

Knock Knock

Kat Underhill

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

MAGGIE STOREY (25), pen-filled hair piled atop her head, sits cocooned in a blanket at her living room table. Writer's paraphernalia covers the surface of the table, including SKETCHES of key characters in her latest fantasy novel.

The clock above the door reads 3:08 AM. She stares blankly at her computer, TACKS out a few words before sitting back and reading them aloud:

MAGGIE

Elmira, backed into a corner by three reeking, boorish men, wished she'd brought a bigger knife. One advanced, grabbing her wrist, and- Dammit!

She bangs her head on the table with a groan.

MAGGIE CONT'D

Stupid, stupid, stupid.

She falls asleep. A few minutes later she wakes with a snort. A soft KNOCKING comes from her front door, but she ignores it, glaring at her screen, fingers idle on the keys.

The knocking continues until Maggie, giving up, rubs her eyes, and goes to open the door, blanket wrapped around her shoulders like a cape.

She has barely opened the door before ELMIRA SAMA waltzes through. 28 and lean, she wears a grey duster, scuffed boots, black leather hat, and fingerless gloves. A long multicolored scarf is wrapped unevenly around her neck.

ELMIRA

Hello, darlin'. How are you?

Kissing Maggie's cheek, Elmira grins and throws an arm over her shoulders and drags her towards the kitchen.

ELMIRA CONT'D

I hope your larder is better than the last I was in. I'm starving.

Maggie, ducking out from under Elmira's arm, stares at her for a long moment before hurrying to the table. She begins searching the papers as Elmira rambles about food.

Glancing up as she shoves a pile aside, Maggie glowers at the back of the woman raiding her fridge. Looking back down, she

begins riffling through a FOLDER labeled 'CHARACTERS'.

Eyes widening, she holds up a page: on it is a SKETCH that looks exactly like Elmira but for the haunted expression and scar marring the sketched face.

Maggie compares sketch to woman a moment longer before searching the papers again. She holds up a RED-SLASHED page of her manuscript, reading under her breath:

MAGGIE

Elmira Sama swept into the tavern, her coat flapping around her heels as--

She sets the paper down, studying Elmira.

MAGGIE

Are you really Elmira?

The woman in question pops up from behind the counter, an apple stuffed in her mouth, and sketches a bow.

ELMIRA

(thickly)

The very same.

Wiping juice off her chin with the back of her hand, Elmira grins and takes another bite of apple, chewing loudly.

MAGGIE

But... what... how... what are you doing here?

ELMIRA

Articulate, aren't-cha, for a writer? Don't worry, dearie, it'll make sense.

Confused, Maggie is about to ask Elmira what she means when the front door is kicked open, and BALTHAZAR CRAINE - 35, tall, broad-shouldered, and sun-tanned - strides in. His ash-blond hair is cropped short and his green-and-gold guard's uniform well kept, if travel stained.

He notices Maggie ogling him, and reaches for the short sword at his hip.

BALTHAZAR

Who are you?

Maggie, backing away, begins to answer when Elmira's voice sounds from the kitchen.

ELMIRA
Balthazar Craine! What are you doing
here?

Elmira marches into the living room. Straightening as he
turns round to face her, Balthazar clears his throat.

BALTHAZAR
Ah... Elmira. I thought I saw Dagan
Fife come this way. Have you seen him?

A brow raised, Elmira tosses Balthazar the half-eaten apple.

ELMIRA
Unless he discovered the arcane secret
of turning invisible, no. I haven't
seen him in a few weeks, actually.

Balthazar scowls at the apple before setting it on the table.

ELMIRA CONT'D
When are you going to give up chasing
petty thieves and start doing real
work?

Spluttering, he strides forwards and looms over Elmira, neck
flushing. She crosses her arms and peers up at him, defiant.

BALTHAZAR
I beg your pardon, madam. But peace
must be maintained in the city, and
being a royal guard means--

ELMIRA
(interrupting)
Save it.

She pokes him in the chest, bearing down on him despite
barely reaching his shoulders.

ELMIRA CONT'D
You know as well as anyone that the
guards are pawns in the pockets of the
nobility--

BALTHAZAR
That's not true!

ELMIRA
--and are paid to turn a
blind eye when--

MAGGIE
If you're done arguing like toddlers--

Maggie steps forwards, and shoves between her characters, hands on either side of her head.

MAGGIE CONT'D

Can one of you please explain why you're here in the middle of the night?!

An awkward silence follows, and Elmira gives Balthazar the cold shoulder. She speaks first, stuffing her hands in her pockets.

ELMIRA

I'd just like to be safe once in awhile. Go where I will without constantly looking over my shoulder, you know? Bodyguards aren't cheap.

Balthazar glances sideways at her, but says nothing.

MAGGIE

Balthazar? What about you?

The two women look at Balthazar. He shifts awkwardly, and doesn't meet Elmira's gaze. He fiddles with his sleeve cuff.

BALTHAZAR

I... Justice. I want justice on... thieves. And their ilk.

Neither woman looks convinced, least of all Maggie, who bites a knuckle in thought. After a pause she speaks.

MAGGIE

Thank you for telling me, but...

ELMIRA

But what? I thought, since you're the writer, you could maybe... change things?

MAGGIE

I don't think I can. It wouldn't work. Not with how--

She looks guiltily at the sketch of Elmira. Balthazar glowers, and Elmira tilts her head to the side, following Maggie's gaze.

BALTHAZAR

Why not?

MAGGIE

Because it- Wait. Actually... hold on.
That could work! Yes, if I did that--

Tapping her chin, Maggie goes to the table, looking over the pages before sitting at her computer, characters forgotten.

Balthazar looks suspiciously at Maggie as she considers his character sketch. Rolling her eyes, Elmira takes him by the hand and pulls him to the door, a hopeful look in her eye.

Maggie doesn't look up, and sits in front of her computer as Elmira shoves Balthazar out the door before he can ask Maggie about the sketch. Pausing on the threshold, she whispers:

ELMIRA

Good luck, dearie. And thank you.

She smiles and closes the door with a SNICK.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Maggie sits bolt upright. The clock reads 7:12. She rubs her eyes, and looks around the room, scowling upon seeing no one.

Shrugging off the dream, she stands and stretches before going to the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Leaning against the counter, she inhales the steam coming off the giant mug of black coffee in her hands. She takes a sip, sighing deeply.

Her eyes snap open, and she rushes back to the table.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mug beside her computer, Maggie rereads the last paragraph, mouthing the words. She begins typing, reading as she goes:

MAGGIE

Grinning, Elmira took Balthazar by the hand, dodged a punch to her head, and pulled him to the nearest exit.

Maggie is so engrossed that she doesn't notice the half-eaten apple on the other end of the table or the colorful scarf piled by the front door.

THE END?