

The Bandit's Bet

There once was a woman, who you'd expect to be quite normal, if anything. Either that, or an honorable person, judging by her looks. She had dark hair, of a shade that matched the bark of a tree, complete with golden streaks from the sunlight. Her eyes were the shade of the grass after a nice frost, while her body was slim and pale, yet curvy. Her name was Citrina.

However, like the most of us, she had faults. You see, this woman was a thief. Every day, she went out to receive her "prizes", as she set off to await a traveler. When one arrived, either by horse, donkey, wagon, or by walking, she would ambush them, and steal any valuables they happened to own. Crowns, diamonds, fabrics, gold coins, precious gems; if they had it, she wanted it. After a nice long day of this banditry, she would place her loot in a cave, which she also lived in. Very soon, she had almost a fortune rivaling that of a king's, or possibly even several.

On what seemed to be an average day, she waited, as usual, for her next victim. And one did eventually show up, after several hours. He was an old man, with pale hair and a beard that went down to his waist. The man had to help himself walk with a stick, and was hobbling even then. Next to him was a donkey, with a bundle of goods on its back. The donkey itself looked exhausted, as if the poor thing had carried the load an entire week! And the load? Citrina could tell that it had a lot of goods that were ripe for the taking. This was the perfect target!

Eventually, she made her move, once the old man had rested himself on a log, to catch his breath. Slowly, the thief withdrew her prized dagger, which was the first thing that she had stolen. Citrina crept towards the man, and started making demands.

"Sir! Please remove the items on your donkey and place them on the ground if you know what's good for you!"

Now, Citrina didn't even need to use sympathy ploys anymore, as she was so full of herself, and would attack people like this even in broad daylight. In her eyes, she could never be caught, in fact. But, this man just looked up at her, and started laughing at something only he knew.

Obviously, this did not please the bandit.

"Sir! Stop laughing and do it!"

The man stopped, but he still smiled. This unnerved Citrina so, as they always handed over their riches, right? But, he spoke again.

“Miss... you are unworthy of my items. They are objects of great power, that only someone with lots of power like myself can even hold. If you must steal, please find someone else.” he spoke, sounding like a frog in early Spring.

Citrina smiled back. He had riches, all right. She didn't believe in magic, but she could tell that he had something in there! Citrina wandered to the load on the donkey's back, and tried to remove items, of which she was unable to lift. Eventually the old man spoke up again.

“Young lady, I believe we can come to a truce. How about you show me that you are worthy to have those items? What you must do is steal a gold coin from my donkey without it or myself noticing, by the end of the day.” he offered, a grave look in his eyes.

Citrina, ever the skeptic, scoffed. “And what will I get if I succeed?”

The man smiled, a look that was frightening in this situation. “You get every coin, every goblet, and every weapon that is on its back.”

“And if I don't?”

The man seemed amused even further. “You don't want to know.”

With that, he turned to the donkey, and said a few words that Citrina could not hear. However, she noticed that the donkey... seemed to nod at whatever he was saying. Of course, that was silly. Donkeys don't understand people, right? All they really did was carry loot around.

Once he was done talking to his faithful donkey, he looked at Citrina. “I bet you're hungry. How about we sit down to eat?”

Citrina sat down next to where the donkey was standing, on another log, and, lo and behold! With just a wave of his hands, fresh bread appeared on her lap, as if it had been cooked from above just minutes ago, and had been tossed down to her. Hungrily, she bit into it, as the man watched. He just continued smiling, as he asked her a few questions about her life. Where she was from, why she was a thief, how many people she had stolen from...

All this time, she was looking for a good time to reach into the donkey's bags to find a gold coin. However, it seemed to be staring right at her, looking at her with angry eyes. So, she continued waiting for a good time for it to not notice, even as she answered the questions.

Finally, she saw a good chance, when the donkey was occupied with a blade of grass on the ground. She slid her hand into one of the bags, searching for a gold coin. Eventually, her hand met one, and she pulled it out, only to realize how close to night it was. Horrified for the first time she could remember, Citrina gasped, fearful for her life.

And, the old man noticed.

“You lost”, Hermes (for he was Hermes!) spoke coldly, and suddenly, Citrina felt... *odd*.

As the donkey disappeared, her arms and legs started to become rough and the same color as her hair. She looked on in horror as her bare feet, ones that she never bothered to put shoes on, started to sink into the ground, lengthening as they did. Her eyes became leaves that came out of her arms, which had multiplied.

Over the years that followed, she remained there, distressing over her plight. But, no one could hear her. You see, Citrina, as you might have guessed, had turned into a tree. However, as people walked near her, they saw that the gold coin had become a fruit so delicious, they had to pluck it off and eat it. It was orange in color, with a peel that was often removed before eating. No one had seen such a thing before, and so they had no such name for the fruit. So, they called them “oranges”, after their color. Soon, they also started calling the fruit “citruses“, as well.

This was her punishment; she had to give fruit and shade to travelers, day in and day out. Citrina was to aid the travelers in their quests, for all eternity.