

The Court of the Vassal

by Husayn R

The court of Benjamin was about to be in session. The lord was not sitting in the main chair at the front. He was customarily late so this was nothing new. The audience, which consisted of a couple of townspeople numbering near 20 were chattering amongst themselves, creating judgments and opinions about what would happen to the convicted. Some old men in the back were betting some coins, while the families of the convicted and the indictee were in the front lost in prayer.

Lord Benjamin walked in and sat in his armchair.

"Begin. I want to hear what happened."

"That bastard took my goat and killed it because he said she was eating his crops."

"She was eating my crops! That goat has been eating my crops for the last six years and I had I not put my hand down. I was sick and tired so I finally did."

"The only thing you brought down was your blade onto the head of my precious goat!"

"Silence. Do you have evidence that she was eating your crops?"

"I do, my lord. Right here."

The Convicted turned to his family and brought up some corn stalks and some grass that had some bite marks and were roughly cut at the top.

"Those...are goat bite marks?"

"Yes my lord! I also found some of the hairs of that goat on my land as well! Right here!"

He brought up some goat fur hairs.

"Those aren't goat hairs. My goat is white, those are black!"

"You lie!"

The convicted lunged across the court to the indictee and began planting punches onto his face.

"Stop right now."

The pillage of punches continued to occur. The audience began to look around for someone to act.

All of a sudden there was a loud crash. Everyone looked to the front of the room. The lord had taken two vases from the wall in the front and threw it on the ground.

"Stop. You, pick this up," he pointed to one of the audience members to come pick up the shards of the vase. "Get back to your seat, convicted."

"Yes, I am sorry."

"Yes, my...?"

"My lord, I am sorry my lord."

"Yes my lord, I apologize."

"Is this your argument? Do you have any rebuttal?" Lord Ben began to lounge in his chair, crossing his legs, and fumbling with the rings on his finger.

"I do. Those are not bite marks. Those are scythe marks. He cut them with his blade while he was on his horse, and because his cut is off and not straight, he blames my goat. My goat doesn't even leave the house!"

"You cut your land on a horse?"

"Yes my lord, I have leg problems."

The Lord scoffed. "You have leg problems, yet that didn't stop you just now." He pointed his finger to him and then to the indictee.

The convicted looked down at his feet. Some of the audience chuckled. One of the men who bet some coin put his face in his hands. He seemed to know who would win this case.

The Lord sighed. "Is that it?" He cleared his throat. "Okay. Your sentence will be decided tomorrow. This court is adjourned." The lord walked out through the back entrance, as everyone stood up and bowed their heads.

The convicted and the indictee looked at each other. The indictee smiled, and laughed a little. The convicted turned around to his family.

The Lord arrived back at his home. Cases like this amused him. He tried to make a mockery of them. He knew exactly what he was going to do. Make the convicted pay the indictor some coin for a three new goats, and also have the indictor give the convicted some of his crop to compensate for the crops that apparently ended up in the stomach of the goat. He, the Lord himself, would just get some taxes from each of them for taking his time.

The Lord prided himself on making the decision to make both parties happy.

However, it was tradition to consult with his vassals before he made a decision. They usually agreed with him, but he didn't take their opinion lightly. Two of them had been to school, and one of them was from the area and knew everyone. He depended on this one to tell him about the two people in the court and how he knew them.

The Lord called the meeting that late afternoon. The vassals were meant to be there before him.

The lord entered the library of his home. The two scholars were sitting there talking about something. They immediately stood up and bowed. He put his hands up and looked around his library. He was usually casual with his vassals, since he handpicked them himself. He trusted them. They weren't his friends, but they weren't his slaves either. However, he expected them to pay him their respects like everyone else in the town.

One of the vassals was missing.

"Where is Henry?" The Lord asked.

The two scholars looked at each other. "He was on his way. He stopped by the church as we were walking here. He may still be there."

"Huh. Maybe he doesn't think this case isn't worth his time. I don't blame him. It isn't worth any of our time, especially mine," the lord said as he sat down and groaned a little. He sighed. "I guess we'll call for him. Roger! Go get Henry from church." Roger, a serf, nodded and left.

At that moment Henry burst into the library. He was sweating, but he looked like he just cleansed himself in the river. He had not a speck of dirt on him. His boots were clean as well. He had the look of a vassal, but at the moment, he had the aura of a judge.

He knew what he had to do. He just had to do it.

"Greatest apologies, my lord. I was lost in prayer to you and to your health, your family, your rule, your..."

"That is alright Henry. You can stop kneeling. Stand up, and sit down here."

"Yes my lord." Henry got up and sat exactly where the lord pointed. He was not to disobey the lord after arriving late.

"I assume you three were at the trial. I assume you to know the case itself, and its," the lord shook his head, "I assume you to know what is happening in this case, and all its contents. It isn't a hard case to understand." He chuckled. The vassals followed his example.

"Yes my lord, we were there."

"What are your opinions on it?"

"I believe it's an easy fix."

"I agree."

"But goats are expensive nowadays," the lord responded.

"Yes my lord, but a goat. Its easy. It isn't even worth my time to discuss this case with you, my lord."

"I believe this is a case that is very much worth our time. Its probably the most important case thus far in your reign," Henry said, "my lord."

The lord looked at Henry and then at the two scholars. The lord had a look of mockery on his face. "What?"

"These citizens, these two citizens under your reign have committed a crime that is worthy of punishment other than replenishing this man of his goat and this man of his crops."

"How so?"

"How so indeed Henry. You aren't allergic to goats are you?"

"No, William, I am not. My lord, these men are two men that must be made an example of."

"'An example of,' Henry? Are you kidding? My lord, this man has spent too much time at the church!"

"Spend too much in the house of God? I believe it's a place you should spend more time, scholar."

"William, I believe it wise to keep your mouth shut in this discussion," the lord said. The lord was again lounging in his chair.

William shrunk his head back.

"An example of, Henry? What do you mean? Execution?"

"Yes."

"Why? Over a goat?"

"Of disobeying God and You."

"Ha, disobeying me? You must mean by taking my precious time?"

"No. Your time is for the people."

"You are quite vocal in this discussion aren't you-"

"William, leave us," the lord demanded just as William began.

"Yes my lord."

Henry smiled a little as William left the room, bowing his head to the lord as he left.

"My time," the lord continued, "is for the people?"

"Yes my lord. We depend on you as a god, and you must be there for us. But these people, these heretics have taken time you could have given to ruling the people in order to give them more attention by killing an animal of God. They were attention seekers that-that, my lord they are making a mockery of your power."

"Is that so, Henry? I'm not seeing your point of view."

"They killed a goat, right my lord?"

"Yes."

"They killed an animal that provides for the people, for this town, and gives its milk to trade. That is good. But it has a soul, and because it has a soul, it is protected by our holy God. It's

protected amongst our cattle, our horses. Just because it's a goat does not mean it is any less than a horse, or a cow, or a dog."

Henry sat up straight in his chair, and put his elbows on the table. The lord began to stroke his chin.

"That is a crime punishable by prison time at the very least. At the very least. Also, you ordered, actually your father ordered, that the farmer is responsible for protecting their own crop, and it is your own fault if it is stolen. However, if it is used to feed the animal of the town, it is a crime to not feed it."

"And that crime is punishable by death."

"Yes, my lord it is. In order to create a continuity between your father, to continue and set new precedents, and also to rightly punish these men, it's the gallows. They are also making a mockery of you and the court. "

"The punishment should be conducted right now."

"Exactly, my lord. I shall relay the news."

The news to the family came as a shock.

When the noose was hung around the necks of both the convicted and the indicted, the priest began to read the prayers. The lord read the reason for the punishment: "Heresy." The crowd gasped. Families cried. The tides of allegiance were shifting.

Henry stood in the back. He could get the land back now. The crops would be given back to him and his family. He might even get a new goat. It was all under his ownership again. He had waited for this moment for so long. Six years. Seven years of planning. It was done.

As the line of the noose began to tighten as the bodies hung beneath the platform, a small smile formed across his mouth.

