

"But what have I done?"

The other guard grabbed the objecting rooster, tying his wings roughly behind his back. "You've been telling stories about us, and now you will have to be taken care of."

The shouts of the old shopkeeper were muffled by a rag that was stuffed into his beak, which made his disappearance mostly silent and quite mysterious to his neighbors the next morning.

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The sun shone brightly through the large windows in the king's court, illuminating the gray feathers of the chancellor and causing them to shine with a subtle

brilliant green as he bowed low before the king and queen.

Both sovereigns regarded the rooster with interest as he began his address.

“I have thoroughly investigated the matter brought to our attention only yesterday by Sir John and have found it to be simply hearsay. With no solid proof to accompany his story it is my belief that we should move on to more important matters. Matters bearing an element of truth.”

The king frowned with uncertainty. “What of his source?”

Freddie smiled at the king—a little smugly John thought. “His so-called source was nowhere to be found, my liege, and this is what has brought me to the conclusion that someone, though I do not know whom, is being dishonest with us.” He sent John a suspicious frown, causing swift anger to overtake him at the unjust accusation.

John quickly intervened. “The Great Caretaker is my witness that my words were spoken only in truth.” Desperation did not cloud his words for he was not afraid, but he would not allow the Chancellor to blight his honour.

The king was quiet as he considered what his next action should be, and finally he ordered seriously, “I consider this unfortunate business finished, and that this...” He hesitated, not remembering John’s name; the queen quickly murmured next to him, too quietly for anyone to hear. “...this Sir John was misled.” He gazed regally around the room. “The matter is settled.”

John watched as Freddie sent the king a humble bow before retreating to his place at his side. This matter may have been settled in the king’s mind but it was definitely not settled for him. He would find the culprit, even if he had to do it without the help of the crown.

\* \* \*

The Wing walked soundlessly down the darkened street until he reached the storefront, where he stopped to study his surroundings. The cold wind moaned lonesomely down between the shabby homes and storefronts, blowing on his cape and causing him to pull it back around him for warmth. This street did not feel like a friendly place at night, but he had long since learned to appreciate the darkness in his line of work.

He kept an eye out for anything that would give him a clue as he walked toward the shop, though he did not expect to find much. The door was slightly ajar and swung open freely, and upon closer inspection he noticed the door had been forced. When he stepped inside he was disgusted to find the home already looted—with any valuables stolen, no doubt.

Hearing the sound of voices outside he stepped into a dark corner and allowed two young ruffians to enter the building.

“I thought we already hit this place?”

“Yeah, I know, but I wanted to make sure we didn’t leave anything. We may not have another chance. Do you have the candles?”

“I’m lighting them now.”

The youngsters lit their candles and were shocked as they beheld the cloaked figure standing before them.

Before they could turn to flee in terror, Wing offered them a proposal. “How would you like to earn some money honestly?”

The vandals exchanged wary glances as they digested the Wing’s words.

Wing continued, his voice becoming stern with reproof. “My condition for your employment is that you return all you have stolen from this place. If you do not return the



stolen items, regardless of what you decide regarding my offer, I will hunt you down and see that you pay one way or another.” When the youngsters nodded fearfully at him he gave them a friendly smile. “Well then, I look forward to meeting you back here tonight where we will discuss our business agreement and you will return this place to its former glory.”

He didn’t wait for their reply but quickly swept out of the room, leaving them in a befuddled state of confusion over what had just transpired.

\* \* \*

Days later, John approached Freddie outside the courtroom after a finished session.

“I have some more information about the thieves that I thought you might want to give to the king.”

At John’s quiet declaration, Freddie stopped to give him an apologetic look. “You know we do take thievery seriously, John, but only when there is proof.”

John nodded. “I understand, Freddie, but I thought you would be interested to know that I now have another source. One I am sure speaks the truth.” His two young city spies had indeed earned their pay when they had informed him of the poor seamstress working hard to support her family and an ailing husband. “It is a young hen, also from the poorer district, who has been stolen from only last night. She also speaks of palace guards and the king’s signet.”

Freddie’s face became a frown of distress. “If you are right then this certainly is a terrible injustice. I will look into this personally.”

“I humbly offer my assistance, Chancellor.”

“That won’t be necessary, my friend,” Freddie responded affably. “Now, tell me the name of this hen and

I will take care of this unfortunate business once and for all.”

John watched the grey rooster walk away with a pleased smile of his own on his face. The trap was now set.

\* \* \*

Quiet and dimly lit streets greeted the two grim soldiers as they made their way stealthily toward a darkened home.

“How are we gonna take care of this hen?” one guard hissed apprehensively to the other. “She has chicks and a husband.”

“We’ll just have to take all of them.”

His indifferent answer was met with more nervousness. “All of them? When I agreed to do this you never told me it would involve hens and their chicks.” He stopped to grab the fellow by the wing angrily. “I don’t like this! Where are we going to take them anyway?”

“Where, indeed,” the sinister voice spoke from the shadows behind them. “What do you intend to do to the five innocent lives you were going to kidnap tonight?”

The two soldiers quickly pulled out their swords as the cloaked figure materialized from the darkness. “That any soldier of the Feathered Fleet, sworn to serve his people and his God, would stoop so low as to steal from the very poorest of the ones he is sworn to protect is an absolute disgrace.” The Wing’s masked eyes were filled with disgust as he glared at the roosters.

They swiftly recognised the black caped hero, and the more fearful of the two took a hasty step backward. His comrade stared back at Wing defiantly.

“This is the king’s business, you bandit, and none of yours.”

The Wing took an angry step forward and pulled his

sword, eagerly facing the scowling soldier. He spoke in a low, angry voice. "I make it my business to defend the rights of the poor and defenseless, even from the king himself." His eyes suddenly sparked with mischief as he added, "Oh, and by the way, I spoke with Freddie this morning."

The defiance that brewed dangerously in the eyes of the rooster became fury. "That dirty traitor!" he growled in indignation. "It was his idea all along! He approached us with the promise of gold."

"I'm sure you must feel betrayed," the Wing responded sympathetically as he pulled two thick pieces of cord from his belt. "Especially after doing all the more unscrupulous work."

"You're right about that," the rooster agreed, and received a nod from his fellow conspirator.

"Well you certainly shouldn't let the fiend get away with it!" Wing declared passionately. "You should make sure he pays for his crimes!"

"Yeah!" they agreed, their own voices ardent with emotion.

The Wing sheathed his sword as he suggested pleasantly to the two villains, "If you will tie one another up then I will take you to the palace where you will be able to see this knave get what he deserves!"

After they were tied one rooster finally asked the Wing, "So what did Freddie tell you?"

The Wing sent the soldier a roguish grin. "He wished me a good morning."

\* \* \*

The first thing Friedrich noticed when he approached the courtroom was the silence. He wondered at it, but never suspected anything amiss. His life and finances seemed to

be going particularly well for him these last few weeks, and, being a rather vain individual, he was not one to become overly concerned. Especially when he assumed that he had taken care of every possible variable. Only a few more weeks and he would have enough to move forward with his disappearing act, leaving the foolish guards to take the punishment for their evil deeds. A contented smile covered his face as he pushed open the doors and stepped inside.

What met him upon his entrance caused him to go still with surprise and alarm.

The room was empty except for the king and the young military advisor, who was fairly new to the court.

“I must say that I am disappointed in you, Friedrich.”

The king’s words filled the rooster with dread, but he recovered his voice quickly. “What have I done to displease you, my King? All these years it has been my great pleasure to serve—”

He was rudely interrupted when the king stood up in rage. “You have served only yourself by stealing from my people!”

“It is false, my liege!” he cried indignantly, sending Sir John a glare. “He is covering up his own crime by incriminating me, and I have a poor family that will prove my words true.”

“Is it the young family you sent the traitorous thieves to collect last night?”

The king’s words caused him to go cold, and he suddenly realized that his crimes had finally caught up with him.

“We apprehended the two officers last night,” John explained grimly, “and they have confessed to all of their crimes. They have also implicated you in their dastardly racketeering.”

Freddie scowled unpleasantly at them but was silent. He knew that his time had ended.

“Take him away immediately,” the king ordered, anger still evident in his voice. “I do not want to see his face ever again!”

As the guards lead the chancellor away, the king turned to John in gratefulness. “I owe you a debt of gratitude, Sir John. If you had not pursued this matter as you did, that traitor would still be my close confidant.”

“It was my honor,” John responded humbly, sending the king a bow.

In his heart he felt peace but also a great sadness, for though he had indeed stopped the injustice as he had promised, he had not done it in time to prevent the old one’s murder.

Thus does good not always prevail before evil has done some damage.

## WHAT CAN WE LEARN?

### **Holy Bible, 1 Timothy 6:10**

But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

Did you notice how all of the evil in this story came from greed? The originator of the plan to steal money from the people was a greedy court official. He used greedy soldiers to carry it out. Even the oafish thug in the beginning was greedy.

Did you know that Satan was greedy in the beginning? The Bible records that he said:

### **Holy Bible, Isaiah 14:13-14**

“I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.”

It also indicates in another place that his heart was lifted up—that he became prideful. Indeed, how prideful would Satan have to be to believe that he could actually take the things that he said he would take? Greed—or covetousness, which the Bible says is idolatry, the worship of gods other than the one true God—coupled with the pride to think that he could achieve and that he deserved what he wanted to have was his downfall.

Yet, did you know that each one of us has to watch out for greed in ourselves? If the love of money is really a root of all evil, then even the evil that our own flesh is vulnerable to has its roots in greed.

Greed can blind our eyes to other evils. That is why they say, “Every man has a price.” Put enough money in front of a man and he can begin to justify all sorts of wrong or shady things, just like the thug at the beginning of the story did when he said, “A rooster’s gotta make a livin’.”

Yet greed is not only in money, but also in things, and sometimes the sinful price that we pay is not in acquiring the thing, but in the effect that the thing has on our lives. Anything that we really want—that we covet or lust after—can blind our eyes to the evil influence that that thing might bring into our lives or the lives of our family members.

God, give me the understanding to identify covetousness—greed—in my life, and the strength to resist it. Amen.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Rachel is a musician and songwriter who sang and played guitar in a bluegrass band with her three sisters for several years. All that changed quickly when she got married and started a family of her own. She has always dreamed of two things: being a mom and writing books. It is difficult to do those two things at the same time, but with all the books on her to-write list, let's hope that she has the opportunity to delight many readers to come!



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