

Chenille's dagger

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 25 Oct 2002

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Roy C. Lackey — 25 Oct 2002, 07:34

Crush writes:

Well, Crane *does* give Chenille the dagger, but it was originally owned by Musk.

That's not how I read it. It's on the page before that "friend" quote. (279, paper) "He'd got it specially made for me, or anyhow the picture put on." The "he" is Crane. He did the same thing with the needler he gave Hyacinth--had it engraved with the namesake flowers.

Poppy was flat out lying when she said there was a guy named Cat who she and sometimes Orpine serviced. Note that the only person who can contradict this story is dead.

The guy named Cat is irrelevant. It was Orchid who jumped to the conclusion that the dagger belonged to a man named Cat--because of the cat image on the hilt.

This is why Musk becomes so agitated when Silk carefully studies the knife. Everyone is looking for the owner of the knife as if he is responsible:

The owner of the knife is responsible for Orpine's death--Chenille.

The "cat" on the handle is a "civet" (or so I read it). "Civet" is a type of feline but it is also a musky yellowish fluid taken from glands in the anal pouch of the civet used as a perfume. So civet is a type of musk. Silk when studying the picture ponders the drop of blood and considers its possible association with Blood the person. So the picture is of a "civet with blood".

The cat on the handle is an ordinary cat. The specific description of the handle's image is: "a scarlet cat strutted with a tiny black mouse in its jaws. The cat's fiery tail circled the hilt." There is no "drop of blood". Two pages later Silk is thinking about the pictured cat, which reminds him of the images on the needler. He goes on thinking:

"Blood's name . . . If the dagger had been made for him, the picture on its hilt would have shown blood, presumably: a bloody dagger of the same design, perhaps, or something of that sort. The cat had held a mouse in its jaws, and mice thus caught by cats bled, of course; but he could recall *no blood* in the picture, and the captive mouse had been quite small. He was no artist, but after putting himself in the place of the one who had drawn and tinted that picture, he decided that the mouse had been included mostly to indicate that *the cat was in fact a cat, and not some other cat-like animal*, a panther for example. The mouse had been a kind of badge, in other words." (emphasis added)

Furthermore, Silk considers the mouse in the cat's mouth. He decides it is a "badge" of some sort. Well whose badge is the mouse? Apollo's - denoting his patronage of medicine. Another connection between Silk and Apollo.

Secondly,

Musk owns Silk's mantaeon, so he has Silk in his power just as the cat has the mouse in his mouth.

The mouse in the image is a "badge" only in the sense that it identifies the cat as a cat.

Silk continues thinking:

"The cat itself had been scarlet, *but hardly with blood*; even a large mouse would not have bled as much as that, and the cat had presumably been tinted to indicate that it was somehow burning. Its upright tail had actually been tipped with fire." (emphasis added) (255-56, paper)

The cat on the dagger hilt has nothing to do with Musk. The title of the chapter in which Orpine was murdered is "The Cat With The Red-Hot Tail". The next chapter, where Silk interviews Chenille, explains the image.

"Do you know, Patera, I'd never even seen chenille, not to know it was my flower anyway, till he [Crane] brought me a bouquet for my room last spring? And I love it--that's when I did my hair this color. He said sometimes they call it burning cattail." (279, paper)

This is repeated about three pages before the end of chapter three in LAKE, when Chenille was at the manse.

"Crane was a friend, just like I said yesterday. He was nice, and he brought me things, when he didn't have to. You remember about the bouquet of chenille? Little stuff like that, but nice. Most of the girls like him, and sometimes I give him a free one. He's got a thing for big girls. He sort of laughs about it."

What the exact connection between "chenille" and the plant "cattail" may be, I don't know. I would speculate that it is because cattail has "long, brown, fuzzy, cylindrical flower spikes" (Webster's), which probably look something like a caterpillar. At any rate, the text makes the connection. Crane gave personalized gifts to both Hyacinth and Chenille, engraved with images of their names because neither of them could read.

-Roy

James Wynn — 25 Oct 2002, 14:39 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Roy stickles:

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The guy named Cat is irrelevant. It was Orchid who jumped to the conclusion that the dagger belonged to a man named Cat--because of the cat image on the hilt.

Crush perseveres:

The guy named "Cat" is anything but irrelevant. The fact that Poppy lied about knowing him shows that she, like Musk, is a Trivigaunte spy. The word "civet" is *Arabic* for "perfume". "Civet" is Musk's real name. The fact that Musk changed it suggests he had something to hide (since the name

could be Vironese as well). If the ownership of the knife came to light, Blood ("a loyal son of Viron") could conceivably have pieced together Musk's true heritage. Certainly Spider would have.

Crane *gave* Chenille the knife. But Crane *got* it from Musk. He *said* he went to Musk for advice, but in fact he took the knife Musk already owned and had the tail of the "cat" tinted red. Then he gave it to Chenille. Voila! Crane and Musk "launder" a potentially incriminating piece of evidence. I guess he *could* have thrown it away, or buried it, or destroyed it - but I suppose it was nice enough that he couldn't bear to do that.

The connection between "chenille" and the picture is that another name for the plant "chenille" is "red-hot cat tail" or "burning cattail." It has long bright red blooms.

As for the connection between the knife and Blood, I just don't believe that Wolfe would have Silk spend an entire paragraph considering the linkage between Blood and the dagger for nothing, when there is (I agree) no evidentiary connection between them. Silk was considering the knife "under the auspices of the Outsider".

-- Crush