

# CHARACTER STORY: BRAWLER

Never lived in a same place for more than a year. Never thought this pathetic village would be the first patch of land that I'd call home that long. Then again, I never thought a lot of things would happen and I'll be damned if that ever stopped them from happening.



I guess life just has a way of working out like that. "My little Templar" – my pa would say after I'd come back from dishing out another beating to a boy who thought too much of himself, my red hair tangled in a mess of mud and blood. Pa was a bastard if ever there was one. Stole for a living, was too cheap to pay the guilds and was always on the run as a result. Never more than a year in the same place.

He'd rush into whatever hovel we huddled in, panicked, half-drunk, shut the windows with a paranoid gleam in his eyes and start telling me how "they" are after us again. Always thought of "them" as these big bad men when I was little – crooked knives, crooked grins. Now I get that he was just as bad if not worse. Same as me now, really. The world is just a mud pit and we're all rotten, biting and clawing, scrambling over each other's heads to crawl out, not knowing that we're all going down together. They don't call it the Dark for nothing.

All his hair-tussling and nicknames aside I think he truly believed I was going to be a Templar. I'm not sure how much he knew of them outside of the fact that they were all women and they could fight – both fit me well enough. For once I don't think he understood how the girls got there – what would usually happen to their parents for them to end up training as a Templar. I don't think he wanted that fate for himself, but ignorance is bliss I guess.

I finally ran away when I was fifteen and I got tired of following him from town to town, always looking over our shoulders, never able to scrape anything but a meager existence from his pickpocketing. I got into a tavern brawl and impressed a caravan guard captain by knocking out two of his teeth – next thing I knew he was offering me work in his band. I never said my goodbyes to pa – I knew it would devastate him and he'd be pathetic begging me to stay. Oh, and I hated his guts and never wanted to see him again.

I had mixed thoughts about caravan guarding. It was easy enough on the first two trips what with the lack of any attacks to defend from. Still got paid – more decent coin than I ever saw from pa! The third trip went much worse. My career as a caravan guard came to an abrupt stop after our very first attack – well planned, well executed – the brigands, hiding in trees, brought a good half of us down with crossbow bolts before closing in to finish the job. I killed one in melee, but the heavy-set woman, their leader, took me down with a shield bash. Guess she liked my spirit because they decided not to slit my throat and offered to be one of them instead. Highway robbery beat being dead, so I agreed.

There was a strange freedom to the highway life. Hide in forests, send one of ours into town to get word of a good target for a hit, prepare, kill a bunch of guards, sell the spoils – drink it all away in the next town. Town watch and the caravan warriors are no Greyguard and we only got in real trouble with them rarely. Lost some people, found some new ones. All of them were one like another – rotten teeth, drunk half of the time, eager for the next bloodletting. And I was one of them.

The brigand leader took me under her wing, thought of me as a daughter. Got respect as people feared both myself and my new adopted ma – ain't no one stupid enough to try something funny. The food was decent, we fought more than we ran and, outside of regular attacks from wild animals, the woods were pleasant enough. Life was good.

Then that one attack came – one that changed everything. Rich-looking wagon – purple velvet, gilded decorations. Knew it was a good haul from the looks of it. The guards were better than you'd expect too as we lost four men in the fight. Even the bastard in the carriage decided to put up a fight – usually it's only the guards who do. He could swing his sword too, despite his rich clothes and all. Bled out two more of ours before Ma put a crossbow bolt in his gut.

She was mad as all hells then – we lost half of the band on that raid. She made him watch as she dragged out his wife and daughter from the wagon – whimpering, pathetic, helpless. Ordered me to end them, so that the poor sod could suffer before he croaked. His eyes, I'll never forget them. He looked sad, blood running down his chin, whispering for quick death. I couldn't do it. Ma was not pleased, but others were more than happy to oblige.

That day I found out that no matter how much of a shithole the Dark can be – there are things I won't stoop to. And staying with those who would make me sick to my stomach. And so, I left the band to strike out on my own. Staggered around for a bit, never really finding a place – never more than a year, until I found this little place on the edge of the Scarred Lands. The abandoned mine that the elders were trying to get up and running were teeming with kobolds and they needed disposable swords to clear the critters out. Great fit for me.

I spent my earnings drinking and dining as I liked, getting into tavern fights when I was feeling bored. It was a low life, but it was honest, and I felt content – for the first time in what seemed like ever. Until one night I was asked if I was brave enough to venture deeper into the mines to face something more than just kobolds for a chance at some serious coin.

As the bruised boys of my childhood could attest to – I never turned down a challenge. I had a good feeling about this.