

# I3

## Klurra

My long way around to Marnie's had taken us far into the Uplands. So, it was no surprise that the first person we met was an Orc.

The Orc emerged out of the mists, stopped and glared at us, hard—and especially hard at Grell.

“Who are you?” she demanded.

“Who wants to know?” Grell shot back.

“Klurra of Stonefields,” she replied, as if she owned the land we were standing on.

“Mind your own damn business, Klurra of Stonefields,” Grell told her.

“It is my business,” she replied, not intimidated in the least. “You being *in* Stonefields. And not one of us. We like to know when one of *not-us* is trespassing on our land.”

“We're not trespassing, we're just passing through,” Grell countered.

“To do which, you have to trespass. On our land. Trespass being, *being on our land*. Duh! So, out with it. Who are you, trespasser?”

Grell was stumped. He'd have to answer, but he didn't have a tribe. So, she'd think he was an outlaw. And would either attack him or get the rest of her tribe to come and attack him, or he'd have to kill her. Which he didn't want to do. He thought she seemed nice.

“Grell of the Oz ... garoos,” he said.  
Klurra’s eyes narrowed in suspicion. “Never heard of them.”  
“Long way away,” Grell said. “Overseas.”  
“Over *seas?*” she said. “No Orcs overseas that I’ve heard of!”  
“Work it out, thicko,” Grell snapped. “You’re looking at one. Me. I’m from overseas. And I’m an Orc. So. Now bugger off out of our way.”  
“How d’you get here, then?” Klurra asked, not budging an inch.  
“On this fucking horse, how d’you think?”  
“Good swimmer, is he?”  
“Eh?”  
“Swam across the sea carrying a big ugly bastard Orc?”  
Grell scowled. “What you clearly mean, is, and I’d have clearly understood if you’d expressed yourself better, ‘How did I get *there*, then?’ Not *here*. *There* being the point of disembarkation from the ship I got there in. From the overseas land of the Ozgaroos.”  
“What was it called?” Klurra demanded.  
“A,” Grell said, “*ship*.”  
“Named?”  
“The *Southern Star*.”  
Grell, we began to see, could think surprisingly fast on his feet.  
“Captain?”  
“Jack Warner,” Grell said. “Only everyone called him Captain Lighthouse. Which you probably won’t get, you being as thick as four short planks, so I’ll explain it to you. Sailors are called *jacks*. That’s one of their nicknames, like *tars* or *sea dogs*. Lighthouses warn sailors. So, are jack warners.”  
Klurra’s face cleared. “Oh. That’s clever, that. One more question, and I’ll decide your fate. Why did you come all the way from Ozgaroo?”  
“That’s my business and no one else’s. However, in order to spare myself the bother of chopping your dense little head off, I will add that I am on a secret mission from my chief.” Klurra opened her mouth to speak, but Grell held up a hand and went on. “You’ll want to know his name, I expect, you being the incredibly nosy type. Bruce. Bruce the Pomhater. Poms being a tribe o’ prats we Ozgaroos can’t fucking stand. Present company excepted,” he added in a mutter to me.  
Klurra relaxed. “Well, why didn’t you say so in the first place, you big bag of wind, wasting my time like that. Papers.” She held out a hand. “From your chief,” she said, and waited.

Grell didn't move, let alone produce any papers.

Klurra said, "No chief would send an Orc out without papers, so's he can get safe passage through other Orc lands."

"I said *secret* mission," Grell retorted. "He's not going to go writing it down on a bit of paper, is he? Gods you're dim, aren't you? Are all Stonefuckers as dim as you?"

"Wouldn't expect him to," Klurra replied. "Not the *mission*, fartface. Just the usual. 'Please let whatever your stupid name is through, blah blah blah.' So. Let's see it."

Grell sighed and got off his horse. "Some people," he said, as he lumbered towards her, "can't take a fucking hint."

"And some people," she replied, lumbering towards him, "can't produce their fucking papers which an Orc would always carry. So, I believe I need to take you to the chief."

"Don't have time," Grell said. "Important mission. Time is of the essence."

"Just have to make time, won't you?" Klurra reached around behind her for a warhammer. It was one of two she was carrying. They were big, brutal-looking things. She hefted it in her hands, staring at Grell. "Orc who 'doesn't have time' to pay his respects to the chief? Never heard of that, any more than I've heard of bloody Ozgaroos! You'll be coming with me."

"No, I won't," Grell said, hefting Fugg, his battle-axe.

"Battle-axe!" she said, scornfully. "Can't you lift a proper weapon?"

"'Course I can," Grell said. "I prefer this, that's all. I'm elite."

"You, *elite*? Fuck off!" Klurra snorted.

"You fuck off!" Grell retorted.

"No, *you* fuck off. With your fucking poncy battle-axe! Put that thing down and use a proper weapon." She unslung her second warhammer and tossed it to Grell, who caught it in one great fist. "Same as mine, it's my spare, so I won't have no advantage by having a better one. Always carry a spare, I do, for when I break one over some stupid *outlaw's* head."

*Outlaw.*

Well, I supposed we were. And Orcs didn't approve of outlaws.

Grell sighed and shoved Fugg headspike-first into the ground. He swung the warhammer a few times to test its weight and balance.

"Gods, what a piece of crap!" he said. "You actually *fight* with this?"

“About to find out, aren’t you?” She grinned, dropping into a crouch. Then straightening up again, said, “Shit, forgot my manners, sorry—might I have the honor of knowing the name of the brave Orc warrior I am about to bash the brains in of?”

“Grell of Ozgaroo.”

“All right, Grell of Ozgaroo, let’s be having you.”

“Oh, you’ll be having me all right!”

“That I will!”

“*Gaaah!*”

“*Rraaaaah!*”

They crouched, facing each other, and paced from side to side, then back again. Their movements began to mirror each other. They raised their weapons at the same time, with the same poses, and flourishes.

Few people have been lucky enough—as Oller, Esmeralda and I were that day—to witness a real live Orc Mating Ritual. The reason for this is that Orc Mating Rituals usually take place after battles, when anyone who might have been around to watch is now dead. I’d say mating *dance*, if that was all it had been. It started out that way, like a war-dance, or a haka, each throwing challenges and insults at each other, but while it started out like a dance, it ended more like a war. Or rather, a battle. Not the battle that we spectators had been expecting, but the oldest battle of them all: the battle of the sexes.

As they stamped and flourished and glared, the threats and insults began.

“Gonna slap you around, that’s for sure, pretty boy!” Klurra threatened.

I thought, *pretty boy? Grell’s the ugliest bastard I’ve seen here. Well, until today ... now there are two of them.*

Grell shot back, “Scarecrow!”

“Pigbollock!”

“Elf-tit!”

“Elf-tit! Did you call me *elf-tit?*” Klurra was incensed.

“Yeah, an’ I’ll apologize to the next repulsive elf-hag I see for comparing her scrawny dug to you. They may be fuckin’ horrible little shits, but there’s a limit!”

Klurra snarled, “Goblin turd!”

“Wolf-bitch!”

Klurra frowned and straightened up. “Oy,” she said in a non-war-chant, more normal speaking voice. “You know the rules. No compliments.”

“Er, sorry,” Grell said. “Where was I?”

“Goblin turd.”

“Yeah, right. Eefrit hemorrhoid!”

She grinned, sank back in her crouch, and said, “Nice one!”

“Oy, no compliments, nibler-arse,” Grell shot back.

“Giant snot!”

“Pustule!”

“Snowdrop!”

“Sheep-shit!”

“Meringue!”

“Meringue?” Grell queried, contemptuously as if to say, *is that the best you can do?*

“Light and fluffy and sweet and crunchy,” Klurra mocked. “Ready for a crunching, meringue-boy?”

“Oh, it’s crunch time, is it?” Grell threatened.

“Come on over and see,” she taunted.

“*You* come over *here* and see. I’m not going near some cabbage-flavored fart—my poor fucking nostrils! You must be joking!”

“You come here, ’fraidy-cat!”

“No, you come *here!*”

They began lifting their feet high to the side, like sumo wrestlers, and bringing them down with thumps that shook the ground, mirroring each other, synchronized, each bellowing, with each thump, “*Wooh ...! Wooh ...! Wooh!*”

Gradually, the angle of their feet changed, from sideways to forwards, a few inches at a time, and the two bellowing, glaring Orcs slowly stomp-danced towards each other, warhammers raised.

After a few more *woohs* they were facing each other, half a dozen paces apart, great plumes of breath billowing from mouths and nostrils.

“Think you’re gonna tap me with that teaspoon?” Grell mocked.

The Orc girl flung her warhammer aside. “Not gonna dirty it with your bugshit-for-brains, you scrawny streak of pixie piss!”

I snorted. *Scrawny?* Grell’s built like a brick shithouse.

Grell tossed aside his warhammer with a casual flick. It sailed into a thorn bush some twenty yards away. “Don’t need no tin-toy hammer for this!”

“You don’t make it easy on yourself, do you?” Klurra sneered. “First little baby’s going to get a spanking, then he’s going to get scwatchies

on his lickw armsy-warmsies when he has to get my hammer out of that thorn bush. Oh no, wait, he's going to have *two* bwoken armsy-warmsies in a minute."

"Gods, you don't half jabber, like a bloody auctioneer with diarrhea!" Grell mocked. "Just shut up, will you. The sight of you's bad enough without your blab-blab, blahdy-bloody-blah-blah blah all day!"

"Who's talking!"

"I am, so you shut up."

"*You* shut up!"

"Or I'll shut you up!"

"Yeah? You and whose army?"

"This army-warmy," Grell echoed her babytalk as he held up his massive right arm, fist clenched. "Won't need *this* army-warmy." He tucked his left arm behind his back.

"Won't need either." The Orc girl crossed both of hers, contemptuously. "One puff and I'll blow you over."

"Yeah?" Grell stepped towards her.

"Yeah!" She stepped towards him.

"Go on, then! Try it if you think you're hard enough!"

"Oh, I'm hard enough, you flimsy sack of duck down!" Klurra leaned forward and blew in Grell's face.

Grell waited till she ran out of breath, which took a while.

When she'd stopped and stood in front of him, chest heaving to get her breath back, Grell said, "Ooh, did someone pick some nice lavender today? How lovely on this soft, spring breeze!" He took a huge breath, opened his mouth, and exhaled a roaring blast that I knew from bitter experience was so noxious you could almost see it. Thirty feet away that I was, I winced. I'd made sure, since our night hog-tied together in The Wheatsheaf's barn, to stand always *upwind* of Grell. His breath could stun pigeons. I was downwind of him now and quickly held my nose before his exhalation could reach me.

Klurra didn't flinch. "Yeah, well," she said, unimpressed, when Grell ran out of breath and stood panting opposite her. "You know what they say. Pretty promises are all very well, but can he live up to them?"

"I dunno why I waste my breath on you," Grell returned in the same dismissive tone.

"Deeds, not words," she mocked. "All sweet talk and no action."

"Yeah," Grell mocked back. "Time for talking's over, flapmouth."

“Then flutter off, little fairy. Back to your gnomey-homey in the dingly dell.”

“You see any wings?”

“Ooh, no, sorry, did some *howwid ickw* boy pluck them off you? *Awwww ...!*”

“And I’m going forward, not back.”

“Oh, are you?”

“I am.”

“Raaaah!” Klurra roared, and “Raaaah!” Grell roared back and, roaring, they charged at each other, thumping into each other’s chests, bouncing off and then thumping in again. At first neither of them used arms, just chests and breath and roars, until the arms came into play and then there was pushing, shoving, grabbing, grappling, and staggering in the least coordinated dance you’ve never seen, which became, somehow, coordinated, as each shuffling monster felt for the other’s weaknesses and maneuvered and feinted and attempted to trip and throw, their roars now subsiding to grunts of exertion. And then there was an *oof*, and an *urf*, and they fell over each other’s feet and tumbled to the ground with another jarring thud and then it was time for us to look away.

We didn’t, half stunned from realizing that we’d just watched an exhibition of foreplay at its most remarkable.

Orc sex is like normal sex, only with Orcs. Sweating, puffing, squelching, shifting, grunting, honking, howls of outrage, and arguments about who had to lie on the damp patch.

I turned to Esmeralda, who was watching, mouth open. “Should you be watching this?”

She shrugged. “Why not? *You* two are!”

“Well, it’s ... you being a noble maiden and all that.”

“I’m not going to be a maiden forever I hope!” she replied. “And when it comes time to stop being a maiden, I wouldn’t mind knowing what I should be doing.”

We watched Grell and Klurra cavorting energetically and loudly on the ground, rolling, and thrashing, and biting, and barking, and giving orders, and complaining, and encouraging, and whacking each other on the backside as if they were horses.

“As long as you realize that’s not the only way to do it,” I pointed out.

"I'm not a complete idiot," Esmeralda retorted. "And I've seen Daddy's picture books. I know what's what and what goes where and how."

"That's a relief. For your husband, especially. I don't know if he'd appreciate a wedding night like this ..."

We knew that we shouldn't watch, but it was impossible not to. Just when you thought you'd seen it all, there was something new. An all-action, rip-roaring spectacle, in living 3-D.

Esmeralda said, "I've practiced fellatio. With a carrot. With my cousin, Roselle. She's twenty." At my raised eyebrow, she added, "Different carrot, we had a carrot each. She showed me how. She's done it for real, with her boyf. She says slowly is best, and humming. She also said best not do *that* when I bit the end off my carrot. She hasn't gone all the way with him, has to stay a maiden, of course, until the wedding night. But she will soon, they're marrying next month, and I expect I'll get a full report. If I ever see her again ..."

She tailed off.

Oller said as he handed us cheese sandwiches, "I had a girl, back in Brig. Mellyn. Barmaid at The Wolf's Head. I thought *we* was wild; I mean she was ... energetic. Inventive. Nothing like this, though."

We ate our sandwiches, which we washed down with water from our skins as we watched, and the *oofs* and *warghfs* and *grurgls* continued in the background. *As dinner theatre goes*, I thought, *this is pretty good value for money*. Seeing as it was not only free, but also 'highly original and superbly executed' (*The New Orc Times*); the characters were 'so well realized as to be entirely lifelike' (*The Daily Chainmail*); the choreography 'was both spellbinding and luminous in its fluidity' (*World of Dance*); and 'not only was the unexpected twist at the end breathtaking, but the entire climax was earth-shattering in its intensity. Highly recommended!' (*Sports Illustrated*).

We watched all the way to that climax. It was preceded by bouts of breaking off and jumping in again, which eventually led, via twists and turns and acrobatics, to somersaults, the two of them tumbling end over end down the slope, gathering speed until they crashed into a tree. Which made Klurra squeal with delight, and Grell yelp, "Ow!" because the part of them that had hit the tree was his head. Klurra giggled, and Grell gurgled, then he jumped to his feet with her perched on him and her legs wrapped around his thick hairy waist, and he ran around the



tree, three times one way and three times the other, while she kicked his thick hairy bottom with her heels and drummed her fists on his back, yodeling with delight. And then they fell, with a shriek from Klurra and a bark of surprise from Grell, into a ditch covered with bracken. Its long brown leaves thrashed about above them, from the thrashing about going on below.

“Be a hell of a honeymoon,” I said, to Esmeralda. “You and ... who? D’you have anyone in mind?”

“No. I’m only sixteen, I’ve got plenty of time.”



Klurra knew of a nearby cave where we spent the night. The Stonefields Orcs kept it stocked with firewood, and Oller had a fire going in no time. There was plenty of room for the horses, and once we’d groomed and settled them for the night, we shared and shared alike. Orc sausage, we discovered, was delicious, juicy and spiced with firepeppers. Klurra loved Esmeralda’s lemon biscuits, so Esmeralda gave her the entire package of them, wrapped up in a linen cloth.

By now, of course, Klurra adored Esmeralda, just like everyone did. She thanked her, and said she’d share them with her mother and sister, who loved cakes and would never have had anything as delicious as these. Then she grinned and said, “Fat chance of that, I’ll eat the lot long before I get home.” So, Esmeralda offered her the other package of them, but Klurra said no, because she wasn’t going home anyway.

A thought struck her as she said that. She turned and looked at Grell, who was sitting on the ground beside her.

He looked at her and grinned.

She reached out and patted him on the knee.

She saw us looking at them, smiling. “They breed *real* Orcs in Ozgaroo!” she said.

Grell swelled with pride and beamed at her. I could tell he wanted to say something nice back but couldn’t think of anything. “*Lucky* Orcs,” he said eventually. “And I’m the luckiest of the lot!”

Klurra smiled at him. “Yeah, well,” she said, her smile fading. “I suppose your luck’s going to run out tomorrow.”

Grell frowned, worried. “So ... I suppose you’re going to haul us up before your chief, eh?”

“No no, course not. Silly old bastard would probably cut your outlaw head off. Bit of a stickler, Chief Elbrig. Old fashioned, one for the rules. I’m not having no one cut that gorgeous head off. No, tomorrow you go one way, I go the other.”

Grell hadn’t considered that.

“Assuming we continue in the directions we were taking when we met. Which were opposite. If you think about it, we’d never have met if we’d been going the same way. And we wouldn’t be sitting here now having this nice chat around this nice fire after what I must say was a very nice day.”

“Me too,” Grell agreed.

“You lot enjoy it?” Klurra wondered.

“Very much,” I said, and Esmeralda said, “Definitely,” and Oller said, “Yes indeed. Never seen the like, me.”

Klurra nodded, pleased. Then she said, “I’m not asking where you’re going, don’t worry. Secret mission and all that.”

“Where are you going?” Grell asked. “If it isn’t secret?”

“It’s not exactly secret ...” Klurra said. “It’s ... Orc business. I could tell you. But not them.”

“Oh,” Grell said.

She waited, watching him.

“I’d like to hear about it,” Grell said.

“Come on, then.”

She and Grell got up and went outside.

When they came back in, his face was shining.

“It’s a *quest*, Daxxie!” he said. “A real, honest-to-goodness proper *quest*!”

“Orc quest,” Klurra added. “Orcs only.”