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## Little Trolls

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## Little Trolls

Disclaimer: this story has much to do with police violence, systemic oppression, and execution.

Rain was beating down harder than the glass of whiskey I was finishing up. As I slouched further into my wooden chair, the back creaking as my weight shifted beneath my round stomach and heavy leather trench coat, I slowly forgot that I was at work and not at my lounge back home. It was a slow night, a slight reprieve. In the darkness of my cramped office, all I had with me were my thoughts and my whiskey. I was running out of whiskey.

A person knocked on my door, a dark silhouette displaying their features against the glazed window. "Come in" I barely make out before an odorous and deafening burp rings from my throat.

"Good evening detective. Started drinking already, I see?" the figure chirped at me with snark to spare. He was covered in water, absolutely drenched. He removed his hat and scarf, laying them across my coat rack before standing in front of my desk. He had long ears and a pronounced chin, and given the badge on his chest, he must have been an elf from central headquarters.

"Can't you see I'm quite busy right now? What do you want?" I let out, preparing myself to the headache that is dealing with elves.

"I promise detective Ruhan, this won't take but a minute. I'm just here to deliver some new orders," the elf put a set of documents in manilla folders. Each folder had a name written on top with a selection of mugshots and information on each of the criminals. There were three folders in total. "We recently had three escaped convicts make the run on us last week, one of

them magical. Headquarters has tried to keep this an internal job, but we need more bodies investigating these three men, and you've pulled off miracles before."

His back was arched over with his fingers draping over each file, taking the time to name each of the men who escaped. Barney, Christopher, and Fergus were the three men, all trolls. "Why do you need my help bringing them in? Don't you have headhunter mages that can snoop them out with magic?" Headquarters had a lot of mages on payroll, and I didn't have a lick of magic on my soul to help me out.

The elf laughed as he began to sit on my desk. "Whoever said about taking them in?" I raised an eyebrow. He pulled out another set of pictures, this time an elven cop laying in a pool of blood. "They are cop killers. They killed one of our boys," his eyes narrowed. "There have been some investigations into my department. I can't do anything about this the way I want it handled. That's why I need you."

"I'm not sure how I feel about being paid to kill some men, even if they are cop killers. Hell, look at Fergus! This guy can't be older than 19. His horns have barely grown in!"

"Detective, please. They were already sentenced, and they cannot be trusted in a cell, else they will escape again. I can tell you are apprehensive, and I assure you, HQ will get you the best lawyers for your defense. You will also be rewarded handsomely," he began to write a figure down, and my eyes widened. "I came here because you work miracles, or are you going to tell me that the Gleise case last year was a fluke? Give me a call when you have an answer for me," he passed me his card. Agent Zela, head of magical investigations.

He left my office, putting his hat back on like some token of authority.

I folded through the men's dossiers. All I had to do was end the lives of three trolls. Three trolls that killed a cop. Three trolls that deserve it. The pictures stained my eyes, imagining each of their faces in their own puddles of blood. And the dead cop... could've been me there. Still might've become me.

I finished my whiskey glass, now warm. I made for the phone and felt the click clack of the phone's keys, as I entered Zela's number. As I waited for the line to pick up, I opened my gun drawer and pulled out a box of steel core rounds.

I've taken my time tracking Barney, the largest and oldest in the group. The local street urchins near his old apartment tell me he's a hulking thing at 9 feet tall. One of them held up a basketball with both of hands, said Barney could hold up a basketball in one hand. I gave the kid a dollar and told him to split.

It was a messy street in Trog-Town. Orks and trolls walked the streets down here. Heard plenty of horror stories of humans and elves getting mugged or worse. Trash littered every corner, and in the darkness of overcast, sometimes I got the sensation I was being watched from the piles of garbage. That stacked the streets and gutters.

Barney had been holing himself up at friends' places and corner motels. Looked like a storm ripped through it with clothes thrown about the floor. His mattress had been ripped apart, and there was fuzz and stuffing trailing across the floor. Like a stuffed animal homicide.

A collection of photographs were stuck to the wall inside of his bathroom. The smell of his uncleaned toilet burned my eyes. He was in some of the photos, standing next to other trolls, orks, and even a few dwarves and humans. I pulled some off the walls, getting a better look at them. In more than half the pictures, a dwarf keeps appearing. A stout, small dwarf woman with large secondary sexual features and cheap make-up. The two seemed very close, given all the pictures of her sitting on his lap and a remarkably scantily clad picture of them kissing on top of a comically large bowling ball next to a parking lot. I recognized the bowling ball statue! The bowling alley on Turnover Ave and Kurt owned that thing. Turning the photos over, the name Carla was penned a few times.

I set out for the alley, closing the door to the apartment and returned the key to the owner. On the car ride, I felt my handgun on my ribcage. It felt cold.

The alley was busy that day. A birthday party for some bratty kid took up 7 of the 19 lanes. Tykes were eagerly waiting their turns to roll their balls with the larger children sporting greater scores. A pair of unsupervised kids, a human and an elf, were loitering next to a claw game with some other cheap prize games, far away from the lanes the children's parents reserved for them. The elf was trying to reach her hand into the machine, cheating the game by stealing a plush toy instead of winning it. I walked past them, as I had better things to do than parent kids that weren't mine.

At the concessions desk, a bored teenager wrote down in a book. "Excuse me. Do you know of a "Carla" that frequents this place?" I asked her as I showed her a picture.

The teenager frowned and got up from her seat, marching to the back of the concessions, past a blackboard with dates scribbled with chalk, and through a door. A few minutes later, a dwarf came from the door and walked to the counter. She pulled out a step stool from under the counter and stood on it. "Can I help you, sir?"

"Yes, you can. My name is detective Ruhan. I'm trying to find Barney, a large troll that I think you know."

"Sorry detective, I haven't seen Barney in a while. He was taken to prison, recently."

"Ah, yes. He recently escaped with a couple others. You were his girlfriend, right?"

Her eyes wandered, and she was noticeably growing uncomfortable with her shifting her weight between her feet. "You could say that. We went on and off."

"Well, do you know where he could have went? He's dangerous on the street, and we need to bring him in before he can cause more unjust harm."

"I don't think he's that type of person-."

"What was that?"

"I simply don't think Barney is the harmful type. He's a close friend, and I'm confident this is all just a big mistake."

"Even so, he's an escaped convict. I need to know anything you know about where he might be. It'll make everyone a lot safer once he serves his time."

She sighed, getting tired of the conversation. "Yes, but I don't know where he is. I simply have not the faintest clue. If I'm being honest, I'm a bit insulted he didn't come to me first, if he did escape" she said with her eyes closed.

"So, you two are close."

"We were friends! I mean, we went on and off. What does that have to do with anything, anyways?" she shouted. "I haven't done anything wrong, and I already told you: I don't know anything. If you don't want to rent a lane, please get out."

Sensing an opportunity, I stood there for a few moments and checked my watch. Double checking the blackboard, Carla should be getting off work within the next 2 hours. "No, I don't have any more questions. Have a good day," I tipped my fedora and walked out of the establishment. Crossing the parking lot, I boarded my car and adjusted my rearview mirrors.

I waited.

Carla walked out, purse in hand, to her car. As she got in and pulled out of the parking lot, I tailed her a few car lengths away, being careful not to have her see me.

Driving across town, she parked in front of a condo in a suburban cul-de-sac. Not letting my car be seen, I parked a block away in a parallel street. It was beginning to become night, and a small forest sat between me and the home. I left my car and made my way to the house. I felt the steel of my handgun grow colder.

Making my way to the house, the internal lights slowly came on as Carla entered. In the backroom sat Barney with a suitcase full of clothes open on the floor. He was laying on the

couch, watching something on the television. He called out to her, and She began to pull the blinds down over the windows. I grew closer, as the blinds obfuscated my approach.

“Barney, you absolutely cannot stay here,” I heard Carla from inside. “They came to my work today. The cops are tracking you, and I don’t think its safe for you to be here.”

A long silence followed, broken by the deep voice of a troll. “I don’t feel safe anywhere else. I was bleeding money at the motel, and I don’t think it was safe there either. Frank said some cop searched my place today.”

“Frank said that? Did he say what he was wearing?”

“Brown trench coat, fedora. Some detective or something.”

“Barn! You know what this means right? They are totally tracking you, and you need to get out of the city! This is serious! What if they use magic to track you or something.”

“I’m fine right here! If you want me to get off my ass, I will, but I don’t want to get nabbed. Please Carla, just let me stay a few more days. I’ll find someone to take me, but I need to stay here a little longer. Please?”

Another long silence. “Fine. Okay, just please work on it. I need a shower. Can you work on dinner?”

“Yeah! Yeah, I can make something. I’ll take care of it.”

I waited outside as he put some water on, and a jet of steam began to waft out of a second story window. Carla must be taking her shower.



My hand glided across the hatch for the back door. The door wasn't locked, so I opened it and crossed the threshold into the home. I lifted the gun in my hand, the metal felt icy with my forehead beading with sweat. My body felt heavy, and my chest was beating hard

I walked into the home and heard water boiling. The smell of noodles and burning tomato sauce flew across the room, and I brought the gun up. I turned the corner, slowly, waiting to get a better look at the troll.

I took another step, and his back was turned to me. He was working the pot, his large arms shifting as he stirred and tossed something. His horns curved inward, almost like a ram. His hand moved to a salt shaker, gripping it between his index and thumb when it would require my entire hand to get a good grip. He was a monster in size.

I drew a breath in and steadied my arm... Pointed my gun... He didn't see me.

The first shot didn't bring him down. He just fell over onto the stove, splashing scalding water across his chest before slipping, falling to the ground. I hurried across the room, training my gun on his chest, as he screamed and tried to get up. Steel core round can rip through bone and cartilage like its nothing, although trolls have a lot more than humans do. Tomato sauce was strewn across his face, and I could tell burns were already appearing through his tank top.

He didn't have a chance to even look at me. His face twisted in pain. I held my breath, and I pulled the trigger a few more times.

I fled the moment I heard wet steps sound from the upstairs bathroom. I bounded for the door, and I could make out a feminine scream, as I made my way to my car through the trees. I felt like I was being chased.

I ripped the car door open, immediately opening it again to vomit with chunky bits of food dripping across the pavement. My sweat mixed with my drool and puke.

I closed the door and sped off, dry heaving as I entered traffic.

Zela congratulated me on my work when I arrived back at my office over a phone call. I had already begun to work on a new bottle of whiskey, no ice. I let the warm, acrid liquid guzzle down my throat, my hands shaking when not holding the bottle. Zela had told me that nobody knew it was me, and that the hard part was far from over. Luckily, Christopher and Fergus were recently sighted at a travel agency preparing plane tickets to a neighboring country. I was sent to check the area. To confirm their whereabouts. He didn't console me. He barely recognized me. Damned elves.

After a time, I refilled my gun's magazine and set out again, mildly inebriated before becoming heavily intoxicated half-way there. I pulled up in front of the travel agency, sitting in my car a few moments before exiting. This was a human district, no wonder the two trolls got spotted her. The pavement was new with the headlights illuminating the road in a soft yellow glow that was easy to look at. It was, maybe, 8pm, and the agency was about to close. When I

opened the door to exit the car, I remembered something about Christopher amidst my drunken haze: he was a mage. He specialized in thunder spells, though his dossier did make him out to be a weaker specimen. Trolls area already dangerous, though, so any magic is just more fuel on the fire.

I disembarked the car, my legs refusing to move for a few moments before I steeled myself and made towards the desk through the door. A man sitting behind the desk talked to me “sorry sir, but we are closing soon. I’m afraid you’ll have to come tomorrow if you want to schedule any trips.”

“Yeah, hi. My name is detective Ruhan. I believe you had some troll customers come through here earlier.”

“Why, indeed they did. We don’t get many trolls or orks that often, so when they come by everyone knows about it.”

“What were their names?”

“Alexander Davis and Jewls Ganges,” fake names with fake identification. Zela’s information was good, and they would be the only two trolls there. Must’ve been them.

“Yes, yes. Can you tell me where they were going?”

“Ah, yes. Let me get out their request form,” he said before sifting through a load of documents in a file stored in one of the drawers. “Dremoth, a common heritage spot for trolls and orks looking to inquire about their history. They wanted tickets for a flight as soon as possible, and we managed to book them for one in a week.”

“Did they give you an address for where they were staying at?”

“Um...” he said, looking through the pages again. “No. We did ask them if they wanted the tickets to be delivered to their house, but they said it was not necessary. They would pick up the tickets sometime before their flight left. They already paid, so it was no hassle.”

“I see...” They definitely knew they were being targeted, and I didn’t want to stick around the agency or else they might get spooked. I was confident that they weren’t at their own homes, and tracking them down now would be close to impossible. They were on the run, but they needed to grab these documents, and if they grabbed them or sent someone to grab them, they could guide be straight to them. “Could you do me a favor? I need you to inform me when someone grabs their tickets. Its very urgent to my investigation.”

“Oh. Of course! I hope they didn’t do anything wrong. Is there something we should know about? They both passed their background checks and-.”

“No, no. Its quite alright. Just inform me immediately if they come in. Try and stall them if they do” I said as I scribbled my number on a piece of errant office paper.

Two days later, while I sat in front of my office window early in the morning, the sky dark with rain, I got a call. A troll matching the description of Christopher, the mage, was collecting the agency tickets. He was being held up by some paperwork, becoming more and more impatient.

I sped there in my car, feeling dizzy. Half-way, I took a few swigs of whiskey, somewhat stale and very warm.

I arrived to see Christopher leaving the travel agency. He had changed his hair, cutting it down to a buzzcut with his horns filed down to a fine point, like a crown. I could barely tell he was a mage until he flexed his hand while walking to the side alley, showing off a selection of avian-styled magical tattoos. I found him, but if I was going to find Fergus, I would need to tail Christopher.

I left my car, my feet feeling sluggish, as I made way for the alley. Christopher's large shoulders squeezed through the alley absent of trash and refuse. Rain began to fall as I followed. He made many turns, trying deliberately to stay off the street. A few times he swung around, trying to check to see if he was being followed. Each time, I hid, slinking into a corner or ducking behind a door.

Eventually he came to an opening, a large construction for a new skyscraper. I felt the gun grow cold in my hand again, rain dripping down my coat and onto my knuckles.

The alley's path led into a large puddle of water. Christopher waded through it, ankle deep, and turned a corner. Waiting for a few more moments, I crossed the puddle, being careful not to make ripples. As I turned the corner, a flash of light flew past my eyes. A massive electrical spark just missed my face. Christopher's arm was hot, water steaming off its wet surface. His face was contorted with fear, eyes wide.

I recovered and readied my gun, bracing against the wall. He let loose another lighting strike, blowing a chunk of concrete from my cover. I emerged and fired a burst. Two shots

missed, as he ducked behind a corner. The third shot landed, penetrating past the wall and into his arm. He screamed in pain, as I heard his feet stumble away.

I walked up to the next wall, stopping before I passed the corner. Taking off my fedora, I moved it past the corner. A second later, he made a thin burning hole through the hat with another flash of light. Energized, I moved up and aimed at Christopher, his coat licked with fire from the electrical shocks he was throwing.

I shot twice more, all center mass. As the bullets struck his body, he made no sound or movement. On the third shot, his hand gripped his chest. His other hand shot another blast. The shot connected, tearing into my coat and burning my torso's left side. Thankfully, the rain dripping off my body caught most of the charge, as I was shocked across my chest and arm. Thinking back, the water probably saved my life from a direct shock to my heart. I steadied again, bracing against the pain, as I fired four more shots.

Christopher went down.

He fell into a puddle, his hands trying to muster a healing spell to ease his pain. Christopher was unsuccessful, as he began to lose consciousness. My entire left side hurt, from my face to my foot. My arm fell limp, the nerves completely in shock, but in pain. Pain after a lightning spell is a good sign.

Taking my gun in my right hand, I went up to the troll. The gun felt cold again. He was twisted with his chest riddled with holes. His fingertips were swollen, bones visible from the magical electricity. Magic was dangerous as it is, but he had really hurt himself trying to attack me. His eyes were closed tightly, and his mouth was guttering something I couldn't make out.

This guy had taken a lot out of me. He hadn't taken me to Fergus like I hoped. Even then, I didn't want to tango with another Troll. I would have to start again to find Fergus... But then I heard a set of footsteps behind me.

I swung around, checking to see the sound.

A troll, no... a teenager. He had a clear raincoat on with a t-shirt and jeans underneath. A baseball cap with holes cut for his horns to fit. It was Fergus, and he couldn't have been older than 19.

My gun felt cold again, colder than it had before. My hand trembled, as I raised it, but I stopped. A flash of light illuminated the street. A loud thunderous crack from a bolt of lightning assailed the sky. The rain poured even more than before.

Some people think it rains because the Gods are crying, mourning for the land, the people, or something else. Did I have to make them cry even more?

Fergus stood there, like a deer. His hands were shaking. His mouth was quivering. He was waiting for me to make my move. But-

But he was just a kid... a kid.

"Hey. Hey, kid!" his eyes stared at me, a deer in headlights. His little horns glistening. "Get out of here.... Right now!" He didn't move.

"NOW! GET OUT OF HERE! RIGHT NOW!" I shoved my gun forward, my finger depressing the trigger. I couldn't find the strength to fire it.

He ran off, almost tripping in a puddle before turning a corner and sprinting away.

I don't know how long I stood there, looking at Christopher. He had died at this point. His head submerged in the watery street soup. Trembling, my body slowly recovered. Fergus was probably waiting for Christopher, protecting him from someone like me.

Today, I'm expecting another visit from Zela now that my paid leave is over. The court battle was short, just like Zela promised. It was nice to get away from the force... to relax after Barney, Christopher, and Fergus. Still, my letter for resignation is printed and ready for submission. Am I betraying the department by doing this? Is there something wrong with what I'm about to do? I still think about that kid, nearly every day. I hope he's doing alright. Can't say I hope the same about myself.

I can see Zela coming through the front door from my window with a manilla folder, same as before...

Could I pick up that gun again?