

Varric – Short Story

The Hanged Man: Loud, stinks of spilled ale, burned meat, and at any hour of the day is full of honest people doing desperate, crazy, or embarrassing things they won't remember in the morning.

My favorite place in the world.

Gallard rubs his ear and glares at me over his cards. “Well, are you in, or not?” Poor elf's lost four sovereigns so far, and the night's not looking up for him. He shifts in his chair.

“I'm in.” I toss another silver onto the pile. “Ser Thrask?” The templar is staring at his hand as if Blessed Andraste might be appearing to him. She could be, for all I know. He's had three pints, and he's swaying slightly.

At the sound of his name, Thrask looks up from his cards and squints at me. “You're bluffing. You can't fool me, dwarf.”

“The last three hands beg to differ,” Gallard mutters, still rubbing his ear. He's got a notch taken out of it -- got off lucky in a Darktown knife fight a few years back, and he can't keep his hands off the scar when he's nervous. “If you're calling, call. Don't just make eyes at him.”

“Well, can you blame him? I am awfully pretty.” I brush some imaginary dust from my coat. Gallard struggles not to laugh and succeeds when the tavern door opens.

“Varric Tethras? Has anybody seen Varric Tethras?” The messenger is in Merchant Guild livery. It's not so much a specific uniform as a visible aura of self-importance. He doesn't come more than two steps inside, possibly for fear of being attacked or, more likely, because he doesn't want to get any Lowtown on his clothes.

“Never heard of him.” Comes the chorus from around the room. The messenger stands by the doorway for another heartbeat, squinting into the dark tavern, then turns on his heel and leaves.

“Well, ser knight?” I break out my most charming smile for Thrask, who responds by downing the remaining ale in his tankard.

The templar nods. “I'll see that silver, and raise you another.”

“I'm out.” Gallard sighs. “And you, ser, are crazier than a bag of wolverines.”

“I'm in.” I smile again and gesture for the waitress.

“So now I've lost four and a half sovereigns to you, Varric, I want to know: What's this story about your brother going into the Deep Roads?” Gallard leans forward, and his eyes catch the light like a cat's.

“It's not much of a tale yet. I'll have to wait and tell it to you after we get back.” The waitress brings me a glass of wine, which I make a great show of sniffing. The Hanged Man's wine cellar is terrible. I don't actually drink anything here. I order wine because it makes people in taverns nervous if you spend all night talking to them and you never have a glass in your hand.

“No one comes back from the Deep Roads.” Thrask mutters. He actually does drink here. If I had his job, I'd probably drink more, too.

“Four-fingered Eddie is giving this expedition of Bartrand's fifteen-to-one odds against, Varric.” Gallard shakes his head. Trust the Coterie to run the numbers on my life expectancy. I just smile and shake my head.

The tavern door slams open and another messenger appears. “Varric Tethras? I need to find Varric Tethras. It's an urgent matter of business.”

“Never heard of him.”

The second messenger disappears.

The templar scowls. “You're going to get killed down there. I've heard the Fereldan refugees talking. Twisted monsters that live in the dark.”

The elf nods, rubbing his notched ear. “Honestly, Varric. Let Bartrand go by himself.”

I shake my head again. “Thrask, are you in?”

“I call.” Thrask lays his cards on the table and sits back, waiting.

“Four knights.” I smile, gathering up my winnings. “I wouldn't take that bet, Gallard. I'm not always bluffing, you know.”