

A Two-Man Job

There were two things you'd be sure to find walking in the Old Maiden: cheap drinks and patrons fighting. The latter made snatching that bottle of rum easy for Graves. He wasn't there for the drunken fist fight circus that seemed to be the night's entertainment, nor was he here for the drinks actually. Bilgewater had better places with finer alcohol and prettier company for that, but since he was stuck here on business, might as well enjoy the place's admittedly mediocre perks.

With one eye on the brawl, he dragged a chair in front of the fireplace. The warmth seeping into his bones was a welcome feeling as it chased away the unrelenting dampness of Bilgewater's rainy days. Relishing the sensation, he sat down and propped his feet up on the hearth, booted toes edging dangerously close to the fire. With a content sigh, he laid down his shotgun and took a couple of swigs from the bottle. All in all, things could be worse!

The cacophony of the drunken crowd was a welcoming sound, lulling him into a false sense of familiarity and comfort. In places like these, it's the silence you had to be wary of, but given the loud cheers, things were going pretty well! Maybe not for Fate though; it seemed his nightly con had resulted in fists rather than fortune.

Graves grinned wildly at that thought. Partners or not, seeing Fate take a few punches was fine entertainment. Even though they had worked out that whole betrayal and Twisted Fate leaving him to rot in jail thing, Graves wasn't over enjoying a little payback. After all, the business they had to conduct could wait a few more bruises. All the time Graves needed to indulge himself with his favorite foible.

He sank back into the chair and took out a cigar from his inner jacket pocket. Reverently, he brought it to his lips, already savoring in his mind the delicious and heady first whiff of fine tobacco. A smile of anticipation on his face, he grabbed his lighter. As the flame lit the tip and as Graves was about to take his first puff, a card flew before his eyes, chopping the cigar in half.

A low growl came past his lips, and with a menacing stare, he laid eyes upon the culprit.

"Sorry," mouthed Fate in his direction when he caught Grave's threatening stare. An apology soon forgotten as he dove in front of another punch that the giant thug was throwing at him.

A frown of discontent plastered on his face, Graves picked up the card that stole half his moment of indulgence. A three of clubs, really? Fate could have at least had the decency to put a damper on his fun with the beginning of a winning hand! With a huff of disdain, he threw the card into the fire, enjoying seeing that nasty piece of paper burn to ashes.

Still, he had half a cigar left and he would savor every inch of it! Until that was done, Fate could very well be gathering his teeth with broken fingers, he wouldn't care!

Once again, Graves grabbed his lighter and approached it from the tip of his cigar. This time, nothing prevented him from achieving his goal and he took a well-deserved first puff. Eyes half closed, he savored the tingling feeling of his toes unfreezing by the fire and the strong smell of smoke titillating his palate.

He was about to take another puff when Twisted Fate, ejected from the fight by a well-placed uppercut, came crashing into his chair. Graves caught himself in time to avoid being jostled into the fire, but his prized cigar wasn't so lucky.

Smoke could've well been coming out of Graves' ears as the last piece of his cigar went up into flames.

"All right, pretty face, it's between you and me now!" He said as he stood up and grabbed Fate by the collar.

"Hey, I ain't finished with him yet."

Graves threw a glance in the direction of the street thug involved in the fight. "You had your chance." He said, his gaze turning back to Fate. "Now, it's my turn."

Without further warning, he punched Fate right in the face. The blow sent him crashing into a nearby table where two men of finer look than the local crowd were sharing a bottle.

As Fate scrambled to regain his footing, almost landing into the lap of the guy with a protruding paunch, Graves went for his shotgun. With one swift move he lodged a clip in the barrel and pointed the gun at Fate.

"Lights out!"

One loud bang and a lot of coughing and confusion later, Graves passed through the doors, Fate in tow, leaving behind a tavern filled with a thick and dark smoke.

"Did you have to punch me that hard?"

"You went for the cigar!" he said to Fate, the pair walking away as if nothing happened.

"Hey! I had to piss you off to make it believable. You're not that good an actor!"

Graves rolled his eyes, mumbling in his beard something inappropriate about con artists and their inflated ego.

"You got it I hope?" he asked once his muted rant was over.

"Who do you take me for? Some common pickpocket?" Fate answered as he produced a crystalline key and passed it to Graves. "The guy has no idea I stole it. We'll be in and out of the guild's vault before he realizes it."

Graves took some time to inspect the key, just to make sure it was the real deal.

"You'll be in an out! I ain't going into any vault with you, partner," he said, throwing the key back at Fate. "Not after last time!"