

Anderson Plays the Pipes, Book 2, Scene 85

“What on earth is that horrible racket?” asked Athena. She and Minerva were getting dressed after morning training; it was almost time for breakfast.

“If I am not mistaken,” said Minerva with a grin. “That is the sound of a pair of cats being swung about by their tails. That, or Anderson is playing his bagpipes.”

“Damn it! I *told* that man! I’ll gut him like a fish!”

Sarah snickered.

“Now, now,” said Minerva. “I distinctly recall you saying, ‘early in the morning.’ As we have been up over two hours, I do not believe he is in violation.” She chuckled.

“Phooey. He’s pushing it, though, and I will make sure he learns that the next time we are on the mats together.” Athena rubbed her hands. “Oh, yes, I will make him squeal like a pig, if he can breathe, that is.”

“I find it invigorating,” replied Minerva.

Athena stared at her friend, shocked. Sarah snickered again.

The mood in Gavin’s quarters was decidedly different. The Duke of Craignish and Striven was bouncing like a schoolboy as the stirring march wafted up from below his windows. A piper of his own! Magnificent! He hummed brightly to himself as he left his quarters, bound for breakfast.

As he entered the kitchenette, Gavin could see Anderson through the windows, marching to and fro on the veranda. The music was much louder here. Abbie was present, preparing breakfast. She glanced up at Gavin as he came into the room, a sour look on her face. “Good morning, Abbie! Such a fine day! But why do you look as if you’d swallowed a lemon?”

“Your Grace. Jus’ because I be a Scot dinna mean I likes that screechin’. `Tis like a poor pig, stuck in a gate.”

Athena and Minerva entered, Athena glumly, Minerva spritely. In fact, Minerva *marched* in, Athena slouched. “Good morning, Grandpère!” Minerva said brightly. Athena mumbled.

“Good morning! Isn’t it glorious?”

“It is bracing and stirring,” replied Minerva. “Makes me want to charge into battle!”

“Ha! Exactly so! However, it does not appear that Athena and Abbie share our sentiments. Say, perhaps two or three more so they could harmonize and some drums to provide the beat; maybe that would change their opinions?”

“Saints preserve us!” exclaimed Abbie.

“Grandpère,” said Athena. “After June, you may do as you like. But after the next combat drill, your piper will not be able to draw enough breath to toot a whistle.” She grinned maliciously.

Outside, Anderson let a last note quaver in the still morning air. He slapped his fist to his chest to Gavin in salute, and Gavin returned it, then he turned and marched off smartly.

Gavin turned from the window, grinning. Athena and Abbie breathed a sigh of relief. “Now don’t you damage him too badly,” Gavin said, wagging his finger. “A good piper is hard to find, even in Scotland. Takes years to get any good at them.”

Athena snorted. “Bah. First, I don’t see how anyone survives long enough to get good at them if playing badly is much worse than that. Second, how many years will it take for Anderson to get there?”

Athena and Abbie cackled with laughter while Gavin and Minerva looked at each other in resignation. Well, it takes all kinds.