

The Stabbing of a Wizard

It's dangerous to spill things within a wizard's tower, as you can never be sure which way they'll fall. For example, the master of this particular tower had been skewered neatly through his throat, and from this wound his blood dripped up. Directly up, past the guests in his fine abode— still holding glasses of glittering champagne and the souls of the damned as they stared, bewildered—and onto the ceiling.

He hadn't even screamed. He didn't need to. The Great Wizard Uzodarim merely fell to the ground with a huff and everything went still. The elves quit dancing, the pegasus offering free rides drifted to the floor, the gnome band ground to a halt; even the shining disco ball suspended a foot from the ceiling ceased turning. All waited to see if he'd rise and cackle at their sober faces, but as the seconds ticked by it dawned on them that the situation was not, in fact, a wizardly prank.

It had been the shindig of the millennium. The greatest wizard of eternity had opened his tower to guests and filled it with all manner of wonders—an indoor meteor shower, a floating aquarium, and a slime buffet, to name a few. With the ending of the War of 1000 Bells, all of magekind had cause to celebrate.

Such an auspicious moment had been interrupted by a murder. There were murmurs, at first, then a crescendo as hell broke loose.

Mages, you see, don't carry weapons. Knives and swords are for those who cannot cast. The mere suggestion that your rival might be packing heat is an insult of the highest order, as it implies that they can't manage to conjure lightning or other, more imaginative things than steel. Killing a world renowned wizard is one thing, but using your own hands to do it is another.

The necromancer Silazar claimed that one of the druids must have committed the murder out of anger at the ethical implications of an indoor aquarium. Dusting the Fairy

squeakily accused the sorcerers of being jealous of Uzodarim's theories on the nature of souls. The bard Glimmerdyke blamed one of their own, as bards hate nothing more than other bards.

Each of the accused were outraged not only at the idea of having murdered their host, but even more so at the implication that they might lower themselves to the level of a common ruffian. They began suggesting their own methods of murder. The druid Ducat would have turned him into a spider and squished him. The sorcerer Vierxae would have conjured water in his throat and drowned him. The bard Efain would simply ask Glimmerdyke to perform and watch the wizard's ears bleed. Serious accusations devolved into petty squabbles. As these voices grew louder, the stairs creaked as the one person in the tower not graced with an invitation descended.

Berry had been but a child when he was made apprentice of the Great Wizard Uzodarim. His first memory was of a forming a flame in his hand with neither candle nor wick, and then of leaving his parents forever. He didn't begrudge them for sending him away to the wizard's tower. It was the right choice—how many opportunities were there for commoners, especially ones like him? He just wished that his teacher would let him send them letters occasionally. The wizard had insisted that once he became a fully fledged mage, he could see them whenever he wanted, but for now there were books to read and floors to sweep and robes to iron and windows to scrub. Berry wasn't sure when he'd be done, but he hoped it would be soon.

In the meantime he was getting better at potioncraft, and there was a little window he could use to look on while the wizard had guests over, so it wasn't all bad. He had been watching the party in such a manner when he found himself getting a little thirsty. Berry wasn't allowed to join in the festivities, but he had figured surely his teacher would forgive him for getting a glass of water.

He found himself the center of attention as all eyes turned to him. A hush fell over the room once again. Many of these people were strangers to him, but he recognized a few as

having been guests before. He wasn't sure if they would know him, though. One such person approached him slowly.

"Cherry, right?" Dusting asked, not waiting for his answer before continuing. "Did you see anything? Have you any inkling what might have happened, or who might have done this?"

Berry paused in thought. He thought about the wizard, and the window. He thought about the books, the robes, the dishes. He thought about the guests, dancing like they hadn't been at war. He thought about how hard it would be to clean up after they left. He thought about the knife, shining under the disco ball. Above all else, he thought about his parents.

"No."