

Fly on the wall

Fly found himself wandering in the kind of place he tends to avoid, and may hope to forget about if he sees less of its kind. He came across a familiar female figure. Could it be Justice? Fly was not sure – he'd seen precious little of her lately. What was she doing in a place like this anyway? Perhaps Fly was dreaming.

'Hello, my dear,' he ventured.

'Hi. You still on my payroll?'

'In a manner of speaking,' Fly noticed that she had an ugly black eye. 'What happened there?'

'That's where the King hit me with his Buzzak'.

'Must have hurt.'

'Tell me about it.' Her voice was brittle.

'You look nervous, lass. Why are you skulking about like this?'

'The King is angry with me. He says I'm not looking after his people properly.'

'Him or his people?'

'He tends to think it's an insult to draw the distinction,' she scowled.

'But isn't that your job?'

'Not so loud.' She looked around nervously.

'So, what are you going to do?'

'I must carry on trying to do my job. I cannot let the King bully me. Mind you, he does make a few points worth bearing in mind. I've come to visit my niece, Social, who lives around here. The King pretends to like her a lot, but she always looks to me as if she can do with a few more morsels. Do you know her?'

Fly has a photograph of her on his wall. He likes to make it look as if they're friends. But they hardly visit. It takes so much time, and she's always hiding away in these damned dungeons. Filthy, these spots, and quite dangerous too. Fly often thinks he ought to make more time for her.

'Yes, but, ahem, haven't seen much of her lately. Why are you looking for her?'

'The King says I should be nicer to her.'

'He means to him, doesn't he?'

'I don't know. Anyway, the way I've been taught, the King ought to look after her himself, and I ought to try to keep everybody, including the King, from making mischief.'

'Given the circumstances, dear lady, you seem to be doing rather well.'

'Thanks. But I'm worried. The King's stronger than I am, and it's quite easy for him to make me look bad and to turn the crowds against me.'

'But you've had strong champions the last few years, to guard you.'

'Yes, but even my chief Champion thought I was over-reacting to the King's wrath. That confused me.'

'Me too, I must say. My dear lady, you really are looking very nervous. Is the area scaring you?'

'Well, I have to admit, I feel a lot more comfortable being pampered.' Justice gave a sad chuckle.

'Yes, and you have to admit – you *are* rather high maintenance.'

'I know. But a girl is at her best when made comfortable.'

'True. Someone has to keep your strength up. Social and her lot are hardly going to be of much help there, are they?' Fly was trying to be encouraging. It also felt better to be talking this way.

'You know,' Justice perked up, 'Social must learn that she ought to be more content with being brought out on parade and so on every few months, and not make too much noise from her dungeons. The King has been trying to get things moving. Her nagging doesn't help.'

'If he could hear you now,' Fly laughed, 'he'd be less concerned about your apparent waywardness.'

'Except that it is precisely my relationship with Social that he likes being cross about.'

'When people are listening.'

'Yes. Anyway, I now know that I must be a bit more careful. Need to sing the King's songs more often. It's not impossible for him to turn really nasty and sack me entirely.'

'Just don't let me down, my dear.'

'I won't, if you won't.' There was an entreating look in her eyes, as if she knew that friends were few.

Before Fly could answer, he was transported from the gloomy parts and awoke to the smell of a terrific breakfast. What weird dreams we have, thought Fly. □



'... an ugly black eye.'