

heard the floorboards creaking below my feet.

Silas is dead. The thought cascaded through my mind, becoming louder as it tumbled over itself. It sank in even more. Soon, I couldn't keep my excitement contained.

"Silas is dead," I whispered, savoring the sound the words made as they flowed into my ears, the feeling on the tip of the tongue as my mouth formed the liberating statement.

"Silas is dead," I declared, a little louder this time. I was *really* starting to like those words.

"SILAS IS DEAD!" I proclaimed, as though to truly finalize the situation. This time, I was sure the entire inn had heard me. I didn't care. Those were words of *power*, goddammit, and I had the right to proclaim them anywhere I damn well pleased.

Sure enough, I had roused Gardain in the room next door to me a bit earlier than he had anticipated waking up.

"Shut your trap, boy, or I'll come over there and shut it for you," he shouted through the wall. After hastily forming an apology, I sat down on my bed and begun to prepare to head downstairs for breakfast.

I should probably give you a bit more information on the situation, starting with the most important tidbit.

My name is Silas.

And Silas—that is, I—*isn't actually* dead. And the person whom everyone wants to kill is I. I've been a bit naughty during the last few months, starting inevitably with the initial boat ride from the nautical port-village of Daemon. I had just found a new adventuring party, and we had all chipped in so we could cross the vast sea of Mer.

I had misled my new party just a bit, though. Being the gnomish bard that I was (but no longer am--we'll get to that), I obviously wasn't a very strong fellow. I had needed to impress my new friends, though, so it had become necessary to think of something, quick.

Luckily, my parents had been rather skilled at bluffing, and it was a trait that they had passed on to me.

Meta: I have *NO* idea how to smoothly transition from the past perfect to the simple past, so I had the brilliant idea to shove this paragraph in here so that you can't call me out on a poor transition.

So, I profoundly displayed my godlike strength to the party, and they quickly trusted me.

I was standing rather smugly with the rest of my new party as we chartered a ship to get across the sea. I managed not to break important bones in my face when I cringed at the price of the trip.

"Five hundred gold pieces? You must be out of your mind!" That was Kathra talking. She had never been one for diplomacy. Still, she was right. I did the calculation in my head, and it meant that I'd have to pay eighty-three of my hard-earned and not-so-plentiful gold pieces, with some change.

Rodrik, the diplomatic fellow of the group, stepped in.

"Is there anything we can do to lower the cost?" There had better be, because this was the only ship in the dinky port that we could charter. If the ship's captain had said no, I would have turned him into the mayor for maintaining a monopoly.

He didn't, though. He said that, if we had enough strong men with us, we could sail for only 350 gold pieces if we helped out a bit around the boat.

It was still a stupidly expensive price to pay for the ride, and was undoubtedly a form of