

01-NÚZYÆL-720 HESBY, KALDOR

2ND WATCH [COLD, OVERCAST, NORTH BREEZE, LIGHT SNOW, 1" ACCUMULATION]¹

Amyleryn Odasart sets, at the table in the great hall, breaking her fast. Her parents, and the village officers, break their fast at the same table. Arranging the tasks for the day and things they must say before Amyleryn departs, divides their attention. The conversation is lively and loud. Her father gives the village officers their work for the day. Her mother directs the household staff on what they need to do. A manor is a busy place in the mornings by necessity. This will be the last such meal with her parents for some time to come.

Earlier, her maid, Felada of Yaanda, helped Amyleryn dress in leather armor, her normal travel clothes. Now Felada serves her dried pea puree with sprouts, cold pork from the suckling pig a la Flaccus of the night before, small ale and fresh wastel with butter. This is normal faire for country nobility and Amyleryn is sure her night's feast will be more elegant.

Meanwhile, her companions break their fast with a simpler meal of pottage, small ale and maslin. The manor staff finished their own meal at this table long before. Terias of Forniad, Zedon of Jaheraka, and Buryn of Tevanan dine alone in the quiet kitchen. They discuss their own expectations and fears of the journey ahead.

Terias offers a curt introduction of himself and then bows his head for a silent prayer of thanks to Larani before eating.

01-NÚZYÆL-720 HESBY, KALDOR

3RD WATCH [COLD, OVERCAST, NORTHWEST WIND, 1" ACCUMULATION]²⁰

Setting out on their journey, the group realizes today is the festival of Tirrale, the Handmaiden of Renewal. Some of the villagers gather at the chapel of Peoni for the beating of the bounds.

The village nine-year-olds will beat their bottoms against the boundary markers to remember them. Most of the children appear excited. One small lad cries quietly – nervous of what he does not understand.

During this month, the villagers begin the spring plowing and sowing of grains. The snow on the frozen ground shows there will be no plowing today.

When they reach the next village, the group notices several shepherds preparing to castrate lambs. The sounds disturb those who are not used to them. The shepherds then set up creep fences so the lambs can graze in places where the ewes cannot.

As the events unfold before Terias, he shows little sign of interest or concern.

01-NÚZYÆL-720 OLOKAND, KALDOR

4TH WATCH [COLD, OVERCAST, NORTH GALE, LIGHT SNOW, 1 ½" ACCUMULATION]¹

Early in the fourth watch, the travelers reach Olokand and the Standing Bear Inn. Standing at the entrance of the Standing Bear, you can see that it appears to have been Khuzan built on a stone foundation about three feet high. The walls are natural stone fitted into timber supports. They show the gray stone and

weathered timber of great age. The door before you is a plank door, recessed to provide some protection from the weather. There is a hook above the door where a lantern hangs to light the way. The windows are square and consist of many small, diamond-shaped panes of glass held together with lead. Shutters, hinged at the top, provide protection from the rain when open and protection from the cold when closed.

Amyleryn identifies herself to the innkeeper. He tells her that rooms have been prepared for her and her companions. Lady Harabor made the arrangements last tenday.

"If you would like to look around the market and the town, please be back in time to prepare for dinner. The town has a curfew and all must be inside by the hour before sunset. The bell at the temple of Peoni rings to let you know the time. There is not much to see since most of the market and the shop keepers have already closed for the day."

After listening to the innkeeper speak, Terias simply states, "If my services are not needed I will offer prayers to the Lady in my room until it is time to sup."

The maid, who shows you to your rooms, is dressed in a typical dress for her job but it is clean and mended, unlike the tavern wenches in Hesby village. She shows Buryn and Zedon to the room they will share. Then she introduces Terias to Herot of Falen, a longbowman who will be sharing the room with him. At the end of the hall, she shows Lady Amyleryn to the room she will share with her maid. She tells you that, after dinner, she or one of the other maids will light your way to your room, turn down your bed and wait until you retire. Master Haselun, the innkeeper does not permit unattended candles in the rooms due to the risk of fire.

Each room has two beds consisting of a down mattress on a rope net in a wood frame. The sheets are of satin and there are down comforters. The maid gives each person a key for a locked chest at the end of their bed. On a bedside table, there is a pitcher of clean water sitting in a shallow pan next to a folded towel and a bar of soap. Underneath each bed is a clean and empty chamber pot. Everything in the room is much cleaner and of better quality than you are used to.

Amyleryn strips out of her armor and stows it in the chest at the foot of her bed, along with her mace. She clean up by taking a sponge bath, then dons her dress, belt, and pouch with her money and the letter of credit. Once Felada is done with her preparations, they go downstairs to the common room.

Buryn's eyes are wide as he stows his gear in the lock box, and he washes quickly in the basin before they go down to dinner.

01-NÚZYÆL-720 OLOKAND, KALDOR

5TH WATCH [COLD, OVERCAST, NORTHWEST BREEZE, 1 ½" ACCUMULATION]²⁰

When you arrive at the common room in time for dinner, you see three large trestle tables and a maid shows you to your assigned seat. The table at the head of the room has chairs for the nobility. The two side tables have long benches for seating.

Along one wall of the room is a row of windows and on the opposite side are a large hearth and two doors. You assume that

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the two doors lead to the kitchen and the buttery (ale storage). At one end of the great hall are the entry door and at the opposite end, stairs leading to the upper floor with the guest rooms. Candle stands at each end and two large chandeliers provide additional light for the hall.

Amyleryn enters the great hall of the inn, wearing the only other outfit she brought with her. Her dress was made by Felada and looked common next to Lussie's elegant gown.

The servants show each person to their place at the tables. Lady Harabor stands at the head of the table, "I want to thank you all for coming. I think you will find what I have to say after dinner to be of interest. However, for those of you unfamiliar with social dinners of this sort, I must say...we do not discuss business during dinner. It disturbs the digestion and appreciation of this fine meal. There will be plenty of time afterwards."

"To start this pleasant conversation, I will introduce each of you. On my far right is Zedon of Jaheraka, a journeyman weaponcrafter. He will be sharing his cup with his mistress Lady Amyleryn Odasart from Hesby manor. On my near right is Terias of Forniad, fighting cleric of Larani. He will be sharing my cup. On my near left is my man at arms, Herot of Falen. He will be sharing his cup with Moile of Sorquil, priestess of Halea and my financial advisor. Next at the table is Buryn of Tevanan, Lady Odasart's hunter. Sharing Buryn's cup is Cyben of Kyfa, priestess of Peoni. The other people in the room are all staff of the inn except for Lady Odasart maid and mine."

Catching sight of Buryn following Terias' lead, Amyleryn says to herself, but loud enough for Zedeon to hear: "Ah!" She turns to Zedeon, quietly saying: "I'll wager that you've not had much experience with social occasions like this...especially not in the company of the King's Granddaughter." and she casts her eyes briefly in Lussie's direction.

Laughing lightly, but not loud enough to carry beyond the two of them, and saying equally quietly, Amyleryn says: "Yes, Lady Lussie Harabor is King Miginath's Granddaughter."

Changing subjects, Amyleryn says: "Here, I'll show you what to do at meals like this, and proper forms of address when you're around those of higher social rank than yourself." She will then instruct him in wiping off the rim of the shared goblet, how to parse out the food they share between them, what to do about greasy fingers, and so on.

"When addressing someone you're sure is a noble, always use their rank, if you know it. In the case of Lady Lussie's father, Sheriff Maldan Harabor, 'Milord Sheriff' is good. While Sheriff Harabor is the King's eldest son, he's a bastard." she says in the matter-of-fact way that denotes the marital status of Maldan's parents. "If you call him 'Prince Harabor', I can't begin to explain to you the amount of trouble you'd be in if you do...although inside, I'm sure he'd be pleased." and she gives Zedeon a grin while she rolls her eyes toward the ceiling.

"For myself, in formal conversation 'Lady Odasart' is proper, while 'Milady' is good for informal situations. Since you are directly in my employ, 'Ma'm' is quite acceptable as well. If you don't know a noble's rank, then 'Milord' or 'Milady' is usually a safe form of address. If you have further questions about these

sorts of things, by all means, ask them when circumstances allow for such conversation."

As the meal progresses, Amyleryn says quietly to Zedeon: "Later, when we're on the road to who-knows-where, I have a task for you. While I have a shield, and am reasonably skilled with my mace, I have not yet learned even the basics of shieldwork. I'll need you to start training me in this. If we should find ourselves in combat, it would be best if I could provide at least a little of my own protection."

* * *

The hunter, Buryn, is a young man with dark hair, eyes and skin. He has small bones, making him shorter than many, and he has a scar that crosses one cheek, pulling his lip up in a permanent half-smile. He maintains a posture of stillness for long periods, and he is quiet, for the most part, preferring to watch and listen. When he does speak, his voice has a hoarse quality to it, as if he needs to clear his throat. He spent a bit of time exploring the market before everyone gathered for dinner, and did not seem to mind the cold or snow. He is dressed plainly, and put up his divers weapons, including bow and sword, before dinner. He nods in greeting to the others, and gives a real smile to his eating companion.

The young Matakea's mood seems to lighten as Cyben is introduced. When it's his turn to speak, Terias says to Lusse trying to maintain a formal air, "You've my deepest gratitude for permitting me here tonight Lady Odasart."

With that he offers a slight bow from where he is sitting at the table, then returns to his seat. "It does my heart well to see so many of the faiths represented here this evening. The Sister Peoni by Cyben for whom we can always give our thanks to for the bounty we will enjoy this evening.

Terias breaks his solemn expression to offer a kind smile in Cyben's direction and then shifts his attention slowly to Moile and as he speaks his face resumes his standard somber look, "While the Lady of Opulence and the Unwilling Warrior would seem not to share many traits, They can both agree that -order- is certainly needed to see a lawful society and a stable economy."

Pausing to take in a breath as if contemplating his next move, Terias finally says, "If I could offer a blessing before the meal, it would be simply that on this new year we break bread as family and find ourselves in the same position throughout and until the next year." After that he bows his head and makes signs the air in the form of a sword across his chest.

Throughout the meal Terias offers cordial replies, though rarely anything deep or personal concerning himself. He also steals a few glances at the hostess, Lussie, and always ensures he follows his own best manners and etiquette in her direction.

His efforts are rewarded this night as his table manners are impeccable. He notices that Buryn is watching him closely but the hunter's table manners are always a step behind Terias' own. For instance, Buryn takes a sip from the wine cup and passes it to Cyben. When Buryn notices Terias wiping the rim of his cup before passing it on, Buryn quickly takes his own cup back to wipe its rim.

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The first course of the meal is an amondyn eyroun (almond omelet) and throughout the meal, there are ample servings of pandemain (finest quality white bread), tourte (brown bread for trenchers) and Goffin Triple Ale. The ale is golden-amber in color with an apple-pear aroma. It has a full texture, a heavy sweet-nutty flavor with a bitter almond finish.

Cyben turns to Buryrn and says, "Worry not lad. What is important is that more food gets inside than onto the tablecloth. You look like a strong young man who is accustomed to hard work. I just hope that your friend the priest is not one of those who joined the priesthood because he heard it is the easy life."

Though he remains fairly quiet throughout the meal, Buryrn's ears redden slightly at Cyben's deduction of his manners. He eats slowly, and watchfully, obviously being careful with his selections. He passes over the omelets but takes several pieces of bread which he washes down with ale.

With a smirk, Moile says, "I can take the measure of his tool and see how much use it has had."

Ignoring the remark, Cyben continues, "That sort are a danger to themselves and to all those around them. I heard of one such priest who burned down the village of Trobrin because he suspected they were worshipping Morgath and were eating raw meat. Merely suspected mind you. He had no proof to speak of."

Buryrn looked down the table at Terias, and gave a slight shrug. "I know little o' priests, save Peoni's, who be kind." His voice is hoarse, as if he has a cold, and quiet, as if he would rather not be noticed.

"That is as it should be," replies Cyben.

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The second course is cobages (cabbage and almond soup). Moile whispers something to Lady Harabor's maid. When the maid serves Terias, she shows ample cleavage and says, "If ee wish, milord, I wud be willing to 'elp pintle maid Moile sar ee arter milady 'arabor retires. 'ave ee iver known de delight uv being sar'd by two worshippers uv 'alea?"

Terias' eyes strain to remain on Felada's face, but he fails several times while he listens to and replies to her words, "Quite the offer, but nay. As a member of clergy we're taught to keep ourselves from such temptations."

He offers Lady Harabor's maid a sheepish grin and resumes eating his meal.

Meanwhile, Herot responds to Cyben's comment, saying, "I heard not of the destruction of Trobrin but I have heard that the road to Olokand is increasingly troubled by bandits. Only last tenday, a coach of the nobility failed to get through. These are troubled times and it is about time that the King started looking after the common folks."

Lady Harabor says, "Herot, I will not have such treasonous remarks in my presence and I will speak of this matter after dinner. What I have heard is that the poor defense and maintenance of the roads is due to the King's need to defend the Oselmarch from barbarians and Chybisians."

"Yes, milady," says Herot, "Please accept my apology."

Amyleryn almost chokes on a sip of wine at the exchange between Lussie and Herot, and whispers to Zedeon: "That's a bad start." and then speaks up: "I know it's a bit early for speculation Milady Harabor, but have you heard anything about who might be favored in this year's Chelebin Tourney?"

"Oh, it is certainly too early to wager on the winners of the grand melee," Lady Harabor answers. "I have heard, though, that the favored with the lance is a local man, Sir Kathel Dezaller. Do you know of him?"

Amyleryn says, "I've heard the family name, but I'm afraid I don't know the man. If he's good enough to be known to you, then I should know of him too. Please, tell us everything." and Amyleryn gives her a big grin.

Lady Harabor smiles back, "I know all sorts of people – some are memorable and some are not. I remember Sir Dezaller because it is said that, even though he is good with a lance, he has the focus of a Khuzdul. He thinks everyone follows the ideals of the Lady of Paladins and he is blind-sided by those who do not. He also has no social graces but wants to marry well. His intended told me that but I forgot who she was. He has the Loban fief further down the road towards Hesby. Almost in the wilderness so I guess that may excuse his manner."

Zedeon quietly says to Amyleryn: "Milady, I believe I know from where that lance might have been forged." He joins in the conversation inquisitive as to where Sir Hathel spends his coin on steel. "I know not of him, but I do have a itch as to where he acquired his lance that brings him such favor," Zedeon says, wondering if there were any like the latter that'll be needing the services of himself when his travels are over.

Lady Harabor's maid gets a wide eyed expression and says, "ooo, 'e nawze 'bout lances! Wud ee care to show pintle maid Moile and I, arter dinner, 'ow ee 'andles 'is lance?"

Lady Harabor says, "A metal lance? I have never heard of such a thing. It would take several knights just to lift it."

Lifting his eyebrow, Zedeon playfully says, "As much as I would enjoying giving a lesson in jousting, there is business I must attend to first." Turning to the table and shooting a glance at Amyleryn, Zedeon continues. "...And you would be amazed as to one's strength when adding a lady of beauty and purity." Zedeon lets out a small grin.

"Young man," Lady Harabor says with a stern look, "you may be considered a great wit out in the countryside but, in polite society, it is considered very rude to ignore the questioning of your betters. Now, what is this about a lance that is forged?"

"My apologies, I am still getting accustomed. I might have been referring to a type of lance that I have been working on for some time now. Heavier than most I'll give it that, but what I have in mind is one that does not turn into kindling off first strike." Zedeon slightly sits higher as he continues. "This is one of the many ideas I have to improve the area that I enjoy so very much." Zedeon lets off a smile looking proud of what he just said.

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“Yes, I see,” says Lady Harabor. “I am sure that is all very interesting to your fellow guild members. You have discussed it with the guild, I assume? If you have not, then be sure to keep it in the realm of ideas. Actually working on such a monstrosity...sorry...new weapon without their approval could get you into deep trouble with the guild.”

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The next course consists of a roste (beef roast with crisps), accompanied by lemonhyt (lemon rice with almonds). Lady Harabor says, “would someone care to entertain us with a song. Lady Odasart, I believe that you and Ebasethe Cyben have the best voices. Perhaps you could grace us with a duet or a roundelay?”

Speaking to Cyben, Amyleryn asks: "Do you know 'The Lucky Squire'?"

“I know it not,” she answers. “Please proceed.”

[OOO: I picture a hilarious song about a squire who attends the Chelebin Tourney, manages to lose every fight he's in, and still wins the hand of his lady love. If Cyben doesn't know it, Amyleryn will instruct her in the chorus.]

One of the verses goes: "Then my feet took off and my legs went, too, And my body was obliged to follow, Me with my hands and my mouth full of pie And my throat too dry to swallow." [OOO: With apologies to Anne McCaffrey.<g>]

After the chorus has been sung a couple of times, Amyleryn will urge the rest of the group and the serving staff to join in on the choruses.

Lady Amyleryn does not do well in singing it (misses some words and then goes back and corrects herself) and she is unable to get others to follow along. [+1 singing]

Lady Harabor says with a tight smile, “Yes, thank you for a valiant effort.” In a quieter voice that only Amyleryn can hear she says, “We will have to practice that one a bit more. I believe it will find a more receptive audience at one or two taverns I know of.”

Blushing, Amyleryn replies: "There's nothing like a little embarrassment to keep one from thinking too well of oneself!" and she smiles widely.

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Another course is served. This time it is saumon rosted (roast salmon in onion wine sauce) accompanied by St. John's rice (currant rice with carob cream). Lady Harabor's maid whispers to Zedeon, “Perhaps dere be more to ee dan yer celibate friend. Wud ee be interested een sampling de delights uv a pair uv ‘alea worshippers? I can assure ee dey a ‘alea priestess ‘as skills dey could bring de daid back to live.”

Seeming to be distracted while gazing out the windows and not following the conversation closely, Ralithina Moile says, “The weather is going to take a turn for the worse, and it's going to rain tomorrow.”

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Finally, the last course of the meal is served...fesaunt and gelye (baked pheasant with cold herbed jelly) accompanied by caudele almaunde (a nut dish served as a vegetable).

Still watching the others to try and keep from making great gaffes, Buryn eats carefully, quietly, but seeming very alert to what's going on around them.

When everyone has eaten their fill, the servants clean the table and retire to the kitchen. The innkeeper himself serves a round of drinks.

Lady Harabor calls for attention, “What I am about to tell you is not to be spoken of outside this room. I hired this dinner as I know the innkeeper to be discrete and experienced in handling matters of delicacy.

“As you may have heard, I am the daughter of the Sheriff of Meselynshire. The Sheriff is one of the claimants to the throne after the death of the King, may he long reign. Recently I have been called to Olokand to serve as lady in waiting to the Princess Royal and the King's Chamberlain.

“There have been many dark rumors going around. Some you have heard tonight. Some you will hear in the future. One thing you have no doubt not heard is of the silence of the King and at least one of the other claimants to the throne, the Earl of Kiban.

“If the reason for their absence was known, it would be much less worrisome to my father. He does not know. This is where we come in. We will go as a company to Olokand with you posing as my companion,” nodding towards Lady Odasart, “and the rest as my retainers.

“Once we arrive, I will go to the castle to take my post. Lady Odasart will continue on to Kiban with her retainers. I will learn what I may of the condition of the King. Lady Odasart will learn what she may of the condition of the Earl.

“You may render what aid you can to the Earl but the important part is to return with the information. Whatever you do, you are not to use the name of my father or myself, since we would then be implicated in any dire deeds that are about. My father wants to be crowned king but if his methods come into question, he need not bother. A king without support can be at most a tyrant.

“If there are any questions, I will try and answer. If not, you may retire to your beds so we may get an early start.”

Buryn shakes his head, ducking it a little, and murmurs, "None milady," then glances around at the others to see if they have questions.

Zedeon nods as he says, "None for me either milady."

Hesitantly the Matakaea raises to his feet, with a proper bow to Lussie he addresses her as formal as he can, "My Lady, the only question coming to my mind is what aid the Earl requires of us? Or do you suspect he may be in need of assistance because of the silence on his part?"

“That is what you are to find out,” Lady Harabor answers. “For one claimant to the throne to become unavailable is not suspicious but, for that to be at the same time as the King is unavailable, speaks of something more sinister and far reaching.”

Amyleryn says, "I have a couple, Milady. Will we be going to Kiban overland or by riverboat?"

Lady Harabor answers, "Between here and Olokand, the women will be riding in a coach with the men walking alongside. Once we arrive at Olokand, you can determine the best route to get to Kiban."

Amyleryn says, "Also, since your part in this mission is to be kept secret, I assume the party will be traveling under the Odasart colors. That being the case, has a pretext been worked out as to why I would be in Kiban? Has provision been made giving me access to the Earl's residence?"

"Yes, one of the reasons the Odasart's have been for this mission is that they are relatively unknown in the kingdom. No cover story has been created so far but we can discuss it on the way to Olokand and I will do what I can to help," she answers.

With a quick burst of laughter, Lady Harabor says, "I have not the authority to arrange entry into another lord's manor. You will have to use what you have been taught in diplomacy, guile and other skills to gain access. Be aware though, it is only the Earl that is missing. The rest of his family is still active."

02-NÚZYÆL-720 OLOKAND, KALDOR

2ND WATCH [COLD, OVERCAST, NORTH BREEZE, LIGHT SNOW, 3" ACCUMULATED]¹

In the morning, you break your fast with eggs, smoked ham, warm, buttered wastel (first quality bread) and mulled wine.

It takes the rest of the watch for everyone to prepare. When you step outside, there is a waiting coach with a strong farm lad at the reigns. He appears to be of nineteen or twenty summers. Herot helps the ladies inside and it is a bit cramped for six people.

Proceeding down Castle Street to the Elendysa Bridge, the guards stop you to pay the toll of 1f per leg and 1f per wheel. Lady Harabor hands Herot 5d 2f to pay for the two horses, the wagon, Herot, Cyben, Moile, Lady Lussie and her maid. Herot passes the money to the guard, who counts the people and asks for 2d more.

Amyleryn hands 2d to Zedeon to give to the guard.

02-NÚZYÆL-720 OLOKAND, KALDOR

3RD WATCH [COLD, OVERCAST, NORTHWEST WIND, LIGHT SNOW, 3 ½" ACCUMULATED]¹

Crossing the bridge and traveling south on the Heru road, you see very few people about...probably due to the cold and snow. By midday, you reach the village of Greaven and another toll bridge. Lady Harabor once again pays 5d 2f for her share.

Once again, Amyleryn pays the 2d for her retinue.

02-NÚZYÆL-720 GREAVEN, KALDOR

4TH WATCH [COOL, PARTLY CLOUDY, NORTHEAST BREEZE, 3 ½" ACCUMULATED]²

Lady Harabor tells you that the ladies will make their presence known to the local liege lord. This will be herself, her maid, Lady Odasart, her maid, Herot as Lady Harabor's escort and the one that Lady Odasart takes as an escort. The rest of you can relax for an hour at the local inn.

Terias steps forward and stands rather rigidly when addressing Lady Harabor, "M'Lady if it's permitted and there is a local chapel here for the Unwilling Warrior I'd like to pay my respects."

"If there is a chapel here, it will be in the manor and I cannot grant or forbid you access to another lord's manor," she answers. "However, I did not plan on staying here that long. We need to continue on if we are to reach lodging in Ovendel by nightfall."

With a nod and a quick word Terias states before stepping back to the rest of the group, "I'll withdraw my request then Lady Harabor. I had thought we were to spend the night here."

"Zedeon, you'll come with me." Amyleryn gives 1d each to Terias and Burynd and says: "I don't know what kind of prices the local inn charges, but I suggest you try to get something warm into you."

Turning to Lussie, Amyleryn asks: "Do you know who holds this manor?"

Leading the group towards the manor, Lady Harabor says, "I know of them but I know them not personally. Lord Afeawyn Barathy is very skilled at arms but a bit simple. His wife, Lady Kaella is an opportunistic shrew who is constantly looking for ways to promote her husband. Lord Barathy real fame is due to his courage when he foiled a plot against Earl Troda Dariune."

Amyleryn says, "Foiled a plot against Earl Dariune? You'll have to tell me all about it, Milady!" and Amyleryn gives Lussie a big smile.

Arriving at the door of the manor, Herot bangs on the door with the brass door knocker. A rather shriveled man answers the door and says, "Yes? Can I help you?"

"Announce us to your master so that we may refresh ourselves before continuing on our journey," says Lady Harabor, "I am Lady Lussie Harabor, daughter of the Sheriff, and this is my companion, Lady Amyleryn of Odasart."

"Yes madam. Please step this way," he says as he leads you into the great hall.

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Accepting the coin with a proper thank you to Amyleryn, Terias then heads into the tavern where upon he searches for an empty table.

Reaching one he kicks out a chair and clammers down on it slowly then begins to adjust his clothing and armor until a server arrives, "Aye I'll have whatever ale I can as long as it's no more than a dram."

The woman who serves you was probably quite beautiful in her earlier years but heavy labor appears to have made her old before her time. In a tired voice, she says, "Yes milord, I will bring you a pint of ale."

With a sneer, the rough looking man behind the bar says, "None of your cheek now woman. If the man only wants enough ale to fill his hand, give him what he asks for."

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Glancing over to the barkeep, Terias says matter of factly, still fiddling with his lute, "Unless this ale's been imported from Dolithor I'll have a full tankard and there'll be change for the lass to keep."

With that Terias swings his lute off of his left shoulder and spends the rest of his time fiddling, strumming and tuning it, but not playing.

After following Terias into the inn, Buryrn sits nearby and likewise waits for the server. "Whatoffer 'e's 'avin', if ye will," he says when asked, jutting his chin toward Terias. He'll keep an eye and ear open for any trouble, or for the return of the rest of the party, whichever comes first.

At the next table, you see a couple of rough looking men who look enough like the innkeeper to be related. One of them tells the other, "If you are going to Tashal, you should not stray off the roads into the woods. Those that do never return. They are eaten by gargun or something far worse."

The other man replies, "I know and those new roadwardens hired by the Mangai are all corrupt, or lazy, and can't be trusted."

Giving them only a glance, lest they call him out for staring, Buryrn listens to their gripes, and waits for his ale, while continuing to keep an eye out.

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Buryrn, Terias and Waede (the teamster) have a pint each of ale with a light brown color, an overpowering citric aroma, creamy texture and a hoppy, citric, slightly musty flavor which remains all the way to the finish. All told, it is not very good ale. With few exceptions, the conversation is about farming conditions and the spring plowing.

Meanwhile, Lady Harabor, Lady Odasart, Zedeon and Herot have mulled wine and pastries (also of inferior quality). Conversation at the manor mostly consists of Lady Kaella trying to curry favor with Lady Harabor while she ignores everyone else. Lord Afeawyn looks embarrassed by his wife's behavior and uncomfortable with social graces but seldom speaks.

At the end of the hour, everyone gathers and the journey continues.

02-NÚZYÆL-720 HERU ROAD, KALDOR 5TH WATCH [HOT, CLEAR, CALM, FOG, 3"]³

Shortly before you reach Owendel, the road enters a forest and quickly comes out the other side. Just as the coach leaves the forest and before it crosses a bridge over a creek, you see a person crouched in the middle of the road.

The driver slows down as the figure rises and turns to face you. To your horror, you see the severed human hand in its mouth and the green slime dripping down the rotting flesh of its face. Spitting out the hand, the creature rushes toward the coach with apparent murderous intent.

The creature rushing the coach causes the horses to panic and bolt, snapping their traces. Waede, who is gripping the reins, is pulled off the coach and dragged across the ground behind the horses. The coach rolls into the ditch at the side of the road and falls over.

Herot readies his falchion and buckler as there is no time to string his bow.

Seeming enraged over what's transpired, but unphased Terias charges at the creature with his shield extended in an attempt to meet it head on and knock it down or stun it. Terias while doing so yells out to those he's left behind, "Someone check on those in the coach and aid them. Lady help us if there are more of these things laying in wait."

Terias slams into the creature, slips in the muddy snow and falls to the ground. The creature ignores Terias and, with a growl, continues his charge towards the coach.

Amyleryn quickly checks herself for injuries, then [OOC: Assuming no injuries...] uses the delay of the creature caused by Herot...and presumably by Zedeon, Terias, and Buryrn...to get out her mace and shield. Amyleryn scrambles out of the coach and starts rummaging through the luggage spilled about the ground in search of her weapons.

Buryrn readies his spear and shield to meet the rush.

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Though his right leg and arm are covered with a mix of snow and mud, Terias scrambles to his feet with a snort, ignoring his sullied clothes. He quickly twists around, reaching instinctively for his sword and dashes off, though at a careful pace, towards the creature.

Terias regains his feet and readies his weapon at the same time as Amyleryn finds and readies her weapons. Herot strikes at the creature and his falchion cuts cleanly through its left arm.

Appearing to ignore any pain, the creature reaches out to strike Buryrn with the claw-like nails of its right hand. Buryrn barely dodges the blow.

Herot yells in the direction of Buryrn and Zedeon, "Do not just stand there! Strike the thing!"

Without sparing a glance for Herot, Buryrn jabs at the creature with his spear. The spear goes right into the creature's gut. It falls to the ground, twitches a couple of times and dies.

Not wanting to waste any time Terias raises his sword up as he steps in towards the creature. He hacks down with full force using his momentum to drive the blow. As a result of his committed swing he forgoes any defensive opportunity.

But he is too late as it is already lying on the ground dead.

Terias grumbles in annoyance, but gives Buryrn a grin and a firm pat on his shoulder as he sheathes his weapon and passes by. Moving towards the ditch where the coach fell, Terias assists the ladies who may be in need while the others huddle over the body, offering the words, "If any of you are are hurt let me know, I've some physicians training under my belt."

His attention falls firstly on Lussie, concern lined on his features.

Amyleryn positioned herself to be between the creature and the overturned coach...a backup in case it gets past the men. Keeping one eye open for any other assailants that might appear while the group is pre-occupied with the creature, she observes the creature for information...anything it's wearing, etc.

Stepping into the movement, Zedeon lunges towards the creature, bringing his shoulders down to follow through with his shoulder.

Zedeon stumbles past as the creature falls to the ground. It is only then that he realizes he should have readied a weapon before his charge.

Zedeon whispers behind him after stopping in his tracks when the creature fell, "This one might not be trusted either." Zedeon positions his weapon parallel with the ground at his waist, bending for a prepared lunge.

Once the immediate threat is over, Amyleryn goes to the coach and sees to the other ladies.

The women in the coach, untangle themselves and climb out. Lady Harabor thanks Amyleryn and Terias for their help and says, "Lady Odasart can stay here and defend us but Terias should follow after the others. It would not do to have their courage and rash actions getting them killed."

Now that the battle is over and Buryrn has a good look at the body, he realizes that he knows this man as a runaway serf, and one of his childhood tormenters, named Bakack of Calluler. A year ago, Bakack developed a strange skin disease and started acting odd. To hide his affliction, he would go around with a bag on his head. The last Buryrn heard of Bakack was when Lord Odasart asked him, six months ago, to watch out for the escaped peasant.

As everyone tries to regain their composure after the brief excitement, they hear crashing sounds coming through the forest underbrush. Weapons are readied for another battle, when you hear, "It's okay! It's me Waede!" and Waede stumbles out of the forest scraped up from being dragged by the horses.

Then you hear the screams and animal howling coming from over the rise on the other side of the bridge...

"E's dead," Buryrn growls, his voice hoarse, but then, he always sound like that. "But more of dem're dare. Da 'orses're bein' attacked. Come!" He glances once at the coach, then gestures to the men with their weapons still readied to follow as he sets out--at a run--toward the commotion on the other side of the bridge.

"I have too much to be done to be held up!" Zedeon exclaimed, as he sets into a sprint behind Buryrn.

While cleaning and sheathing his falchion, Herot says, "Hold! I would advise going in stealth once we are all prepared rather than rushing into the unknown, willy nilly." He then strings his longbow and quickly strolls toward the bridge.

Buryrn pulls up at Herot's words, and waits on the others to join him.

As the men head for the bridge and the women try to regain their composure after the brief excitement, the women hear crashing sounds coming through the forest underbrush.

After helping the other women out of the overturned coach, Amyleryn was getting out her armor when the crashing sound reached them.

"Oh great, just terrific." she mutters to herself. "Take cover behind the coach." she orders, indicating the side away from the sounds.

Hoisting up the hem of her skirt and tucking it into her belt to free her legs, Amyleryn readies her mace and shield to attack whatever is coming through the underbrush. She relaxes a bit when she hears, "Be not alarmed! It is I, Waede!" and the teamster stumbles out of the forest scraped up from being dragged by the horses.

Putting down her weapons and going behind the coach, Amyleryn gets her armor out of her luggage and takes off her dress.

Waede blushes beet red and quickly turns his back.

Cyben gasps and says, "Lady Odasart! Have some decorum! Have you no decency?"

Amyleryn says, "While we're under attack by hideous mutants? No. I need to be in armor. Modesty has no place in such circumstances." Continuing to speak while donning her armor, she says: "From here on out, I'll wear my dress when we're in cities, towns, manors, and such, but while we're traveling cross-country, I'll be in my armor unless ordered to do otherwise by someone of higher rank than myself." and she casts a quick glance toward Lussie.

"You can do as you please," says Lady Harabor, "but in wielding weapons and wearing armor, you show no confidence in the abilities of those whose job it is to defend you...and you draw attention to yourself. By drawing attention to yourself, you draw attention to the rest of us. By showing no confidence in your defenders, how can they have confidence in themselves? If you have no desire or ability to blend into society, you are completely useless to us and might as well return to your country manor."

Amyleryn says, "I take that as an order. At our earliest opportunity, I will have my armor sent back to Hesby manor. The mace and shield will remain. If anyone asks about them, I'll lie." Amyleryn gets out of such armor as she had gotten on and get back into her dress. She gives Lussie a hurt look.

With a stern look, Lady Harabor says, "Are you deliberately trying to be difficult? You should keep the armor and weapons with you for those times, rare may they be, when you are acting in roles less public and less than ladylike."

"Yes Milady." Amyleryn says, then smiles at Lussie as she realizes that her answer could be taken as a reply to Lussie's question. Belatedly, Amyleryn says: "I'll keep the armor."

Moile says, "This must be some sort of invocation to Milady Halea," and she begins to take off her dress as well.

Amyleryn says, "More like homage to Larani than anything else." Speaking to the coachman, Amyleryn says: "Waede, since you returned by yourself, I presume that the coach horses are likely in the next shire by now. I hear horses over where the men are fighting. In the off chance that any of those horses survive this encounter, I want you to inspect the coach for damage. If it's

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serviceable...and just overturned...remove everything that can be removed to lighten it, that we may set it upright. Do this now."

"Yes, mam," he says and proceeds to try and inspect the coach and unload it without ever looking in her direction.

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As the men approach the bridge, they can see tall trees on either side of the road and obscuring the view. The other side of the bridge is hidden by tall brush along the stream and ground fog. To make the situation even more miserable, a drizzling rain start coming down.

Upon reaching the rise of the bridge, they look out over a scene of carnage. An overturned wagon lies across the road with its two horses struggling to escape the wreckage. A mutant with a large body and an incredibly small head is hacking maniacally at them with an axe. Lying on the ground next to the wagon and screaming in pain, is another mutant with the head of a dog. Blood pumps from its leg while a third mutant (this one with a pointed head) tries to bandage the wound. Another mutant, with cloven hooves for its unshod feet, feasts on the body of a small child. Finally, they see a mutant with scaly skin searching through the scattered bodies while it carries an unloaded crossbow.

Terias' nostril's flare as his face turns flush in anger. He shoots a glance over to the others as he kneels down trying to prompt them to do the same. Then in a low whisper the Matakea says, "I count five, though ones injured. So we can each mark one off and charge them. I'll go for the one with the axe and small head. Let's not waste time here there could be someone alive in that carnage."

With those words he draws his sword while remaining low and begins to pray quietly to his goddess calling upon "Larani's Shield" to protect him while he staves off these foul things. Once finished Terias draws the sword symbol across his body with his left hand and looks to the others as he readies himself.

With a glance toward Herot, showing that he will listen to his orders, Buryn readies his spear and shield again, in preparation for a charge.

Seeing Buryn stopping, Zedeon does the same... Kneeling on one knee, weapon still in the ready

Turning to Buryn and Zedeon, Herot says quietly, "I say we attack as soon as you two designate your targets and Terias finishes his prayer. You will have to charge down to meet them which means you will not surprise more than the closest one. I will remain here on the bridge as long as my arrows prove useful."

Preparing for his first shot, Herot says, "I will take the one furthest away with the crossbow.

With a nod of acknowledgement, Buryn says, "Dog 'ead. On your word."

Zedeon says, "And I'll be takin' eh pointed one"

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Herot motions for you to begin and you charge toward your respective targets. He then fires an arrow toward the one furthest away and hits him in the stomach. The creature pulls the arrow out and begins loading his crossbow.

As Buryn and Zedeon continue their charge, Terias slashes at his target with his shortsword. The creature dodges the attack but slips in the snow and mud to fall to the ground.

Running at the balls of his feet, Zedeon lowers his weapon at his waist, as he puts his shoulder at stomach level. His face instantly turns into a deep scowl. The mud starts to add to the weight so his raises his strides.

Zedeon jabs at the mutant with the cloven hooves and it almost dodges out of the way. Zedeon's spear stabs into its left hand for a grievous wound. The mutant jabs at Zedeon with its own spear and puts itself into a position that allows Zedeon a second attack.

When he gets in range, Buryn stabs his spear at the creature with the dog's head. His own mouth is pulled back in a snarl.

Buryn overestimates his target and his spear stabs into the ground next to it. The mutant stops moving and silently relaxes to the ground.

At this moment, the mutant with the pointed head arrives from the other direction and swings a shortsword at Buryn. Buryn blocks the blow with his tower shield which opens the opportunity for a counterattack. Buryn stabs at his attacker with his spear but the mutant dodges out of the way.

With his foe lying prone, Terias plants his right foot into the wet earth and snow in an effort to get a solid position and prevent slipping himself. Then he slashes his sword downward towards the creature's head and neck.

Terias' foot slipped just a little causing his shortsword to slash across his victim's hip. The mutant gasps and stops moving.

The mutant, with the scaly skin, finishes loading his crossbow and brings it to bear on Herot. However, the crossbow fires early and the quarrel stabs into the left foot (hoof?) of the mutant attacking Buryn. The mutant screams in pain and falls to the ground. Buryn takes this opportunity for his counterattack and stabs the mutant in its stomach...it stops moving.

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While giving the creature a swift kick to the ribs Terias glances around briefly to see how the others are fairing. He notes Buryn's foe dropping by the bolt from the mutant, with the scaly skin. Then looks over his shoulder to ensure Herot is not loading his bow for another volley, tensing to rush at the one with the crossbow in hand.

Terias' kick slams into the mutant's right shoulder and, with a sigh, its shallow breathing stops.

Stealing a second glance back towards the scaly skinned creature, Terias changes tact. He moves to sheath his sword, then reaches over his left shoulder to tug free his spear. Once readied in his hand Terias takes aim to thrust his spear into the air towards the remaining mutant.

Terias notices that Herot has already loaded and fired. Following the arrow along its path, Terias can see it land solidly into the right thigh. The mutant stiffens a moment and falls to the ground unmoving.

Taking a moment to look around, Buryn tries to assess the situation, keeping his shield and spear ready.

"Your weapon is poor in make you ugly...." Zedeon screams as he thrusts forward.

The mutant with the pointed head steps back and waits to see what Zedeon or Buryn will do next.

After watching his target take his last, Zedeon turns towards the pointed one, says "Your turn," and makes his way towards it. Zedon, making a "shoveling" motion, lifts up his spear while stepping towards the pointed head mutant.

He is a little closer than he expected and his spear pierces the mutant's left thigh. The mutant falls to the ground and stops moving.

Zedeon looks around to see if there are any more creatures. "Any others to taste my spear?"

Glancing over the battlefield, Terias sheathes his spear over his left shoulder and then calls out, "Buryn, Zedeon check these creatures for any clues as to who or what they are. Make sure they're dead before you get to close. Herot check on the women back at the coach. I'll see if there are any people that survived that I can help."

"I will as soon as I collect my arrows," Herot says walking onto the battlefield. He collects his arrows, cleans them and puts them into his quiver. Taking out his falchion, he delivers a killing blow to the mutant with the scaly skin while muttering, "Disgusting, filthy creature." Cleaning his falchion, he recrosses the bridge to return to the wagon.

Terias walks through the wreckage and carnage and to look around and inside the fallen wagon. All the while he keeps a safe distance from the startled horses.

A quick glance at the horses shows that they have been injured and will probably not survive long. The coach too has been damaged beyond repair. Going over the battlefield, Terias finds corpses of the coachman, a young child, a man and a woman (dressed as freeborn artisans), a priestess of Peoni, a laborer, and, at the edge of the forest, a man lying faced down who, from this distance, appears to be a freeborn craftsman.

Examining the bodies and their belongings, Terias finds two hooded wool robes [#1, #17], four pairs of leather shoes [#2, #10, #14, #18], a mang [#3], a handaxe [#4], a pike [#5], a small wooden container filled with a gray resin [#6], a small ceramic vial with a brown liquid [#7], two sleeved wool shirts [#8, #11], two pair of woolen hose [#9, #13], 34d, a hooded woolen tunic [#12], a glaive [#15], a sling [#16], a large scale cowl [#19], a staff [#20], a longbow [#21], and a mace [#22].

Terias rushes to the man laying face down, hoping to find signs of life.

When he turns the man over, he is utterly surprised to find Zedeon's face staring back at him – this man could be Zedeon's identical twin. The corpse is clutching two pieces of paper [#23, #24].

Terias reels back in his surprise, clearly caught off guard by the sight and then looks over his shoulder to Zedeon and then back to the corpse with a gruff 'huh'. After a moments respite he turns to Zedeon, "Oi, Zedeon, do you have a near twin brother or nephew that looks just like you? Because if not you'll want to have a look see here. Otherwise I've some grave news to give."

Terias reaches down and takes hold of the two papers [#23, #24] from the dead Zedeon look alike and eyes them over casually.

http://www.duttond.topcities.com/Harn/Handout_a1_s1_h1E.gif

After having searched over the people for survivors Terias makes his way to the horses to see if he can offer them any sort of aid in terms of stemming their bleeding or put them out of their misery. Though he keeps a safe distance at first as he tries to calm the two steeds.

From what he knows of medicine (very little) and what he knows about horses (nothing), he does not know how to help them other than putting them out of their misery.

Hesitantly Terias reaches for his sheath sword, but pauses while regarding the two horses and glances across the bridge. He suddenly bolts off in that direction.

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"I got'n idea who dey be," Buryn says as he starts to move amongst the dead, looking for clues and anything of value. "Da wan by d'coach anyways. He's a run'way, we r'ported some time ago."

Among the mutants, Buryn and Zedeon find a handaxe [#25] two shortswords [#26, #27], a spear [#28] and a crossbow with ten bolts [#29]. The clothes they are wearing are pretty tattered and disgusting [but I can elaborate if necessary]. The only one still breathing is the one with the pointed head. They have no other belongings.

After they've collected all the extra armaments, Buryn places them on the ground and brings his spear to bear on the mutant with the pointed head, to kill it. When there is no protest from Zedeon, Buryn finishes the mutant off. He then collects the weapons up again and heads back to the carriage to see what help he can be there.

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Herot finds the ladies standing around and the teamster struggling, trying to find a way to up end the coach. He calls out to Waede, "Hold off on that until the rest return to help. You cannot do it alone. Go and find the horses." Turning to the ladies he asks, "Are any of you injured or in need of assistance?"

Amyleryn says, "I don't believe so, thank you. I take it that the mutants have been dispatched?"

"I believe so," says Herot. "The lads are just finishing them off now and asked me to come check on you."

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At that moment, you hear slow plodding hoof beats coming from the north and fast hoof beats coming from the south. The first turns out to be Waede leading the horses for the coach and the second turns out to be a number of liveried soldiers. The soldiers come to a halt and the leader says, "We were passing on patrol and heard what sounded like a battle. What has happened here, who are you people and can we be of assistance?"

<http://www.duttontopcities.com/Harn/Dasarayne.gif>

Amyleryn looks at Lussie with a 'You're on.' expression.

Before Lady Harabor can respond, Herot says, "Over there, you have the privilege of addressing Lady Lussie Harabor, daughter of the Sheriff of Meselyneshire, and, on the other side of the overturned coach, is her companion, Lady Amyleryn Odasart. The rest are her retainers and I am her man-at-arms, Herot of Falen. We were on our way to Owendel, when we were way-laid by a number of mutants. The ladies' other guardians and I dispatched our attackers and the others are even now gathering whatever loot can be found. There is another coach on the other side of that bridge but I doubt there are any survivors. Now, if you would be kind enough to introduce yourselves to the ladies, as I recognize not your livery."

Reaching the group as he rushes in, Terias calls out as he comes to a skidding halt, "Where's the horse rider .. Waede? I need him to--"

Terias then stops, noting the additional group of soldiers and offers them a curt nod.

He then moves over to Waede and asks quickly, "You know anything about treating injured horses? We got two down there and I'd rather we saved something's life out of this mess if possible. If so let's not tarry here as their bleeding out."

The commander of the new arrivals was just about to introduce himself when he was interrupted by Terias' arrival. As the soldiers ready their weapons, he exclaims "Who is this impudent hopping flea and by what right does he rush in here shouting orders and interrupting his betters?"

Terias gives the leader the once over and straightens up to attention, but remains closed lipped.

Coming from around the overturned coach, Amyleryn says: "Commander, this is Terias of Forniad, Matakea of Larani. He's with me, but not under my authority. Only the officers of the Church of Larani have that right...and the Lady of Paladins, of course." Pausing a moment, she asks: "And you were going to say?"

"Yes, milady," he replies, "I am Sir Orot of Dasarayne, bachelor knight and brother to Lord Drojar Dasarayne, the local manor lord. One of my men and I can have you ride pillion to the safety of the manor or, if that would be too undignified, we can remain here while your coach is set aright. In either case, the remainder of my militia can help in the disposal of the bodies."

Amyleryn says, "Sir Orot, may I present the Lady Lussie Harabor, the daughter of the Sheriff." After any exchange between the two of them, Amyleryn will continue: "I am Lady Amyleryn Odasart. My father holds Hesby manor. For myself, I would prefer that our coach was put back on it's wheels. If you

could have your men get our horses back, I would appreciate it, thank you."

After a couple of hours, the horses are retrieved, the coach is put upright, Herot gathers the rest of the loot to be divided up later and the bodies are all burned. Sir Orot, and his soldiers, accompany the coach the rest of the way to Owendel, where he points out the manor to the ladies and the inn to the commoners.