

The Tale of Castor Sloan -from the journals of Talia Tale
by Julie McMillin

“Nothing bad could happen,” Amiryte chuckled. “Twas only Castor!”

From the other side of the fire Talia Tale, Bardmistress of the Band of the Twisted Claw shoved her tattered notes into her book and slammed the worn leather closed. “Only Castor?”

Everyone was startled by Talia’s outburst. “Aye?” Amiryte ventured, his Romanian accent sitting heavily upon his words. “’Tis only Castor. What would that whey-faced boy do? Smile like a pretty girl?” There were renewed chuckles all around.

Talia glared at the assembled gypsy Band. “Castor’s smile is how women die. Or perhaps you have forgotten Jenny?”

Bailey, newcomer to the Band, looked at Talia questioningly. “Jenny?”

Talia took a breath and composed herself. She pointed at young Lillith and the Nightjar girls. “To bed. All of you.”

Avis Nightjar, the youngest of the rogues, stood up like a shot. “No! I want to hear!”

Talia replied with a glare that she typically reserved for her tiny children. “This tale is not for young girls. There will be plenty of time for you to be terrified of Castor Sloan later in your life. For now, you will go to bed and if you listen to my tale where we cannot see you then your nightmares will give you away. And if you wake any of us up with your nightmares then you will help Jameson cook for the next fortnight.”

Sighing, the girls went to bed. The Band was fairly certain that the young rogue girls were not hiding in the shadows to listen to the story, but still they waited to ensure the girls were not within earshot.

After a few moments Bailey asked again. “Jenny?”

Talia stood up and straightened her skirts. “Jenny is the end of the tale. Before I begin I must be very clear, this story is full of my own conjecture. I will try and clearly state which part is fact, but know that the rest is my stitching together the details in order to make this madness more sensible.

“Madness, my dears, is the driving force behind the Tale of Castor Sloan.

“There are many in the ranks of the Draco Disciples who study magic and forgotten lore. But Castor is fascinated by our mortal bodies. I suppose you could say that he would make a fine barber surgeon, saving that he’d be more likely to take you apart than put you together. Taking us apart has been his life’s passion for as long as anyone can remember.

“Apparently it started simply enough: dogs, cats and birds. Then expired lizards. But none of those were as exciting as the corpse he received from the gallows. Even on his first subject, his cuts were delicate

and precise. Each organ was carefully extracted. His notes filled books. But, of course, his first subject was a common criminal and the corpse was cold when it arrived.

“Castor’s goal is not to study the common. He wants to find physical perfection.

“That was when the comparisons began. Side by side he lined the bodies. How he acquired them is anyone’s guess. Which man had the largest stomach? Was this heart firmer? Ahh, his bowels are straighter. What if – yes. If the mages can trap souls and place them into other hosts, then surely Castor could create the physically perfect host! And so, he tried.”

There were a few nervous giggles from the gypsies. Amiryte’s deep chuckle filled the glen with more warmth than the pale fire. “Castor, the boy who has never had a shave? The mewling common-kissing canker-blossom?”

Talia patiently held up her hand and waited for the giggles to subside. “No matter what you name him, no matter what you think of his youthful features, I assure you that his... hobby... is quite real. We know that a Draco Mage filed a report regarding the state of Castor’s workroom at the Draco Disciple Manse. Despite what you may believe, even among the Draco Disciples, necromancy is not a common practice. Castor approached the wrong mage to give a soul to his... creation.

“We know that Castor was sent to Scotland to cool his heels for a time. Castor did not go to Scotland alone. A woman, Isabelle Lutz - his lover, accompanied him. We know nothing about the years Castor spent in Scotland, but when he was summoned to Bristol to serve the Praetor he came alone. Isabelle was found... in pieces.

“If Liam is to be believed, Castor’s... “escapades” with so many women is something that has happened only since he reached Bristol.

“Which brings us to Jenny. The Beautiful Jenny she was called – with a face that looked not a day over sixteen and hair the color of sun ripened wheat – she was the eternal summer night. As one of the new girls who worked with Chastity Trollop she worked the docks - where Castor has been known to sit for hours on end. Time, and togetherness, ran their course. Castor charmed his way into her heart near as anyone could tell. She and Castor spent a great many nights together. They all ended the same way: Jenny would show Castor to the door of the public house, he would return to the manor and she would off to bed. Every night. It was sweet. Some would even venture to say it was romantic – but not many. After all, there was still coin involved. The girl’s beauty alone could not buy her bread. But still, she and Castor were quite the couple.

“So the morning she was discovered dead came as quite the shock. She was found sitting in a chair, slumped over the small table in her room, with a single stab in the middle of her back. The strangest part is that it appeared the knife also went through her corset, but her corset was laying on her bed and there was no blood on the garment. Near as we can tell – she must have been stabbed, but didn’t realize it until she was preparing herself for bed. There was no one else in the room with Jenny that night. Castor was the final person to see her alive. In fact, the whole public house saw Jenny say goodnight to him when he left.

“Twas I who found Jenny that morn. I went to speak with her because of this.”

Talia pulled a stained piece of foolscap out of her pile of notes.

“Jenny tried to learn everything she could about Castor – for us. Her final note – “Seeks perfect woman.”

Talia let the phrase hang in the air for a moment while she put the note away.

“Castor is hunting something – something that very likely does not exist. But that will not stop him. He will create his perfect woman if he must, and death is not an obstacle. So aye, Castor will smile prettily – even as he kills you with such a delicate hand that you don’t know you’re dead until they find your corpse.

“I learned that morning that I’ll never turn my back to Castor Sloan. And you would all do well to remember that simply because the Disciples do not all bear the title Praetor does not mean that they do not all walk with madness and death.”