

Talking to Yourself Again, Genevieve?

By C. Jade Wyton

Genevieve Jones has been haunted by Kordulf the Corruptor, a lich she failed to kill at the end of her training. Despite the man's constant presence watching her, nobody seems to believe her, and she is constantly shunned and mocked by the others in her family.

Contains descriptions of stalking, abuse/violence, manipulation, mental illness, and ableism.

~~~~~

A weight pressed down at the foot of Genevieve's bed, and she woke with a start as she realised he was back.

*Kordulf was back!*

Her breath caught in her throat as she stared at the lich satyr that sat on the floor by the foot of her small bed; his elbow casually leaning on her mattress like the arm of a couch. He peered at her, softly, and she found she couldn't move. She was frozen in fear.

*He'd never been in her bedroom before.*

At least... not that she'd known.... Had he been in here before? Had he watched her before? The thoughts ran through her head, and she felt her tail give a tiny twitch that was held down under her three winter blankets (not that it was winter; she had simply never adjusted to the cold of the Sword Coast).

She shivered when she noticed Kordulf's lips were upturned in an affectionate smile, and she wondered if he'd noticed she was awake, or if he thought she was still sleeping.

She dared not move. Just in case.

She lay as still as possible, barely daring to breathe....

And Kordulf's smile fell, slightly, and he shifted.

'I'm sorry, Genevieve, I didn't mean to wake you. Don't be frightened—'

He touched her leg, and the scream finally escaped her.

'Genevieve, it's alright,' Kordulf spoke in a soft voice, one that could have been mistaken for loving, if he'd not been lifting himself to lean over the bed and place a finger on her lips. 'Shush, now, dear. I'm not going to hurt you.'

'DON'T TOUCH ME!' Genevieve cried, tears immediately welling in her eyes as she thrashed sideways and fell from her bed in a tangle of blankets and sheets. 'GET AWAY FROM ME!'

'Let me help you, Genevieve—' Kordulf reached out to help unwrap the woman from her bedding, and she cut him off with another scream.

'LEAVE ME ALONE!' she cried as she hid herself within the tangle of bedding and covered her face to hide it from the lich as she wailed and sobbed. 'LEAVE ME ALONE! LEAVE ME ALONE!'

The bedroom door swung open, slamming into the chest of drawers beside it, and footsteps hurried in; joined the sound of a sword scraping against the floor as

it was dragged along.

‘Genevieve!’ the voice of Genevieve’s father, a man called Exodus, called over the sobbing.

‘He’s here!’ Genevieve cried. ‘He was in my bed! He was in my bed!’

The sword dragged from the bedroom door, to the window, and then to the wardrobe, as Exodus checked each for a breach. Then, the sword was loudly discarded aside, and Exodus’ arms wrapped around his daughter within her bundle.

‘It’s alright,’ he comforted. ‘It’s alright. It was a bad dream. Just a dream. There’s nobody here.’

*‘In my bed!’*

Exodus moved again, clearly checking on and under the bed for an intruder, but finding nothing.

‘Shh...’ one of Exodus’ hands rubbed Genevieve’s back, while the other worked to free her from the blankets. He spoke softly, calmly, and with a sweet note. Though his voice still trembled. ‘I promise, lambkins, that nobody’s here. Your windows are latched and your wardrobe is empty. You’re safe.’

‘He was in my bed!’

‘Who was?’

She realised she couldn’t answer; as far as her family knew, Kordulf the Corruptor was dead. He’d been killed a year ago. *She’d* killed him a year ago.

*She couldn’t admit to them she’d failed. Not now. Sachem would be furious she had— And even more that she’d lied about it! He might actually kill her over it!*

So she bit her tongue, trembling in her father’s arms instead of answering, and let him tut and stroke her hair as the tears fell.

‘Shh... I’m here, lambkins. I’m here.’

‘Stop crying, Genevieve, it’s unbecoming,’ a new voice cut into the room from the door, and Genevieve froze as her grandfather, Sachem, stepped into the room. His boots *clumped* heavily against the floorboards with each step.

And with each step, Genevieve flinched.

She dared not look up when he reached her. But she could feel Sachem’s eyes boring into her as he tapped his foot in a disapproving way.

‘Do you have *any* idea what time it is?’ he growled. ‘You’ve woken half the family. The children are terrified and confused. And here you are, screaming over nothing. *Again.*’

‘Father, please—’

‘Do *not* interrupt me!’ Sachem snapped, cutting Exodus off and causing Genevieve to bury her face deeper into her father’s chest. ‘It’s all well and good, isn’t it, for *her* to be up before sunrise— She does *nothing* all day, while the rest of the family work themselves to the bone to scrape by!’

‘She pulls her weight!’ Exodus argued, and Genevieve felt him tense and rise, just an inch, as he prepared to rise to his feet if need-be. ‘She does more around this house than anyone—’

‘Scrubbing floors and tending hens doesn’t earn a Jones their boots, son,’ Sachem’s voice was full of venom as he took another step towards his granddaughter. ‘Anyone can throw a cup of seed in a yard and pick up a broom.’

The *children* do more!’

Exodus was on his feet, now. And Genevieve trembled; her hands clasp around one of his wrists as she silently held him, just as she had when she was little. He moved between his father and his daughter with great speed, and Genevieve realised why only after he stumbled. His tail lashed as furiously as Sachem’s own, and his face contorted in a hiss of anger that Genevieve had never seen from him before.

‘Don’t you *dare*!’ Exodus hissed as he hooked a foot under his discarded sword and, with one swift motion, kicked it up into his free hand to point at his father. ‘Don’t you ever *dare* aim a blow at my daughter again! Do you hear me?! You may be head of the family, but we *both* know how to fight! And if I have to choose, it will be her over you, every time! So unless you want to draw your own weapon you need to *stand! Down! Now!*’

Sachem hesitated, clearly taken aback by his son’s outburst. And for a moment, he simply stood in place unmoving.

Then, his lip twitched in an angry way, and he met his son’s eye.

‘Well. If you’re feeling so riled up and ready for a fight, I’m sure you won’t mind joining Solemn today, while he checks on those necromancers, hm?’ Sachem drawled. ‘He leaves in ten minutes. I suggest you go get changed, now.’

Genevieve saw her father’s eyes tighten, as he placed himself firmer between Sachem and her, and it was clear he would not leave the room until Sachem did. She wanted to thank him for protecting her, but didn’t dare to. Not while her grandfather was there to be offended by it.... So, instead, she watched on and held her tongue as the two men glared at each other....

Then, Sachem turned and, boots clacking loudly, made for the hall. ‘Just hurry up, Exodus. Before Solemn leaves without you.’

Exodus didn’t reply. He stayed firmly in place over his daughter until Sachem was gone.

Then, he dropped his sword and whirled around, falling to his knees to cup Genevieve’s cheeks with concern.

‘Are you alright?’ he asked, examining her face as if expecting her to be covered in bruises.

Genevieve felt her lip quiver, but managed to hold back the sob that wanted to escape her; she was scared Sachem would hear her again, and come storming back in. Instead she just buried her face into Exodus’ chest and sniffled.

‘It’s alright, I won’t let him hurt you,’ he promised. ‘I won’t let *anyone* hurt you.’

She couldn’t bring herself to believe him. She knew he would try, but she wasn’t stupid.... Kordulf was looming around every corner, surely just waiting for his chance....

She shook the thought from her mind and sat up straight, wiping her eyes as she did. ‘You should go,’ she whimpered. ‘Before grandfather realises you’re idling.’

‘He can be mad at me,’ Exodus comforted. ‘I can take his anger.... Are you alright, my little lambkins?’

Genevieve nodded, wiping the last of her tears away, and let out a long breath. ‘I’m alright.... It was... just a dream, I think.’

A kiss pressed into her cheek, and her father sat with her in quiet for a short moment, making sure she really *was* alright, before standing and brushing himself down with a sigh. 'Well. I suppose I should go take my *punishment* with grace, hm? You take it easy today, alright? Try and relax. I'll be back before lunch.'

'*Okay,*' Genevieve squeaked. Though she wanted to beg him to stay, she let him go, and sat, shivering, on the floor for a moment longer. Until she heard his footsteps down the hall, by the front door, alongside Solemn's own....

She rose to her feet and stumbled to her wardrobe. She opened it slowly, half-expecting Kordulf to be on the other side of the door, before heaving a sigh of relief and pulling out her day-clothes.

She took a step back and undid two of her nightgown's buttons, before she felt a chill down her spine and froze.

'*Let me step out, before you get changed,*' Kordulf's voice whispered in her ear, and she whirled around just in time to see her previously-open bedroom door click shut.

Genevieve let out a frightened cry, which she hurriedly muffled into her dress.

And she heard the door open, again, and peeked out from the fabric to see her aunt, Demise, peering in at her.

'Are you alright, Genny?' she asked, softly. 'What is it, now, love?'

'I... I saw...' she swallowed, not daring say anything more.

Though, it seemed she didn't have to, as her aunt gave a heavy sigh and a pitiful look, and shook her head. 'There's nobody there, Genevieve....'

'I...' Genevieve shuddered, and her aunt quickly stepped inside to help her stand steady. 'I keep seeing him.'

'Who, love?' Demise asked, cupping her cheeks just as her father had. 'Who do you see? What does he look like?'

'He... he looks like...' she wasn't sure she should answer. If her grandfather found out she failed to kill Kordulf.... But... she needed to talk to *someone*.... 'He looks like... Kordulf.'

'*Oh...*' Demise let out a soft breath, and brushed Genevieve's hair from her eyes. 'Oh, I see.... I see.... Listen, Genny, the first life you take is the hardest, but you shouldn't feel any guilt. Kordulf was a horrible man. He manipulated so many people.... I know how you feel. The first lich I took down... his eyes *still* haunt me. But it's something you learn to live with.'

Genevieve didn't know what to say. She knew she couldn't correct her aunt, though she *wished* Demise had picked up on what she'd *actually* meant, so the secret could come out....

A small kiss was pecked onto her nose, and Demise released her face to help her unbutton her clothes. 'Come, Genny. Help me in the kitchen; busy hands, empty mind.'

Heaving a sigh, Genevieve quietly agreed to help her aunt, and began to get changed. She didn't argue that Demise helped her undress. She was grateful for the steady hands. And the eyes to help keep Kordulf's own off of her....

Genevieve glanced around the room again, worried she'd see the lich watching her, but instead found her vision obscured by Demise slipping her dress over her head... and pausing.

‘You’ve done your bra too loose,’ Demise commented, and Genevieve bit back a groan as the woman—in an attempt to be helpful— pulled it painfully tight and re-latched it. ‘There! That’s better. You don’t want to lose your figure *before* finding a husband, do you? At least give him a few years of you at your best before you let yourself go!’

Though it was clearly meant to be a joke, the comment cut deep, and Genevieve looked to the floor as her dress was tugged down.

‘There we go!’ Demise chirped, pulling the dress’ belt—again— painfully tight. ‘Hah! Maybe if you did your hair up, you could land a rich husband and help us all out!’

‘What’s wrong with my hair?’

‘Oh, nothing, dear,’ it wasn’t a reassuring tone, as Demise quickly smoothed the dress out. ‘It’s... unique! Very Maztikan.’

Genevieve felt a pebble in her chest sink.

*Very Maztikan....*

In other words: weird and out of style.

‘Come now, Genny,’ voice soft, Demise took her niece by the arm and began to lead her. ‘Let’s go get breakfast started.’

Genevieve didn’t argue, and simply let herself be lead through the hall. She glanced around as she did, scanning for signs of Kordulf....

And found him in the shadows by the grandfather clock, watching her calmly.

‘Genny, love,’ Demise paused, her hand moving from Genevieve’s arm to her back. ‘You’re shaking. Are you alright?’

A glance to her aunt, eyes wide and fearful, and she swallowed before turning back to find Kordulf was gone.

‘Oh, sweetheart!’ Demise held her firmer, now, and caught her as she stumbled. ‘It’s alright. It’s alright, love. There’s nothing there. It’s just the morning shadows. I know that sunrise makes them look like they’re moving, but I promise, there’s nothing there.’

There was nothing Genevieve could say. Not without admitting her failure.

All she could do was turn to her aunt and bury her face in her shoulder; sniffing.

‘Aw, like a leaf, sweetheart,’ Demise cooed as she held Genevieve tight and stroked her hair. ‘It’s alright. You’re alright. Come on. Let’s get you distracted from all the bad thoughts, hm?’

She didn’t want to go to the kitchen. She wanted to go back to bed, and curl up, and cry and cry and cry until her father came home. But she couldn’t bring herself to argue with Demise as the woman walked her through the halls. So she let herself be stood at a bench in the kitchen, and under Demise’s instruction, she began cracking eggs into a bowl. One at a time, her trembling hands growing no more steady as each little sound of the waking morning made her ears twitch with hyper-vigilance as she tried to discern any signs of Kordulf from the rest of the sounds around her.

‘Genny, I’ve got to run out to the storehouse to grab some more flour,’ Demise commented. ‘We have enough bread for breakfast, but we’re going to need some fresh loafs for the rest of the day.... I’ll just be a minute, alright? Shout if you need me.’

‘Okay,’ Genevieve confirmed as she threw the empty eggshells into their tub, knowing they would later be washed and ground to calcium powder. ‘I’ll be fine with the eggs.’

‘Thatta girl.’

The kitchen’s back door closed quietly behind the gnome, and Genevieve found herself left alone as she whisked air into the bowl of eggs.

She looked down at the yellow mixture, and bit her lip.

It was so plain. So bland. She knew that, though eggs were cheap and filling, most of the family was truly sick of them....

Slowly, her eyes trailed from the bowl to the sparsely-stocked herb cabinet.

*Perhaps she could make the morning a little better for the rest of the family?*

It couldn’t hurt, could it? Just some parsley. A little bit of butter. Pepper. A pinch of powdered chicken stock....

Before she knew it, she found herself gathering the ingredients. And then, just as she was popping the lid off the parsley, she heard a whisper in her ear that sent a chill down her spine:

*‘I wouldn’t.’*

She froze, trembling, as Kordulf’s breath touched her cheek.

*‘Sachem won’t be happy with you,’* Kordulf warned. *‘Please. Put them away. I can’t bare to see him abuse you again.’*

The little container of dried parsley rattled in her hand, as she shook in fear at Kordulf’s hand brushing her hair from her eyes. *‘Leave me alone,’* she squeaked. *‘Please. Please leave me alone.’*

*‘I just want you to be safe—’*

Desperate for Kordulf to remove his lips from beside her ear, Genevieve poured a generous portion of herbs into her egg mixture. Then butter. Then the chicken stock; ignoring his warnings and begging, under her breath, for him to leave her alone.

*‘Oh, my Genevieve....’*

She packed away everything she had used, before returning to her whisking. *‘Please. Leave me alone. Please. Please just go. Just leave me alone.’*

*‘Genevieve—’*

‘Please!’ she raised her voice from a whisper to the sob-like tone just before a shout, and squeezed her eyes shut as she mixed the eggs. ‘Please! Please! Please stop! Just leave me alone! Just—’

‘Genny?’ Demise’s voice returned to the kitchen, alongside Demise, and she placed down the heavy bag of flour so she could hurry to Genevieve’s side and pet her on the back. ‘Genevieve, who are you talking to? Are you alright?’

A wet, laboured breath, and Genevieve shook her head. ‘He came back.’

‘Oh, honey...’ the gentle touch turned into a tight embrace, and Demise rocked the woman gently in her arms. ‘Shh.... It’s okay. It’s not real. He’s not back. He can’t hurt you.’

Unable to correct her aunt, Genevieve found she could do nothing but cry into her arms.

*‘Oh... there, there, sweetheart... it’s alright... you’re alright....’*

She wasn’t.

She wasn’t sure she would ever be alright again....

~~~~~

‘What is this?’

The entire dining room froze, at Sachem’s tone, and all eyes glanced sideways (sideways; too scared to look directly at the obviously-impending confrontation) to Genevieve as she finished scooping her grandfather’s breakfast onto his plate.

Genevieve herself paused, her eyes darting from Sachem to the food and back. ‘Um... eggs and... toast?’

Sachem leant forward, motioning to the egg. ‘What is... *this*. In the eggs.’

‘Um... pepper. And... parsley... and...’ she glanced around the room for help; but very few of her family even met her eye. Most averted their gazes.

The few who kept their eyes on her, gave gentle and approving nods... but stopped when Sachem threw up a hand in anger.

‘You wasted herbs on *eggs*?!’ he hissed, rising to his feet and looming over the girl in a threatening way. ‘We can’t afford to waste good herbs on trivial things like *eggs*, you stupid girl!’

Genevieve flinched, instinctively, as the man towered over her, and attempted to stammer out an apology, but instead found herself gripped tightly by the arm.

‘Sachem!’ one of Genevieve’s cousins cried, rising to her feet. ‘She did us a favour! It wasn’t even her turn to cook and she—’

‘Quiet, Charity!’ Sachem snapped. ‘Unless you want to join her scrubbing the halls!’

Genevieve shook her head; a subtle motion, begging her cousin not to make things worse.... And, hesitantly, Charity sat back down to watch as Genevieve was dragged out of the dining hall.

A hand-held scrub brush and a bucket were thrown at her, and she was ordered to clean the floors and skirting boards.

She didn’t dare argue.

Ignoring the pain in her stomach from skipping breakfast, Genevieve got to work; scrubbing the floors until they were as clean as she could get them... and trying her best to ignore the tears that fell to join the suds.

She was about halfway through the first hall, when a soft hand tapped her on the shoulder. She knew who it was immediately and, not even bothering to turn around, simply sighed.

‘Please, just leave me alone.’

‘I brought you food,’ Kordulf answered, holding down a plate to her. ‘I know you like pineapple....’

Genevieve side-eyed the plate, and saw a lavish dish of pineapple tarts— A fruit familiar to her from her childhood in Maztika... but so expensive here in the Sword Coast, she assumed she’d never eat one again....

Her stomach rumbled, and she felt her mouth watering. But, still, she refused; closing her mouth tight and withdrawing her hands to her chest.

She couldn’t owe a lich a favour.

‘My Genevieve... you need to eat,’ he pressed. ‘It’s not healthy to go hungry. Especially not while labouring. I can see that you want to eat it. Why won’t you accept it?’

Bottom lip trembling as the delicious smell wafted up to her, Genevieve turned away from the plate.

‘Please, my love—’

‘Don’t *call* me that!’ she choked out, doubling over until her face was pressed against the wet floor. ‘*Don’t!* Don’t speak to me like that! Just— Just leave me alone! Leave me *alone!* I can’t *take* you anymore! I’m tired! I’m so *tired* of you following me *everywhere!* I just want a *day* without you looming over me! Please! Please! Please just leave me alone!’

‘Talking to yourself again, Genevieve?’

Genevieve lifted her head just in time to see another of her cousins, Repose, kick her bucket of water across the hall and soak the floor. Without missing a beat, Repose kept on down the hall.

‘You’re never going to find a husband if you keep acting crazy,’ she commented. ‘*Especially* if you don’t start grooming yourself properly. You’re a woman, not an animal. Shave you tail!’

Genevieve trembled, as Repose made her way outside.... And then slowly lowered her face back to the floor, ignoring the water and soap that soaked her hair, and began to sob.

Then, suddenly, the water dried up; some sort of gentle magic pulling it away. And the plate of pineapple tarts was placed beside her head. And Kordulf’s hands found her shoulders. She didn’t bother to push him away as he began to massage them, and when she finally lifted her head, she saw that the hallway was now spotless; her work finished for her.

‘I can punish her for you, if you want me to,’ Kordulf offered.

‘*No!*’ Genevieve sobbed back. ‘No. Please. Just... just leave them alone. Leave me alone....’

‘Eat something,’ Kordulf ordered, his hands slipping around her so he could softly sit her up. ‘You’ll feel better. I promise.’

Genevieve shook her head... but when Kordulf retrieved one of the tarts and lifted it to her lips, she found she was too exhausted to fight it, and obediently took a bite.

It was the most delicious thing she’d eaten in years!

‘Ah, there we go,’ Kordulf cooed as Genevieve took another, much more enthusiastic bite. ‘That feels better, doesn’t it, my love?’

Genevieve’s mouth was too full to respond, as she loudly slurped up the pineapple innards. She took the next tart that was offered to her. And the next, until the plate was clear and Kordulf was smiling again.

‘There, see?’ brushing a strand of hair from her lip, Kordulf gently pulled Genevieve back until she was leaning against his chest. ‘I’m only here to look after you, my dear.’

Too exhausted to pull away, Genevieve simply sat still as Kordulf wiped her cheeks and chin clean.

‘Anything you need, you just tell me, and I’ll provide it,’ he promised.

‘Anything at all....’

After a long pause, Genevieve sniffed. ‘I.... *I want you to go,*’ she finally breathed. ‘*Please. Leave me alone.*’

A long, heavy sigh escaped Kordulf, and he rose to his feet; gently moving

Genevieve as he did so she didn't fall. 'Alright, I'll leave you for tonight... but for what it's worth, my Genevieve?' he scooped a finger under her chin, so he could turn her gaze to his. 'I think you're perfect, from the tips of your ears to the end of your tail. You don't have to change a single thing of yourself, if you don't want to. Please try and remember that.'

Genevieve shivered, as Kordulf backed away into the shadow of a doorway and vanished.

And then, her lip trembled.

And the tears came again... just in time for her father to see, as he returned home with her uncle.

Exodus hurried to her side, dropping everything he had carried so he could wrap her up in his arms and squeeze her tight. She saw Solemn cast her a sympathetic look, before she buried her face into her father's chest, and she heard her uncle step past her and make for his father's office.

'I'm sorry, Papa,' Genevieve breathed into her father. 'I'm sorry.... I know I shouldn't cry. I know. But I can't help it.'

'No, no, shh...' Exodus hugged her close, and rocked her gently. 'You can cry as much as you want, lambkins. I'm here. Okay? I'm here. You just let it all out.'

'I'm sorry.'

'Shh... it's alright. It's alright. I promise, it's going to be alright. I'm here.... I'm right here. And I'll never stop fighting for you. I promise. I'll *never* stop fighting for you.'

—END—

If you enjoyed reading, please consider supporting me and my work at
cjadewyton.com

~~~~~

*This publication is provided for free and may be redistributed as long as credit to the author is provided and no money is made from its distribution.*

*Permission to change this document to other ebook formats is given for the sole purpose of ereader compatibility.*

*This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, livings or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.*

*No generative artificial intelligence was used in the writing of this work. Any use of this publication to train generative artificial intelligence technologies is expressly prohibited.*