

Bets, Bulls, & Butts

Benito let out a loud belch as he rubbed his empty belly. Empty that is, except for the alcohol running through his system. He'd just woken up from passing out in his cups.

The brothel smelled of sweat, sex, and stale beer. The owner attempted to cover the smell with cheap incense, which only managed to empower the thick cloying scent. The combination turned his sour stomach.

Benito reached into his pocket, disappointed that he'd spent his last copper. Broke once again and sulking in his chair, his mind wandered. The laughter of a nearby table reached his ears. Benito leaned back and eavesdropped on the conversation...

"I shit you not, walked right up to the thing. Reared back like he was some actor in a play and smacked it right on its arse. Took off like bloody lightning after that, didn't even get a scratch on 'em." The man ended the story with a slap to the table and uproarious laughter from his friends.

"With balls like his, he had his hands full just carrying 'em around. Of course, he couldn't pull out coin to pay for his own ale. Lucky bastard didn't buy a drink the rest of the damn year!"

Benito's mouth was open, the words coming long before he thought them through, "I would do it for just a night of free drinks." His outburst silenced the nearby table. Its occupants all turned to look in his direction.

"What did ya say, boy?" one of the men, a scarred, mean-looking curmudgeon asked.

Benito realized his mouth had just bitten off more than it could chew, *again*, rose from his chair and walked over to their table. "I said, I'd do the same thing for a single night of free drinks. I wouldn't need a whole year."

The men traded looks. One even smirked, giving the others a slight nod. Benito missed the byplay, lost in dreams of free beer.

"Is that a fact? Alright lad, how about we up the stakes a bit, eh? How does that sound?" the storyteller said, giving Benito a once-over. *This is going to be fun*, he thought.

The kid, not much older than a teenager if he had to guess, was a small one. 5' 4" or 5' 5" max, and skinny. He might be quick, but it was worth a few extra coins to the men at the table to find out.

Interested in getting a bigger payday, Benito gave it no thought, instead asking, "Up the stakes, how? What did you have in mind?"

The old curmudgeon spoke up this time, an evil glint in his eye. “We’ll buy ya drink for an entire week if yur able to do as ya say.”

“And the stakes? I won’t, but what happens if I lose the bet?” Benito asked.

The man grinned then, showing a few missing teeth. Swinging his arms wide to encompass the rest of the table, he hollered, “Join the *Legion*, boy! We all done it. It’ll make a man out of ya and by the looks of ya, it’s needed.”

Benito hesitated, but his desire for free alcohol overruled his common sense. “I’m fine with that, but it’s never going to happen. You have a deal.”

CRACK

The storyteller slammed his palm down, harder this time onto the wooden table. The sound echoed throughout the room, grabbing the brothel’s attention. Jumping to his feet, the man yelled, “MANCHESTER” at the top of his lungs. “We have a Manchester on our hands, you twats!”

Benito had heard of someone calling “Manchester” when making outlandish bets. It was done when one of the bettors believed the other would back out due to fear. Doing so would label them a coward, their betting days over. To Benito, that was far worse than joining the Legion.

“Hey! I ain’t a coward. All I’ve gotta do is smack something on the ass and get away, right? That doesn’t sound so hard!”

The table in front of him roared with laughter.

Wiping tears from his eyes, the storyteller tried to pull himself together before asking, “Lad, are you telling me you missed the part of the story about what it was the crazy bastard smacked on the arse?”

A bad feeling started to grow in Benito’s gut. Shaking his head, “No, I just heard that he smacked its ass and ran off without a scratch.”

Taking a moment to close his eyes, the man fought back laughter. “A Sacred Bull” he managed to say.

Benito frowned, “A what?”

“A *Sacred Bull*, you dumbass!” wheezed the old curmudgeon between coughs of laughter.

Its ropes cut, the sinking feeling in Benito’s gut became a freefall.

The men wanted to turn it into a spectacle. Rather than going straight to the village's Sacred Bull, they set a time for the next afternoon instead. They wanted a day to spread word about the wager.

Benito left with his head low. *I have no idea how I'm going to survive this, let alone win it.* Sacred Bulls were a breed of bovine with a strong earth affinity. Considered "tame" in the loosest sense of the word. They left you alone as long as you did the same to their herd. Touch one of them and they would kill.

"I really am an idiot, how could I have made such a stupid bet."

"Bet? What's this I hear about a bet, you been gambling again boy?" In his mood, Benito hadn't been paying attention to his surroundings. His neighbor, Old Betty, was out watering her garden. She'd been telling him for ages to knock off the gambling or he was going to wind up either homeless or dead. Thinking about having to join the Legion if he failed tomorrow, Benito realized that she might just be right in the end.

With a deep sigh, Benito nodded and sat near where she watered her tomato plants.

"How bad is it this time?" she asked, voice tired.

"It's pretty bad. Ma'am."

Tilting her head to the side, she considered him. "Alright then, out with it. What the hell did you get yourself into now?"

Putting his head in his hands he mumbled, "I have to smack a sacred bull on its ass and----" She cut him off, "Speak up boy, and quit mumbling. I swear I just heard you say you have to smack a bull's ass."

Blushing, Benito took his hands away from his face and started again. "I did, I have to smack a bull's ass, A Sacred Bull's ass *and* I have to get away from it without getting hurt."

Old Betty stared at Benito for a long moment and then dumped the contents of her watering can over his head.

Benito spluttered as the cold water ran down his back and stole his breath. He jumped up from where he had been sitting, looking at Old Betty in shock. There, he found another, this one of pain. He could see the disappointment written on her face as she shook her head. "Benny, sometimes I wonder why I even try. You really can be an idiot sometimes."

Turning to her home, over her shoulder she called, "Come with me. There is only one thing I can think of to help get you out of this mess alive."

Looking like a drenched puppy, Benito followed along as she made her way inside. “What’s that ma’am?”

“Train Benny, we’re going to train you.”

“AHHHHHH” Old Betty could hear Benito’s girlish screams from her garden. With a sigh she thought, *I don’t know what I’m going to do with that boy. He’s going to get himself killed. This was the only way to distract him I could think of.*

Her idea of training involved Benito chasing the mice and rats living in her cellar. He could “train” his speed and dexterity, “As they were the only chance you have to see the following sunrise.” She’d told Benito that she’d pay him a copper for every three mice or rats that he caught. *Nothing motivates that boy more than money and food.*

At the thought, Old Betty’s eyes homed in on her neighbor’s house, an idea forming, *I think it’s time to call in some reinforcements.* Old Betty set down her watering can and walked across the street.

Benito rushed the corner where he had one of the furry little bastards trapped. *I’m going to get you this time, those coppers are mine!* His thoughts preoccupied, Benito didn’t see the broom handle sticking out until it was too late. It caught his foot, causing him to fall flat on his face.

He let out a groan. After almost two hours, he’d caught eight vermin so far. One away from making his third copper, enough to buy a half-dozen honey buns from the nearby baker.

His stomach rumbling, Benito realized he hadn’t eaten all day.

No wonder I’m struggling to catch these things. I’m starving! Forcing himself out of the dirt, Benito climbed back to his feet with a new drive, this time fueled by hunger.

Walking outside, Benito saw Old Betty crossing the street. “I’ve got ‘em! Nine of the little guys, that’ll be three coppers ma’am!”

Old Betty raised her eyebrows, “Nine of them? That old tom of mine must be getting lazy..” Reaching into an inner pocket of her dress, she pulled out the three owed coins and held them out.

Benito’s mouth had already started to water at the thought of his warm, buttery, and yeasty prize. Imagining the *crackle* as he broke open its hardened glaze. He reached to take the

money, but she kept her grip on the coins. "Don't go spending this on more drink, boy. It's only mid-afternoon and we still have more training to do."

"We do? Do you have more rats you want me to catch?"

Old Betty let out a snort, "Sweet Heavens I hope not, otherwise they are likely to eat me out of hearth and home. No, Benny. Your next bit of training is over at Carl's place." She pointed back the way she'd come.

"Okay.... What is he going to have me do?"

Another snort, followed by a cackle, "You'll find out when you get there, now hurry up. You've got a long day ahead of you."

Benito, rubbing his full belly with one hand, stuffed the final honey bun down his gullet with the other and made his way up Carl's stone walkway. Wiping his greasy hands on his pants, Benito knocked and stepped back to wait. After a moment and with no answer, Benito moved to knock again just as the door swung open. It caught him full in the face, knocking him on his ass. "Ow owowow Oooowww!"

"Shit! Sorry sonny, ma legs just don't work like they use'ta and it took me a second'ta get outta ma chair." Carl's old scratchy voice apologized.

"No, don't worry about it, Mr. Carl. Old Betty said to come over here and see you about some training?" Benito said, rubbing the goose egg that was sure to form.

Hawking a phlegmy-sounding loogie, Carl spat it an impressive distance. "Sure do. Betty said you'd gotten yaself inta trouble again and need'ta work on a few things or else you'd be carrion food this time ta'morrow."

Letting out a deep breath, Benito nodded in confirmation.

"Said ya needed practice sneakin up on som'n big. Well, I don't have nothin big but I've got som'n you'd have'ta work for ta sneak up on. I'll even pay ya ta do it."

Benito would have done it anyway. He didn't have a choice, but hearing he'd be getting paid, his attention focused in on what Carl was offering. "How much are we talking about?"

The old man side-eyed Benito, holding up three fingers, "Coppers."

That's enough for a meat pie from the stand down the road. "Deal," Benito replied before Carl could change his mind. "What do you want me to do?"

According to Carl, the best way for Benito to train his stalking skills was to catch the backyard chickens he had running loose. As Carl said, they weren't large but Benito wasn't having much

luck sneaking up on them anyway. He'd be just out of arm's reach when they seemed to sense him, skittering away a moment before he pounced.

After a few minutes of watching Benito try and catch a chicken, Carl had to admit the show was too good for him to witness alone. He decided to ask Betty to join in the entertainment.

Carl heard two voices as he approached her home. Continuing around the side, Carl saw Betty talking to Jesup, one of the village's fishermen. Waiving for their attention, Carl hollered, "Y'all wanna see a show?"

Betty wheezed a breath from deep within her chest, "I thought it'd be funny to watch. I was about to head over but wanted to ask Jesup for a favor." Carl looked between the two with a raised eyebrow.

"Wants me to take the boy fishin in the mornin, keep him busy," Jesup answered. Carl nodded his head in understanding. "That'd be mighty kinda ya. If ya gotta minute, ya can watch the dummy runnin round after some chickens smarter'n him."

Jesup's grin was answer enough.

"Arrrrgh!" Benito roared, *why can't I catch these damn things!* He'd become desperate by this point. Cornering one, he dove forward onto his stomach, slid across the grass, and finally, *finally*, caught one of the feathery assholes. Benito climbed to his knees and raised the chicken over his head in triumph, just in time for it to shit down the side of his face.

He gagged, dropped the chicken, and wiped off as much of the warm and stinking feces as he could. His stomach roiled at the smell and knowledge of what dripped into his ear. Benito did a poor job of removing it, only smearing it across his face and coating his hands. It was a losing battle and his stomach revolted. Once his insides settled, empty of the honey buns he'd just enjoyed. Benito reached up, wiping the vomit off his lower lip.

Carl was willing to pay Benito to catch and cut the chicken's flight feathers, even without the pretext of training. He was tired of chasing the damn birds when they escaped his fence. After watching Benito blow chunks for a second time, Carl felt he owed the boy twice as many coppers.

Hysterical laughter forced Jesup to sit and poor Old Betty was worried she'd have an aneurysm, struggling to remember the last time she'd laughed so hard.

Wiping away tears, Carl took mercy on the fool. “Boy, sweet heavens, that was funny. Ya rightly need some help with this, so watch. Ma bones are too old ta do this more’n once.”

Benito watched Carl enter a half squat, his arms out wide, and hanging past his knees. He walked bowlegged toward a chicken. Approaching the bird, Benito could see that Carl wasn’t staring directly at it, he was looking at the ground to its left as he approached. Quick as a cobra, he snatched it off the ground, cradling it to his chest.

Benito stood, jaw hanging, as Carl turned toward him with a gapped-tooth grin and said, “That’s how ya do it, sonny!”

Benito was shown the trick to snaring chickens, something he was assured, could be used on most animals no matter the size.

“Don’t stare right at ‘em. They gonna feel ya eyes on ‘em. Look just off ta the side of ‘em, ya will still be able’ta see ‘em.”

Benito found it helped him get close to the birds without making them nervous but he still ran into trouble when it came to catching them.

The broom Carl had taken to using, smacked the back of Benito’s head once more. “No! Yer movin too quick, yer freakin ‘em out! Slow sonny, go slow.” Benito tried to follow Carl’s instructions. The problem was, once he was within arms reach of his target, he moved too quickly, startling the bird into squawking and making its escape.

Carl sighed. *The boy just ain’t getting it.* Deciding to take another approach, he called Benito over to him. “Now boy, I don’t wanna hear no denials, I know ya’ve done it, I’ve seen ya.”

Benito hunched his shoulders. He wasn’t sure what Carl had seen him do but it probably wasn’t good.

ignoring Benito’s reaction, Carl continued, “When the baker pulls out a fresh tray of honey buns or hot cakes and ya plan on stealing one.” Carl smacked the top of Benito’s head with the broom as he opened his mouth to object. “I said I seen ya didn’t I? That’s not the point. When ya go ta steal one, how do ya do it, hmmm?”

Benito took a moment to give it real thought, remembering to the numerous times he *had* stolen a hot cake. *I’ve always had to go slow so I didn’t draw attention!* The realization smacked Benito in the face like Carl’s broom had all afternoon.

The last puzzle piece slotted into place and Benito knew what he'd been doing wrong. His next attempt was a success, as were the following half-dozen.

Carl nodded in satisfaction. *Huh, I'm better at this than I thought I'd be.* He looked back towards Betty's house, where she and Jesup were still watching. Jesup took the opportunity to mime wiping his chin and throwing up. Carl snorted loud enough that it made Benito jump and drop the chicken held in his arms.

Mumbling under his breath, "Crazy old bastard." Benito lowered himself back into his half-squat and approached the last obstacle between him and his meat pie.

Benito waved goodbye to Carl, happy with the 6 coppers in his pocket, double what he'd been promised. He earned a bonus for his hard work and was proud of it.

Calling it a day on such a high note, Benito went to find dinner and was feeling pretty good overall. Between chasing the mice and stalking the chickens, Benito felt like he was in peak condition and thought he might have a chance after all.

Passing Old Betty's house, Benito saw her in her garden again and waved as he passed. Standing from where she'd been pulling weeds, she called, "Benito! Jesup asked for your help tomorrow. Can you meet him by the docks mid-morning?"

Benito hadn't spoken with Jesup much over the years but he knew Jesup was a good friend of Old Betty's. "I can do that, did he say what he needed help with?"

"Something to do with fishing, said he'd treat you to lunch for helping."

Knowing he would be fed was reason enough, Benito was happy to help.

With food in hand, Benito played hot potato with the pies as he walked home for the evening. Oblivious to the fact that he hadn't worried over tomorrow's looming threat for hours.

Jesup waited for Benito as he made his way onto the docks. Walking up to him, Benito gave him a small wave and stuck his hands in his pockets.

He felt off after seeing people watching and whispering as he walked by. *It must be about the stupid bet. Those four from the brothel sure spread it around fast.*

Guessing at what was wrong, having heard about it himself from a couple of gossips. Jesup dove right into their plans for the day. "We're going fishin. Mrs. Betty asked me to show you a

thing or two and train up your reaction speed. If you're going to stand a chance this afternoon, you're going to need it. You're going to have to react the moment you smack that bull."

Remembering how good he felt after yesterday's training, Benito perked up at the thought of more. Recalling that Old Betty promised Jesup would feed him lunch didn't hurt either.

Jesup had Benito help push a nearby boat away from the dock before they jumped in. Passing Benito an oar, Jesup instructed him on how to use it and keep the boat from drifting to the side or spinning in a circle.

After 15 minutes of rowing along the river bank, Jesup called a stop and tossed out an anchor line. Handing Benito a pole, Jesup showed him how to bait his hook and they cast out their lines. Benito's throw was caught on a low-hanging branch and Jesup had to help get it loose. His second attempt went better, if not where he'd tried to place it.

Sitting back, with his rod held in the crook of his arm, Jesup began to speak softly. "A lot of people think fishin is all about waitin. They're wrong. It's just a part of it, the smallest part. You could come out here, throw out your bait, and yea, you might catch two or three fish a day doing it that way. But, that ain't fishin, that's just wastin your time. A *real* Fisher can tell you what I mean..." finishing his last word with a grunt, Jesup grabbed his rod and gave it a strong pull. "We get things done." With that, he began winding his line around the rod wheel, tugging as needed once he'd reeled in all the slack in the line.

Benito was impressed, they'd only been out for a few minutes and Jesup had one on the hook already. Jesup pointed near Benito's feet where he saw a net with a long handle. Benito grabbed it and waited.

After a final, strong pull from Jesup, a flash of silver scales could be seen in the sunlight. Lunging forward, Benito scooped the fish out of the water and into the boat.

Admiring his work, Jesup looked down with a contented smile. "May have made that look a little too easy. I've been fishin this river for decades. I know where and when they are going to be. I know what they like to eat, I know *them*. That's what I wanted to teach you. If you can learn somethin about that bull, it might just save your ass."

Bending down, Jesup pulled the fish out of the net and removed the hook from its mouth. He smashed it onto the side of the boat, killing it instantly. Jesup then tossed it into a water-filled storage compartment to keep it fresh. Returning to his seat, Jesup checked the bait on his hook and tossed what remained into the river.

As he baited on a new worm, Jesup continued speaking. "The main thing I want to help you improve while we're out here is your reflexes and reaction time." Giving Benito the side-eye, he said dryly, "If that's even possible."

Benito looked at him in confusion. That is until he felt the rod in his hands give a small jerk, realizing it'd been doing that for a short while and he hadn't noticed. Benito jumped to his feet, gave a mighty pull, and almost threw himself into the river. If not for Jesup grabbing him by his belt, he would have fallen overboard.

He also managed to snap his line pulling it so hard. Now he was left to reel in the weightless string and thread on another hook.

Settling back down in his seat, new line cast out, Benito looked at Jesup. It was always said that the man didn't mince words and would give it to you straight. Building up the courage to ask, and before he could chicken out. "What do you think of my chances today?"

Jesup gave Benito another side-eye.

"Shit."

"Pretty much what I thought..."

Silence reigned after that and Benito found it comforting. No expectations, no responsibilities, just pay attention to his rod and pull hard to set the hook the moment he felt a fish bite. Over the next couple of hours, Benito had a few opportunities to practice and even managed to catch a few, as Jesup continued to reel in fish after fish.

Soon enough, Jesup looked up, the sun high in the sky, and declared, "That's enough, we'll head back to the village and I'll cook up a few of today's catch for lunch."

By the time they returned to the docks, Jesup finished selling the day's catch, and they finished their meal, it was well past noon.

The sun was starting its descent and it was time for Benito's date with the bull. He could be dumb at times, but he wasn't a coward. *I've done everything I can to prepare for this. Hell, this could be the start to my own legend. Like the stories the traveling peddlers tell of great heroes.*

"I'm worried for the boy," Old Betty repeated for the fourth time since Carl picked her up from her home.

"I know, but there's nothin we can do for the little idiot," he said.

“He won’t make it in the Legion. He’s too soft and the bad apples would eat him alive! Look at what’s happened already with just our local scum.” Betty continued as if he hadn’t spoken at all.

Heaven’s Mercy, the entire village is here. Benito stopped in his tracks and stared at the crowd. He’d known people would come out to see, but he had no idea it would be so many. He stood frozen in place for too long and was soon noticed by the crowd.

A loud cheer began and a path opened between him and a group of four standing beside the paddock gate. Steeling his nerves, Benito made his way through the crowd. The gathering felt split between two groups, those excited to see what was to come and those who looked at him as if he was already dead.

Don’t let it get to you, this is where you make a name for yourself.

Reaching the paddock gate, Benito stood in front of the four men.

The old curmudgeon with his gap-toothed grin on full display, the same evil glint in his eye. The storyteller stood proud, hands on hips, their two companions working the crowd and taking bets.

The storyteller stepped forward and said, “You showed up! I’m honestly surprised! Are you backing out? You’ll be labeled a coward. Don’t forget, I thought you might and called this a Manchester for all to hear.”

Benito ground his teeth, yelling, “And I told you yesterday, I ain’t a coward. I came, I’m here, let’s do this. I’m thirsty and could use a drink.”

I can do this.

The crowd roared at his proclamation and Benito felt their energy flow through him like electricity.

Facing the gate, Benito saw Old Betty, Carl, and Jesup standing off to the side. Old Betty waved, Carl nodded, and Jesup pointed towards his head. A reminder to use what the three had taught him. He dipped his own in acknowledgment and hopped over the gate into the paddock.

Benito’s eyes were drawn to it immediately, *the Sacred Bull*. Head and shoulders above the surrounding herd, it was huge. Not just in size but in build, its shoulders looked to be made from earthen boulders.

Benito was lucky the bull was off to the side and not in the middle of the herd. He moved forward, each step smooth as butter. He could not risk spooking any of the nearby cattle as his boots crunched in the tall dry grass. He started to sweat as the bull grew larger and larger the more the distance closed. He could practically feel the beast's aura once within 15 feet of the creature.

Squatting behind a spotted cow, Benito observed the Sacred Bull in all its glory. Up close, the thing was *massive*, it was also terrifying. *I ain't no coward*. Benito repeated it a few times as he continued to "observe" its movements. *This is stupid, it's just standing there eating grass. What the hell am I supposed to learn from that?*

As if on command, Benito did learn something. Its cowpies were just as massive and overwhelmingly powerful as the rest of it.

Accepting that he wouldn't get anywhere with that tactic. Benito decided to make use of another skill he'd been working on, stalking his prey.

Creeping around the heifer he'd chosen for cover. Benito worked his way around to the bull's rear, where it wouldn't be able to see him, being careful to view the bull in his periphery, just like Carl had shown him.

Benito edged his way around, lining up with the paddock fence to make his escape as quick as possible. Looking over his shoulder at his exit point. Benito saw the crowd had moved to his side of the paddock for a better view.

Great, they better not spook the herd or this bet is over.

Reorienting on his target, Benito took deep breaths to calm himself. He was going to need all of the skills he'd been training. The speed from chasing mice in Old Betty's basement, his quick hands catching Carl's chickens, and the reaction time he'd shown fishing with Jesup.

Gliding his way the last two or three feet, silent as a wraith. Benito stopped breathing. The world slowed and the crowd quieted as he closed the last few inches... *There*.

Benito felt it, the stars aligned, and he struck like a viper.

SMACK

He was moving. Tearing off, back the way he'd come. His hand throbbed with pain after hitting what felt like solid rock. He was sprinting as fast as he could to his egress point when he heard it. A deep, resonating sound that shook Benito to his bones. Then he felt it. Through the soles of his feet, the ground shook under heavy impacts. Benito could barely hear the crowd

screaming for him to run over the bull's bellow. Risking a small peak over his shoulder, Benito nearly shit himself. Taking one step for every two of Benito's, the beast was gaining *fast*.

Fear empowering his movements, Benito poured on the speed almost missing the spotted cow moving into his path because of it.

Benito knew he couldn't stop, could feel it in his still rattling bones that if he did, he died. He also knew he was moving too quickly to get around the animal. This left him with only one option, something only someone of his size could do, he went *under* it.

At full speed, Benito dropped to his side, feet first. He stretched out his body and prayed to anyone who'd listen. Someone must have heard him because his timing was perfect. Managing to squeeze right between its slow steps. He grazed a single raised hoof before he was through and back up and running in seconds.

Sprinting towards his salvation, Benito was counting the distance. *20 feet, 15, 10, five fee----* He never got to finish the thought.

"Uhhhgh" burst from Benito's lips as he was hit by the power of a runaway horse, or, a pissed off bull in this case. A sharp, burning pain started in the back of his thigh, moving up his leg. It continued until it reached his left ass cheek before digging in deeper, the pain flared and Benito screamed. He felt pressure tighten around his waist. *Shit, it's caught on my belt.* The next thing Benito knew, he was airborne, screaming the entire flight.

Goodbye cruel world, I wish I'd had more sweet cakes.

Hitting the ground, Benito's first thought was whether or not his leg was supposed to bend that way, he was pretty sure it wasn't. The next, snapped him back to reality, as he looked for the Sacred Bull coming to finish the job. Seeing that he was surrounded by chattering people, it took Benito a few moments to realize that he must have been thrown out of the paddock. It took a few moments more to figure out why he was still alive. Once a Sacred Bull either killed or ran something out of its area, it wouldn't pursue, It would return to protect the herd.

Benito laid his head down in either relief or pain, he wasn't sure. The agony coming from his leg answered the question of whether or not it was broken and coupled with the pain in his ass, he didn't have the energy to move. With a deep sigh, Benito couldn't help but think, *I guess this isn't the start of my fame and fortune.*

The crowd, busy watching and staring at Benito parted, and the four men who'd orchestrated the spectacle appeared staring down at him. To his great surprise, when Benito met their eyes. He didn't see the laughter or scorn he had been expecting. No, now he thought he saw respect in their depths.

"Pick up the lad, boys. We'll patch up his bleeding arse, splint that leg of his, and get him able to walk again. The Legion will heal him the rest of the way after he's joined." The storyteller said.

Benito groaned, "No chance of me getting out of that is there?"

This time, it was the old curmudgeon that spoke, "Sorry boy, ya don't back out of a bet involving the Legion, but yur goin to learn all about that soon enough." To his companions, he said, "Now help him up so we can get him splinted. After somethin like that, I think he deserves a drink."

Looking at the man in confusion, Benito asked, "A drink? But I lost. You said I still had to join the Legion." The old man wheezed a laugh, "Yur right boy! I did and ya are, but I'd buy any man a drink for provin his metal like ya just did. Now call me Sal, Boot, ya drinkin with the Legion tonight."

Slamming his now empty beer down on the table, Benito let out another massive belch. Looking around the table at Eryk, Mateo, Lirkin, and Kolm. He stood with a sway and announced, "And *that* ladies, is how taking one in the arse landed your's truly in the Legion!"