

**REBELLION & TYRANNY**  
AND OTHER STORIES

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## THE REBEL AND THE TYRANT

DONG, DONG, DONG, boomed the great bell in the Tower of Athanaric, making it known to all in Nârac that the noon hour had come.

This was the time when those who were out—specifically those who were out buying, bartering, trading, observing, and all the like—would return to their place of living and there commemorate the lunch-hour if they had not already. This was the time of day when plans and schemes were set aside for the briefest of whiles; for this was the midday.

But not so for Talëmar the Would-be-Street-Urchin. As he trudged up the long, stony path which led up to the houses and halls of Gabaranath, Lord of the City, his mouth was set in a hard line, and an unrelenting fierceness burned defiantly in the shadows of his sea-grey eyes. But beneath that facade, he was really quite glum, for he had been re-captured...again. This was the fifth time in the past three months to be exact, and it was only the twenty-second of June on this day.

Why, oh why, could he not stay *uncaught* for several months at the very least? Alas, he could find no answer to that. As a matter of fact, he seemed quite unable to find an answer to most everything lately.

Talëmar's hands were bound tightly behind his back with a small stretch of rope, but nothing else—this likely being so due to the inescapable fact that he was surrounded by a small ring of

sweating soldiers, wearing bright mail and holding sharp spears in their hands.

Beside Talëmar strode Taran, one of Lord Gabaranath's most trusted servants. He primarily served as his chief advisor and with his sharp wit and tongue, he able to, with good success, push Gabaranath to decisions that he otherwise might not have made. But for all his convincing words and conniving ways, he was kind, in his own way. Out of all the people that Talëmar had known during his 'stay' at Gabaranath's halls—more truthfully an imprisonment—Taran was the only one who had ever shown him any kindness.

But at the present moment, Taran was not smiling.

"Why can you not stay out of trouble and mischief for once in your life?" he said now, wearily wiping a hand across his brow. "These exploits and escapades of yours lead only to nothing but trouble and misfortune for you and all whom you associate yourself with."

"I am not Gabaranath's personal servant," snapped Talëmar, his expression darkening further.

"No, you are not," said Taran, even more wearily than before. "But if you continue to behave in this troublesome manner of yours, you may soon annoy his Lordship enough that he might revert to more, unfortunate options. And mind you!" he said on a sudden. "You are not to call your master by his given name alone. You are to refer to him at all times as *Lord Gabaranath*, nothing less."

Next year, it shall likely be *King Gabaranath* and after that, *Emperor*," spat Talëmar mockingly. "He evidently wasn't satisfied with 'Governor,' so he had that changed to 'Suzerain of the South,' and now, it's 'Lord' he wants. Well, I'll let you know that I'm tired of his petty games. I can call him anything I want and I will. *Swine's scum*, I name him, and I wish he were, for then I should

forever be freed of his wretched thumb, under which I am to cower like a weakling slave, without strength or honour.”

“You will hold your insolent tongue!” exploded Taran in sudden anger. His black eyebrows were bristling with an impatience grown over many months out of the gradual buildup of a tried temper. “I have stuck my neck out for you time and time again. Without me, you would have been worsted long ago! Well, I shall no more, and that’s final. If you can’t learn my way, then you shall have to learn the hard way, and know this! I shall not feel the last bit sorrowful for you when the profits of your reckless and foolish ways come crashing down on you like a precipitate thunderstorm out of the heavens—even if it be painfully hard beyond measure. I have lost all the patience that I may have once held for you. So mind you!” With that, Taran turned sharply away from him and stormed to the forefront of the group in order to summon the guards. They were nearing the gates that so barred Gabaranath’s halls.

*Blast his help for all I care, thought Talëmar. I can make well as I am able without it.* Inside his heart, he knew this to be untrue, but he was grown too proud to admit it to even himself, and that was the way of things.

The soldiers, who had kept a small distance between the two of them, were now snickering and whispering amongst themselves. However, the laughter quickly faded from their faces when Talëmar fixed his scorching eyes upon them, his furiousness at being humiliated, drawing it all the more acute.

When they turned away, winces still lingering on their faces, Talëmar turned his gaze forward, all glumness that might have once resided within him now wholly wiped away.

Now, there was only a burning anger. Anger at Gabaranath. Anger at the world and everyone in it. Anger at Taran, who had now turned his back on Talëmar, who had only desired a small taste of freedom. He was not the first to betray him.

Nor the last.

Before them, the wide stony path curled upwards for a small ways, before ending at the steps which ascended to the doors of the Governor's House. There presided Gabaranath, the cruel and traitorous governor, now proclaimed supreme sovereign of Nârac and a few of the surrounding lands.

They traversed the rest of the path, marching up the steps, until coming at last, to the great black doors of the Hall. Taran bade the guards open them, and they entered the Hall, save for the soldiers, who, having done their duty to escort them, now turned back the way they had come.

Inside, the room was half-lit, and it took Talëmar's eyes several moments to adjust to the too-familiar sight that lay before them.

Long benches and chairs lined the walls in the back. In the foremost of these sat perhaps a dozen different persons, most of them in chains. At the far end of the room was a small dais on which was situated a large seat wrought of stone. It was like to a throne, yet was not nearly magnificent enough to be called one. The floor was made of dark stone that was dull and rough in most places.

At the moment, Gabaranath was holding court for several men and women convicted of some wrongdoing or offense, and he was dealing out 'justice' as he called it—albeit in his own twisted form of it.

Taran, who had silently returned to Talëmar's side, intoned without looking at him, "Seat yourself, till the Lord Gabaranath calls upon you." Talëmar did so, though his face was haughty and dark.

A little ways away, Gabaranath glanced briefly at him and his face twisted into a partly-mocking, partly-sardonic smile. However, this lasted only for a moment, and he swiftly turned his gaze upon the man standing in front of him, having just finished with the

three men who had been standing there when Talëmar first walked in.

They had stolen some food from a shop, one of them to feed his starving family. Gabaranath had decreed that they should be hanged by dawn the next morning.

The man in front of him was haggard, and his ragged clothing was greatly disheveled. He looked as if he had spent the last few days in one of the rank cells that were Gabaranath's dungeons.

"What is this peasant's offense?" asked Gabaranath, turning to the man standing several feet away from him. The man glanced down a partly unfurled parchment scroll and read off, "Two months worth of unpaid taxes and evading his Lordship's soldiers."

Gabaranath turned back to the man in front of him. "Not paying your taxes for two months and avoiding my peacekeepers when I send them someplace to carry out my will are highly serious offenses. While the first annoys me more than the last, each is of no less consequence to the other. Now, why in all of Ared'dor would you commit these two *very* unfortunate offenses, when you were well aware of what would happen were you to so foolishly commit them?"

"I...I have not much money," said the man, his eyes flickering from the floor to Gabaranath in a nervous manner. "Not hardly enough to pay for such..." Here the man spluttered almost and coughed. "If you will forgive me the term, your excellency, the taxes you impose on the citizens of this city are somewhat...harsh. I have not been able to earn much money these past several months, and if I were to pay what you order of us, my family would die of starvation." The man was practically pleading with Gabaranath to understand.

"You are not forgiven," said Gabaranath, sourly. "However, I will wave such offensive disrespect this one time. As for the others, I shall not be so lenient. For these, you shall be sentenced to work in

the Stone-lands for four years: two for each offense, until I hold your debt fulfilled.

“But my family...” said the man, dread fear entering into his eyes. “How will they survive? They’ll starve to death or end up as lowlife on the under-streets, barely able to make it by. Is there not some other way?”

“The dungeons!” Gabaranath said suddenly as if he were just now happening on the idea. “They can stay in the dungeons until your four years are fulfilled. There, at least, they shall have food and drink, if not comfort. But survival is of more value than any comfort, I’ll warrant.”

“The dungeons?!” cried out the man in horror. “But there, the chances of them surviving are even lower than the former alternative!”

“Nonsense,” said Gabaranath, with another one of his fake smiles. “My prisons are the best that you’ll find around here.”

“Will you not show any mercy for poor souls such as myself?” whimpered the man. “Even if they were to survive, I would likely not. Four years in the Stone-lands is certain death. Hardly does fate allow those who are sent there to ever come back.”

“There is, indeed, some small chance that this could be so,” said Gabaranath. His mouth had now curved into a cruel smile. “But in any event, that is where you shall go, unless you will consent to send your family in your place. Only in that instance shall I show ‘mercy.’ Will you send them or go yourself? Which is it, knave?”

The man’s face had changed. Where there had once been despair, now only bitterness and anger remained. “I see now that there is only hate and disdain for those below you in your heart. I would never send my family in place. *Never.*”

“So be it,” said Gabaranath. “Guards, take him away.”

From the shadows of the Hall, two men in armour emerged and, grabbing the unfortunate man roughly by his shoulders, they escorted him from the building. As the dispirited man was dragged

by him, Talëmar caught a small glimpse of his face. It was beyond stricken: empty and devoid of anything, for hope had left him and death awaited.

Then, the doors to the Hall closed, and the man was gone.

From his seat, Talëmar seethed with anger. Looking at the people in the room around him, he wondered if there were any here who felt any sort of compassion for the doomed man. However, he saw naught on anyone's faces, and Taran's was stony, and he stared straight ahead, his eyes boring into nothingness.

*Is everyone too much afraid to stand up to Gabaranath's tyranny?* he wondered.

It seemed that it was so.

The next hour dragged by, much as it had before and it was only after Gabaranath had finished sentencing the rest of the offenders that he finally turned to him. He motioned for Taran to usher him near.

"You," he said, pointing a finger at Talëmar, "are greatly trying the patience of my most benevolent heart."

"Since when have you been benevolent in all your wretched life?" laughed Talëmar. "That's about as likely as me tearing apart the jaws of a dragon."

"Arrogant, foolish, and presumptuous knave!" shouted Gabaranath in anger. "I have fed you, clothed you, and given you a place in my halls, though you hardly deserve it. Do you then wish for the lordship of this city and the lands about it to rule for yourself? What more could you possibly want?"

"Nay," said Talëmar. "I wish for nothing of yours. To touch that which is yours would be to defile myself and that I will never do so long as I live. I merely ask for one thing, but that you shall never give to me."

"And what is that?!" sneered Gabaranath.

“My freedom,” Talëmar said. “To be forever freed from these halls and to never have to look upon your wretched face again. To be free to walk and live where I wish: that is what I want.”

“Freedom!” snorted Gabaranath. “Freedom?! That is what you wish?” He laughed. “What in Pergelion makes you think yourself deserving of freedom? As long as I live, so shall you live here also.” Shaking his head ominously, he said, “I give you one last chance, *boy*. One last chance. If you disobey me again or even think to trespass my laws, I will send you to that same place where I sent that pathetic earlier. I *will not* have my commands broken so often and disrespected as you have done to them. Begone! I have other matters that I must needs attend to.”

He turned and stalked back to the dais.