



# CHARACTER STORY: SNEAK

I keep hearing people complain that life is difficult. Am I wrong to want to experience this hardship? Sheltered away, far from the struggles and dangers, I am not certain if I ever truly lived.

A daughter of a mighty lord, protector of the realm, or whatever was left of it after the terrible events of a century ago. Yet as the tutors told me – in that time of despair our keep stood strong, a bulwark of protection against the relentless onslaught of the monstrosities that would claim our land as their own.

It was my great-grandfather who held the evils at bay and his daughter who built up what is now the northernmost civilized land still holding against the evils of the Scarred Wastes and the unbridled corruption beyond. Ever since I was a child I found strange comfort looking out from the walls of our keep, seeing the gnarled forms of the twisted trees stretch into the horizon.

The people of this land flock to my family for the protection it offers. My father is surrounded by warriors loyal to him those who can protect our people and assert his will over those who would challenge his authority. He has created a semblance of safety for the land and allowed me to grow up within the walls of the castle, enjoying every comfort and luxury that most people can only dream of. And I hate it.

Those who stop at the castle tell stories of danger, daring, adventure, adversity. They all look downtrodden, their clothes ripped and mud-stained, but what a thrill it must be to oppose the creatures of darkness, to travel through the corrupted forests, to fend off bandits, to seek ancient mysteries amidst crumbling ruins! The tales I heard and the books I read describe a world full of opportunity for those who can seize it. Yet here the only opportunity that awaits me is an advantageous marriage proposal. How dull. I am no fool and I understand that life beyond the keep is full of peril, but I think I would rather face that than wither away next to an ungrateful oaf of a husband.

I have decided long ago that I would not submit to this existence. Getting around the castle, into places where I'm not supposed to be I was always agile and nimble. I know these corridors well and I am light on my feet, able to stay out of sight. With enough curiosity and attention, one can find many secrets in our keep and a hidden tunnel leading beyond the walls was a welcome discovery. I had my plan and means of escape. Not for a second did I doubt that this is what I want for myself. A few weeks were spent putting together a travel pack. Some food, enough coin to get by, a slender blade, an outfit that wouldn't make me stand out too much. Sneaking around the castle, these things were not difficult to get a hold of.

My most prized possession came to me when I was rummaging through the scrolls in the map room to ensure I would not get lost on the countryside roads. An ancient-looking map, torn and scorched around the edges, it seemed to hint at a source of great treasure in a ruined city below a small mining settlement to the north, on the very edge of Scarred Wastes. What a thrilling adventure to start my new life! I rolled it up and snuck out, keeping it close to my chest. My preparations were coming to an end.

A caravan to the north was not hard to find once I made my way out of the castle on a rainy night. The caravan captain looked me over with a smirk but took my coin as I got a place in the stagecoach. My travel companions smelled and coughed. The raindrops seeped through the cracks in the damaged roof. I looked out of the window, saying silent goodbyes to the lights of the castle windows that were drifting away, blurred by the rain's veil. I pulled up my hood and put up my feet on the opposite seat. Once I get to my destination I would pursue the secret of the map. My adventure was about to start!