

The Coin Counter's Friend

By Justin Cien

The Grinelli Bank was an opulent establishment where fine gentlemen and ladies could take their most precious belongings and have them locked away in some posh, cushioned vault. It was here that such elegant effects would be preserved until the need arose to showcase the item at some ostentatious dinner party or some other such extravagant demonstration of one's affluence. Of course the fine members of Whitehawk's high society paid no mind to the bank's practices beyond the teller's window. Past the grand entryway, along the velvet rug, over the granite countertop, and down the marble hallway there stood a door. This door was special, though not because of its exemplary craftsmanship or the treasures which lay beyond. On the surface, this mahogany portal seemed to open onto nothing more than a dusty stone hallway. However, it was at the end of this simple corridor that the wonder and amazement began. A lone staircase stood at hallway's end, spiraling down into the darkest depths of the dankest basement which this pillar of society's wealth had been built upon.

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Down here the days ran on ceaselessly as they had for who remembers how long. Time does feel unmoving when you measure it one gold piece at a time. And so was the life of Veegle, one of the many hapless goblin slaves given the "honor" of counting the gold of the wealthy free folk on the outside of the dungeon walls. Veegle had been trapped in this filthy basement for as long as he could remember. He knew he hadn't been born here, but his memory of life before this drudging, torturous existence was void. Anything that had happened before had been replaced

with the memories of his cold, hard floor space, fingers numb from the tiresome repetition of moving coins one by one from one pile to another.

Veegle longed for the day he died, the day when his frail body could no longer lift itself off the soot covered floor, the day his malnourished tummy digested itself, the day his dust coated lungs collapsed under their own weight and he could breath no longer. That was how most of the others went, that or from the beatings. As he awaited his slow and painful demise, Veegle dreamed of being born in his next life as a mighty bugbear, a mountain of fur and muscle. He imagined coming back to The Grinelli and stomping in the heads of each and every one of his slavers and freeing his fellow thralls from this hell. Of course he couldn't go killing himself though, then he wouldn't meet his quotas and that would insight quite the nasty lashing. And so, Veegle continued to painstakingly count each and every last insufferable coin they put in front of him.

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Of the nigh infinite coins which the goblin wretch had seen in his years of servitude, he had never seen a coin such as the one he held in his grimy, bony little fingers. The intricate patterns of some forgotten mint captured the intrigue of Veegle's shallow mind. It had, of course, been some time since Veegle had felt anything other than unbridled animosity towards a filthy, putrid, rotten, slimy coin. There was something different about this coin, however, some sort of natural charm to it. Perhaps it was that it represented a break in the monotonous existence Veegle led, but something compelled him to keep the coin. He knew that he would be beaten to death were his transgression to be discovered, but he found that he no longer minded so much. At least he'd be taken away from this sunken reality. And who knew, maybe his dreams of returning as a bugbear would be realized. And so, Veegle held on to his enigmatic prize and each night as he

lay awake on the frigid slab he called his bed, he would examine the intricacies of his treasure. It was during these late hours, as Veegle cradled his auspicious reward between the crook of his thumb and forefinger, that the inklings of a malformed hope began to take root in this poor goblin's crippled psyche.

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Veegle gagged breathlessly at each drenched squelch as he stumbled up the spiraling staircase one step at a time. Drenched in the viscera of the dungeon guards, the frenzied goblinoid was overcome with a sudden urge to smile. His lips curled back into an accursed sight, the curve of his grin reaching from one pointed ear to the other. Veegle's heart raced as he stared at the large wooden door in front of him, the final barrier that stood between him and the beautiful, blinding brilliance of daylight. The cold steel of the door handle made Veegle's skin tingle as he turned it, he relished every second as the door creaked open. After stepping from the darkness of his prison and into the glaring brightness of the sun which shone through the skylight, Veegle stared down at the red puddles forming around his feet, staining the beautiful white marble. He gazed into the abyss of the beautiful stoneworking until an ear splitting shriek shook him from his murderous stupor.

Looking up, his crazed eyes met those of an elegant duchess whose horrific fortune it was to have spotted his frightful visage from over the teller's counter. The basement dweller had never laid his eyes upon such a beautiful creature, but she gave him away. She alerted the entire grand entryway of his presence. And that angered Veegle.

In the past weeks the coin counter had learned where giving in to his anger could get him. Why, it got him here. That and the help of his special friend. Unfolding his clenched fist he

looked at his most prized possession. Blood had found its way into the grooves of Veegle's coin, morphing the etched image into that of a wicked, cackling skull.

Kill, Veegle heard his friend's voice from over his shoulder. It was a voice he had come to worship in the weeks following the acquisition of his curious coin, a fiendish whisper of a voice which had taught Veegle all he could accomplish by giving into his hatred.

Dropping to all fours, the enraged goblin broke into a wild sprint towards his prey. Ducking under his desk, the teller cried for help. The duchess ran for the exit as fast as her impotent legs could carry her. Over the counter Veegle leaped, unrelenting and with greater ability than he had ever before possessed, another gift from his new friend. In mere seconds, Veegle's unnatural speed had him on his victim's heels. Brandishing his coin, the rabid little goblin called forth a splintered spike of discarnate shadow. Another leap found Veegle on the woman's shoulders. Heart racing, he raised his implement high above his head and fell his fair lady with a single blow, punching a vicious hole directly through her skull. Having vanquished the mark of his ire, Veegle's chest heaved and with a final sigh his wrath subsided, his apparitional implement vanishing.

Veegle turned his gaze from the corpse which lay motionless before him. He felt a pit in his stomach as he realized his revelry had come to an end. A group of rancorous guards, weapons drawn, converged upon him. He hung his head in acceptance and stroked the corpse's silken hair, the closest thing to decadence he had ever felt.

You aren't finished yet, Veegle looked up at the massive double doors of the entryway. "I-It's you!" Veegle stammered as he laid eyes upon the one who was responsible for getting him this far. *Come to me my disciple*, and so the blood-soaked goblin did.

As he approached the wicked shade that stood in the doorway, Veegle offered up the coin his selfless friend had gifted him. A frigid chill crept through Veegle's entire being as his benefactor curled its long shadowy digits around his hand and folded his tiny fingers around the coin. *It is yours*, the amalgamation of whispers proclaimed. Tendrils of shadow flowered forth from the coin, shrouding the goblin in a veil of darkness. Veegle stared into the ghastly visage of his liberator and shed a single tear as he was swallowed by the umbra and delivered from his perdition.