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The Carriage Rolls On

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THE CARRIAGE ROLLS ON

tonayo crow

The horse-drawn carriage bumped and jostled its precious passenger as it wound its way down the dusty road towards town. From the driver's seat of the carriage, a view of the bustling town stretched for miles to the east: tall mansions dwarfed the small homes of the poor, and an entire neighborhood was burned black from a fire the previous week. The smell of fish (it was a river town) wafted on the breeze to the carriage, and one could almost hear the bartering and shouting from the market, a large enterprise stretching the entire length of the canal over the river. A large pothole momentarily halted the carriage's procession, and the driver was forced to hop down and manually guide the horses in the right direction. This activity put him in quite the irritated mood, and he grumbled about dust and horses and roads as he climbed back onto his seat (a rather tough feat for such a paunchy man). Once back on track, the carriage resumed its trek to town, where the passenger hoped to buy some expensive trinkets.

Soon the town embraced the carriage in full, and the sights and smells and sounds of life banged against the carriage's exterior like a fist on wood. To reach the expensive part of town, the carriage had to cross a less-than-legal flea market selling goods to the highest bidder (faux gold jewelry was particularly popular). The passenger never liked this part of the journey. *Indecent*, she called it. *Heathens*, she thought, mentally chastising the vendors. Finally, the carriage reached its destination. *The Silk Emporium, and Other Goods*, the sign read. The dusty carriage rolled to a stop, coming to rest while the mistress entered the store to do her shopping.

The carriage was left to fill the absence of its mistress by imagining what she was doing inside the store.

"Good evening, miss, how can I help you?" asked the bony shopkeeper. Miss Pembington raised her icy eyes to his and sniffed. He chuckled nervously, muttering something about inventory, and skulked away. Miss Pembington approached the merchandise lining the back wall, a wide array of pistols, knives, and hammers displayed proudly on a black velvet surface, glinting in the dim shop light. She smiled as she reached for the wicked hunting knife with the etched ivory handle she'd been eyeing for the past two weeks.

"I'll take this one, Lonny," she called out. A loud crash ensued and Lonny the shopkeeper stumbled out from the back of the store.

"Ah, yes, this one is in fine form, one of my best!" he exclaimed. "Just what are you hunting miss, if I may ask?"

*"You may not." Miss Pembington shelled out some silver coins while Lonny hurriedly wrapped the knife and stuck it in a bag labeled *The Silk Emporium, and Other Goods*. Miss Pembington said, "I trust that you will be discrete, yes? I would hate to have to come back here," she smiled with her mouth but not her eyes and Lonny paled.*

Insolent waif, she thought.

"You won't hear nothing from me, miss, I swear!" Lonny squeaked out.

"Good." Turning sharply, Miss Pembington walked out the door and back to the waiting carriage, leaving a faint trace of her earthy perfume behind.

The carriage, filled again with its mistress, prepared to journey onwards. The breathless driver called out "Where to, ma'am?" and the passenger said, "I have an appointment, dear, we mustn't keep the mayor waiting." The carriage imagined that she smiled when she said that, her new hunting knife gripped in her palm.