

Under the Same Roof

a *The Witcher* fanfic

by Rodo

for *Amiodara*

THERE WERE DARK clouds gathering over the mountains, back where the Gwenllech wound its way south before turning west to leave the valley and make its way towards the more populated regions of Kaedwen. With a small sigh of relief, Geralt of Rivia spurred on Roach so that they would reach the keep before either night or storm reached them. It was colder than he liked, since winter was almost upon them. Finally, Kaer Morhen came into sight and with it the promise of a warm hearth and pleasant company.

At the stables, he was greeted by Vesemir, his face as ragged and friendly as Geralt remembered. When Vesemir saw him, he smiled the same kind smile that Geralt still remembered from his childhood.

“Wolf, I was afraid you wouldn’t make it before the snows close the pass,” he said, then added, “You’re the last. The others are here already.”

“Even Lambert?” Geralt asked, although the answer was obvious. There were three horses in the stable, which meant three witchers in the keep, with Roach tiredly shaking her head, waiting to be relieved of saddle and bridle and eager to rest in a warm, dry place with plenty of hay.

“Even Lambert. He’s been here a week, and Eskel for a little more than two.”

“And you two haven’t killed each other yet? I’d call that a success.”

“I’ve spent as much time outside the keep as possible, before we’re stuck inside for months, and Eskel has been keeping him busy. The two are trying to perfect their recipe for some kind of hooch. I don’t even want to know what they put in it.”

“I’m sure I don’t either,” Geralt told him before proceeding to take the saddle off his very grateful horse. “How long has it been since we all wintered here?”

Vesemir paused for a while and stared past Geralt, into the sky above the walls, already a shade darker than when he had arrived. “Let me think – Lambert hasn’t been here for three years, but Eskel missed that one, stuck down in Redania because he couldn’t finish a striga on time. So five years, I think.”

Five years, Geralt thought. Long enough to be happy for the reunion, but not so long that he didn't know what kind of trouble being cooped up inside all winter with all four of them would mean. Lambert would challenge Vesemir, Vesemir would eventually grow tired of it and Geralt and Eskel would get very drunk and wonder out loud whether they would be coming back next year.

Vesemir's smile turned slightly crooked when he saw Geralt's face and Geralt scoffed. They were as much of a family as witchers could have and it showed.

When he had finished settling Roach, Geralt walked up to the main keep, wondering if the walls had crumbled much in the past few months. Kaer Morhen had been more rubble than castle for decades now, but it was hard to tell. By now, the ruin felt more like home than the bustling castle of his childhood.

In the dining hall, he found Eskel and Lambert huddled over an improvised still. When they saw it was he who entered, not Vesemir, they both broke into grins and abandoned their latest pet project in favor of welcoming him.

"Geralt!" Lambert exclaimed.

"We thought you wouldn't make it," Eskel added in a more measured tone.

"We thought you'd finally met your match," Lambert disagreed. He dodged Eskel's elbow in a well-practiced motion that only a witcher's reflexes made possible.

"What kept you so long?" Eskel inquired.

"About a week's ride away, the villagers insisted I take care of a grave hag for them."

"Yeah, they tried that with me too," Lambert told them. "I figured it would still be there come spring, or the villagers wouldn't. Either way, not something I wanted to deal with. Not for the coin they offered, anyway."

Geralt raised his eyebrow at him, but Lambert just returned the look.

"We aren't all into heroics," he reminded Geralt.

"It was only an old woman anyway," Geralt admitted. "She sometimes dug up fresh graves at night to look for valuables. The villagers didn't bother with deep burials since they haven't had a problem with ghouls for about a century."

Lambert laughed and even Eskel smirked, highlighting the angry scar on his face.

"So no money for you, then," Eskel surmised.

Geralt shrugged.

"Too bad, you could have paid for our drinks."

"Vesemir said you're the ones making the drinks."

“Well yes, you could have paid us for the drinks,” Eskel joked. “Other than that, how was your year?”

Together, the three of them walked past the still to the great hearth, where a fire was already crackling. In the distance, Geralt heard thunder, but the chairs around the fire were in the same place as always, looking terribly tempting after a long day on horseback. There was no longer any reason to worry about the weather, especially since Lambert produced some bottles of Temerian Rye from the kitchen.

“Nothing much to tell,” Geralt admitted. “Drowners and ghouls, for the most part. One chort.”

“Then let me tell you about this werewolf I met in Bremervoord,” Lambert began, handing Geralt the bottle.



It was a drop. At first, Geralt thought he had imagined it. The Temerian Rye had done its work while Vesemir had walked past them, shaking his head and hiding his fond smile. By now, he was probably snoring deeply enough to give the storm a run for its money. Geralt, Eskel and Lambert had exchanged all their new stories and had instead begun to retread old ground.

“Is it true what Vesemir says about that zeugl?” Lambert asked, but before Geralt could answer, another drop fell, right onto the top of his head. This time, he was fairly sure he wasn’t imagining things.

Instead of answering the question, Geralt turned his face upwards and peered at the vaulted ceiling, struggling to get his eyes to fully cooperate. When he finally managed to focus to his satisfaction, another drop fell, this time slightly to the left of his nose. A couple of seconds later, there was another. They were coming faster now. From the corners of his eyes, he could see Lambert and Eskel follow his gaze.

“Well, this place has really gone to shit,” Lambert commented when the next drop hit. “Old Vesemir clearly can’t keep up with things anymore.”

“We should get a bucket,” Eskel suggested. Geralt noticed he moved his head back and forth sluggishly and wondered if he did the same. How many bottles had they finished?

“This is my favorite place by the fire,” Geralt said, sounding more wistful than he had intended. It was probably time to stop drinking. And to abandon his favorite place. With a sigh, he staggered to his feet, but after a few steps, his body decided he’d moved far enough and let itself fall to the ground. It was cold and uncomfortable and too far away from the fire. The next drop hit the ground in front of the chair.

“We really should get a bucket,” Eskel pointed out again.

“Are we really going to let our evening be ruined by this ploughin’ place?” Lambert grouched, but a hiccup ruined the effect. “Come on, it’s just a little hole, let’s fix it and then I’ll show you where I hid a bottle of Mahakamama—Mamahaka—Dwarven spirit.”

Geralt stared up and the ceiling again. It was high, and in that moment, another bout of thunder shook the castle. What did any of them know about fixing roofs anyway?

“It can’t be that hard,” Lambert argued. “It’s probably just a missing tile. There have got to be some spares in all this rubble. You with me?”

Geralt stared at Eskel and Eskel stared back, blinking slowly. He knew it was a stupid idea – Lambert always had stupid ideas when he drank too much, and not a single good one. There had been that time with the goat – but then Geralt looked back at the chair and didn’t want to go to sleep thinking about how his favorite place by the fire had been ruined. He shrugged, and Lambert beamed.

“What about you, Eskel,” Lambert asked.

Eskel paused in his swaying. “I think I’ll get a bucket,” he finally said.

“Suit yourself,” Lambert said. “Come on, Geralt, let’s find a roof tile.”

That was easier said than done. Geralt found a couple of Cat potions in his bags, but they didn’t help much as he and Lambert wobbled over to the collapsed tower in the dark through the pouring rain, blinded by the occasional bolt of lightning. By the time they reached what remained of the roof, Geralt was soaked down to the bone and he doubted Lambert felt differently, even if he didn’t seem bothered in the least.

“How about this one?” he asked, then kicked it to show Geralt which one he meant. One of the edges broke off. “Well, I guess not.”

Another bolt of lightning, followed by another crack of thunder that left both of them staggering through the stones. Just before his eyes recovered, Geralt’s foot got caught on an old brick. For a couple of precarious seconds, he tried to regain

his balance, arms swiveling through the air. He failed, falling face first into the dirt. To his luck, Lambert was too busy searching the rubble to notice any of this, or Geralt wouldn't live it down for at least another five decades. When he lifted himself up, his eyes fell on a roof tile that seemed undamaged.

"Found one!" he called.

Behind his back, he heard Lambert walk over until he came to a halt beside him, his black boots caked in dirt and rain.

"What are you doing down there?"

Geralt pointed at the tile, wrapped his fingers around it and then struggled to his feet. It looked fine as the rain stripped it of some leftover dirt. Beside him, Lambert seemed to come to the same conclusion.

"Let's find the leak, then, come on." He slapped Geralt's arm before sauntering off back towards the keep. Geralt followed him, still wondering if they should be doing this. But they had a tile, and they were wet already, so why not? Back indoors, they found Eskel, who had passed out on the floor in front of the fire, curled up around a bucket that was slowly filling with water. He was snoring.

"Should we wake him?" Geralt wondered out loud.

"Nah, not like he'll be any use fixing the roof if he's had enough to fall asleep like this. Come on, you know the way to the roof?"

Geralt nodded. Of course he knew. Back when he was young the young witchers-to-be dared each other to run across it when they thought the older witchers didn't pay attention. Although thinking back, the old goats had probably heard everything.

"Back when I was little, we used to run around on it," Lambert told him. He sounded almost wistful.

"I think we all did," Geralt murmured.

Halfway up the stairs, Geralt almost stumbled again, his mind lost in memories of a different time. The glass of the window they used to climb through was broken, but the shutters behind it were new. Vesemir, he supposed. Keeping the keep in an even halfway inhabitable state must be quite the work for one old witcher. No wonder the roof was leaking.

Lambert opened the window and climbed through, then Geralt followed him. For the first time, he sincerely entertained the thought that this might be a bad idea. This high up, the winds were roaring and the lightning seemed more dangerous than on the ground. Cold finally began to chase away the sluggish

warmth from the Temerian Rye, clearing his mind. But Lambert was already halfway to the spot where the hole should be, not bothered by any of the pandemonium.

“Are you sure this is a good idea?” Geralt shouted, hoping he was loud enough. Another bolt of lightning highlighted Lambert’s features as he turned, making him seem almost manic, like a vampire about to pounce.

“Don’t be a pussy!” Lambert roared back. “Get over here! You’re the one with the tile!”

Geralt had forgotten all about the piece of slate in his hand. He hesitated for a moment, unwilling to follow, but also not willing to leave Lambert alone. In the end, loyalty won over caution. He paid as much attention as he could to every step across the uneven, wet roof until he reached Lambert, who stared at a spot where there was indeed one tile missing from the symmetrical pattern.

“You do know how to fix the tile to the roof, don’t you?” Geralt asked.

“How hard can it be?” Lambert scoffed.

That was a no, then. But just as Geralt opened his mouth to say that if it was that easy, there wouldn’t be thatchers and roofers, Lambert snatched the tile. He knelt down with surprising deftness and jammed the tile in place. Then he looked up with a challenging smile on his face; it lasted only for a second. Another bolt of lightning distracted them, and when they could both see clearly again, the tile had almost fallen off the roof. Lambert hollered and jumped, throwing himself on his stomach and sliding after it.

Before he knew what he was doing, Geralt was jumping after Lambert and grabbed his ankle, desperately trying to slow them down. He bent his knees, angled his feet and tried to grab onto something, anything with his left hand, but they kept moving. The tile was forgotten, and in all likelihood lay broken on the ground below. All Geralt could think of was his desperate wish not to join it. When he finally came to a halt, his left hand was clutched around the edge of the roof, his knees felt raw and his right shoulder was heavy with the weight of one very still witcher.

“You alright?” Geralt called down.

“Yeah,” Lambert replied, his voice hoarse and far more sober than it had been just moments earlier.

“I’ll swing you back and forth, and you try to grab the edge of the roof, alright?”

For a moment, there was no answer, until Geralt figured Lambert had probably nodded. Despite his protesting shoulder, he moved his arm. It was slow progress at first, but Lambert's weight helped get the momentum going. Just three more swings, two, one ... he heard Lambert grab the slippery slate first with one hand, then the second, then Geralt relaxed his grip. As fast as he could, Geralt hurried over and grasped one of the hands, and slowly, they managed to heave Lambert back onto the roof with their united strength. Finally, the tension flooded out of him and Geralt took stock of himself; he was wet, cold, and still too drunk for comfort.

"Let's go back inside," he suggested.

Lambert shot him a look Geralt couldn't decipher. "We'll never mention this again, alright?"

Geralt shrugged. He was no less eager to leave this awkward episode behind himself than Lambert was.



The next time it started to rain – a couple of days later – Geralt moved on to a different spot beside the fire, one that didn't allow him to keep an eye on the room in the way he liked. He wondered where Eskel had put that bucket. When the others arrived to present him with the result of their newest brewing experiment, they cast surreptitious glances at the ceiling as well. But the drops never came. Geralt sent a questioning glance in Lambert's direction, but only got a shrug in return. Eskel shrugged as well. After a couple of moments, he moved his chair back to its usual spot.

An hour or so later, Vesemir finally joined them.

"Want to give it a try?" Lambert offered, holding out his tankard to Vesemir.

Vesemir shook his head. "I can smell from here that this is one of yours. No thank you. You two have many talents, but brewing isn't one of them."

"Hey, do you know what happened to the leak in the roof?" Eskel asked.

Geralt and Lambert exchanged a look.

"Of course," Vesemir said, stretching his stiff fingers towards the fire. "I fixed it."

"You fixed it?" Lambert asked incredulously.

"Who do you think has been keeping this place from falling apart?" Vesemir asked him. "A bit of mortar, a new tile, that was all it took."

Geralt sighed, Eskel looked slightly amused and Lambert a little sour.
“Did I miss something?” Vesemir asked.
“No,” Geralt answered. “Nothing at all.”

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