

“Hello Urchin, I have something for you.”

“Heard you were distributing faerie gifts, boss. I’m glad you didn’t forget your Urchin.”

“Naturally. You have been of great help, and I will always reward loyalty.”

“So, what are the odds that this gift will play tricks on me? Will I be nabbed and carried away by red-capped goblins?”

“Worse, you will serve an immortal monster bent on world domination who will send you on risky errands for only a modest remuneration.”

“So business as usual?”

“Exactly. This is the many-blades, a dagger that can extend into a sword. The size and shape of the blade follows your wishes.”

“That’s the second knife you give me, boss. It’s like you expect me to shiv someone.”

“I am, in fact, counting on it. You are an average fighter but an excellent trickster, Urchin. I would prefer if you stabbed before getting attacked. This should help you do so.”

“Great. When do I get to practice?”

“Right now. Draw it.”

“Fuck.”

“Language.”

“Hello John.”

“Miss Ari. You had something for me?”

“A gift I brought back from the other side. I hope you like it. It was difficult to find one that suits you so I had it made by a winter court artisan. This is the Life Cage, it will protect your heart and chest without prompt but it will not spare you from the pain you would have sustained. Winter gifts tend to be double-edged, I am afraid.”

“But it will keep me fighting?”

“So long as the Life Cage endures, so will you. And it can endure quite a bit of punishment. It is not quite as effective as my armor but it can fit under the one I made for you. It might seem strange to hear but I hope you never have to use it.”

“I want to keep fighting, Miss Ari. Until the job is done.”

“I know.”

“Thank you. I will use this for you.”

“I know.”

November 1880, Marquette, IGL group Headquarters.

It starts with an itch at the back of my head, as if being observed by someone. Someone who would not be the usual massive purple eldritch being. It crawls in my everyday life when I hunt some large alligator and watch behind my shoulder for an invisible threat. Ako, who trains with me when he can to create his Magna Arqa, notes that I am more distracted than usual. Even the safety of Pookie and my art collection fail to distract me from the impending doom. It is inevitable and there is nothing I can reasonably do to stop it. It is as inevitable and regular as the tide.

On a fine night of February, the news comes as I sign on the purchase of some land to the west. Winter still grips Illinois in its icy claws and I have started a fire in my office's hearth just so the ink would not freeze. The nostalgic smell of wood smoke mixes with that of fresh coffee in a rather pleasant perfume that fails to distract me. Mrs Starr's bell chimes with the solemnity of a death knell.

“Yes?” I grumble into the horn.

“A gentleman here to see you, he says...”

“Send him up.”

“Right away, ma'am.”

Uggggggggggggggggggggggg.

I brace my hands on the desk, waiting for fate. He knocks on the door soon enough.

“Come in, Mr Bingle.”

“Miss Reynaud? Or would you prefer Delaney? You can call me Alexander, if you prefer!”

The latest spawn to grace my shores has grown a lot in the past years. Gone is the fresh-faced English lad. Now a powerfully built frontier man in well-fitting if worn clothes

stands with confidence, poise, and a glorious mustache the likes of which I had not seen since his glorious ancestor Cecil Rutherford Bingle graced us with his presence.

“Miss Delaney or simply Ariane will do. I prefer consistency when it comes to pseudonyms. How are you, Alexander?”

“Fine! Or rather, as well as can be expected in my endless struggle against the injustices of this world. The frontier is a cruel place where laws and customs only apply so long as someone believes they might be caught. Why, just last month...”

I settle to listen to his passionate retelling of how he uncovered a ring of unscrupulous cattle farmers who paid bandits to rob rivals only to absorb their stolen herds into their own. I have followed his adventures from afar, of course. I may have inflated some of the bounties he collected in the past with some ‘concerned citizen’ bonus when times were lean, as a sad Bingle is a risky thing indeed. I may have also provided medical help in the form of a traveling healer mage once or twice.

Alexander stops when Mrs. Starr comes to deliver a cup of coffee and some floral tea for him.

“But I digress. Oh, Jasmine! My favorite. How did you know?”

“It is part of my nature to know things,” I mysteriously reply.

I just pay talented investigators to keep an eye on him. He does not need to know that.

“Impressive as always, Miss Delaney! But then, perhaps you can guess as to why I am here?”

I can guess he is here to ruin the opera season, which is supposed to open in three days in Melusine’s domain with ‘The Pirates of Penzance’. I had saved the best seats. Now I will have to miss the premiere. The knave.

“No, Mr Bingle, I cannot see your thoughts, I am sure we both find that knowledge very comforting.”

“Haha, indeed, though that would be most impressive! No, then please lend your ears to a terrible tale of corruption and death. Do you know of the Black Hills?”

“Oh yes, what a fiasco that almost was,” I reply, thinking about that dreary place and the battles that took place there. “We had to silence the discovery of a certain precious metal to stop settlers from moving in too fast.”

“We? Who is... You call the battle of Little Big Horn ‘almost’ a fiasco?”

“I never liked Custer,” I reply with a frown. “Glory hound. Not like George Henry Thomas, my favorite by far! The one you worship rest his soul. We are getting sidetracked, young Bingle. The Black Hills are an Indian reservation in the Dakota territories due west of here under the

control of the Lakota, Dakota, Sioux or whatever you fancy calling them. They have a relatively unified social structure and military. Local resources are timber and gold.”

“Gold?” Alexander replied, alarmed.

“Yes, gold. Keep it to yourself. Due to the, ah, presence of accursed among recent Lakota allies... it would be best if large-scale conflicts were not to happen. We have managed to acquire and monopolize a lot of the land directly around them to create a buffer and this shall hold for now, but publicize the presence of underground resources and all bets are off.”

I lean over the desk and stare right in his eyes.

“You will not do that, will you?” I ask.

“Of course not! I will be no party to treaty breaking. Of this you can be sure!”

“Focus young Bingle, and tell me of death and corruption.”

“Yes. It all started in the fall of seventy-nine while I was traveling north to claim the bounty for an escaped fugitive. On a fine morning by a river, I came upon Johnny the Butcher bearing a sheriff’s star. Now, you may not have heard of this dark and twisted individual, but know he has slain seven women across the frontier in his murderous spree, and that I believed him hanged. Thus you may imagine my surprise when I not only found him alive, but also representing a cause I had dedicated my life to. Him. A scoundrel whose dark soul would not find redemption in a thousand years!”

Alexander scowls and closes his hand into a fist. Few things seem to genuinely anger the Bingles, yet those that do send them into a spiraling rage even I would fear.

“Dear Johnny thought his new position and the posse at his back would give him the right to taunt me. He dared believe I would fear touching him. Fool. I could not stand that a symbol of justice would adorn a chest hiding such a shriveled heart. I would have died rather than let such a desecration go unpunished!”

“Yes, yes. I understand.”

“My apologies. You are not at fault and yet I lose my temper in front of you. In any case, I opened fire on those mongrels and slew them to the last man. Trying to interrogate Johnny as he breathed his dying breath led to more taunts, and I learned the identity of the man who had allowed him to turn a new leaf. It was none other than a judge by the name of Zakarias Ramsey based in Ortonville at the edge of Big Stone Lake. A judge! I had to go and investigate, and so I went there with Honoré under the guise of an escaped outlaw from Texas.”

For a moment, his light English accent turns into a surprisingly convincing Texan drawl.

“Heard some good things about y’all fine fellers.”

“Impressive. And then?”

“We were recruited and discovered the truth! Judge Ramsey recruits outlaws as enforcers and lawbringers, then sends them in ‘patrols’ into the Black Hills where they pillage camps left and right. When the Lakota braves inevitably fight back, he moves in with his full force and clears stretches of land which he then sells to illegal logging operations.”

I realize that this is a serious issue. It will only take one fortunate prospector trying his luck in a nearby river for gold deposits to be discovered, and then we might be too late to catch the rumor on time. I have to warn Ako that it might be better to let one mining consortium on some lands and let them police settlers than a tide of illegal miners. Hmm. In any case, Judge Ramsey certainly found himself a sweet, cost-free arrangement. His only loss would be disposable ruffians

“Unfortunately we were found out before I could find undeniable proof of wrongdoing bearing the judge’s stamp. The snake is canny, I’ll give him that much. We were found out when we resisted an order to slaughter women and old folks in a deserted camp. We managed to flee the ensuing firefight, and I have since then petitioned the marshal office and even the army! It was in vain, however. My complaints have never reached a sympathetic ear despite my best efforts. I suspect the corruption runs deep.”

Well of course it does. We are relying on it.

“The hearts of mortals are ever filled with greed. We know this,” I agree.

“Hmm, yes, the mortals. Hmm. Indeed. In any case, I shall not rest until we clear this infamy! Given the extremely challenging circumstances, I can think of only one solution.”

I personally can think of several. I could contact a few people and have the judge removed in two weeks. I could also have him murdered in one, or three days if I do it myself.

“We need to strike hard and shine the light of the law over this den of corruption, whether the local authorities want it or not. The gaze of the entire nation shall fall upon them. In order to attract such an intense glare, we are left but with one choice!”

“We are?”

“The government has moved some of its gold reserves to secure locations inland in case the Eastern Seaboard is attacked, including a secluded fort in Minnesota right next to Ortonville. We are going to steal gold from the Western United States Bullion Depository. A few metric tons should do.”

It takes me a few seconds to remember to close my jaws. If Alexander notices the fangs, he makes no mention of it.

“I beg your pardon?”

"I have a plan but I could use your expertise, because none of us know how to use explosives. We will return the gold afterward, of course. "

"Why yes, obviously, dynamiting a gold reserve? Such an incredibly daring endeavor, young Bingle!"

"Unless you have a better idea, of course."

"No no. Nope. Truly, we have no choice."

"Then will you help?"

"How could I deny you my help in such a grand challenge? You were right to come to me. Together, we will grab all that gold and make away like thieves."

"And return it eventually," Alexander tells me with a warning tone.

"Yes, the pursuit of higher purposes is its own reward."

"Hear hear! How brilliant, how inspiring of you Miss Delaney. We truly are kindred spirits. Blessed was the day when my esteemed grandfather met you. Nothing moves me like justice itself."

Well for me it would be high-yield explosives but I do not wish to dampen his spirits.

"Will you come with me then or do you need to prepare first?"

"Just a few hours should do. Give me a rendezvous at and I shall join you with supplies and... I believe two of my allies. You can count on me."

"Good evening Sephare. I am going to rob the western bullion depository."

The image in the mirror does not move. I know the spell is working because of the way the silvery picture shivers like wind sending ripples over the lake, and so I wait for the inevitable reply.

"Goodness me, what a way to start a conversation. Could you perhaps not?"

"I must."

“And what outlandish reason could possibly justify such an absurd action, hmm?”

“Alexander Bingle.”

Sephare sighs, an unusual sign of annoyance.

“Ah.”

“It has been a while since the latest adventure for him. I have been monitoring his progress.”

“I suppose it is preferable to channel him than let him run amok.”

“My thoughts exactly. Although...”

I frown, suddenly considering a new thought.

“Is there a reason why the godlings always return to me? Do you know? Or do our kin also engage with them?”

“I know of a coven that keeps ties with the godlings of love, or romance, or whatever you see fit to call them. No one else has chosen to approach them and no one else will. Once bound, you may become, and please forgive the term, a recurring character. As for finding out the logic behind their working, you know what happens to those who get too close to them for the wrong reasons. I regret to inform you that as far as the Accords are concerned, you are the resident expert on godlings. It goes without saying that you have our full support to handle the issue and bring it to a satisfactory and flaming pigs-free conclusion.”

What a subtle way to tell me that they wash their hands off the problem and leave me to handle those shenanigans. Also I do not have a flaming pig problem. Those were all just coincidences.

“Do contact Isaac. I believe the Rosenthal monitor the bullion reserves and their contents. It would be wise to find out what the consequences would be and how to offset them before you pull the proverbial trigger,” Sephare continues.

“Certainly.”

I attempt to contact my sharp friend, but I find that he is currently in the middle of a meeting which is fine. It gives me time to think about what to do. I do not have any pressing matters to attend at the moment and it has been some time since I last worked with John and Urchin. We shall have a coven moment all together with our Nightmares. It will be fun. I also need boots. And a felt hat. For a moment, I entertain the possibility of pants. Do I dare? No, not while there are some who will recognize me. John would be fine but not the rest. No, I shall not cross that last line. I am a respectable member of the community now, not some savage hellion Jimena dragged around for her assassination projects.

Aw.

I shall compensate this loss with a generous acquisition of guns. And explosives. There is always a need for explosives. We will also need two secured carriages. I take notes with a quick hand to have everything prepared by dawn until Isaac has his mage open the channel again.

“Ariane? I believed you reached out to me?”

“I am involved in yet another burglary.”

“My condolences. And how can the consortium assist you in this terrible ordeal?” he asks with the barest crinkle of amusement around his eyes.

“I am going to burglarize the western bullion depository and quite likely escape with a fortune in gold ingots.”

“Ah.”

“Yes.”

Isaac sighs deeply, the burden of a stable US dollar exchange rate heavy upon his shoulders.

“Why can your strange friend not find us some forgotten gold mines and ancient treasures filled with unknown artifacts?”

“He does not need my help for that.”

“So it is. What are the chances that the gold could be found again and recovered?”

I consider the options. Bingle is fundamentally a champion of justice and a good egg. Of course, the fortune will eventually find its way back into the hands of the law, as it should be. The story would suffer no other conclusion. If it were ill-gotten gains there is a chance they could end up at the bottom of some unplumbed chasm, but government property is usually returned.

“Very high, in my opinion.”

“I shall trust in your Bingle expertise, my dear. Very well. I will warn our associates and prepare to manage the crisis. The media will love it. Oh, do note that the Supernatural Task Force has agents on hand. There might be wards.”

“Excellent.”

We make some small talk and promise to catch up on this development later. Truly, a welcome distraction.

My preparations are done long before the sun returns and, soon after, we are on our way.

“Gentlemen, I shall set up a few rules for the next operation for the sake of anonymity and also to provide a good story. We are not here as problem solvers. We are here as facilitators while Alexander Bingle completes his task. Remember that the most important way to work with godlings is to provide a good narrative, and barring that, to leave them alone, for whatever fate manipulates the world around them takes interference very poorly.”

“Yes Miz Ari.”

“As you say, boss.”

“The first rule is that we will not show any ability that could not reasonably be displayed by a human. From now on, there will be no shows of strength or agility a mortal at the top of the world could not achieve.”

“Does it mean I must miss?” Urchin asks.

The thought clearly displeases him.

“It means you may strike arms, fingers, and weapons rather than eyes every time.”

“Can I use the strength I had as a mortal?” John asks in turn.

“Of course. It would be strange if your power did not match your imposing physique, dear John. Just... refrain from derailing any locomotives with your bare hands.”

“I understand.”

“We will all take our Nightmares and ride alone as much as we can. You two still scare mundane mounts.”

The edge of the Black Hills is so dense with forest I am tempted to explore the region by myself later. Rocks and lone elevations jut out from the woods like old teeth cracked by eons of wind and rain, their rocky flesh in turn smooth and brittle. The moon is beautiful tonight. Bingle’s team spreads over the clearing we have reached, leaning against trunks and sitting

on stumps in a picturesque fashion. A low log cabin propped against a cliff awaits us a few steps away from a merry campfire. Temperatures are glacial. The mortals bleed out their heat with every puff of frozen breath that escapes their chapped lips, and yet they still stand with casual grace as if the deep cold did not bother them.

Alexander has expanded the ranks of his gathering of misfits since the last time we talked — not that I am in any position to criticize. I recognize Honoré, his Haitian second-in-command and expert knife wielder. There is also Felicia, the pointy-nosed sharpshooter who even now cleans her rifle with confident moves. I am utterly jealous that she has the confidence to wear pants while I do not, but no, I have made my decision. Maybe I shall buy a pair and try them in private. Yes, that sounds delightful.

Next to the pants wearer stands a hulking brute with scar-covered hands named Bill Hannigan. He plays the role of the bruiser and he plays it with both efficacy and gusto. His blue Irish eyes follow us as we ride in and settle on John, recognizing competition when he sees it.

The last member of this eclectic group is Whistles-at-Dawn, a grim Lakota shaman of some power whose family was killed by trespassing poachers. He is the group's most mysterious member and possibly the only one to recognize us for what we are, if his spiking heartbeat is any indication. Both Bill and Whistle joined the group after the Steeleborough fire. We meet in the flesh for the first time.

"Ladies and gentlemen, please allow me to introduce an old family friend, Ariane Delaney! Some of us met her before. She will be providing precious help for our next endeavor."

"He was not joking! You have not changed at all!" Felicia gasps as she stands. She takes a few steps forward to confirm what the light of the fire hints at, but stops at a respectful distance, suddenly afraid.

"Bondye sove nou, that is the truth," Honoré agrees.

The others tense and I smile amicably.

"Gentlemen, and lady. I assure you that the curse is not contagious."

"*At least not easily,*" Urchin whispers and I use a small liana to throw a pebble at the back of his knee.

"I am here as a friend and ally. You have nothing to fear from me while we are on the same side."

"And when we ain't?" Bill grumbles.

"Surely, Mr Hannigan, you are not considering defection, hmm?" I ask.

The poor man's expression turns into a rictus of fear. Yes, you big oaf, I know who you are.

“My friends! My friends. My family have known Miss Delaney since eighteen aught five. I trust her with my life.”

The Lakota mumbles something in a tongue I do not recognize.

John answers in the same tongue to everyone’s surprise including mine. He patiently exchanges a few sentences with the shaman until the native slowly nods and sits back down, pushing tobacco in his pipe with shaky hands.

“Hmm, John?” I whisper.

“I speak Ojibwe. I told him we were honor-bound to assist. He believed me.”

“I see. Well done.”

“Hmm, well, yes,” Alexander continues. “Right, introductions!”

The three of us listen to Alexander briefly introduce his minions, all of whom I have detailed files on. We politely nod and smile, then our time comes. I allow Urchin to go first.

“Urchin, knife-wielder and poker player extraordinaire. At your service,” he greets with a bow.

“I’m John Doe,” John greets with a rumbling voice.

He does not elaborate. A small shrug shakes the main sail that passes as a shirt over his mighty frame. Massive muscles slide under buttons, making them bob up and down like buoys over high tide. I allow the deafening silence that follows to last for a few seconds before continuing.

“And my name is Ariane. Mr Bingle perhaps mentioned that I am cursed and was well acquainted with his grandfather, the illustrious Cecil Rutherford. My friends and I do not like the day very much, but the night likes us. A word of advice, do not play card games with Urchin, and do not arm wrestle John.”

“And what should we not do with you?” the girl asks.

Ah, a perfect introduction. I grab the Big Iron at my side and flip the heavy revolver around a finger, then two, using tricks Sheridan and a few others taught me. The mortals watch the deadly implement twist and jump and dance and twirl in my expert hands. To finish, I turn in my saddle and let the gun land back in its holster.

“So, dueling. Got it,” the girl finishes in a cool voice.

“Why admit you lots are cursed? Feels suspicious to me,” Bill Harrigan growls.

He is right to be wary. I believe he represents the human norm. The Bingles and their immediate allies tend to be a little naive, I find.

“I do not lie to Alexander or his close friends,” I reply with a shrug. “The others have no need to know.”

“You say you knew his grandpa? Ain’t you a little too fresh around the ears for that?”

“I am considerably older than I look.”

“God won’t like that, I bet.”

“I would not know. We are not on speaking terms.”

“As fascinating as this all is,” Alexander interrupts, “we are on a schedule, so I will remind everyone of what matters here. I have called upon you fine folks because I trust you, or in the case of Miss Delaney’s guests, I trust the one who brought them. We have all proven ourselves countless times against the cruelties and injustices of this world and now the time has come to do so once more. Cast aside your doubts and remember that we are all servants of good regardless of our past and nature. United in this most noble of purpose, we cannot fail. Close ranks, stand shoulder to shoulder, and we will achieve the impossible as we have before. The corrupted judge will fall. We will make sure of it. Now let’s head inside so I can tell you more.”

The godling of adventure turns without a doubt in his pretty head that we would follow and, naturally, we do. Our Nightmares ride back to the forest as we move in. I end up walking side by side with a nervous Felicia. She smells of anguish and old sweat, the poor dear. Red welts mar her pretty cheeks. I make a note to get her a scarf of some sort to mitigate the damage, and also to have a talk with her. Reassure her that I am not after Alexander and she can return to her unrequited love while Bill himself burns with passion for her. Ah, the group dynamics of mortals. Always amusing to see from an outsider’s perspective. An ambitious player could set Bill against Alexander with a few words and test that old friendship of theirs. Love and jealousy could achieve what battles have failed to do. Not me, though, I have better things to do.

The log cabin turns out to be warm and dry, which makes me wonder what the group could possibly have been doing outside. Perhaps they were feeling cramped? In any case, we gather around a central table and the map pinned upon it. Two separate structures occupy it. The first is a sprawling complex surrounded by a wood palisade labeled ‘Fort Dearborn’ while the second is an isolated square surrounded by empty space and, beyond that, another palissade. The word ‘depository’ was added with a blue pen. Alexander points at it once we are all settled.

“Right, this is our target, the Gold Bullion Depository. Two floors and a relatively small surface but what interests us is the vault underneath. A single set of stairs leads to a corridor and then the vault gates proper. Two safe combinations are required to open the secured door, but unfortunately we cannot obtain one of them because the holder is in another state under constant guard. Hence the need for dynamite.”

I frown. This all sounds terribly wrong. I decide to speak up.

“Hold on. Even assuming we can use explosives to open the gate, the resulting explosion will be noticed. You cannot move metric tons of gold away if you are under fire from an entire garrison!”

“That would normally be true, but the vault is built deep into the earth. It was carefully dug out. With the military base far enough away, they should not notice.”

“This means you have a plan to subdue the local guards.”

“Yes.”

“A non-lethal one.”

“Yes.”

“Given by your inside man,” I add.

Alexander blushes while the others shift their postures, looking askance at the ‘brain’ of the operation. Seldom has the term fitted less than now.

“I was going to introduce everyone tomorrow but I suppose I can mention him now, since there is no cause for theatrics anymore. We do have a man in, yes, the very same who shared his knowledge with me. His name is Willy Adler, and he will get us through the guard.”

Aha! With a name like that, he has to be an antagonist. Wily adder indeed. It appears we will be backstabbed and left behind. Oh, the humanity!

Was the man called William or Willy Adder before and got drawn into our tale, or did the force behind godlings create him from nothing? Was he born and raised for the sole purpose of becoming a secondary character? Sometimes, the unthinkable power behind the godlings scares me.

“How will he do that?” Honoré asks with suspicion.

“He is a guard himself. In fact, he is a high-ranking member of the mint. And before you ask, yes I questioned his motives. Mr Adler wants to demonstrate a flaw in the current safety measures used by the depository, the very flaw will be using ourselves. You see, the defenders on site number few, barely a dozen, because they rely on alarms to rouse Fort Dearborn’s garrison. Take out the alarms and the depository is defenseless. Relatively defenseless.

“The alarms number two: the first is a hand-cranked siren on the second floor, and the second is a buried telegraph cable linking the depository to the fort’s headquarters. We must disable both before reaching the gold.”

“The defenders could shoot at us. That would be heard,” I say.

“Hmm, good point. We will have to be fast then. Whistle says he has a concoction that can disable grown men in only a few seconds. We merely have to sting them before they can pull the trigger. They will wake up without consequences. We employed this devious yet effective method before.”

“How do we get in?”

“Let’s go over the plan step by step,” Alexander says.

“At six thirty in the evening, our team will arrive by train at the stop facing the depository. We will take the spot of a weekly, regularly scheduled delivery that Mr Adler canceled on his side. The sun will have long set by then so people of Miss Delaney’s proclivities should not be affected.”

“Thank you kindly,” I say.

“We will be disguised as guards. Mr Adler will be present as well as a few of his fellow guards, who will assist us in moving crates inside.”

But of course. I have read enough tasteful fiction to recognize we are being made into patsies. Ariane of the Nirari, a trope. Disgrace.

“While we move in, Whisper and Honoré will dig out and disable the telegraph cable. I wish you could come with us gentlemen, but the local mint does not allow the employment of members of the Sioux and Negro race. I am sorry.”

“Not your fault, monsieur.”

“The same goes for you; Felicia dear. I fear no disguise would allow you to pass for a man.”

While I can manage through a careful binding of my chest, I fear our sharpshooter’s bust may not be so easily hidden. In a real situation, a mortal with my body would struggle to pass as well. I walk differently, not to mention other wardrobe issues my dress currently masks and that I would rather not utter here. Once again, Alexander proves his inexperience with duplicity. Ah, truly he is still young and so are his associates. No matter. A simple illusion will allow me to blend in.

“Once we have gained access to the first floor by presenting falsified documents, Bill, John, Urchin, myself, and Adler’s best fighters will move from room to room and disable the guards without raising the alarm. Shouts might not be heard belowground, but gunfire and the siren will be so we must move with diligence and precision. Remember not to kill any of the guards, or wound more than their self-esteem whenever possible. The crates will contain ropes which we will use to secure them. After this is done, we will gain access to the vault through the same means. We have to go through a series of gates to reach the vault door and we will use our numbers to hide the pacification of the guards we come across. Mr Harrigan will make sure they may not call for help without harming them,” Alexander continues with a pointed look at his hulking follower.

“Yeah don’t worry. I will be gentle,” the man replies with conviction.

“After all of the guards are secured and both of the alarms are gone, we will move them to the top floor where the explosion will not harm them, then Miss Delaney can work her magic with the dynamites we will have brought in the crates. We will rush in once the vault is cracked and carry as many ingots as we can, though no more than two stacks. We will carry them to the train and escape from there. After we have put some distance between us and the fort, we will unload the gold at a safe house and, from there, Mr Adler will share its location with the relevant authorities. I have prepared an envelope with my plan and sent it to General Hall in Illinois as an extra measure of safety in case we are found out so we can prove our intent was good.”

And thus the law will have his name when the prize inevitably disappears and the note is taken seriously, not to mention that a crime made in the name of good is still a crime. Ah, the sweet summer child. He has not yet been backstabbed enough. Oh well.

“There is just one last minor hurdle. We must acquire the dynamite from the Pattersons who have yet to deliver it,” Alexander finishes with a frown.

“Oh, let us do it!” I offer without mentioning I have brought my own explosives.

“We are retrieval experts,” Urchin adds.

“And I can use this opportunity to ascertain the quality of the goods. It would be a shame if they failed,” I continue.

Especially since I have no intentions of using them. Only an absolute donkey would believe dynamite sticks can achieve anything except collapsing the building on our heads. The vault doors have to weigh literal tons. It would take Loth’s expertise to pierce through them without specialized equipment. No, I will be using my safecracking skills and spells, since Isaac mentioned mages and there are bound to be wards in place. As for the explosives, I wonder what they will eventually be used for. Oh, I cannot wait!