

*The
Good
He ought
to
Do*©

by Mick Dawson

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A figure wearing a simple Hessian mask ran along the rooftops of Nusalle's capital, Caliet. He had watched the streets from his lofty vantage point for the past three years. Civa sprinted to a chimney and vaulted over it; on leaping free, his hand casually flicked out to take hold of a lonely spire. His momentum twirled him to the opposite side where he slid down the steep four story roof of an orphanage; finally slowing to a stop with the aid of his hands.

His keen eyes peered through the slits in the sack to the streets below. The usual thieves and vagabonds had to be lurking in the shadows somewhere; he knew it. On raising his gaze up the end of the main thoroughfare; he detected little movement. Two men of the city watch ambled by, chatting idly but little else.

Civa sat down with his feet dangling over the edge and pulled the sack free of his head. It was horribly marred due to the cruelty of his first employer. His thoughts travelled back to a time when he was the main attraction of a travelling carnival; an acrobat whom they called the 'Catman.'

Civa would have laughed at the title, had it not been so apt. He was from the Cat tribe in inner Nusalle. Feral cats roamed the bush land where he came from in great droves. Some were hunted and eaten, while some were even tamed as kittens for pets. As a boy; Civa had no friends to speak of and he often spent his time watching the feral cats hunt and play. He emulated their every movement; from the tensing of the shoulders to the placing of his feet for leaping.

"This man has gristle for bones!" he remembered the ringmaster shouting to audiences packed to see him; the same paying throngs that had come to see the poor wrecks of humanity in the 'freak booths.' Civa also recalled the day he went to leave, while scratching at loose, disarrayed wisps of hair on his cratered scalp.

The ringmaster refused to allow him to go, so he had the mask affixed to his head

by way of a strong resin. When it was finally removed; this was to be the end result.

Civa stretched as the wind picked up. His eyes shot to the heavens; noting that no stars showed through the clouds.

His arms and legs seemed heavier appendages than what were suited to his body. Chords rippled to the middle of his chest where it was exposed above his leather jerkin. His legs bulged in his homespun troos as he squatted to replace the mask. The brown eyes within danced with glee at the panoramic view before him. When he was a mere tumbler in the main tent; Civa had trifling swings and platforms with which to entertain the throngs. Here however; the Catman was free and the rooftops of Caliet were his playground.

Hopping off the edge of the roof; he pivoted to take hold of the eave with his calloused hands; the boots which he had specially cobbled with jagged soles; stamped into the wall, where he remained momentarily in a vertical crouch. Kicking away; he landed without wavering on the rails of a balcony.

Civa twisted for a clothesline arcing across the street and leapt with outstretched arms. The line sailed cleanly into his hand; the momentum abruptly swinging him upward. He let go at the apex of his swing and appeared to 'hop' in mid air to the next. For the next turn of the glass, the hero of Caliet negotiated the shingled crowns of the city northward; finally coming to rest by a small belfry on top of a local house of worship.

He gazed across at the rounded tower which rose well above all others in the city. Civa didn't know it at first whom it belonged to. All he knew was, that he had to get a closer look at the spire which dominated all else; to the point where it could be seen well away from Caliet's outer boundaries.

Out of curiosity alone; the Catman negotiated the highest structures he could in order to catch a glimpse within the window which radiated a yellow glow. For a moment, he saw a Nusalleean woman; later learning that she was the Lady Nolga. She was of course a woman of station; but Civa could see that she originally came from the

tribes. Nolga apparently never saw the need to adorn herself with either cosmetics or jewellery but nonetheless; Civa thought she was nothing short of breathtaking. As most Nusalleans; her skin had tanned deep coppery brown under long hours of its harsh sun. Long raven-black locks fell about her shoulders like wispy tendrils of smoke. Deep brown eyes peered sadly from above a nub of a nose set in an almost perfectly elliptical face.

Her body was well curved and trim; filling the simple dresses she wore magnificently.

Civa at first; had been commissioned to steal from her. The fence he once worked for; informed him that the Lady Nolga was a widow who had never left the confines of her home and never removed her necklace.

The Catman at times saw the way she caressed the bauble vacantly. He found he couldn't bring himself to steal the only item which offered her comfort in her grief.

A crooked smile etched his face, beneath his mask. It was enough to see she was in good hands; her own hired guards patrolled the gardens to the base of the tower.

Civa was about to turn and leave, when a scream split the air. He watched concernedly while her guards pushed open the door to the base of the tower and disappear within the opening, with weapons raised.

On a building adjacent to the tower; a jib stood waiting for the next days labour. The counter weight of stone held the beam steady; supporting a platform which in turn dangled by a chain for the loading of materials. The Catman sprinted for a ladder leaning against the house of worship and sprang to the top rung. It hovered away from the edge at first; then picked up momentum as it fell toward the slightly lower roof of the unfinished building. The ladder bowed minutely as it hammered against the edge; a heartbeat after the hero of Caliet had leapt free and tumbled to his feet. Without a break in momentum, the Catman raced for the beam of the jib; grasping it in both hands and viciously kicking the bricks free it contained. He wrenched it soundly to one side and stepped onto the beam as it swung lazily toward the tower. Taking two more

strides across the narrow timber; he sprang for a window sill. A single hand slapped onto the jutting brickwork as his feet simultaneously anchored themselves against the wall. The window directly beneath him stirred; giving host to the head and shoulders of a thief.

Civa saw that he was a Quelandi man due to the fact that his skin had burned even darker than his. As most cat-men; his clothing was entirely black. The intruder pulled a necklace free from within the folds of his tunic and inspected it. A pink diamond almost filled his entire palm; set between the links of a sturdy silver chain. He gently scraped at the gem with curiously curved metallic talons, protruding from his hands. As he shifted on the sill to make ready his escape; the hero of Caliet noticed the same metallic bands on his feet.

Letting go of his single restraining hand; he allowed himself to fall. Instinctively, the thief turned his head skyward in time to see the man in the Hessian mask plummet his way.

In one fluid act, Civa slammed his feet into his chest; jolting the thief free of the ledge. The diamond itself was snatched from his grasp as he fell; while the hero of Caliet again clutched at the sill with feet anchored against the wall. To his chagrin; he watched the Quelandi extend his claws into the wall, and slow his descent in a sickening screech of steel against stone until he came to a halt; one story above the foot of the tower.

Civa grit his teeth against the malevolent stare and watched in horror as the cat-man stabbed his claws into the wall; scaling ever higher; as fast as a man could jog.

Looping the necklace over his head; he rolled through the window and raced down the stairs. More guards from the gardens flowed through the front entrance, rushing up to meet him.

Civa stepped onto the wooden rail and jumped to a suspended chandelier. It swung briskly under the momentum; allowing him to somersault over their heads and sprint out the door beyond them. He raced through the main thoroughfare; knowing that his

reprieve was brief at best at the sound of steel 'chinking' on stone; emanating from somewhere behind him.

"I will have my prize!" the Quelandi shouted.

Ignoring him, Civa ran up the drawbar of an abandoned cart and somersaulted over a fence. Catching the upper edge of a carpet merchant's shingle, he pulled himself up and over into a crouch. Without pausing; he sprang free; a mere heart beat before the shingle shattered at the talons of the Quelandi.

"Do you think to elude me indefinitely?" the frustrated voice boomed into the narrow alley.

The only thing to break up the sheer surfaces of the foreboding monoliths on either side, were the many barred windows. Civa jumped and wrenched himself higher with a steel bar in each hand. He kicked away, to grasp hold of the bars of a window on the opposite building; the ringing of metal striking metal; filling the air in mid flight.

In this fashion, Civa alternated between structures; never pausing for breath as the tell tale ringing of metal signalled that his pursuer was only one leap behind.

On reaching the upper most window he swung laterally; kicking away to wrap his arm around the neck of a stone gargoyle. From the corner of his eye, Civa saw sparks and chips of stone erupt under his feet in conjunction with the Quelandi's angered screech.

He swung himself around to the rear of the grotesque statue, where he planted his feet in its back. In two steps he gained the top of its head; putting him within reach of the overhanging eave. His fingers hooked onto the rim and tensed; pulling him up and over. A glance over the edge informed Civa that his nemesis was a moment behind. He turned and fled up the slope of the roof, where it grew ever steeper; leading back to the open belfry at its spire. In order to gain the ridge of the structure; the hero of Caliet sprinted diagonally for a hole left behind by a missing shingle. His hand dug into it and pulled on the rafter in attempts to propel him up the sudden rise before the belfry. He took two more steps and dived just out of reach of the box frame. With clawed fin-

gers; he desperately scabbled up the slope where he took hold of the timber frame work.

The thief rapidly closed with him as his talons easily sank into the shingles and swiped again; narrowly missing Civa's feet.

The hero of Caliet gained the roof above the bell; hanging onto the spire as he stared down into the face of the Quelandi; now standing at the foot of the belfry.

"There is nowhere left for you to run." the thief said coldly. "You are in my domain up here."

"I beg to differ." Commented Civa; dropping to the other side of the bell in the open frame. "Up here...you are in mine."

Taking hold of the framework in both hands; the hero of Caliet kicked both feet into the bell. Its upward arc collided under the chin of the Quelandi like a smith's hammer; catapulting him onto his back. The unconscious form slid eerily backward for the edge and over...never to rise again.

For a time, Civa panted; listening for any sign the taloned thief still stirred. With no sound of the 'chinking' of his claws to challenge him; he peered over the edge to readily spot the prone form.

His calloused hand cupped the gem around his neck; then with a nod, he began the journey back to the tower of the Lady Nolga.

Civa made his entry; gliding lithely through the window into her bedchamber. She yelped at the sight of the intruder, and for the longest of times; looked hard into the eyes in the Hessian bag.

"I believe this belongs to you, Lady Nolga. I am sorry for the grief you have suffered."

At the sound of her cries; three of the lady's guards stormed into the room. To

the fore of them, one carried a crossbow; levelling it at the hero of Caliet.

"Back away to the other wall!" he growled.

"No, Thrimmon!" Nolga interjected.

Civa looked to the woman with no less a look of consternation etched on his face than her guards.

"Return to your posts." She added in a calmer tone; still fixing her gaze on Civa.

"Are you sure, my Lady?" Thrimmon queried.

"Quite certain." She assured him. "Leave us."

Thrimmon bowed and left the room; following after his men. In their absence, Civa stared unspeaking at Nolga; undaunted by his silence, the lady poured a decanter of a fine Pendaran port into a silver goblet and handed to him. Civa accepted the refreshment but tacitly stood with the goblet in hand; refusing to drink from it.

"You think I would poison you?"

The Catman shook his head.

"Ah, you are reluctant to lift your mask."

"Why do you offer me hospitality?" he blurted.

"You have done me a great service tonight. I am curious as to why you returned my necklace to me? It was already in your grasp; you could have disposed of it before anyone was any the wiser."

Civa sighed heavily; he very much doubted Nolga would understand his reasoning. He wanted to desperately tell someone, anyone. A thought permeated his rationale; once he jumped through her window, he knew they would never meet again.

"I have seen the way you caress your diamond...I have felt your pain." He whispered. "It made me wonder how many others felt a similar loss. How many children had not received things from their parents? How many betrothed couples were deprived of gifts for each other; due to me? I had decided to steal no more. I wanted to repent of all

the misdeeds I had imposed on others. Alas; it would have been impossible to

return everything I had stolen, so I turned my hand to the prevention of further thefts."

An uneasy silence filled the room.

"I had no idea what a noble heart beat in that chest." began the Lady Nolga.

"Do not mock me."

"I do not; I would see the face that belonged to such a man."

"No." Civa said flatly.

The lady lowered her head as she spoke.

"You still do not trust me." She said in a dejected tone. "Then I will give you reason to."

Nolga advanced to the table and carefully slipped the necklace over her head.

Standing before the hero of Caliet, she held the diamond up in front of his eyes; affording him a better view. It was of a rough quality with several small cracks to one side. He had stolen a lot of jewellery in the past and knew its value.

"This is my most valuable of possessions."

"It is worthless; merely a diamond used to cut other diamonds."

"It is the key to my entire fortune; look to the cracks."

Civa followed her finger; tracing the imperfections.

"It is a map, hero. I am from the tribe of the Magpie; a mere two days ride inland from the port of Garan."

"I have travelled there."

"Then you will be able to recognize the mountains depicted here. And see here; a river passes through it and to the western side, is my clan."

Civa nodded attentively.

"As you see, within the boundaries; is a curious mark. It is the location of my family home where the bulk of my great wealth is buried."

She brushed her hand against the side of Civa's mask as he digested the information.

"Now... would you allow me to look upon the face of who I know to be a true

champion?"

Civa closed his eyes; nodding in resignation. A calloused hand pulled the bag from the deformed scalp and waited for the inevitable gasp of horror he had so often experienced in the past. Tears spilled from his glassy eyes when he looked to the gaping stare of the woman; feeling exposed, like a young girl who was forced to denude herself in front of the gaze of lecherous eyes.

"You are handsome, by any standard."

"I warned you, not to mock me."

"You misjudge me. You have risked your life, you have felt empathy for the suffering of others and wish to make amends for the wrongs you have done. Your thoughts and actions are selfless and when you shared this with me; you became the most comely man I have ever seen."

Civa watched the woman's gaze; gauging her for any sign of mischief and when at last he discerned none; Nolga leaned in to kiss him passionately.

The End