

## **The Mage and the Frost Giantess**

*(assorted excerpts)*

### **First Part**

. . . yet as fast as Morro was juggling his thoughts, the composite image did not make any sense. The heirloom, the fact that the thief had willingly fled through the Northern Reaches, and that said thief apparently had not suffered a single encounter with the Snowmen while they had to fight their way through the murderous horde with great effort. None of it made any sense – it was as if they were hunting after a ghost.

The rustling of the nearby trees pulled the mage back to reality. As he raised his head, he saw how Shana strode out of the thicket in all her glory – and, remarkably, entirely in the nude. Without bothering to give her smaller companion even a single glance, she waded into the small lake until the water reached up to her navel and began to wash herself, seemingly entirely indifferent about the presence of the spectator on the shore.

Morro was quite flabbergasted. While his blood led a heated debate as to whether it should flow upward or downward, he desperately searched for words to break the almost physically painful silence.

„A....a lady would be ashamed“, he stammered. It originally was meant as a deadpan comment, but his phonemically blushed face eliminated any attempt of pronounced casualty at record speed.

The Frost Giantess seemed to ignore his words. Only after a short moment, she began to turn towards him, intentionally making the move as slow as possible. When she answered, her smug smile was as broad as it was thin.

„A frost giant lady would indeed be ashamed to stand before the eyes of a frost giant gentleman while all in the nude. Fortunately, all I can see here is a shortling who, not counting his alarmingly low-hanging lower jaw, has no means whatsoever to threaten my honor or chastity.“

„Shortling? Now listen here, Shana – I know you like to forget this more than often, but I'm more than ten years older than you! For heavens' sake, I'm not a small child with whom you can merrily play ring a ring o' rosie in the nude and with nary a worry!“

„Oh, is that so? Grinning broadly, Shana trudged back to the shore until she stood straight in front of the Meduanese man, straddle-legged, and towering above him.

„And what will the big, bad mage do to harm poor me? Will he follow suit to the tundra wolves and begin to hump my leg? Or will he arrange for a ladder so that he may try and kiss me?“

„The big, bad mage will do nothing thatalike. He nonetheless would strongly prefer that his partner – who, for the record, still is below marriageable age by Meduanese law and custom –

would not arrange herself in front of him in semi-erotic poses.

„Why, if that is the case . . .“

With a pout that could have molten down rock, Shana returned into the water and once again to wash herself, making a great deal out of turning her backside to him. It took a good while before she calmly said:

„You know, Morro, if you wish to bathe *with me*, you would merely need to say so.“

Morro Taiz was proverbially speechless.

## **Second Part**

„I'm quite happy that we finally got rid of that Kadit brat“, Shana grumbled as walked down the pathway with giant steps and Morro on her shoulder.

„Why are you so bothered about her?“, the mage replied. „You will have to admit, her influence as an industrial heiress by no means was without its uses.“

„Sure, but still...“

„And without her abjuration magic, we likely wouldn't have lived past that one encounter with the witch coven, now would we?“

„Whatever; I still can make do just fine without her.“

„You seem unnecessarily aggressive, Shana.“

„*I am not aggressive*. She just did a number on my nerves, and it more than often was embarrassing to watch how she would latch on to you on every even just remotely thinkable situation. 'Oh, oh, save me, noble mage. I am not at all a trained abjurer who is entirely capable of defending herself in the face of danger!‘“

„You're exaggerating, Shana. True, she was kind of clingy, but abjurers just happen to be kind of hamstrung if they are entirely on their own. Besides, you have seen her after the meeting with the interrogator's minions. Queen Gondova may want to normalize the relations of this country with the other nations, but the average Brynn still is only fond of spellcasters if they are dangling from the next tree. The poor girl was scared out of her mind.“

„You need not remind me of this, Morro. May I remind you of the fact that I saved your behind from that exact fate?“

„Why are you so angry about her, then?“

„I am not. She just annoyed me, okay?!“

Both kept silent for a good while. Only the soft murmuring of the trees in the wind and the thundering steps of the frost giantess on the dirt road broke the silence.

„Shana?“

„What is it?“, the still simmering giantess growled.

„You're not jealous of her, are you?“

The promptly following but still very sudden cessation of movement on the part of the giantess very nearly threw Morro off Shana's shoulder. When she turned her head to him, her normally pale blue skin color had transformed into a worryingly deep shade of purple.

„Jealous!? What do you. . . how would you think. . . how can. . .“

For a moment, Shana was gasping for air like a fish on dry land. As Morro quickly realized, it was the calm before the storm.

„Now listen, mister mage – I *still* am a frost giantess. What do I care who is flirting around with a shortling like you? I don't give a rat's arse! As if I had to vie for the attention of a guy who barely goes above my kneecap! A-and especially not because of some stupid Kaditi whore that throws herself on anything with two functioning legs! And besides, . . .“

As she continued her tirade, Morro rapidly came to see the rapid provocation of the giantess as an absolutely terrible idea. It was one thing that she could easily crush him in her hand without all too much effort. It was another thing entirely that her superhuman stamina would allow her to keep up her rant for what could possibly be hours.

„Listen, Shana“, Morro began. „I didn't mean it. I mean, I know that you're . . .uh . . . a big girl, and that you. . .“

„I am not afraid, Morro“, the frost giantess said, now with a much calmer voice. „I just don't want to lose you, okay?“

Silence again blanketed the unlikely pair. Shana began to continue her way down the road, although her steps now were slower, and almost cautious in a way.

„. . . you are afraid Shana, no?“

The giantess did not answer.

„Afraid of the possibility that I simply disappear while you will have to make the rest of the journey all alone.“

Shana still did not say anything, but Morro could feel how her body tensed up. He suppressed the desire to lay a hand on her shoulder (given that he already was sitting on it anyhow), and instead made an awkward attempt to pat her head.

„But you don't have to be afraid, Shana. I won't just desert you. Damn it, we do need each other after all. I need you to make it out of this snowball of a country alive. And you need me to find the thief who took your family heirloom.“

„. . . yes“, Shana answered, her voice oddly mechanical. „I need you to find the thief“.

The rest of the way was entirely taciturn.

### **Third Part**

. . . but though they had managed to elude the rather unfriendly snowmen, it quickly dawned upon Morro that they had simply exchanged one danger for another: The storm had grown in intensity, and now bore such a biting cold with it that the mere act of breathing became painful. Shana herself was not particularly sensitive about such temperatures given her nature as a frost giantess, and Morro could ward off the cold via magical means, but the howling winds of the Northern Reaches still proverbially threatened to freeze the blood in their veins. They had to find a shelter – and quickly so.

Unfortunately, this was easier said than done. The snow ushered up by the wind produced a blank, white wall that limited one's sight to but a few feet. But the snow in the air was not their only problem – for when it remained on the ground, it would pile up to false hills. Shana almost fell over more than once when one of her feet suddenly sank in on seemingly solid ground, but at the same time, she could not slow down her step. To stop here and now would be a death verdict.

When Morro had almost accepted the fact that future scientists would investigate him as a glacial mummy, Shana suddenly increased her pace. It did not take long until the mage could see the reason for this: A gaping hole marred the cliff wall before them; large enough to allow passage even for a giantess.

The hastily entered opening led into a cavern whose spaciousness was only limited by the large number of stalagmites that were lining its floor. Still, it was a much more pleasant place than the storm-stricken outside world, and both giantess and mage quickly agreed that they would rest in the subterranean domicile until the snowstorm on the surface had found its end.

They began their often-repeated ritual without much hesitation: While Taiz summoned up pieces of wood and lit them on fire via elemental magic, Shana opened her backpack, drew forth one of the massive pieces of meat that served as their main provisions, and began to work on it with her hunting knife. In time, two steak of vastly different size were sizzling on the arcanelly-fed fire.

The meals were consumed without much commentary. This was not so much because they had nothing to talk about, quite on the contrary. But the events of the last twelve hours had left them so tired that both barely had enough energy to engage in chewing motions, not to speak of longer conversations.

Afterwards, both mage and giantess crawled into their respective sleeping bags without much further ado. Shana's breath slowed down quickly, yet Morro simply could find no rest. He initially blamed this sudden onset of insomnia on the turbulences of the last few days, but sooner than later, the mage realized that there was a much more banal reason for his restlessness: He was growing increasingly cold.

Whether it was the declining amount of adrenalin in his blood or just the campfire that was slowly dying down, the uncomfortably frosty tingling that had been kept at bay by a pleasant feeling of warmth until now was clearly crawling back into his bones, and far quicker than he deemed acceptable.

Naturally, a mage of Morro's caliber would have had an easy time to time to keep himself warm with the normal tools of his craft, but the fight with the snowmen had left him dangerously drained of focus, with even the mere creation of the campfire they had sat around becoming a difficult task for him. In his current state, the usual spells for such situations likely would not only warm him up, but could potentially light him up light a candle. There were more than enough horror stories of of mages who blew themselves to smithereens by casting spells while on low focus, and Morro had no greath enthusiasm to join their ranks.

Alas, he could not sleep like this. No matter how deeply he buried himself into the wool-lined folds of his sleeping bag, the cold followed him like a starving swarm of bloodsucking insects. As he kept rolling over, the mage suddenly heard Shana's voice.

“Is it possible that you are just a bit chilly, Morro?”

She lay on her side, her body turned towards him. Her head, lazily rested on her left hand, bore a mildly amused expression. Morro began to fear for the worst.

“ ‘tis an erroneous impression”, he toiled to utter while doing his best to prevent his teeth from chattering.

“Indeed? Why, maybe the darkness is just tampering with my vision, but I could swear you are quivering quite strongly even under all those furs.”

Shana's hitherto mild smile had grown into a smug grin. Taiz now was seriously nervous.

“Shana. Don't even think about it.”

Her grin widened.

“Shana, by the gods. Do not. Even. Think. About it.”

That the frost giantess had dragged him into her sleeping bag despite of his vocal and bodily protest was humiliating enough. That he now was effectively locked in a rather awkward position between the breasts and the folded arms of Shana did not help, either. But what really drove Morro Taiz mad was the complacent look on the face of the giantess that she maintained even while asleep.

A part of the mage practically screamed to somehow wriggle out of her unilateral embrace, but at the same time, another part of him had already fallen to the siren's call. The slow, but steady beating of the giantess' heart, the raising and sinking of her chest, and atop of all, the warmth

radiating from her body placed a heavy, all-consuming weariness upon Taiz. Even as he was silently murmuring curses, his head slumped down onto her sternum, and he fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

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