

Chapter Four

A Promising Young Troll

When he awoke this time, he was at least unbound. He was lying on his back on a wooden floor in a dark place. But he knew he was not alone from the hubbub of voices and motion around him. Something startling had happened—no, frightening, he thought as his senses fully reassembled themselves and reported for duty—and a crowd of people were reacting to it by putting as much distance between themselves and the something as their circumstances allowed.

But their circumstances were not liberal; the mob had not gone far away, though the panicky cries and curses suggested they would have liked to. Krunzle also suspected that, given the chance, the unseen melee of forms struggling against each other in the darkness would have welcomed the opportunity to bathe—surely, nobody wanted to reek of filth, sweat, rotten meat, and untreated sores. And over it, a strong stink of charred meat.

His head ached, but at least it was clear. He sat up, and as he did so he heard from behind him the tramping of hard-soled boots on planks, accompanied by a faint light that grew stronger. He turned his head and, seeing

vertical stripes of light, realized that they were gaps between the timbers of a heavy door. Someone was approaching the other side, carrying a light.

A rattle of iron keys, then the turning of an uncoiled lock, and now the door was pushed in. A big man armed with a club bent to peer under the low lintel of the doorway, extending the oil lamp into the room. "What's all the ruckus?" he said.

He didn't seem to have directed the question at Krunzle, and the thief used the presence of the light to look about him. He was sitting on the floor of a large room, its walls made of squared-off logs. The room contained three or four score men—ragged, filthy, scrofulous-looking men—who were crowded in a group against the far wall, their eyes large in the lamplight.

The eyes were frightened and focused on Krunzle—except he now saw that the mob's collective gaze kept going to something on the floor between him and them. Something man-sized and man-shaped that, when the fellow with the lamp came into the room, casting more illumination on the scene, was revealed to be a man. Or at least most of one. And what was left of him was dead.

The man with the club stepped past the thief and bent to examine the body. Krunzle took the opportunity to rise. He thought about making a break through the open door, but decided he was far too wobbly on his feet. And for all he knew, in the blackness that seemed to be outside this jail—for ragged men, a strong door, and a man with a key and a club all said jail to Krunzle—he'd run straight over the lip of the gorge.

The corpse was that of a heavily muscled man with a scarred face and no hands or forearms. Above where his elbows should have been were charred stumps, still

smoking. His eyes were wide open, as was his mouth, creating an impression that his final emotion had been huge and painful surprise.

The jailer made a noise of confirmation, straightened, and poked the club gingerly in Krunzle's direction. "You," he said, "back off. Over in that corner, and stay there." When the traveler raised both hands in a gesture of non-confrontation and did as he was bid, the man with the club pointed at a couple of the ragamuffins and said, "You two, haul this out and dump it in Skanderbrog's trough."

The indicated pair crept forward, took the corpse's ankles, and began to drag it toward the door. "Wait," said the jailer, then stooped to rifle the body's rags, which Krunzle noted were in better condition than any of those worn by the other men in the cell. Having found and pocketed a few items, the man with the club said, "Carry on."

He remained in the room, eyeing Krunzle warily, until the corpse detail returned. Then he pointed the club at the thief again, said, "No more trouble," and left, taking the lamp with him.

Krunzle heard the key turn in the lock again. Before the light went, he had seen rags and sacking on the floor near him. He scooped these into a pile, then lay down. Over on the other side of the room, he heard stirrings and mutterings and a few curses as the crowd of ragged men composed themselves for what remained of the night.

None of them came too near Krunzle, for which the traveler was grateful. Their stench was not to his liking. He raised a hand to carefully waggle his jaw, poked with his tongue at the loosened tooth, and contemplated the general ache in his skull. He had known worse.

He needed sleep. Tomorrow would bring more information about his predicament, and perhaps some means of improving it. His last thought was to wonder again what Skanderbrog was.

Krunzle, along with the other slaves, was roused at dawn by the clanging of an iron bar on an iron triangle hung outside the strongroom. The door was flung open by another man with a club, and the slaves roused themselves from where they had slept on the floor and rushed outside. The thief rose and followed.

He found himself on a broad platform made of planks, close to the edge of the gorge. The ragged men were clustered around a big cauldron near the door to the barracks. They'd taken rough wooden bowls and were dipping them into the big pot and slurping the contents. More tough-looking men with cudgels—some of them had coiled whips at their belts—stood around, some of them telling the ragged men to hurry up and finish.

Krunzle went to the pile of bowls, found one that was not too encrusted with dried remnants of previous meals, and moved toward the cauldron. He could not help but notice that those in his path—or even well wide of it—moved out of his way. Even the bruisers seemed chary of coming too close to him.

He dipped the bowl into the stuff in the pot—some kind of pasty gruel afloat with chunks of spoiled vegetables—and brought it to his lips. It tasted like pig swill, the kind given to swine who were not highly prized by their owner. But he reasoned that the day was not likely to offer better nourishment, and he remembered someone saying last night that he would be “moving baskets of ore.” That was not work to be undertaken on an empty stomach.

He saw the red-bearded Ulfen who had beaten him at Wartnose's behest come down from the town and speak a word with a big-shouldered guard who looked to be in charge. The thief recognized this one too: he had been one of the men who had come to take him from Room Thirteen. Now Redbeard went back the way he had come and the head guard cast his gaze over the workers, until he found the one he was looking for. "Raimeau!" he called. "You show the new man what to do!"

A gangling young man with long locks of prematurely gray hair got up from where he'd been eating, drained the final few drops of gruel from his bowl, then wiped its wet inner side with a finger to lick off the absolutely last remnants. He tossed the bowl onto the heap of others and came very slowly toward the traveler, his hands extended in a gesture that said he hoped for no trouble.

Krunzle noticed that Raimeau's eyes went from his to the thing around his neck and back again. The traveler put the facts together. To the young man he said, "You have no need to worry about this,"—he moved a hand to indicate Chirk—"as long as you leave it alone."

"Have no fear," said the other. "Seeing what happened to Chenax was instruction enough for me."

"Chenax was the man with no hands?"

"He was, though he had a very hard pair of fists before he met you, and had no qualms about using them."

At that moment, a whistle blew and the slaves moved toward the edge of the platform. "Work?" said the thief.

"Work," said Raimeau. "We'll be hauling baskets of ore from the face up to the crusher. Watch where you put your feet, because there are no railings on the ledge or the scaffolding. One misstep, and you'll be joining Skanderbrog for dinner. Like Chenax is about to do for breakfast."

The thief focused on the immediate. “Are Chenax’s shoes still available?” He indicated his stockinged feet. “Mining is no work for the unshod.”

“They will be if Skanderbrog hasn’t had breakfast yet. He usually doesn’t bother to peel his fruit.”

Skanderbrog, it turned out, was a name—a name that had been given to a juvenile male troll by his mother, who after nursing him through childhood and teaching him the rudiments of trollery, had handed young Skanderbrog the forequarter of a deer and sent him down from the mountains to see if he could establish a territory for himself and get on with life. But Skanderbrog had been unable to find a niche that was not already occupied by larger and more experienced trolls. Starving, he had come down to forage on the outskirts of Ulm’s Delve. After eating a couple of unsuccessful gold-panners—they made poor meals, being half-starved themselves, living off leaves and roots while striving for the elusive gleam in the pan—he had been trapped in a pit that Wartnose’s mage had caused to be dug and lined with charms.

The man with the wart on his nose was, as the thief might have expected, the same Boss Ulm by whose order Ulm’s Delve barred “thieves, filchers, bun-passers, vagrants, and holy-fakers.” The skeletally thin wizard he employed was Mordach the Prudent, and the red-bearded Ulfen was Brundelaf, the outfit’s chief enforcer. He even knew the name of the brawler who had clipped him: Little Fost, he was called—apparently there was a larger version somewhere in the world. The thief thought he would as lief as not be spared the experience of making Big Fost’s acquaintance.

Raimeau was both the knowledgeable type and the sort who liked to tell what he knew. As they descended the scaffolding then stepped off the trestle-work to where a broad ledge had been cut in the rock face, he filled Krunzle in on the history of Ulm's Delve. By the time they had wrested a pair of sturdy shoes from the feet of dead, handless Chenax, laid in a broad wooden trough at one end of the ledge, near a cave sealed behind a grillwork of black metal, the thief was well briefed.

Boss Ulm had established himself quite solidly here in the Rumples, as this stretch of hilly country was called. Hearing of the gold strike and the rush of goldbugs into the region, he had come with his henchmen to establish the first saloon, brothel, and hardware emporium—in tents at first, though a sawmill was one of his earliest accomplishments, so that he could put up more enduring structures.

Once the instant town was booming, and Brundelaf and Little Fost and the others had eliminated any doubts as to who was in charge, Ulm had begun to think larger thoughts. He had hired Mordach the Prudent and set him the task of locating the source of the alluvial gold that had the prospectors lining the river's banks, panning and sluicing. The mage had cast his runesticks and questioned a number of subterranean beings he managed to summon and bind. Finally, he had marked a spot halfway up the south side of Starkriven Gorge, as the sheer canyon upriver from the town was called.

Ulm had established a claim to the gorge by the simple expedient of sending his bullyboys to throw out the handful of gold-hunters who were trying to work the gravel beneath the swift-running water at its bottom. He then moved the infant town to the edge of the chasm and began to develop a mine.

Mines require miners. These Ulm acquired by the simplest and least costly of measures: he promulgated several ordinances, signed by himself as *de facto* Reeve of Ulm's Delve. He knew that gold camps attract more than goldbugs; they attract several categories of persons who are skilled in separating prospectors from their pokes of dust and the occasional nugget. Boss Ulm made many of these activities illegal—the penalty for engaging in such banned enterprises was to be sentenced to an indefinite span of labor in the mine or the sawmill. He soon had a sizable, though resentful, work force.

Ulm had them build a trestle-work of timbers from the gorge's bottom to its top, and cut a wide ledge at the level where the seam of gold within the rock came closest to the rock face. Some of his enslaved card sharps, cutpurses, badger-gamers, and sandbaggers were set to hacking their way through to the gold, while others carried baskets of split rock to the surface, piling up the ore where Ulm had put more of his prisoners—there seemed to be an unending supply—to building him a crushing mill.

In the early days, the work had gone slowly, but the pace speeded up considerably when Mordach was able to bring Skanderbrog—in massive leg fetters of hammered iron—into the picture. Accommodating the troll required extra shoring up of the scaffolding, the cutting into the rock of a cell barred with a thick grill of charmed iron—the cell outside which Chenax waited to make his final contribution to Boss Ulm's wealth—and the manufacture of a huge hammer and chisel scaled to the young monster's size. But the investment was worth it. After a couple of the least-motivated workers were delegated to become

troll-fodder, in full view of the rest of the work force, the mine's productivity increased severalfold.

Krunzle was on the ledge with Raimeau, trying on the dead man's shoes—they almost fit—when the whistle blew again. "We should leave here," the other man said. "Skanderbrog's coming out." As he spoke, a creak of metal on metal announced that the iron grillwork covering the opening at the end of the ledge was being winched upward on unseen cables. The thief needed no more encouragement but went quickly back the way they had come.

The young troll emerged into the morning light, blinking. Krunzle could see that he was not full grown: his undertusks thrust up no more than a few inches and he was barely twice the thief's height, even allowing for the stooped, bent-kneed stance that was common to his species. But his months of enslavement to Boss Ulm, each day spent swinging a hammer with a head as big as a man's torso to drive a long, thick chisel into resisting rock, had put even more muscle onto Skanderbrog's arms and shoulders than most mature trolls ever achieved. Trolls were generally averse to hard labor, preferring to make their livings by leaping from concealment onto passersby of whatever species. After overwhelming their prey with sudden, massive violence, they would sit down immediately to eat them raw. Trolls actually preferred cooked food, but most were too lazy to bother gathering fuel and going through the process of kindling a fire.

Skanderbrog's attention was drawn to the trough. He picked up Chenax in both his talon-tipped hands and brought his long snout down to sniff the body's charred arm-stumps. He clearly found the scent

unpleasant, and delicately pulled Chenax's upper limbs from their sockets, much like a man twisting the wings off a cooked fowl, and threw them into the gorge.

The iron entrance to his cave closed behind him. He ignored it, and hunkered down on his haunches. A single twist of his wrist and Chenax's head popped off in his hand. He tossed the morsel into his mouth and Krunzle heard it crunch between the wide molars. Skanderbrog chewed, it seemed to the traveler, quite thoughtfully for a troll, his gaze moving across the crowd of slaves ranged over the flat and inclined surfaces of the scaffolding. He focused most clearly, however, on Mordach the mage, who had come down from above, along with a crew of torch-bearing men from Boss Ulm's cadre of enforcers.

While Skanderbrog made short work of the rest of Chenax, spitting out a metal belt buckle before swallowing the last of his meal, the men formed a double line of fire across the ledge between the troll and any possibility of his escape up or down the trestle-work. Mordach took up a position behind the twin rows of lit torches, raised his hands skyward, so that his sleeves fell back from his stick-thin arms, and shouted several harsh syllables.

The troll reacted as if he had experienced a sudden toothache. He shook his head, spittle flying from his black lips and prominent bottom tusks, and got to his feet. The look he gave the mage and the torchmen would have rendered Krunzle in instant need of a toilet, preferably one behind a locked and troll-proof door, but the men did not flinch. One or two of them even jeered and made rude noises with their tongues and lips.

Skanderbrog took only three steps, then paused where a sheet of canvas covered something against the gouged rock of the cliff face. He bent and threw back the heavy fabric as if it were the lightest cloth; beneath were his hammer and chisel. Mordach sent another string of syllables his way, and the young troll took up the tools and faced the rock. He set the chisel's edge into a crack, drew back the hammer, and slammed it forward. The collision gave off an almost musical *chink*, and a chunk of rock separated from the cliff and fell at Skanderbrog's feet. He swiveled, stooped, and bashed the hammer against the lump of stone, smashing it into fragments. Then he turned, straightened, put the chisel back against the wall, and repeated the process.

The torchmen parted enough for Mordach to step through to the fore. The troll eyed him askance but continued to cut rock from the cliff face and reduce it to smaller pieces. The mage's arm moved in a sweeping motion aimed at the ledge, and a rune carved into the nail of his index finger glowed with a light that made Krunzle's eyes ache, even at a distance. A smoking line appeared on the floor of the ledge just short of the growing pile of rock fragments. The troll paused in his work, sniffed at the air above the line, and growled. Then he went back to work.

Mordach and the torch-bearers departed, climbing the scaffolding's steps back up to the town, though not before the wizard favored Krunzle with a considering gaze. When the steps were cleared, the overseers hurried the slaves to form two parallel lines from the ledge up to the top of the gorge. Baskets were passed down from above until every man had one. The thief and his minder were pressed into line, becoming two

links in what would become a continuous double chain to move baskets up and down the scaffolding.

Now a slave with a long-handled iron rake stepped up to Skanderbrog's growing pile of broken stone. Gingerly, the man extended the tool and pulled some rock across the line, which had now ceased to smoke but remained plain on the ledge's surface. As the rake's heavy tines grated on the stone, the troll paused in his labors and turned his head slightly toward the sound. Immediately, another slave, whose only function appeared to be to watch Skanderbrog, hissed a warning. The rake man stepped back. But the troll only growled again, then with a grunt, swung the hammer against the chisel head. The first man in the basket chain scooped rock into his basket then passed it to the slave beside him, who passed it in turn to the next man.

And so went the morning. For the first hour, Krunzle was in the upward-moving chain, taking a loaded basket from his left and passing it to his right. It took about half a minute for a basket to be loaded with Skanderbrog's output, so that every thirty seconds he had to bear a load for a few moments. At first, it wasn't hard, but as the minutes piled up, his shoulders and lower back began to ache, and his forearms to cramp. Raimeau was opposite him in the second chain, passing empty baskets downward to where the troll kept making fresh material for them to shift.

After an hour, a whistle blew and the two chains changed jobs. Krunzle welcomed the relief. But all too soon, it seemed, the whistle sounded again, and he was back to the hard life. By now the sun was well up, and the rock face caught and reflected its heat. Sweat ran down the thief's face and chest, soaked his shirt to his back, made his eyes sting with its salt. He

reminded himself that he had sworn never to engage in brute labor—a vow he had seldom broken, and then only at the order of a magistrate who could command guardsmen with whips and truncheons to enforce their sentences.

The whistle blew again, and Krunzle was back to passing empty panniers. “Do we get lunch?” he said to Raimeau, working opposite him.

“More gruel,” was the answer. The man next to Raimeau made a face. “Sometimes with a cat or a few rats in it.”

Krunzle grunted. It was time to find a new occupation. But he was surprised at the idea that emerged from the back of his mind—until he realized that the thought had not been his, but Chirk’s.

Are you insane? he thought back at the snake. *Even here I am too close to the troll.*

But the thought formed: after lunch, the snake wanted him to take the place of the man with the rake.

Why? But in a moment, he knew the reason. Chirk wanted to have a conversation with Skanderbrog. *You are insane*, Krunzle thought. *No one ever benefited from a conversation with a troll, unless it was the troll—a little diversion before dinner.*

The word formed in his mind: *Nonetheless.*

No, returned the thief, *and that is final.*

But it wasn’t. Chirk showed him pictures: Mordach the Prudent dissolving the thief in a vat of acid, then draining it away to retrieve the unharmed bronze serpent from among his smoldering bones; Mordach sliding Krunzle into a blue-flamed furnace, then raking through the ashes for the again-unharmed Chirk; Mordach coating the traveler with a sticky, sweet syrup and staking him down between two great anthills, returning later to—

Enough! said Krunzle. *He will do one of these things?*

A moment later he knew that Mordach was delayed only because he had not yet decided which of these methodologies would create a maximum reduction of Krunzle with a minimum effect upon the object around his neck. The mage was known, after all, as “the Prudent.”

Lunch was gruel and rotten pumpkin. Krunzle found a few flakes of gray meat in his, and swallowed them without comment. The work had given him an appetite as well as an acute awareness of several muscle groups that he had always taken for granted. He cataloged his aches and pains and swore to himself that Boss Ulm would one day render up an accounting for each and every one of them.

While they were eating, Mordach the Prudent returned and, with the torchmen to shield him, renewed the strength of the boundary spell he had cast that morning. Then he went back to town, throwing Krunzle a considering gaze as he passed.

The whistle blew and the thief said to Raimeau, “Come, and quickly.” They descended the rough wooden steps as lightly as could be allowed by Krunzle’s ill-fitting shoes and the prospect of plunging to a deadly battering on the rocks below. By the time the basket lines were reformed, he was standing near the mage’s deadline—still visible, though no longer smoldering—with the rake in hand. Raimeau was beside him, wearing a look of deep uncertainty when he wasn’t casting fearful sideways glances at the troll, the monster sitting with his back against the wall, glowering at them and the rest of the uncooperative world.

The man who had used the rake before said, "Give me that." To add emphasis, he scooped up a fist-sized rock and cocked his arm.

But it seemed to the traveler that the man did not have the full conviction that the implied threat required. *Chirk?* he thought.

Instead of an answer from the recesses of his mind, Krunzle saw the man lower his arm. The chunk of rock rattled among others in a basket, and the fellow—and his assistant, though not without a muttered threat to Raimeau—joined the basket chain.

The gray-haired man was regarding the thief with even more trepidation than when they had first met. "What?" said Krunzle, turning to where Skanderbrog was levering himself to his splay-toed feet and taking up his tools again.

"You don't know?" said Raimeau, keeping his voice low.

"Assume I don't." Krunzle raked a pile of rock toward the man whose job it was to fill the baskets.

"The snake," his partner whispered. "It glowed, kind of purple, but when you look at it too long black spots start floating before your eyes. It did that when Chenax tried to take it."

"Oh, that," said Krunzle, "of course. I'm familiar with the effect."

"Get to work!" The shout came from above, where one of Ulm's bullyboys was pushing his way down the steps between the lines of basketmen, and reaching for a whip coiled at his belt. Krunzle turned and began to rake rock.

Skanderbrog hacked at the cliff face as if it were his direst enemy. The muscles of his shoulders and arms bulged and flexed as he swung the hammer that

seemed to weigh no more than a switch of willow. Raimeau watched the troll closely, speaking a warning whenever the creature gave over attacking the wall of rock and turned to smash the boulders at his feet into pebbles. For that phase of the operations, the thief and his helper stood well back.

Even so, a flying shard opened Krunzle's cheek. He felt the sting, then a warm trickle making its way down through the dust on his face. The troll looked up from his work, snuffling, his nostrils dilated. He stared at Krunzle, and for a few seconds the traveler knew what it was to be a rabbit undergoing inspection by a fox. Though he was well beyond the mage's line, still he took a step backward.

As he did so, words formed in the back of his mind. He pushed them back where they had come from, saying, *I don't think so. One of my longstanding rules is not to draw the attention of man-eating monsters. It has served me well so far and—*

A jolt of pain shot up from the base of Krunzle's spine to rattle his skull. He felt an even larger one forming where the first had begun, like a thundercloud boiling up on the horizon.

Well, if you insist, he thought. Ideas began to form in his mind, a strategy for gaining the troll's cooperation. Krunzle watched the sequence of thoughts unravel, then said, in his inner voice, *No*.

A jolt of pain shot up from his spine again. He spasmed, hissing, so that Raimeau looked at him in alarm. The thief ignored the man and the troll, which had also glanced his way, and said to Chirk, *I did not say 'no' to the project, but only to your approach*.

He was surprised to hear a voice, soft and sibilant, speak in his head. *It makes sense*, came the reply. *The*

creature must hate Ulm and Mordach. A chance to take revenge—

Krunzle cut off the voice. *You are collecting crumbs, ignoring the cake.*

How so?

Let me show you. He received no response and took the silence for acquiescence. Aloud, he spoke to the troll in a carrying whisper: “Skanderbrog! Do you enjoy your work?”

The creature was back at work on the rock face. Krunzle saw it regarding him from the corner of one eye while the hammer and chisel continued to gouge out chunks of gold-bearing ore. Over the clink of iron on iron, he heard a deep-throated growl. “You mock me?” Skanderbrog said.

“Don’t mock him,” said Raimeau. A full-body shiver had taken possession of Krunzle’s helper. “He doesn’t like being mocked.”

“I cannot pass the line,” said the troll, “but these can.” He nudged the pile of broken rocks with the end of the chisel.

“It’s true,” said Raimeau. “Boss Ulm had a half-orc overseer named Horkak who used to stand just clear of Mordach’s line. He would mimic Skanderbrog’s labors and make uncomplimentary comparisons. One day, the troll picked up a piece of ore and threw it at him. The boundary spell heated the stone so greatly that it exploded in Horkak’s face. He fell into the gorge and broke on the rocks.”

“Horkak tasted bad,” Skanderbrog said. “Too much gristle.” He turned his head to look Krunzle up and down. “You will be more tender.”

The thief would have gladly ended the conversation at that point, but Chirk was insistent. “I do not mock,”

Krunzle said. "I wondered if you had had enough of working for Boss Ulm. If you might want to move on."

Skanderbrog addressed himself to the rock face. "I do not like to work," he said. "But before I was captured, I starved. I ate frogs and dug for worms. I tried to make a place for myself in a cave on the edge of Grunchum's territory, but he drove me away. The same happened when I went into the land of his neighbor, Brugga. Here, at least I eat well and do not sleep on wet leaves."

Krunzle smiled to himself as he raked the cracked ore toward the men who filled the baskets. "Still," he said, "it's no life for a promising young troll."

The hammer rang on the chisel. Another great wedge of rock fell at Skanderbrog's feet. "It is true; I am not content," he said. "But I am resigned to my fate."

Krunzle let a few moments pass, then he said, "What kind of weapon does Grunchum wield? Or Brugga?"

Skanderbrog turned to smash the wedge of gray stone. He cocked his head, remembering. "They are traditionalists," he said, "and favor the long cudgel. They are not particularly adept, but they make up for it in sheer power."

"Do they eat well? As well as you have been eating this past little while?"

It was obviously not a question that had occurred to the troll, if indeed questions ever did. "Now that I think of it," Skanderbrog said, "probably not. The odd deer. Or a bear when they're still in winter sleep."

"And would either of them have developed the kind of muscles that now adorn your upper body?" Krunzle said.

Again, the troll took a long moment while the dull teeth of his mentality engaged the issue. "Grunchum was big-bellied, but his legs were spindly for a troll.

Brugga looked as if he had had a good winter. But he's getting long in the tooth."

Krunzle nodded. "So would either of them expect to be confronted by a well-fed, hard-shouldered young challenger armed with an iron-headed hammer? Not to mention a sharp iron spike that he could throw like a spear?"

The troll paused, the hammer poised. He held the chisel out at arm's length and studied it. "I would have to think about that," he said. He set the iron spike into a crevice, and brought the hammer down. Splinters of rock flew.

"You might also think," Krunzle said, "about how comfortable a territory an enterprising troll might make by combining both Grunchum's and Brugga's. You did say they were neighbors?"

Skanderbrog had gone back to cutting more rock from the cliff. He did not answer, but his expression was as thoughtful as his kind could manage.

We'll let it cook for a while, Krunzle told Chirk.

Where did you learn about trolls? the snake said.

I know nothing about trolls in particular, said the traveler, *but I know what it is to be young and seeking for a place in an uncooperative world. Don't you?*

Chirk was a while in responding. *My history,* it said at length, *is different from yours.*

Yet we are both bound to another's service, aren't we?

The snake was even longer in giving an answer, so that the traveler thought he would receive none. Finally, he heard, *You should know that I am not as easily gulled as a troll.*