

A Disturbance in Lel

There is a long road crawling up the side of a hill with a castle at the top. The hill and the castle are in the center of Selvin, the capital city in the Kingdom of Lel. The city spreads out for miles around the hill, but there is only one road up to the castle. The kingdom of Lel is a peaceful little kingdom stretching only fifty miles in a rough circle around Selvin. The King, Dalek, lives in the castle with his wife Malenda and their only son, and heir to the throne, Jontha. Up in the castle in a back room somewhere among the dust Jontha was practicing a spell of astral projection, sending his mind out of his body to look around, which requires complete concentration. Not a few people have lost their lives from incorrectly casting an astral projection. Jontha was sitting on the floor cross-legged in the middle of the room in a meditative trance. His gold-dust hair flowed to his shoulders and his big blue eyes stared into himself.

“S-e-e-k-o-o-r-a-a-a! Th-e-e-m-u-u-s-a-a-a! S-a-a-a-l-e-e-n! S-e-e-k-o-o-r-a-a-a! Th-e-e-m-u-u-s-a-a-a! S-a-a-a-l-e-e-n! S-e-e-k-o-o-r-a-a-a! Th-e-e-m-u-u-agh!” The door to the room suddenly opening broke the prince’s concentration as a maid entered the room with a bucket and mop.

Jontha jumped up from his position on the floor and then swayed a little as dizziness took over his head. “What are you doing?” Jontha was surprised and angry from being jarred out of his trance. He is a tall man and well muscled, who is frightening when he is upset. Marena was frightened now.

Marena started wringing her hands and cringing submissively. “I’m sorry, your highness. I didn’t know you were here, your highness. I’m sorry. I am supposed to clean all these dusty old rooms so the castle will be spotless for your party next week, your highness.”

The prince was getting his anger under control and stated the obvious, “You could have killed me interrupting my trance like that.”

Marena backed up into the doorframe and would have backed out of the room if she had not missed the doorway. “I’m so sorry, your highness; I didn’t know. I didn’t know I swear it. Please don’t hurt me.”

Jontha lost his anger and his face took on an open and friendly expression. “I’m not going to hurt you woman. It wasn’t your fault, it was mine for not putting a warning on the door or locking it.”

Marena was shocked and blurted out, “You’re not going to punish me, your highness?”

Jontha patiently explained to old woman, “Not for something that wasn’t your fault. You didn’t know I was here; how could you, I told no one.”

Marena bowed low and said, “Oh thank you. Thank you, your highness. I am grateful.”

Jontha, wishing he could just leave and be done with her, took her hands and forced her to rise. “It’s alright. I didn’t mean to yell at you when you came in, I was just a little unsettled from being snapped out of the trance.”

“I’m sorry, your highness.”

Jontha’s annoyed expression was lost on Marena. “Enough with the sorry. I’m all right. No harm done. You can clean the room here.”

Marena was beaming with gratitude. “Thank you, your highness. Thank you.”

“Yes okay, I’m going to go now and leave you to your work.” Jontha all but ran out of the room to get away from the woman’s fawning thanks.

Marena was still feeling anxious after interrupting the prince. She was surprised she was not punished severely for it. As she moved into the next room, she had another start. She opened the door to see a man standing in the middle of the room with a blanket rapped around him. He was of average height with dark curly hair and dark eyes.

Marena gasped. "I don't think I can take much more of this fright. Who are you?"

The man was looking into the mirror. He turned towards her. "I am the-... a friend of the prince."

Marena was only shocked for a second. This wasn't the first time the prince had brought home a strange man. "Oh, a friend of the prince." *One of his drinking buddies no doubt.* "Does he know you are here?"

"No. I must have fallen asleep." Looking into the mirror again, the man said more to himself than Marena, "I don't think he knows I exist."

One of those nights eh? The prince has enough of them. "Fallen asleep. I understand." *Passed out is more like it.* "But where are your clothes?" Marena moved her mop and bucket into the room and stared at the stranger questioningly.

"I seem to have misplaced them." The man frowned. "I don't suppose you could get me some old clothes from a storage or something?"

Too drunk to remember where you put your clothes. I suppose there was a woman too, but she seems to be gone now if there was. "I owe the prince a debt of gratitude this morning. You are in luck. He was just in the room next door. I could probably find him for you."

The man seemed to consider this option for a moment and then dismissed it. "No. That's all right. I will catch up to him later. I could use the clothes more."

"Of course... What was your name?"

“Jon-...Jonas.” Jonas sneered around the name.

“Well Jonas, let’s get you some clothes.” *And out of that blanket so I can burn it.*

“Follow me.” Marena led Jonas out of the room to find some clothes.

The prince, who was still a little shaken from the interruption decided that it was time for a drink. He headed out of the castle and into the town towards his favorite tavern, The Winking Woman. As he entered, the tavern owner went over to a back table and ushered some customers to a different table allowing the prince his usual placement. The sun was just going down and soon the tavern filled with patrons.

Every table was crowded with people. Only the prince sat alone at his table in the back corner. Most of the other customers recognized the prince and those that didn’t, recognized the expense of his wardrobe and knew to leave the chairs at his table empty. The prince wasn’t one who liked company unless he invited it. Jontha could handle his alcohol well, but being overly thirsty, he was drunk a couple of hours after dark. Unfortunately, he wasn’t the only one. A large bear of a man with a scruffy beard and black shaggy hair walked up to Jontha’s table and stood there.

“May I help you?” Jontha tried to be civil, but the sharpness was not lost.

“Why do you get a table all to yourself when Belfour has to stand?”

“Belfour is it?” Jontha eyed him up and down. Not wanting to start a fight, he reasoned with the big man. “The reason I get a table all to myself is because I am the prince.”

Alas, Belfour was not impressed. “And I am the king,” he replied “and I think you should find another table.” With that said Belfour swept Jontha’s drink, which happened to be full, onto the floor. The prince was not looking for a fight, but he could not tolerate wasting alcohol in that

manner. He stood up, swept the table itself out of the way and marched straight at Belfour, or as straight as someone who had been drinking for two hours could march.

Belfour swung one of his powerful arms at Jontha, but the prince slipped/ducked out of the way. Jontha swung an arm of his own and connected with Belfour square in the jaw. The bear of a man didn't seem to notice. He grabbed Jontha in a bear hug and attempted to connect the prince's ribcage to his backbone. Jontha struggling for breath managed to bash his head into Belfour's face causing the hold to be released. The big man stepped back a pace and drew out a knife.

"Just wonderful, a crazy drunken bear with a sharp object." The prince's sarcasm was not lost on the growing crowd of spectators. Jontha pulled out his dagger and took up a defensive stance. Belfour swung his knife at Jontha and Jontha sliced his arm just below the elbow. Belfour didn't notice. Jontha stabbed at the big man's chest, but took a slash across his own ribs instead. They circled each other warily, each man dripping blood onto the sawdust.

By this time the tavern owner had realized what was happening over the noise, and started over through the crowd to stop the knife fight. Belfour lunged at Jontha, but stumbled a little out of drunkenness. The prince brought his dagger up hard between Belfour's ribs and the big man fell to the floor. As Jontha bent over the man to retrieve his dagger, a small wiry man came up behind him with a knife. As Jontha stood up pulling his dagger from Belfour's corpse, the little man plunged his knife towards the prince's back. Fortunately, out of nowhere a dagger went flying past Jontha's shoulder and buried itself in the little man's throat. The prince looked up and saw a dark curly haired man of average height and build smiling across at him.

"I don't mind a fair fight, one on one, but I won't tolerate a sneak stabbing someone in the back." Said the stranger as he retrieved his dagger from the little man's neck.

“You saved my life friend. I’m Jontha. Prince Jontha if you didn’t know.”

“A prince? Well, that’s something. I’m Jonas. Just Jonas, and I would have done the same for anyone.”

With the crowd now dispersing, the tavern owner was finally able to arrive at the scene. “My prince, I am so sorry. I was in the kitchen and didn’t know what was happening. I tried to get here sooner to stop him...or them I guess. I will take responsibility for their actions. Please do not shut down the Winking Woman; it is my family’s only source of income. Without the Woman they will starve, your highness.”

“Relax man. I’m not shutting anything down. It wasn’t your fault that a couple of drunks decided to pick a fight. The people responsible are lying dead on your floor.”

The tavern owner immediately turned to his peacemaker, “Kelax, get rid of these offending carcasses at once.... Thank you my prince for being so understanding. If there is anything I can do for you, anything at all...”

“Well, this excitement has started to sober me up. You could get me and my new friend Jonas here a couple of drinks.”

“At once your highness. Bela! Don’t just stand there looking stupid, get a round of drinks for the prince and Mr. Jonas.” The barmaid jumped at her name and scurried off to get the drinks. Jonas helped Jontha right his table and they sat down to wait for their drinks.

“So, Jonas, I guess I owe you a debt. It’s not every day somebody saves my life.”

“Nonsense your highness, the worm deserved to be killed. Him and the bear had probably planned it all before hand. You look like a man who would carry a large moneybag.”

“Please, call me Jontha. The sad thing is, I don’t even have a moneybag. My father pays my tab each week, including a tip for the barmaids. I don’t even know how much a drink costs.”

“Well, in that case, Jontha, let us drink a lot if your father is picking up the tab.”

“It’s the least I can do,” Jontha said with a smile. Bela finally returned with two drinks for each of them and made sure neither man had an empty glass for the rest of the evening.

By the end of the night, Jontha and Jonas were thoroughly drunk. As they were the last patrons to stumble out of the tavern Jontha said, “Jonas, I insist that you come home with me. I must put you up for at least the night. Do you have lodgings already?”

Jonas stopped and stood swaying. “Alas, I had just come into town when I met you and have not sought arrangements for sleep as yet.”

“Well, you certainly travel light. You don’t have any saddlebags? And it’s settled then; you will come home with me.” Jontha put his arm around Jonas and they proceeded to walk towards the castle. “I want you to meet my parents at any rate. They will no doubt be grateful that you saved the life of their only child.”

“How could a man refuse an invitation,” Jonas stopped for a second to settle his stomach and then continued, “from the prince?”

“The same way he refuses any other man.” Jontha slapped Jonas on the shoulder.

“I guess you’re right. But as I would not likely refuse any other man, I accept your offer Jontha. I will come to the castle, sleep in your nice soft beds, eat your delicious foods, and make a nuisance out of myself.” Jonas stumbled, but the prince caught him.

Jontha smiled at his newfound friend. “We shall sleep in the beds, but as for breakfast, I am not sure we will be hungry. Or up for that matter.”

As Jontha had predicted, neither man felt like consuming much more than water the next day (after sleeping through the entire morning). Once they were fully awake and recovered a little, Jontha took Jonas to meet his father. The prince cast a small revivify spell on his new friend so that at least one of them would be presentable. The prince's head was pounding, as wizards are unable to cast a revivify spell on themselves. Something like trying to pick up your own feet. He wore a smile nonetheless. At the door to the throne room, the guard informed the prince that his father was expecting him. As Jontha and Jonas entered the throne room, the king dismissed his councilors with the wave of his hand.

“So father, I hear you were expecting me. I hope I didn't keep you waiting.” Jontha's voice was chipper despite his aching head.

Dalek had a sour expression on his face. “Actually I wasn't expecting you to roll out of bed for another hour or two. I heard about your experience last night. I assume this is the man who came to your rescue?”

Jonas bowed low for the king. “Jonas, at your service, your majesty. And it was hardly a rescue. Your son can take care of himself. I merely dealt with the pathetic soul who didn't have the courage to confront Jontha face to face, and no wonder after he dealt with that bear of a man.”

Dalek looked unimpressed. “Yes, well, I thank you for saving my son's life. Not that it is much worth saving.” Dalek cast an unsatisfied glance at his son.

Jontha being his usual humorous self replied with sarcasm. “Why thank you father, I love you too.”

The king ignored his son's remark. "Jonas, you are welcome to stay at the castle for as long as you like. I am sure my wife will want to give you some token of our appreciation." The king implied that he did not necessarily agree with his wife.

Jonas aware of the tension between father and son decided not to ask for any reward. "Your son was kind enough to treat me to a drink or two last night, your majesty. That is enough for me. I will, however, take you up on your offer of accommodation."

The king frowned at Jontha. "Maybe you can keep my son out of trouble for a day or two."

Jontha smiled. "More likely father, he will help me find it."

The king called his advisors back to him and dismissed Jontha and Jonas. "I am sure you two have very important things to do. You may go to them."

Jontha not letting his father get the last word said over his shoulder on his way out, "As a matter of fact father, we do. We must rest up for a long and vigorous night of drinking. It's hard work you know. Come on Jonas."

For the next few days Jontha and Jonas drank late and slept late, all paid for by the king of course. They found they had a great deal in common: drinking, carousing, gambling, and womanizing. The prince did not have any other friends, so Jonas slid into the role of best friend. The prince trusted Jonas with his life, which is understandable, as Jonas had already saved it once. One of their other commonalities discovered during a night of drinking and carousing was a lust for hunting, so they made plans to go hunting at first light the next day. Of course first light turned out to be lunchtime.

After eating a large chunk of bread and drinking a couple glasses of water each, great for a hangover, they got bows out of the arsenal, grabbed a few wineskins and headed for the stables.

An hour later they were tromping through the forest, drinking, talking, and occasionally even looking for game. They were officially hunting for stag, but anything actually moving would equally have satisfied them.

“Is that a rabbit?” Jontha squinted into the trees.

“Where?”

“Over by that tree.” Jontha pointed.

“You’re going to have to be more specific than that, my friend. There are hundreds of trees. That’s why they call it a forest.”

Jontha clarified which tree. “The one shaped like a woman.”

“Oh, that one. It might be a rabbit...if rabbits are made out of stumps.” Jonas could not help but laugh at his own joke.

“Well, I thought I saw it move. Besides, it’s kinda shaped like a rabbit; you have to admit that.” Jontha was defensive.

“I’m sure you did see it move, Jontha. You need another drink.” Jonas handed Jontha the wineskin. “As for being shaped like a rabbit, I will give you a vague similarity. – Wait, what’s that?”

“What’s what?” Jontha looked around and then back at Jonas.

“Shhh. I think I hear something. Hoofs.” Jonas looked around for the cause of the sound. Jontha just looked at Jonas doubtfully. About one hundred yards ahead of them a stag stepped into a small clearing in the trees. The stag had four points on each antler. Jonas whispered, “See. I told you I heard something.”

They slowly dismounted and tied their horses to a tree. Getting out their bows, they crept towards the unsuspecting animal. Both of them had big broad smiles splitting their faces. Once they found a clear line of fire to the animal, they stopped and spread apart a ways. Jonas motioned to Jontha indicating that he could take the shot. The prince moved a couple yards further away to get a better shot at the flank. He steadied himself as much as he could with a buzz going through his head from the wine. He drew the bow up, pulled the arrow back to his eye, and loosed straight at the stag's side. At least that is where the arrow was supposed to go. The arrow actually pierced a tree a foot above the animal's head. Before Jonas had a chance to take proper aim, the stag was off through the forest disappearing behind trees.

“Well, that was a bit off. I adjusted for the wind, but not the alcohol.” Jontha was disappointed.

“Too much to drink?”

“Not enough. I'm usually falling over by the time I find some game. I overcompensated for the alcohol. Give me another gulp.” Instead of passing Jontha the wineskin, Jonas raised his bow, aimed at Jontha's head and loosed. The arrow zinged by the prince's ear and thudded into something behind him. Enraged, Jontha ran over to Jonas and knocked him to the ground with a punch.

“What the hell do you think you are doing?” Jontha stared down at the man menacingly.

“Look behind you.” Jonas pointed past the prince.

“Look behind me where?” The prince glanced back and discovered a man lying on the ground with a knife in his hand and an arrow through his eye. “Where the hell did he come from?” Jontha realized Jonas had saved his life again and went to go help his friend to his feet. “I'm so sorry, Jonas. I didn't know.”

“It’s all right. I understand. If someone shot an arrow at my head, I would probably knock them down too.” Jonas attempted to dust off his clothes and only ended up making them dirtier from his muddy hands.

“No. I should have known better. I should have trusted you.”

Jonas slapped Jontha on the back. “It’s all right my friend, but I think I’ve had enough hunting for today. You?”

“Yes. Let’s go back and get seriously drunk. That’s the second time you saved my life in the past week. I don’t think I could ever repay you.” Jontha gave Jonas an embrace.

“Nonsense. I was just there, that’s all. You would have done the same for me. And by the way, thanks for the tip on over compensating. I almost missed him.”

Jontha complemented Jonas on his skill. “It was an excellent shot. You took him right through the eye.”

Jonas looked slightly abashed. “Yes...but I was aiming for his throat.”

“Oh. In that case, I’m glad luck was on our side.” Both men started to laugh.

“Speaking of our side...It’s not really my business, but this is the second time somebody has tried to kill you in the past week, and this time was no bar fight.”

“Are you trying to say that somebody is paying these men to kill me?”

Jonas looked serious. “I don’t know, but I would start watching and listening closely if I was you. I may not be around if there is a third attempt.”

“You may have a point there. Let’s head back to town.”

On the way into town, Jonas offered to take the horses back to the castle and meet Jontha at the Winking Woman. By the time Jonas wandered into the Woman a half hour later, Jontha was drinks ahead of him.

“So I’ve got a bit of catching up to do. Bela! Bring me a couple of drinks. And the prince seems to need another as well. I have something to tell you Jontha.”

“A story? I hope it’s interesting.” The prince finished his drink.

“A little. I went into the castle to put our bows away after dropping off the horses at the stables. I went up the back way so I wouldn’t bother anyone.”

The prince interrupted mocking his friend. “More like so no one would see you stumble in with no game.”

“That too.”

Bela returned with two drinks for Jonas and one for Jontha. She smiled at the men and then moved on to another table.

Jonas continued his story. “Anyways, it took me past your father’s study. He was talking with one of his councilors. He said, ‘So two fools have now failed me. We are running out of assassins. If that other drunken lay about had not shown up, he would be dead by now.’ Then they started talking about governing stuff.”

“You’re sure it was my father?” Jontha looked doubtful.

Jonas resignedly answered, “Yes. I’m sorry. I recognized his voice.”

The prince slammed back the drink that Bela had just set in front of him and ordered another. Jontha and Jonas let that topic of conversation drop away and talked about more mundane things while they drank. Jontha was not ready to talk about the implications of his father trying to kill him.

Three hours and fifteen drinks later, they came back to the subject. Jontha, in a lull in the conversation, questioned the air above the table. “Why would my father want to kill me?”

Jonas, after pouring the rest of his drink down his throat answered, “I don’t know. Maybe he doesn’t want you to be king when he’s gone?”

Jontha was still a little doubtful, but starting to accept the information. “I know he’s never had much love for me, he thinks I am a worthless drunk, but I never thought he could want me dead.”

Jonas fed Jontha’s ego. “Who is he to judge you? He is not such a great man.”

Jontha agreed with Jonas. “No, he isn’t. I could be a good king.”

“Of course you could. At least as good as him.”

Jontha finished his drink, and ordered another for each of them. “Yeah, I’d be a great king! Someday.”

Jonas took it one step further. “You’d be a great king even now!”

“Yes I would.”

Instead of letting it drop at that, Jonas continued. “How dare he hire assassins? Won’t even get his own hands dirty!”

Jontha was completely under Jonas influence, not to mention the alcohol. He had a false sense of heroism. “The coward!”

Jonas pushed him further. “You should show him you won’t stand for it.”

“I won’t stand for it! ...What should I do?”

“He doesn’t want you to be king? Become king.” Jonas almost whispered the last two words.

Jontha started to smile. “Become king...Yes.”

“You’d make a better king than that coward.”

“Yes! You’re right. It’s the only way.... When do we do it?”

Jonas filled in the details. “Now. He’ll still be in his study, won’t he? Alone. I have a drug we can put in some wine for the guards.”

“Yes. Tonight. Before he hires a third assassin. Finish your drink, Jonas. We have work to do.” Jontha by this point actually believed that it was his idea to murder his father.

“Yes, your majesty.” Jonas smiled cruelly.

Twenty minutes later, Jontha and Jonas were walking down the hall of the castle towards the king’s study. The two guards were standing sleepily on either side of the door.

“My father still up and working?” Jontha walked up to the guards.

“Yes, your highness.” The guards both bowed to the prince.

“Maybe he doesn’t need sleep, but he should think about his guards once in a while.”

The guards though tired would not speak ill of the king. “We’re fine, your highness. We will be replaced when he retires.”

“Well, why don’t you have a drink at least? Jonas, give them a drink of wine.”

“Yes, your highness.” Jonas gave the soldiers the wineskin and they each took a long drink from it. They echoed their gratitude.

“Think nothing of it. I hope my father doesn’t keep you up too late.”

“Your father will retire when he is ready.” The soldier let out a big yawn.

“Are you okay soldier? You look tired. Maybe you should sit down.”

“I’m...All...Ri...” Both soldiers fell asleep and slid down the wall to the floor. Jontha banged open the door to his father’s study.

“What is the meaning of this?” The king stood up from his desk, startled.

“I know about your plan, father. Your assassins. I’m here to return the favour.”

“What are you talking about Jontha? You are drunk again.”

Jonas stepped forward. “I believe I can answer that question.” He sardonically added,
“Your majesty.”

The king growing impatient said, “Please do.”

“You see, Jontha here believes you have been hiring assassins to have him killed.”

“Why would you think that, son?”

“Again, your majesty, I can better answer your question. You see, I have been hiring
assassins to make an attempt on your son’s life in order to stop them.”

“Jonas, what are you saying?” Jontha was confused.

“To what purpose were you saving my son?”

Ignoring Jontha, Jonas continued to the king. “You see, father, the only way to get close
enough to you was to use this pathetic fool of a prince to help me.”

“Father? What are you talking about man?”

“I’m sure Jontha will understand eventually. I’m your son. I’m here to kill you. The rest
is irrelevant.”

“Guards!”

“I’m sorry father, it will do you no good. Your guards seem to have fallen suddenly
asleep.”

Jontha struggling to understand through the fog in his head questioned, “You are my
brother Jonas?”

“No, you complete idiot. I am you. Your better half.”

Jontha finally realized what was going on. “The spell!”

“Yes. The spell.”

The king, not understanding, asked, “What spell?”

“When I was interrupted. I must have split into two. You are my dark half. I understand now.”

The king was still not following. “I do not understand. Could somebody explain it to me.”

Turning away from Jontha, Jonas regarded the king, “You don’t need to understand, father.” Jonas pulled out a dagger.

“No. What are you doing? Jontha, help me.”

Before Jontha had a chance to react, Jonas quickly closed the distance to the king and brought his dagger up into the king’s heart.”

“Jonas how could you?” Jontha stopped with his hands still reaching out towards his father.

Jonas, smiling, replied, “Jontha, how could *you*?” The king fell to the floor.

The prince knew what he had to do. He quickly gathered his power in his rage and unleashed it. “Salan! Chagra! Elenia!” Jonas just stood there smiling. The spell sucked Jonas back into Jontha’s body. The prince knew if he had killed Jonas, he would have died himself. A guard ran into the room looking around warily.

“Your highness, the guards outside are asleep. What is going on?”

“The king is dead soldier. Jonas killed him.”

“Did this Jonas escape, your highness?”

“No. I destroyed him with magic. Have this mess cleaned up.”

“Yes, your highness.”

The next day, the prince’s birthday, Jontha was crowned king. After the coronation, he had a word with his advisor and childhood teacher. “Petr, my loyal friend, I need you to do something for me.”

“Anything, your majesty.”

“A few days ago, an old maid interrupted me in the middle of a spell. Have her put to death.”

“But didn’t she help your plot to kill your father?”

“Yes. But that is hardly the point. There is no excuse for disturbing the prince in meditation.”

“King, your majesty.”

“Yes. King.” Jontha smiled a cruel smile. “And have the owner of the Winking Woman put to death as well. I was assaulted in his establishment. Tell his son that I expect better treatment in the future.”

“It shall be done, your majesty.”