

MONSTER STORY:
GIBBERLING

I cursed the fools
under my breath.

Quiet, I said, silent
as a mouse.

The lumbering oaf knocking over the stone pillars left and right. The insolent tracker who wouldn't up about all the dangers she reads in the prints on the floor. Bet she would be happy knowing all her track reading was spot on. If she'd still be alive of course, which is not the case.

Playing dead, the oldest trick in the book. It helped in the gutters when the rival guilds came. It helped in the raids when the guards showed up. It damn right helped down here, holding back ragged breath as the brutes savaged those stupid enough to put up a fight. The bloody slashes burn with pain – I was never good at bandaging. But I am alive and that's what matters. Get up. Stumble away. There are strange faint voices in the distance, ignore these – ears still ringing, must be hearing things.

Hours of limping, holding my side so that the guts don't spill out, keeping down the grunts of pain. Must be quiet. Silence is safety – even wounded I make no noise as I stalk the shadows. This is a lot like the streets after all, only difference is that your would-be murderers are not interested in your money, just in it for the fun. Charming.

The voices come back every time I stop to rest. A skittering, uncertain, spitting voice – a language I do not understand but even the awkward stumbling rhythm of the muttering is unsettling. I just want it to be quiet, damn it all to hell, so that I could focus. Can't rest, can't relax, always hearing it. Getting closer, then drifting away, can't tune it out, always there, in the shadows, at the back of my mind.

The rusted cage had a few jagged pieces that used to be bars sticking out. Bloodying my hands, I pry one off and use scraps from my torn cloak as wraps for a handle. I can't help but smirk. A most pathetic knife for a most pathetic warrior. No matter. I killed with a kitchen knife I can kill with this. As long as I get the jump. As long as it's quiet, which it's not. Again. Damned voice whispers now, taunting me – how does it never shut up?

It chases me, always there, not letting me rest, not letting me collect my thoughts, not letting me center. All these gibbering, sputtering words, murmurs, whispers - without end. Must shut it up, can't go on like this. I hear it's getting closer. Whatever it is – it must be coming in for a strike. Keep to the shadows, circle it, get in position. My chattering pursuer got careless and now I am the hunter.

I almost feel pity for the creature once I see it. Small, crooked wretch, a beastlike head on its stooped furry shoulders, a crude knife at the ready, sneaking to where it thinks I am. Its lips moving constantly as it mutters to itself – oh how I hate that squeaky voice now. Murderous gleam in its eyes. A lunge from my concealment, and my knife is buried deep in its back, blood flowing down my arm. I can't stop myself from stabbing it again and again, letting out all my frustration, all my terror, all my hatred of this place. Its body is limp on the floor in the spreading puddle of black blood.

I step away, hoping to finally find quiet solace. Yet the voice remains. I grasp my ears falling to my knees, trying desperately to block it out. I choke the corpse, shaking it violently – there is no breath left, yet the voice is lodged in my mind like a jagged blade refusing to slip out. I stumble away, carelessly, feeling my way along the crude cavern walls, rushing, tripping, getting up and moving on.

Knowing perfectly well that with this clattering voice in my head I will never know silence again.