

11-NÚZYÆL-720 KIBAN, KALDOR

4TH WATCH [FRZG, PARTLY CLOUDY, NORTH CALM, FOG]

As Terias eyes adjust to the outside light, he looks around in the general vicinity trying to spot anyone nearby. He then turns back to look into the tunnels to see if he can see an approaching light source. As the Matakea does this he tells Herot, "Douse the torch. Let's head back to Kiban and report to Lady Odasart."

He can see a group of people coming down the tunnel with torches in hand. Then just as Herot douses the torch, Terias notices someone toss a lit torch at a building and run towards him shouting, "Fire starter, stop him." As the person brushes past Terias and knocks him to the ground, Terias is astonished to be looking at his own face. Then before Terias can react, his double runs off down the street.

Herot comes over to help Terias up off the ground and says, "What was that all about? Are you all right? Do you really think we have enough time to report back to Lady Amyleryn before they start their foul ritual? And we should help put out that fire over there."

Brushing himself off, Terias nods curtly, gaining his bearings. He then states firmly, "Aye, you're right, you're right. Let's make haste to stamp out the fire and be away to 'WHSE 131'. I believe I know where it is." The Matakea then dashes towards where the torch was thrown, telling Herot, "Look for anything we can use to scoop water - buckets and the like. Else we'll have to make use of our waterskins."

Herot grabs a bucket of dirt that he finds in front of the building and scatters the dirt on the torch, putting out the fire. "One of the advantages of growing up in the city is knowing where things are and that all residents are required to keep a bucket of water or dirt just for this sort of necessity," He says as he rushes down to the moat, fills the bucket with water and returns to douse the embers.

When the fire is completely out, Herot looks at Terias and asks, "very well, which way?"

"Well done. Across from the Laranian temple.", Terias says resolutely. He then looks over the building that the fire starter tried to light ablaze in an effort to determine what it was (shop, warehouse, etc).

There is a brass plate near the door, which reads "Crissam of Devis, Litigant"

Terias says, "Huh, the Litigant's place. I spoke with'em when we first arrived. I wonder if this is a separate matter or tied together somehow.", The Matakea mentions off-handly, in thought. After a moments reflection he dismisses it.

On the way back to Kiban, Terias asks Herot, "Did you happen to get a look at the arsonist?"

Looking around, Terias notices that they have never left Kiban.

Herot says, "No his back was to me when he knocked you down. Why, did you recognize him?"

"Aye", Terias replies, pausing for a effect, "T'was like looking in a mirror." Then stating matter of factly, "Though I may've been seeing things." The warrior cleric ponders the matter further,

adding "If not though, this is the second time we've seen a twin of one of our group. Both times Crissam was loosely involved."

Herot says, "I recall the previous time if you are referring to the victim of the mutants but I do not remember Crissam being involved. How do you mean?"

Terias informs Herot, "The notes we found on his person regarding a claim to a small fortune. They instructed him to see Crissam. When I went to turn parchments over and inform the litigant of the fate of the poor man, he immediately claimed they were forgeries."

"Ah I see," replies Herot, "and I take it you could follow it no further such as who could publish or forge the documents and why?"

The man-at-arms seems to provoke Terias into a lengthy train of thought reply, "Without returning t'the dead mans town or village and speaking with the two signing witnesses about the origin of the note there was little else t'investigate. Unfortunately or fortunately I'm nay well entrenched in the underworld of illicit activities such as forgery. And I doubt those would be so inclined to reveal any such information to a Laranian. Then again this Crissam could have been lying fer whatever reason. But I had no reason t'doubt him. And with our actual task, I set it to the side. Still I have the note, perhaps I'll pursue it once we have some time."

Clearly puzzled by all of this, Terias tries to add levity to the situation, "Regardless I hope this dashing fellow doesn't continue to besmirch my good face. Otherwise life here will become quite difficult. Well more difficult then it already is."

The rest of your journey is uneventful and, as you round the corner and come within sight of your destination, you see many people headed in the same direction. As before about a dozen of them are very well dressed and enter the building as soon as they arrive. Another dozen appear to be rough sorts who may be bodyguards, stevedores or just hired thugs. As they arrive at the building they spread out around it and stand guard.

Two of the thugs are carrying a bound and hooded man dressed as a nobleman and they bring him into the building. Two more are carrying a bound and hooded adolescent girl and they also enter the building. Terias recognizes the clothes the girl is wearing as being the same as the one who appeared to recognize him before she ran away.

As Terias and Herot get closer they hear low chanting coming from inside but they do not recognize any of the words.

After giving the building a once over, Terias comments, "Time fer a plan. Storming the place is nay a choice unless we find reinforcements. Possibly the Church of Larani. Other ideas I'm having are sneaking either through a back way.. or a ruse through the front... one of us sacked and tied while the other leads them." The Matakea turns to the Man-At-Arms, "Any preference or thoughts yerself Herot?"

"I still think we have not time to gather reinforcements and for convincing your fellow clergy," Herot says, "As to a ruse with one of us in a sack, I would think very carefully about that. We hear of a human sacrifice and we see two people being carried in

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bound. Do you really want to take their place? I am for the back way myself."

The Matakea nods curtly, "The backway it is. I'm not to sure what the Lady would say about all my skulking as of late. Speaking off .. I should remove the surcoat as it'll only draw attention to us."

"With a bit of a smile, Herot says, "Hopefully, the end will justify the means. If you eventually save the lives of innocents or your betters (meaning those of the nobility) then I doubt you will be thought of badly. But I know not the minds of your clergy or your goddess." With a brief chuckle he continues, "I know my goddess believes the end justifies the means and we are frequently asked to force people to enjoy themselves. Otherwise, people can come up with the most absurd reasons why they should not. Make not overmuch trouble for yourself by complicated rationalizations, is what I always say."

"Aye it serves well until the law or worse yet the Gods strike you down.", Terias chuckles gruffly.

Terias reverses his surcoat to the undyed leather beneath.

Arriving at the back of the building, you find a door with two guards and a window that can be approached without being seen. At closer examination the window is covered by thin wooden strips. When some of the wood is removed, you reveal iron bars beneath. You can see through the window and can possibly fire an arrow inside but it is not possible to easily get past the bars.

Inside you can see a large room with maybe a dozen men in robes spread about large copper circle lying on the floor and continuing to chant in a foreign language. A pentagram is drawn in the circle with chalk and, standing above the pentagram is Terias' look-a-like. Two roughly dressed men hold the bound nobleman by the opposite wall. Two more carry the bound adolescent girl to lay her on the pentagram on the floor. A young man dressed as a nobleman steps forward with a broadsword and brings it down to chop off the girl's head. He then reaches down removes the hood and places the head in the center of the pentagram.

Terias finally recognizes the girl as the one who picked his pocket when asking directions to the temple of Peoni.

His look-a-like in the circle appears to liquefy and reforms to look like a much smaller version of the creature they had fought in the sewers. Some black smoke appears around the girls' head and a booming voice says, "Karison Dariune now you are mine."

The young nobleman falls to his knees and in a sobbing voice pleads, "Oh please just give me more time. I can still do it."

The chanting falters a bit and there are several gasps at what is being witnessed.

Herot strings his longbow and readies an arrow.

The events that unfold before Terias both enrage and confuse him. Before the Matakea can even react to the girls beheading, the deed has already finished, and there is little he can do but watch. Seeing his twin melt into a similar creature he fought before causes his jaw to drop. He blinks hard a few times as if trying to refocus his eyes.

Suddenly Terias stiffens up, he clenches his teeth and says in a low voice resolutely to Herot who is drawing his bow, "I'm nay sure what your aiming for, but forget the demon thing - its hide's too thick. If y'see a skull lay'n about try for that - could be the source of its power."

In a quiet and reverent voice away from the window, Terias prays to Larani for 'Ortha's Faith' [15secs]. And if there is still time as Karison begs before the creature, the priest continues on to 'Larani's Shield' [25secs].

Terias' voice falters as he recites Ortha's Faith and he realizes that the only Larani worshipers are probably the two nobles within and himself. However, he pours his faith into the two prayers and he can feel them working. Watching Herot, Terias follows the movements to string the bow he had found so long ago and he hears a slight crack as the wood of the bow starts to split. He holds his hand over the crack and readies an arrow as he can see Herot do.

From inside the room he can hear the booming voice again coming from the forming smoke, "Gruark, you have failed me. Where is my gate?" "I can still do it master," says the changeling

Glancing quickly inside, Terias can see the smoke taking on humanoid form. The creature quickly reaches over and snatches up Gruark and then starts pulling him apart like one would pull the meat off of a roast. Gruark begins screaming in a terrified voice and then stops as he dies.

Herot takes this moment to fire an arrow through the window to hit the girl's decapitated head and knock it out of the circle. A moaning bellow comes from the cloud of smoke and the smoke dissipates. The chanting stops and there is a mad rush as all of the robed people running for the doors.

Lowering his own longbow, Terias beams as he says, "Well shot Herot! I'd nay have made that even with Larani's blessing. Let us deal with the aftermath."

"I take it that was the skull you wanted me to aim at. By your leave when we have some time, I can show you the basics of bow work," Herot says, "Aftermath...yes...what would you have me do?"

Everything gets quiet except for young Karison huddled down and sobbing and a whispered "Can anyone come to my aid?" from the hooded and bound nobleman by the opposite wall. His guards have fled with the rest.

After placing the bow across his back, Terias reaches for his lance and shield and dashes off to the the backway entrance.

"Aye t'was. And I'd appreciate that.", Terias mentions as he readies himself. "Arm yourself, we'll nay face resistance, but a dose of fear on that fools soul may serve us well. We'll go in and help the one tied up and have words with both."

The Matakea stalks off through the back door. He motions to Herot to untie the bound man as he approaches the simpering noble.

Herot unties the man and removes the hood. In a feeble voice he says, "Thank you, I am the Earle of Balimshire, Help me to return to the castle and there is a knighthood for you and your companion for saving my life."

Full of bluster and boldness, Terias states as formally as he can to the noble, "Karison of Dariune, I am Matakea Terias of Forniad, Ataken with the Order of the Lady of Paladins. We have stopped what foulness you loosed for now and saved you. Your chance to confess yourself has arrived. Do so and avoid further shaming your family name. Nay to mention whatever demon you have freed upon Kiban might be stopped from cursing your entire clan. Leave out not a word."

"How dare you speak to me in that manner!" Karison says, "By your dress you are neither gentry or clergy. Either that or your actions are shameful to your clan or religion. You are neither my judge nor my confessor. Your obvious contempt for the nobility also puts a lie to you being a priest of Larani. When witnesses come forth to the events of this day, who's face will they say was in the circle at the time the demon appeared – and I myself, saw no demon but I did see you. Also, my informants told me that you are wanted for questioning in the matter of the murder of a magistrate. I suggest you see to your own soul if you wish to continue in your treasonous remarks."

What boldness the Matakea held dissipates, but not into anger or fear, rather in it's place pity forms as he says morosely, "Larani's will - it would be mercy to smite you down. That demon you summoned forth did not seem content with your grovelling. I'd hoped you would try for an honorable out, but I see t'is nay the case.

Instead you choose to dig deeper with lies most untrue. Your deeds here will catch the better of you and what help I offered is now rescinded. I look upon a noble who's fate is now sealed with the demon pact he has sown."

"Leave off that," says the Earl in a feeble voice, "Your manner does you no service and if you so much as whisper one word of slander against my family, I will see that you are brought to justice. Now I am going to have to require that you accept my hospitality and speak to no one of this until it is thoroughly investigated."

"Yes," Herot says, "Let us not take a fortuitous ending of these events and turn it into something very unfortunate to us and our companions. Do not allow your words to overstep your authority."

Hearing the Earle speak, Terias practically does a double take. His back was to the nobleman the entire time as he spoke to Karison.

The Matakea turns his attention fully to face the man and gives him a proper and respectful bow. "Apologies Sire, I did not know I was in your presence. Of course this matter is yours and your families to deal with. I did not think your son would have stooped to sacrificing his own father. Herot and I have been acting on wits end today following scant leads to ensure whatever foulness stirred was not brought to bear. I am Matakea Terias of Forniad, Ataken to the Order of the Lady of Paladins. As to my holy garb, my surcoat is reversed because we wished to get as close without drawing the eye of others and pure white is certainly not meant for such things. I now act by your leave."

"My wish," says the Earl, "is that you and your companion aid me in returning to the castle where you will be my guests until

this matter can be sorted. If you are as innocent as you claim, you will remain my guest until you can be knighted and give me your formal allegiance. Karison, you can follow us and face your responsibilities or you can wait here until I send the guards to arrest you. If you run, it will be admission of guilt and I will declare you outlaw."

Dipping his head slowly, Terias replies, "By Larani, I shall see to your safety then Sire." The Matakea quickly reverses his surcoat, and then nods curtly to Herot when he is ready.

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Alias is walking past the temple of Larani, thinking about the message he had gotten this morning from a messenger hidden in the shadows, "We know what you have been about and we allow that not without paying the proper respect to the master. We will allow you only enough time to find traveling companions for a safe journey...elsewhere. After that time, there will be grave consequences."

All of a sudden the building on the opposite side of the road produces men in robes of expensive material, and ruffians who look like dock workers. All of these people are screaming and appear to be scared witless. They appear to not even see Alias as they jostle him to get by. Soon the road is empty and quiet. Further along the road, Alias passes the building that produced the crowd and he hears from within shouted words about saving souls and shaming of families.

Terias and Herot take up stations on either side of the Earl to catch him should he stumble. As soon as they step outside they see someone who is listening while trying to not look like he is listening. The Earl points to Alias and says, "Have that man accompany us. He too will be my guest until we find out his involvement in this situation.

"Aye, you come with us. I want you near me, but keep your distance from the Earl and your hands exposed.", Terias says with authority.

The man turns and runs back the way he came and is quickly around the corner.

"Do you want us to fetch him my lord?" Herot asks.

"No," the Earl says in a weary voice, "leave it and I will send some of the guards from the castle after him. Just keep your eyes open for ambush."

The rest of the trip to the castle is uneventful and the Earl tells the startled guards, "send a squad to the buildings across the road from the Larani temple, arrest my son and return him hear unharmed. He is now under house arrest." He tells another guard, "send another squad to roam the streets and if they find anyone acting suspiciously, bring them to the goal for a little free room and board." Finally, to a third, he says, "have rooms made ready for our two guests here and see to their comfort.

Speaking up rather hesitantly, dipping his head Terias asks, "Apologies m'lord, may I speak?"

"Yes? But make it brief," the Earl says.

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When granted permission, the Matakea continues as politely and gently as possible, "Both Herot and I were on errand by Lady Amyleryn of Odasart. She was the one that tasked us with uncovering what was going on in Kiban. In the process of the investigation earlier on she was gravely injured. T'is why she was not with us tonight. Would it be possible t'send word t'her on our whereabouts? And also the Laranian temple on my behalf? I've responsibilities and orders I'd rather not go neglected."

The Earl calls forth another four guards and tells them, "Escort this man to the temple of Larani and then to the house of his lady. Hire a cart and bring his lady and her servants back here to be my guests for a few days." Turning to Terias, he continues. "You are not to speak of what you have witnessed this night to anyone. Simply tell them I have asked you to be my guests, you will be unavailable for a few days and anything further is none of their concern. If you try to tell them more than that, I can assure you the consequences will be dire both to you and to the ones you tell. Also, do not lead your lady to believe she is to be rewarded for your brave deeds. It is my belief that each of us are responsible for our own deeds. Your liege would not expect to take punishment in you stead so should also not expect to take any of your reward. Your companion can stay here as a pledge on your return."

"Aye and understood on all counts Sire.", Terias replies. He then falls in line with the fourth guard.

Your journey to the temple is uneventful and the porter stops you at the gate, "What is your business at this time?" he asks.

After the porter makes the inquire, the Matakea responds, "Would you be so kind as to relay a message to Obasaran Kobb on my behalf? I'd informed him I would be away from the temple this eve and likely chores in the morn. However, t'is been extended for the next few days. My name if your nay sure is Terias of Forniad."

"As you wish, Matakea," says the porter and goes inside to deliver the message.

When the exchange is complete, the warrior-priest informs the guard where the townhouse is located before setting off.

Your trip to the townhouse is uneventful. At the door, the guard captain points to one of his companions and says, "Go to Bydarf's drayage and fetch a cart to carry the lady. On the way back stop at the physician's and have him send someone with healing skills to tend to the lady's injuries for an extended period. At least a tenday for the trial and the knighting ceremony and quite possibly an indefinite period after that if the lady intends to accompany the new knights on any mission the Earl sends them on."

11-NÚZYÆL-720 KIBAN, KALDOR

5TH WATCH [COLD, PARTLY CLOUDY, NORTHWEST BREEZE]

Lorard and physician Quosso of Fabun are just sitting down to dinner when there is a banging on the door. Master Fabun answers the door and one of the Earl's guard says, "I need someone with healing skills who can leave immediately and tend to a lady's injuries for an extended period of time, at least a tenday and probably much longer."

Turning to Lorard, Master Fabun, "How fortunate. I invited you to dinner to discuss your journeyman travels and here is the opportunity to travel with others. As I have always said, safety in numbers. What say you? You should accompany the guard to assess the situation and, if you need to refresh your memory for specific injuries, you can make a brief visit here before you leave. Does that sound acceptable to you?"

Turning to the guard, Master Fabun says, "May I present to you Lorard of Bassill, journeyman apothecary?"

Lorard says to the guard "I'll gather my things and be with You shortly: " Master Fabun it looks like I'll miss another of your fine dinners. I thank you for the opportunity" he leaves to get his traveling kit and upon return " good sir lead on, and to you Master Fabun a good eve and my thanks"

Stepping out into the road you see a man pulling a cart full of cushions. The teamster nods at the guard and you both follow long behind.

Your trip is uneventful and, when you reach the townhouse, the guard raps on the door.

A maid answers the door, turns back to those inside, and says, miylady Odasart, dere are mae visitors and wan aw'mun 'as a cart." Turning back to those outside she looks at Lorard and asks, "who may I cut be bawlin'?"

Noding to the maid, Lorard says "Madame, I ave been given information that someone in this household requires the services of a Psychic. Please inform your mistress that I Lorard of Bassill have come in answer to such a summons. Myself and these other gentlemen shall wait here while you do so."---

Matilda goes to Lady Amyleryn's side and says, "A psychic named Lorard uv Bassill zeth ee 'ave need uv 'im and more uv de Earl's zolders 'ave arrived

A questioning look crosses Amyleryn's face for a moment, then a look of understanding comes into her eyes and she says: "Ah, it seems that the Earl has been informed of my injury. Show the new arrivals in, Matilda."

Matilda returns to the door and says "Dicky way please." And leads everyone to Amyleryn's bed.

Follow the maid in to maid into her mistress presence Bowing to the mistress and noddong to the others in the room Lorard says, " M'lady, you are sick or injured? My name is Lorard and I am a Physic sent to attend You" "Please tell me what ails you, and I shall see to your treatment" Bows again and awaits her ladyships answer---

"Well then, greetings Lorard." Amyleryn says. "Injured in combat...a fractured hip. Another physician has looked at me, and...as you can see...trussed me up in this contraption." and she indicates the leather and old sword blade splint that is serving as a lower-body cast. "It is intended to keep me from moving wrong and further agravating my injury, thereby preventing healing.." She sighs finishes: "I'm afraid I'll be of limited use to one and all for some time."

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After the dinner things have been cleared off of the table, Amyleryn has Felada bring her writing supplies and begins by

making a list of the amounts, names of the issuers and where they are located, and the dates they were issued (if available) from the bearer bonds. [OO: As has been discussed before, Amyleryn is just listing the named data, not trying to forge copies of the bonds.]

[OO: Current game time for Amyleryn is 5th watch, so this is changed from "breakfast" to "dinner". Since Amyleryn is not a mercantylor she has no idea which of the passages that look like names are the holder of the bond and which is the usurer. Nor which of the numbers are amounts, which are dates and which are merely codes to prevent forgery. What she can determine is...

#34: looks like a name Amen of Gabslyle and Bidow could be a location.

#35: looks like a name Amen of Gabslyle, possibly another name Saredo of Arbom and Bidow could be a location.

#37: looks like a location Kolorn

#38: looks like a location Querina

#39: looks like a name Dabin of Crasele and Olokand could be a location.

#40: looks like a location Nubeth

#41: looks like a name Tyarairant of Berrairse and Zoben could be a location.

At this moment, Terias and three guardsmen enter the townhouse.

Terias looks to the guardsmen as they all step inside. Then with a smile of relief and bow to Amyleryn he says contently, "Lady Odasart, the Earl of Balimshire has requested your presence along with Felada and Matilda. All is well. We are to spend the next several days in his company. One of his guard has gone to fetch your 'chariot'. When you are ready we can depart."

Amyleryn starts at first seeing the guardsmen, then relaxes slightly at Terias' words. When he finishes, she says: "I can hardly wait to hear about your exploits this evening." A slight frown crosses her face, then she asks: "Where is Herot?" and she raises one eyebrow momentarily.

"He is well and good at the Earl's.", Terias answers, but says nothing more.

"When you came in at first...with men wearing the Earl's livery...I thought you had done something to get us all arrested, but I see that you still bear your weapons. If we were to be arrested, you wouldn't still be armed."

The Matakae simply nods in response to Amyleryn.

"Requested our presence?" Amyleryn asks, then smiles. Turning to whichever of the guardsmen seems to be in charge of the detail she says: "Will someone be posted here to guard our belongings while we're at the castle, or should we bring all but the furniture?" As she listens to the guard's reply, Amyleryn puts the bearer bonds, and the now-complete listing of their contents, into her backpack.

The guard says, "I have been given no orders regarding that but I suppose it would be appropriate to leave a guard here to allay your concerns about our fair city being filled with thieves – until I'm ordered otherwise. You should, however, bring whatever you need for an extended stay of several days."

"Yes, please leave someone on guard here...thank you." Amyleryn says to the guardsman. Turning to Felada and Matilda, she says: "Pack up such money as we have, and our clothing and toiletries. Leave my armour and weapons...except for my dagger..., and the furniture and other household goods." She takes direct possession of her backpack.

Both say, "Yes, mam," and do your bidding.

Lorard says, "With your permission m'lady I would like to examine the wound.

Amyleryn says, "Certainly, but I need to have SOME modesty."

Interrupting Felada and Matilda in their packing, Amyleryn says: "Felada, Matilda, leave off with that for a few moments. For the physician to examine my injury, I'll have to get out of this...whatever this is (indicating the 'splint')...and that will require that I at least partially disrobe. Please hold up some blankets to screen me off so I don't scandalize the Earl's guardsmen." She will indicate that Lorard be inside the blankets with her.

Lorard says, "How long ago were you injured, and how much pain are you in"---

[Amyleryn says, "Four days ago...seems like an eternity. Enforced bed rest does not suit me, but if I want to heal, I'll have to endure it. As for the pain...yes, it does hurt, but not so much that I can't handle it."

Amyleryn continues, "Please be quick about your examination. We shouldn't keep the Earl's men waiting any longer than necessary."

The splint about Amyleryn's body consists of a number of dulled practice short swords wrapped in a blanket from the bathhouse. There is enough give that she can sit upright but not twist or turn. Walking is possible but difficult...stiff legged and painful."

while waiting for her ladyship to disrobe in preparation for examination Lorard says, "M'lady I beg your pardon but in my haste I forgot to ask how I may address you, will you kindly tell me your name?" "I promise that this exam will be brief as the guards seem anxious to depart. I just want to see your wound for myself and to check that the hip has been set right"

Lorard has not a clue he has not seen an injury like this nor does he know how it should be treated.

Amyleryn says, "I am the Lady Amyleryn Odasart, daughter of Sir Dalfougo Odasart, holder of Hesby Manor." Amyleryn begins. "How to address any noble depends on what you know of them and what relationship...if any...you have with them. In the absence of any knowledge, 'M'lord' or 'M'lady' is the safest form of address. If you know who they are, then it is proper to make a reference to their rank. For instance, if you are speaking to the Earl, 'M'lord Earl' or 'Your Excellency' should be proper.

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However, if you've never met them before...and you have the chance to do so..., ask someone who knows the noble if there is a preferred form of address."

While Amyleryn is saying the above, she is getting out of the splint. "For myself, if you are in my service or employ then 'M'lady Odasart' is proper. If not, then 'M'lady' is best. My given name is only used when I'm being formally presented to someone, or by family or close friends. The same pretty much applies to address between nobles...those of lower rank using the same formula that I've outlined for you to for how to address someone of noble rank."

Amyleryn continues, "As for my wound, it is a fracture...not a complete break. This splint is intended to keep me from moving in certain ways so as to not stress the injury and prevent healing or making the injury worse." and she carefully stands so Lorard can examine the injury. Once he's done, she will put the splint back on, get dressed, and let Felada and Matilda get back to packing. When they're done, Amyleryn will indicate that everyone can be on their way.

While Amyleryn receives impromptu treatment from Lorard, Terias speaks idly with the guard around him. Likely in an attempt to distract them. The Matakea asks, "How long have you lot been serving the Earl?"

The guard captain says, "All me life and my father before me and his father before him. The Earl has been a good master, he has.

The group of guards minus the one left at the townhouse, leads the cart through the streets to the castle. The trip is uneventful and you soon arrive, the leader of the guard goes to the great hall just as a man dressed as a forester is lead away by a servant.

The guardsman soon returns with another servant and he tells her, "This is Lady Odasart and she and her freeborn companions are to be the Earls guests for a few days, show them to their rooms and then back here for dinner."

The servant leads everyone to the same room as the huntsman and tells Lorard, "You will be sharing a room with this man," and she indicates Tarim.

Turning across the hall, she shows Terias and Herot to a similar room with rag mattresses on rope net frames, "This is the room you two will be sharing," I will return in a moment to show you back to the great hall.

The Matakea simply nods then goes and washes up. He says a short prayer of thanks to Larani as he cleans himself. Then as Terias is drying off, he asks Herot with a wry grin, "All this finery getting to ye?"

"It could certainly be worse. I owe naught to anyone and I am about to become gentry," Herot says with a smile. Patting the bottom of the servant girl as she leaves, he continues, "Everyone knows all the innkeeper's daughters and manor servants want to warm the beds of the gentry. The only downside I see is that, when an innkeeper sees a surcoat, they raise the prices since everyone also knows all the gentry are rich but I have not seen how that comes about. Speaking of a surcoat, have you thought of the coat of arms your going to ask for?"

"You must be having the blessing of Halea at this moment – after all, what every mothers' son of Larian wants is to become gentry, is it not?"

Terias chuckles at Herot's action and description of gentry. He then grows thoughtful at the question of a coat of arms.

"I'd nay thought of it. If ye'd asked me ten years ago, it'd have been a dragon and a nude woman. Though I don't think that be appropriate fer a Laranian Clergyman. Yer welcome to it of course.", a sly grin crosses his face.

"I will keep the woman but a dragon would be too grand for me. That would be more the device of a king and a kingdom has not yet been offered,"says Herot.

"Let's nay keep the Earl waiting.", Terias swings open the door and allows Herot to pass, stating, "Age before beauty."

With a snort, Herot says, "I am not that old and you are not that beautiful but my stomach is beginning to wonder if my throat has been cut." He steps out the door, jogs left one step then follows the hall to the great hall. A servant meets the two of you and leads you to the head of the tables on either side. At the master's table is the Earl and a young man with a family resemblance to the Earl (he is older than Karison but younger than the Earl.).

As you seat yourself, the Earl says, "may I present my two saviors, Herot of Falen from Olokand and Matakea Terias of Forniad from the Temple of Larani, this is my eldest son, Scina. I apologize for the sparseness of the company but the hour is late."

In the direction of Scina, Terias offers sparse words, "Well met."

Scina ignores you as he continues a discussion with his father regarding some of the finer points of hawking.

And then in response to the Earl, "Nay, t'is quite grand the hospitality you've shown my liege."

The Earl also ignores your response, intent on the discussion with his son.

The servants serve the appetizer, canel eyroun (figs stuffed with cinnamoned eggs).

She guides Amyleryn, the teamster and guards to another building, This room is much better prepared with a feather mattress on an enclosed bed. As the guards carry Amyleryn to the bed with Felada and Matilda following, the servant asks, "Will you be joining us in the dining room or would you like to have your dinner in here?"

"If there is time, I will bathe. In any case, I will join the company in the dining room. My lady's maid and my housekeeper can assist me there, and back again afterwards." Amyleryn smiles at the servant and says: "His Excellency shouldn't have to wait on a minor noble, even if she IS somewhat the worse for wear."

"I am sorry milady, but a proper bath would take hours and could not be arranged until the marrow," she says, "we can help you clean yourself somewhat but even that would take a turn of the glass while water is heated. If you wish not to keep the Earl waiting you will have to come anon since they are probably

serving the first course as we speak. When you are ready, go out the door, straight down the hall through the stairway and onto the ladies' gallery. You will be seated with the other ladies at the far end of the gallery."

"I'll come now, then. I just know I'm going to make a poor impression all around." and Amyleryn sighs deeply. Turning to Felada, she says: "Help me into my best garb, please. It'll have to do. Then off to supper." Turning back to the servant, she says: "Please arrange a proper bath for me on the morrow."

"Yes, milady," says the servant as she leaves,

It is another half turn of the glass before Amyleryn is dressed. Felada leads Amyleryn where they were directed. At the circular stairway, Matilda says, "I will go find the kitchen so I can have supper as well."

Beyond the stairway, Felada and Amyleryn travel along a balcony to the two trencher tables at the end. A mature noble woman looks up and asks, "Hello, who might you be?"

"Greetings." Amyleryn says. She grunts in pain as she immediately sits down, then sighs a little as the bench takes her weight. "Sorry. I'm afraid my manners are somewhat deficient at the moment...I'm recovering from a fractured hip."

Amyleryn takes a moment to sit in the least painful position she can, then says: "I'm the Lady Amyleryn Odasart, daughter of Sir Dalfougo Odasart, holder of Hesby manor in Ambarnis hundred, Meselyneshire."

With a wry grin, Amyleryn says: "I don't often use that full title...makes me sound rather pompous, don't you think? And you are?"

"I am Lady Olena Pierstel, wife of the Earl and the lady of the castle. We will make allowances since you probably get little opportunity to exercise the social graces on your country manor." Noticing a young woman (late teens, early twenties) enter the room and flop down on the bench on Olena's other side, she says, "and this is my daughter, Enoriel Dariune."

"I am honored to meet you both." and Amyleryn bows her head in a respectful nod.

"You are correct about the social graces. We got few visitors who were not relatives. When it was necessary to meet with our superiors, my father would go to them and I never got to accompany him. It was our clanhead, my great uncle Fugys, who decided that I should travel about the kingdom and try to polish off some of the rough edges. I would be grateful for any instruction in the social graces you would care to give me."

Below in the great hall, you can see the Earl seated next to a young man with Herot and Terias seated on either side.

* * *

After an unsuccessful hunt, Tarim returns to the home of his adoptive mother where he is still living. Just as he closes the door, there is someone knocking outside. Tarim answers the door to find a guardsman in the Earl's livery.

"The Earl has asked that you gather your belongings for a long journey. He may be knighting two men within the tenday and

will want you to support them on their journey by hunting and foraging. You will be paid for your service and you will be the Earl's guest until you leave. What say you?", the guardsman asks.

"The Earl?" Tarim laughs and sets down his bow by his feet, using its tip to rest one hand and then the other.

The guardsman nods. "Within a tenday."

"But... why me? And to where? Who are these knights, and must I guide us as well?" A voice calls from upstairs, and Tarim absently hoists the bow back to his shoulder. "How long will be I gone?"

"You will be serving at the pleasure of the Earl," says the guardsman, "and he will provide such details as he chooses."

"What sort of pay?" asks Tarim.

"The fair wages of the Earl."

Again, a high voice calls from the upstairs, asking about the visitor on the steps.

"I will go," says Tarim, bowing his head to the guardsman before pulling the door shut.

"I am not at liberty to answer your questions and thus obligate the Earl," the guardsman says as he leads you through the streets.

You pass some swineherds whose pigs are picking through the garbage in the middle of the street. The guardsman gives them a wide berth.

Upon reaching the castle, the guardsman brings you to the main hall and tells one of the servant girls, "This is one of the Earl's freeborn guests, please show him to the room that has been prepared for him."

"Yes," she replies, "right this way."

She shows Tarim to a small room with bunkbeds with rag filled mattresses on rope net frames, a small bedside table, with a pitcher of water, a towel, and a wash bowl."

"Dinner will be served as soon as the rest of the guests arrive," can you find your way back to the great hall or would you like me to guide you?" she asks.

* * *

After checking for any obvious signs that something was wrong (ie bone sticking through skin) Lorard thanks her ladyship. Traveling with her ladyship and the guards to the Earl's residence, he follows the maid to his room. Upon entering and seeing another occupant "good eve sir, I am called Lorard, may I have the pleasure of knowing the name of the person with whom I appear to be sharing accommodations with? Also did you want the top or the bottom?" pointing to the bunk bed

Tarim looks up from the washbasin, startled. Then he wipes his palms on his shirt and strides over to grasp one of Lorard's hands in both of his.

"Well met! And here I thought they gave me two beds because I sleep long and hard." Tarim smiles and studies the big man

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before him. "But I think the bottom bunk is yours, as there's more of you than me, not to mention your travel-sack."

Tarim hoists his own, smaller bag to the top bed. "And I'm Tarim, hunter-at-large, recently made hunter-to-someone-of-the-Earl or somesuch. I may have the top bunk, but if you know the goings on here, you have a leg up on me."

Lorard says, "As you wish Tarim" putting his travel sack on the lower bunk. "Appointed hunter to a Earl, you must indeed be good at your trade for this to happen." Lorard goes over to the wash basin to rinse the dust of travel off his face. "As for me I am an apothecary by profession and a poor mans physic if pressed" "The Earl sent word to my master that a Physic was needed to take care of some wounded." "I arrived to find that my paient was a Lady with a fractured hip." "betwen you and me, If you suffer from some ill I can make you a potion that will fix you up right quick. A broken bone leaves me clueless." "I imagin that as soon as the Earl can find and send for a proper physcian I'll be dismissed with some thanks"

"Now as the hour grows late how about you and me go see about getting something to eat. I can eat a swine whole (exageration)" He gestures towards the door and starts heading in that direction

"For dinner, I was, er, waiting for... ah, no matter." Tarim glances around for a mirror, then straightens his shirt."A Physic? Then I'll be glad of your company and hope not to need your services. Between you and me, I'm yet only a fair hunter, more keen of eye and patient than skilled. If Larani doesn't watch over me, I'll as likely be a meal for the next boar as he will for me." He hustles around the bed to catch Lorard by the door. "But I'll try not to break any bones."

Lorard says, "Tell you what, you don't break any bones and I'll try and not get between you and a boar deal?" Puts arm arond Tarim's shoulder and exits the room---

You both go out the door make a quick U turn to the right, proceed down the hall and enter the great hall. A servant shows you to your assigned seats, Tarim below Terias and Lorard below Herot.

Then another servant serves the appetizer. You notice, as you have heard is the usual custom in higher social circles, you will be sharing your cup, trencher and utensils with the one next to you.

Anxious to avoid any breach of etiquette, Tarim places his hands at the edge of the table and waits for others to reach for a drink. He looks briefly at the tall men above him, one fair and one dark, the two conversing as Lorard takes his place.

Tarim then turns to look down the great hall, buzzing and blooming with talk, and tries to recognize anyone of importance who might be in attendance.

Seated stiffly at one end of the table, either by an evident soldiers appearance or over compensating due to discomfort or both is a blond haired, fair skinned young man of six feet. He shows no signs of scaring either from weapons or pock marks. His frame though tall is light and sinewy. From his white surcoat and red trim, along with holy symbol most could guess he is a follower of Larani, likely clergy.

The Matakea offers a curt nod to Tarim and Lorard as they find themselves a seat. What is immediately noticeable when he speaks is that his mannerisms shift in and out of formal and relaxed wording, but overall it seems pleasant enough, "Well met, I'm Terias of Forniad, a Matakea with the church of Larani and Ataken to the Order of the Lady of Paladin's. The rascal sitting across from me is Herot of Falen. A Man-At-Arms by trade and a Woman-In-Arms by night fall."

"Guilty as charged," Herot says, "Is it not said, Larani gives us strength, Peoni gives us forgiveness, but Halea gives permission!

A broad grin creeps onto the warrior priests lips as he looks across to his companion, stiffling a chuckle. Clearly the two are friends.

Tarim says, "Well met! I'm Tarim, hunter-at-large, and honored to meet another Laranian. A Matakea, no less!" Tarim stands quickly to speak and face each man, and then, before sitting again, adds, "And his good companion, of course! I'll be sure not to stand in the way of his duties, day or night."

It is a small company for dinner, Tarim recognizes the Earl at the head of the table but not the young man beside him. Other than the three men that arrived at the same time threere are several soldiers wearing the Earl's livery, seating further down either side table.

Glancing at the occupants of the room Lorard goes to his assigned seat. Nodding to Herot he says "good eve Sir."-"do you have any idea of what this about? [waving at the guests seat at tables]-

With a bit of a smirk, Herot says, "Herot of Falen here and you need not 'Sir' me I have not been knighted yet. And what 'this' is about is dinner where one eats to sustain the body."

Lorard says, "you may not be knighted Herot, but you do carry a sword. It has been my experience that it is better to safe by calling the wielder Sir than not." gesturing towards the trenchers of food "as for calling this a diner there are to few people present to call it a feast and yet the Lord provides us with a splendid repast." "I'll call it diner to be at least polite, you however may call it what you will"---

"You are young lad, so I grant your inexperience but take it from me, mistaking the difference between a shortsword (a freeman's weapon) and a longsword (a gentleman's weapon) can be believed to be a sign of weakness and would draw the predators like raw meat. To call me Sir when I am not of the gentry could have me brought up on charges of me feigning nobility – and I would not thank you for that. On the other hand, not calling someone Sir when they wear a longsword could have you brought before the magistrate due to disrespect to the gentry and you would not want that."

Lorard says, "Tis true I don't know the difference between types of sword and who is entitled to carry which, but as long as someone carries one where I do not I'll err on the side of caution and call him Sir."

"Just keep in mind, if it is I and I survive the goal, I will come back and teach you the difference – from the pointed end," Herot says.

As the night goes on, other courses are served cobages (cabbage and almond soup), a choice of entrée: mawmenye (lentils and lamb), gyngere (gingered carp), or vyand de ciprys ryal (spiced minced chicken relish); accompanied by fruytes ryal rice (artichokes with blueberry rice), wastel bread and beer (amber color, citric-pear aroma, full, slightly oily texture, balanced malt-hop flavor with a powerful fruity finish). For dessert there is faun tempere (gilli flower pudding). Between the soup and the entrée, Tarim notices one of the servant girls watching him.

Tarim looks at the lass, then looks down on instinct. Attention from a girl unsettles him, at least before he's made her laugh or shared his show of sport. Is she interested in him, or just awaiting a time to give him instructions? Has he made a breach of etiquette even before the meal is done?

He looks up again, and she is still studying him.

She smiles and winks.

Lorardsays, nodding to the Earl's table first and then the other gentlemen "Greeting I am Lorard apothecary by trade and physic sometimes by necessity. I wish to thank m'lord for this fine repast" He watches with some slight amusement the interplay between Tarim and one of the maids.-

* * *

After the entrée is finished, the Earl says to Terias, "Would you like to tell us one of your religious parables?"

"Aye, my Lord, let me gather my wits for one.", Terias responds before scratching at his stubbly chin for a brief moment. "One comes to me", he says, "T'is of three noble brothers. Two of whom, the older ones that is, were warrior stock. The youngest - Fidinus was a home body. He preferred the confines of the manor. And he was mocked for it by his brothers. Still all the family were devout Laranians. One fateful year, the village, Kokina, that they held sway over was seized by an opposing knight and his band of near do- well men. Because the season provided a drought, food was scarce and many were weakened from it. As a result, Fidinus's brothers who had lived the life of victorious warriors, were humbled and lost their courage having never been defeated. Fidinus himself not wishing to see defeat come so easily, donned armor and a weapon and challenged the dark knight. The brothers cried out against him to stand down as all was lost, but Fidinus ignored their pleas. The knight accepted the duel. The battle was swift and the young noble came out the winner. He offered quarter to the knight for the honorable duel, who replied in turn to Fidinus, 'If you let me live, my men will kill you for your weakness of mercy.' Again his brothers pleaded, but this time to do as the foul knight suggested.

Again, Fidinus ignored them and asked the knight to yield. He agreed. Immediately upon rising the knight and his men slaughtered Fidinus, his brothers and destroyed the manor."

Terias pauses for a effect here, he takes a sip from his cup and then continues after letting the others mill over what they've heard in surprise. "When the brothers met again in Dolithor - the

two older ones were ranked high in Larani's army. But, Fidinus to their suprise was placed in the seat with the Knights of Dolithor. The two cried out, 'Why? Why not us? We were mighty warriors throughout our lives. Fidinus kept himself safe in the confines of the manor!' Hearing them, Saint Mendiz flew down and spoke thusly,"

Here Terias breaks, eyes closed as if reciting the line exactly and in a booming tone, "Fidinus has displayed greater courage in his gentleman's defeat than the two of you did in all of your victories. Anyone can be brave when they are winning'.

The Matakea smiles pleased with his own tale, then decides to explain further for the others as he glances around, "Having had the benefits of the teaching of Larani I realize the moral may not be clear t'others -- True courage is to keep one's faith in the face of certain death or catastrophe. "

Tarim devotes his full attention to the parable, reacting to Fidinus' fate without surprise, as if receiving news that was grim but inevitable. At Terias' explanation, Tarim nods with enthusiasm.

After the dessert is finished, the Earl once again addresses Terias, "Did I not see you with a lute earlier? I am sure the ladies would love for you to play us a tune."

Hesitantly Terias replies, as he reaches for the lute at the side of the table leaning up against his pack, "Aye M'lord. I've been known to pluck the chords, but harper I'm not. All the tunes I know are somber. Though I have one that is meant to rouse the spirits for battle. I leave it to you and your company to chose your ears fill. I'd nay wish to dampen the mood with my own melancholy ways."

"Proceed," says the Earl. Terias doesn't play very well but he does not completely botch up the tune.

The soldier-priest after playing a couple of melodies, winds down his strumming and then returns his lute to the floor by his pack.

After the final course of the meal and a final round of drinks, everyone goes to their room for the night.

Before tucking into sleep, Terias says a quiet reverent prayer of thanks to Larani for the outcome of the nights events.

12-NÚZYÆL-720 KIBAN, KALDOR

2ND WATCH [FRZG, PARTLY CLOUDY, NORTH CALM, FOG]

You awake at the first of the second watch to the sound of a tapping at the door, "brexis weel be zar'd een de gert 'all een a turn uv de glass," says a servant.

Amylereyn awakes from a nightmare about her brother Jak being attacked by mutants and she feels they will all be in danger by the events of this day.. Her hip feels a little better.

Awakened from her nightmare by the tapping on the door, Amyleryn calls out: "Thank you, we are getting up." She then calls to Felada and Matilda: "Felada, Matilda, get up." As she's rising, Amyleryn looks around, notices that Matilda is not present, and says to Felada: "Where is Matilda?"

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"I know not, mylady," answers Felada, "she returned not from dinner last night. She did, however, send a message by one of the servants saying 'all of this was too grand for her and she did not belong here.' She has probably left the castle and returned to her family."

"That's too bad...I was starting to like her a lot." and Amyleryn sighs. "I hope her emerging psionic abilities don't cause her grief. At least she knows they're developing. Forewarned is forearmed."

Come over here close. "When Felada has come close, Amyleryn says in a low voice: "I've had another of my prescient visions. There were two parts to it. In the first part, I saw my brother Jak being attacked by mutants. We are far away from him, so there's nothing we can do to warn him. I can only hope he will come through it safely." and a worried look come over her face.

Amyleryn continues: "The second part was a strong sense that we will all be in danger today. I could see no details about what the danger will be, so be extra vigilant. Be ready to defend yourself, flee, or take cover."

Amyleryn says, "I would prefer it if you could wear your dagger today, but I > don't want the Earl's people to think we feel unsafe here in the castle and have them be offended...even though I DO feel that we are in jeopardy today. Keep your eyes open for things that be used as a weapon in a pinch if you find yourself suddenly in danger. Things like a torch stuck in a wall sconce or a fireplace poker, for instance. Any questions?" and she pauses for an answer.

"I understand and will do as you say as I have a dagger," answers Felada, "but I should point out that the grand folk of the castle will think this is all very peculiar. The agreement between master and servant always includes a provision for the master to protect the servant from harm. If not themselves, then by hiring men-at-arms to protect them both. Commanding me to defend myself is a failure of that agreement and could be grounds for me to leave your service if I wanted – which I don't so I ask you to consider carefully what you say to people."

"You misunderstand me." Amyleryn says. "I said that I would prefer it if you could wear your dagger, but that the people here would take it wrong if you did. If I demanded that you wear it, I wouldn't have said anything about using inopportune weapons. By all means, leave your dagger here. Terias and Herot are currently in my service and should be available to aid you if necessary."

"Yes, mylady," Felada says, "I always carry my dagger so that I will not be taken for a serf. Better to demonstrate ones freedom than try to defend it, my papa always said."

"A servant knocked on the door and announced that breakfast will be in a turn of the glass, so help me get dressed, please."

Terias awakes with a headache and feeling a little dizzy.

The Matakea struggles to get his bearings, holding his head in his palm a good while after the servant as woken him and Herot. He mumbles to himself, "I've forgotten what it's like to wake without my head throbbing. And dizziness is a new one." He then quickly gets dressed and washed in the remaining ten minutes he has, all the while fighting the urge to stumble back to bed and sleep off the pain.

Tarim awakes, hears a moan from the room where Terias and Herot are sleeping and tears begin streaming from his eyes. Shortly the tears stop and he has a headache.

Tarim sits up and shakes his head vigorously, as if to shrug off the tears and ache.

He sits quietly, listening for further sound from the room across the hall, and leans over slowly to peer at Lorard's bunk below.

Lorard says, grumbling at the sound of knocking on the door "Who is making that infernal racket? Can't a person get a good night's sleep" He cracks his eyes open to see Tarim looking down at him "Good Morrow I think, you look like I feel. Remind me not to indulge in such rounds of drinking in future" "I guess we should get up and get some breakfast" Matching actions to words Lorard rolls out of the bunk and attempts to stand up, moaning and groaning while doing so.---

To break your fast, you are served, corned beef hash, soft cheese, goose eggs, coconut milk, corn pone and small ale or cider."

During the meal, Terias eats contently, still appearing hungered from the night before. Clearly the difference this time is he appears refreshed and more relaxed at the table.

The Earl says to Terias and Herot, "Once you finish your meal I will want your depositions, one at a time, as I will be holding a special hallmoot all-day today to find the truth of recent events. Tell your lady that I will need a deposition from her as well regarding what she knows or does not know. After each of you finishes telling me what you know, I will also want an oath regarding your silence. These events are nobody else's business."

The Matakea nods curtly and the Earls command.

Odd sometime during this happening Lorard stumbles in to eat breakfast. He nods and mumbles a greeting to anyone that is still in the dining hall.

With Tarim at his heels, still uncertain of his place in the grand trappings, and more than a bit blurry from the night before.

* * *

After the pair are dismissed, Terias approaches Amyleryn and mentions, "The Earl has asked each of us to recount our tale m'lady. Including yourself. Does this mean the veil of secrecy you've held us to can be lifted?"

When Terias asks one of the servants for directions to the lady's gallery, he is directed to a spiral staircase at the end of the great hall. Climbing the stairs he follows the balcony around to where several lady's are seated for their morning meal. When Terias asks his question, the lady seated next to Lady Odasart says to Amyleryn, "Who is this impertinent young man? Is he with you? Last night you asked me to advise you on social graces. Well in polite society, one does not simply walk up to strangers without being introduced nor to their betters without being announced or being summoned. It simply is not done."

Terias' attention turns towards the woman speaking and he simply smiles then dips his head courteously. He stiffens up and awaits Amyleryn's response.

"Terias, this is the Lady Olena Pierstel, wife of the Earl and the Lady of the castle." Amyleryn begins. "Your Excellency, may I present to you Terias of Forniad, Matakea and Ataken to the Order of the Lady of Paladin's. His Excellency intends to knight Terias and another of my retainers for...certain deeds." Shooting Terias a wicked grin, she again addresses Olena and says: "It would seem that Terias is also in need of a crash course in the social graces if he's to do honor to the new station he is about to enter."

"Yes, so it would seem," she answers, "I will have the temple informed that their teaching has not been sufficient."

After Terias and Olena have finished whatever exchange they have, Amyleryn says to Terias: "In answer to your question, yes, recount our tale...starting with the gargun escape and our pursuit of it. Leave nothing out. Instruct Herot to tell his part from his arrival in town as well."

Turning to Olena, she asks: "Your Excellency, do you have need of anything more of Terias, or should he be about his duties?"

"No, I have my own people to see to my needs," she answers, "He may be on his way."

The Matakea offers a bow to Amylern and then Earl's wife then heads back down stairs.

When Terias returns to the great hall the Earl and his son are gone and Herot is just returning from the south hallway. "That was easy enough," Herot says, "as I know naught. It is your turn now. Down that hall to the tower room at the end."

In response, with a sheepish smile Terias says, "Aye, I know a bit more, but feel like t'is myself." The Matakea follows his friends directions, arriving at the door and gives it a knock before entering.

A guard opens the door and allows Terias to enter. You can see the Earl and his son sitting at a trencher table. As you stand in front of the table, the Earl tells you, "Let us hear the events since you arrived in this town that caused you to make your accusations against my younger son and your defense regarding the accusations against you regarding the death of the magistrate. Be quite sure you tell me only the truth and all of the truth as you know it. If you try my patience or if I suspect what you tell me, my gratitude will not prevent my torturer from getting the truth out of you by whatever means necessary."

A frown forms on Terias lips as he begins to speak, "Apologies your Lordship, I know not your faith so you may not hold this point in high regard, but as a devout Laranian - I would nay lie to a superior. And with the oath of secrecy I had sworn to Lady Odasart I can full disclose what I know."

The Matakea pauses in case the Earl wishes to interrupt.

Then continuing on the warrior-cleric explains, "I am duty bound to Lady Odasart through her father. We were tasked with a matter most vital - that of the succession. Of concern was Kiban and your state m'lord. Apparently you had fallen silent on some affairs. We were asked to come and investigate the why's and wherefores and make sure you were in good spirits."

Seeming unsure as he speaks, Terias mentions, "I'm nay sure how important this is and how it is tied together, but on the road to town we encountered some strange mutant creatures. Tied to this event was a dead man of remarkable appearance to one of our companions. He bore a note for a litigant in Kiban claiming him to be an heir to significant sum of coin." Terias produces the note from within his pack and lays it out.

With a bit of a smile, the Matakea explains, "How we eventually stumbled on to all of this - was a side event that unraveled at the faire. A gargun was loosed accidentally and ran into the sewers. Lady Odasart and I gave chase. We lost track of the foulspawn, but I suspect it fell prey to what we found next. In a room within the sewers we discovered a circle with a pentagram inside. Stepping inside caused a demon like creature to appear. Similiar t'the one we bested tonight. I'm nay sure if you laid eyes on it. T'was a loathsome sight. This is where Lady Odasart injured herself. We entered mortal combat with the cursed thing and she took a severe blow."

His cheeks grow somewhat flush as he lowers his head in shame, "We were no match for it so I called for a retreat. As we rounded the bend we met one Ralif of Rudethe, who had heard we descended into the underbelly of the town and came to aid us at his churches request - that of the Sage."

Switching gears, Terias mentions, "At that time we heard sounds were we had ventured and returned to see what transpired. T'was a sight to see. The pentagram and circle were gone. All that was left was a cabinet. Inside I discovered a handkerchief with the initials 'FS' upon it, some coin, alchemical mixtures, bonds and the words 'Ordo Septenarius' etched into the wood itself." With that Terias then lays out the handkerchief.

Clearly proud of his investigative results, the warrior-cleric goes into detail, "The initials I would come to find were that of Fonor of Stippa as he'd laid claim t'killing the gargun - t'was his cellar we found and the 'Ordo Septenarius' is a supposed fund fer orphans and widows. Though I'm guess'n t'was the groups name that abducted you."

Terias then adds to his continuing tale, "After searching the cellar as best we could we returned to Raliff's Uncle - the Magistrate. Here he was most cordial with us. Helped see Lady Amyleryn to a physician and off to the Peonian temple to recover."

Here Terias pauses briefly, rubbing the back of his neck in thought before starting up again, "Days passed as I pieced t'gether what we found while the lady was on the mend. My poking about caught the ire of others though and I was given stern warning to leave things be and best leave the city by a group of folk. The leader bearing a patch of a rope and pulley. After they said their piece they backed away down an alley and by a miracle of the Lady herself, I saw a parchment fall from one of the men." Again Terias goes through the same process of laying it out for all to see.

Firmly the Matakea states, "This is probably the most damning of evidence I have. And t'was the key to uncovering what was going on. The parchment spoke of a meeting in the hall of Mangai during that eve and t'was signed by your son - Karison"

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Reciting what he can from memory, Terias says, his voice growing husky – clearly he is not one to speak at such length,

"After conferring with Lady Odasart, Herot and I ventured to the Hall and watched as a large company of people entered.. From what I noted Magistrate Rudethe was present, there were two people bearing the Dariune crest and another that bore the badge of the mason's guild. Herot say others with the pulley badge and others with the wagon badge. We then snuck closer to an open window and over heard pieces of conversation. Something about a ritual the next day, that the secret temple was discovered so it would be held elsewhere, they needed a human sacrifice and it wasn't any of the group inside and that afterwards they would all be rich beyond measure."

Between his story, Terias takes in an audible breath to refresh himself and then goes on, "The next day as Herot and I were planning how to find where the ritual would be held, we received a summons from a young lad in service to the Magistrate at Lady Odasart's townhouse. He wanted the pair of us for lunch. We thought our luck had turned and quickly set off with the runner. Of course t'was for the worse.

The moment we set into the Magistrates room – the cursed boy threw up a hue and cry and dashed off claiming we slew the man. I can probably draw the look of the child from memory if need be to question what he knows. Gave him a silver pence too for his efforts. The sight was gruesome. But we noted in blood Rudethe had managed to write out `WHSE 13'. I knew right away what that was as I passed it every time I went to and fro from the temple. T'was the location of the building across the way. It seems either the Magistrate had a change of heart or because of betrayal sought to do so in turn to the others." Terias then pauses to add, "This is the next piece in our favor as it helped lead us to you Sire."

The Matakea goes into detail about what unfolded from there, "I said we'd been to the Magistrates before so I knew we could find escape through the cellar into the sewer and that's the path Herot and I took. Once out into the light of day – a sight most strange unfolded. Some one.. who appeared much like me tossed a torch into a building to set fire and dashed off. Quick footed Herot grabbed a bucket and quickly doused the flames. The building belongs to one Crissam of Devis. The same litigant who I mentioned at the start asked that man to come to town under false pretenses with the claim of coin. Whether he had a role in this or t'is coincidence I do not know."

"Anyhow fearing what we may miss we dashed off t'the location scrawled out in blood. Two dozen men in total – half of'em rough looking sorts entered the building. Herot and I made our way around back t'see what we could do to stop this madness. Peaking into a window I saw the one that looked much like myself change for into a smaller form of the demon Lady Odasart and I battled into the sewer. This was done after your son had cut the head off of a woman as a sacrifice. The woman who coincidentally had stolen from coin from me days before. I'd wanted justice, but this was far beyond that. Had I known this was to happen I'd have reacted. You likely heard your son pleading with the creature. As Herot readied his bow I noted the scene with the demon inside the pentagram and circle was the same we had seen in the sewers. Immediately I recalled Lady Odasart's wisdom. We had seen a Khuzdul skull inside of the

ring before and now the woman's head lay there. After asking for Larani's blessing I told Herot to aim true for the skull to knock it out of the circle as the creature was nigh-impervious to attacks."

With a smile in the Earl's direction, the soldier-priest states liberally, "The result as you know was success! When the skull was knocked free the demon disappeared and the others all scattered. Herot and I stormed inside quickly in an effort to secure Karison and the captive he had.. which turned out to be you – your Lordship."

As the tale tapers down, Terias explains rather calmly, "T'is a tale most fantastic. I've done my best to explain the why's and wherefores. Hopefully it clears me of what charge is laid against me and shows the extent of your sons involvement in all of this. If y'have any further questions – I may have missed or glossed over I'll gladly try t'answer them m'Lord. I've also my personal journal of the events if y'wish to read it over."

The Matakea takes a stiff stance of attention as he awaits a response from the Earl.

"Your tale of spying, murders, threats, breaking and entering private property, theft, doubles, imposters and what amounts to the whole town in some conspiracy to rebellion for no apparent purpose, is indeed fantastic. You are dismissed but you are not to leave the castle nor speak of any of this affair to anyone without my leave. You may escort your lady here to give what evidence she has. And then I will verify what of your story I can and make my own judgments on the motivations of those involved. Tell Lady Odasart that she is allowed to have a litigant present if she wishes but the only local litigant is this Crissam of Devas you mention. She is also not under any suspicion or compulsion and she can leave you to your fate if she wishes. But your fate will not await the sending for a litigant from another town. I do find it mildly amusing however that your religion will not allow you to lie but does allow spying and trespass," says the Earl with a wry smile.

Terias nods curtly, and replies seriously, "Understood. On the matter of faith and action. T'is a task of choosing the lesser of sins. Especially when employing them in just situations. Ones allegiance is a heirarchy to Larani first and foremost, their Lord, their kingdom, and the people. One must balance and bend to fit as many as they can - but never break."

Once dismissed, the Matakea heads to find Lady Odasart. He approaches and bows from a distance waiting to be called forth.

Seeing Terias arrive, Amyleryn bekons him to come closer and asks: "Yes?"

Terias says matter of factly to Lady Odasart, "M'lady, the Earl is ready for your company. He asked me to mention that your allowed a litigant present if you wish - but that would be Crissam of Devas. The Earl also said your not under any sort of suspicion or compulsion so you can leave me to my fate if you want. I can lead you there now if you desire."

Amyleryn sighs, then says: "I had hoped to bathe before having to testify, but I'll not keep the Earl waiting. Help me go to attend him, please."

The Matakea does as instructed and helps Lady Odasart into the barrel. He then wheels her as carefully as he can to the Earls

chambers. Once inside he sets her down carefully as he can muster and then stands rigidly at attention.

As Terias wheels in Amyleryn in a barrel, the Earl seems startled and says, "My word! I meant not to interrupt you in your bath. I merely wanted to hear your version of what has happened since you arrived in Kiban." Turning to Terias, he continues, "please return the lady to her room until she finishes her bath and discuss not what you have told me. I would prefer to hear it first hand in her own words."

A flash of confusion crosses Terias' face as he looks down to Amyleryn. When he realizes what the Earl is seeing the Matakea stifles a chuckle, but a snort escapes. The soldier quickly falls in line and stiffens up letting the lady respond - a thin smile remaining on his lips.

Looking up at Terias, Amyleryn says: "When I told you that I didn't wish to keep His Excellency waiting and to help me attend him, I rather thought you would wait until I at least toweled myself dry!" and the corners of her mouth twitch upward slightly. "When you started bringing me here, bath and all, I have to admit that I was a bit startled. Are all you Laranian priests so literal-minded?"

At this, her composure gives way completely, and she laughs so hard, she nearly submerges herself.

The Matakea does not respond, he merely stands impassively.

Gasping a little as she stifles her laughing, Amyleryn addresses the Earl: "My apologies, Your Excellency. This must be about as far from proper decorum as it's possible to get!" and she chuckles momentarily. "I have to admit though, that this is the most fun I've had since I was a little girl! I will finish my bath as quickly as I can and return directly."

"Yes, quite extraordinary, I will admit. I can think of a couple of situation that would be less dignifying but none that should be mentioned in the presence of a lady. Only I shudder to think what could give you more pleasure when you were a child," the Earl replies.

Nodding her head to the Earl from within the barrel, Amyleryn say to Terias: "Trundle me back to my room, Terias." As they're wheeling down a hallway, she says: "I can only guess what Felada is going to say about this. You might want to be wearing your armour when next you lay eyes on her." and she laughs a little.

Terias turns around after taking hold of the barrel and returns Amyleryn to her room.

When he gets to the door Felada is waiting for him, "How dare you treat milady in that manner: I may be just a servant and it may land me in the goal but you try anything like that again and you will have me to contend with. You can probably beat me easily in a fair fight but, remember, you have to sleep sometime and in defense of milady nobody said I need to fight fair."

When the noblewoman is finally ready, the warrior cleric turned personal chauffer returns Lady Odasart to the Earls chambers.

"Well now, that certainly did not take long. Are you ready to give your statement now, milady?" asks the Earl.

"Tis nay my place to question the orders and wishes of nobility. I imagine the same is true for yourself.", Terias answers stoically towards Felada.

With a bit of a squeak, Felada says, "Are you saying that milady put you up to this? I knew she learned some strange ways when she was in those foreign lands but nothing that would account for this. But if you are saying the Earl put you up to this, I will have to give him a piece of my mind. From what I hear tell, this is no way for the nobility to be carrying on. If that is not so, you had best learn what is proper for nobility and what is proper according to your calling and where they differ since I also doubt that your religion approves of such a thing outside of marriage and even between man and wife it is not something to be flaunted in public or before the household staff. It just is not proper."

And Terias notices a tear in her eye.

His patience still holding, Terias tells Felada, "Calm yourself. Anger will do little to resolve anything and this matter is already settled without incident. There was no signs of impropriety and Lady Odasart was covered at all times."

"Enough, both of you!" Amyleryn commands. Relenting and giving Felada a warm smile, she says: "Thank you for your concern, Felada." and she reaches out a hand from her bath water, taking Felada's hand in her own. "You are my ever-faithful companion and protector. Know that I love you for it."

Releasing Felada's hand and turning to Terias, Amyleryn says: "I'll put this incident down to all of the occurrences of the last few days and your impending knighting. In future, please be sure that I'm truly prepared to depart when we are going to leave for somewhere." Smiling at Terias, she continues: "I did find this occurrence...exhilarating." and he can see a devilish gleam in her eye. "Please wait outside the room while I finish up my bath and get properly dressed for my audience with the Earl. When I'm ready, I'll call you in."

When Terias has gone out and closed the door behind him, Amyleryn says to Felada: "Hand me that washing cloth over there please." and she points to a cloth lying on the floor. "I dropped it in my surprise when Terias started wheeling me out." As Felada is retrieving the washing cloth, she continues: "Terias is right, in that nothing serious occurred. The Earl was startled when Terias wheeled me in to his chamber, but he seemed amused rather than scandalized. I would expect that a man in his position has seen much worse."

After Felada has handed Amyleryn the washing cloth, she changes to the task at hand. "Were you able to find anything to sweeten up the scent of my dress?"

"Yes, milady, one of the servants gave me some oil of lavender to sweeten the scent of your body. I can only guess at their motive, no doubt some subtle suggestion resulting from last nights dinner before your chance to bathe. Sometimes servants have ways of showing their displeasure without their master's knowledge," answers Felada.

Amyleryn finishes scrubbing herself as quickly as she can, towels herself dry, and dresses with Felada's help. When she's

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dressed and ready, she says: "Fetch Terias to lend his arm and help me to attend the Earl."

Yes, milady," says Felada.

* * *

"I am, Your Excellency." Amyleryn takes a moment to compose herself, then begins: "I came, with my retainers, to Kiban on instructions from my clanhead, my great uncle Lord Fugys Odasart, to ascertain your condition. You had disappeared from public view for an extended time, and apparently there were persons elsewhere in the kingdom who became concerned about your wellbeing. I was given to understand that the concern centered around the fact that you have a legitimate claim to the Throne when the day comes that His Majesty...may the Gods watch over him...dies."

"You can imagine much better than I, what thoughts would be going through the minds of others in the kingdom who feel that they also have strong claims to the succession should other claimants start vanishing."

"Yes indeed," the Earl says with a chuckle, "possibly even to the point of sending someone to investigate what advantages could be gained by my removal." A couple of the guards in the room stiffen and appear to pay closer attention to what is being said.

Amyleryn continues, "On our journey here to Kiban, we were attacked by some mutants. We defeated them handily. The only connection this might have to the situation here in Kiban, is a paper taken from one of their bodies that mentions the litigant Crissam of Devis. If he has any part in the events here, I do not know of it."

"After arriving in Kiban, we went to the faire. At one point, we stopped at the freak show. The fool had a gargun, and at that moment, it slipped it's confinement and escaped into the sewers. No one seemed overly worried about it or inclined to pursue it, but I noticed that it was a female and should it have been pregnant, I felt that this was an immediate danger."

"I would ask you to refrain from making judgments about the actions and motives of the townspeople who you have had little chance to get to know," the Earl says.

"Terias and I got into our armor and descended into the sewers through an entrance behind the Silver Way inn. A lantern enabled us to follow the gargun's tracks easily. Those tracks ended in a smear of blood at a door with a small window opening in it. Through the opening in the door we could see a pentagram inside a metal ring set into the floor. In the center of the pentagram, was a skull that I was able to determine belonged to a male Khuzdul."

"We were able to get the door open and enter the room. As we did, smoke began to appear inside the pentagram, which formed itself into what can only be described as a demon...horns, wings, the lot. We engaged it in battle, but we were no match for it. Terias stabbed it with his spear, but he might as well have been trying to stab the wall of your castle for all of the good it did us. My mace was equally ineffective. The creature struck me a blow...only my armor and the fact that the blow was glancing saved me. As it is, my hip was fractured. That is what this strange splint is for." and she indicates it.

"We withdrew, and fortunately the demon seemed to be confined inside the metal ring by some means, otherwise I'm sure we would have been killed then and there."

"A short distance away, while looking for another way out of the sewers, we encountered Ralif of Rudethe, nephew of the Magistrate. By his account, he had come looking for us. Hearing some noise back the way we had come, and wanting another witness to what we had seen, I insisted we go back...although Terias didn't think it was such a good idea, because of my injury. When we got back to the room, we found that the ring and pentagram were gone, but the impression of where they had been inset into the floor could be clearly seen."

"A search of the room revealed a cabinet inscribed with the words 'Ordo Septenarius'. Inside were some vials, a square of cloth with the initials 'F. S', and some bearer bonds. We searched for another way out of the room, but found nothing. We later determined that the initials stood for 'Fonor of Stippa' as we heard later that he claimed that a fund intended supposedly for the widows and orphans of tradesmen had been stolen. His description of what had been stolen could only have been the bearer bonds we found in the demon room."

"I'm guessing that the bearer bonds now belong to you. I have them in the room you have provided me with. I should have thought to bring them with me, I'm sorry. Terias can bring them to you right now if you wish."

"Yes, I think that would be best. I am neither a widow nor an orphan but I will see they get where they are intended," The Earl says with a bit of a frown.

Amyleryn says, "Terias, would you please go to my room, have Felada give you my backpack, and bring it here. Thank you."

Amyleryn continues, "We left the room and Ralif guided us out of the sewers by way of the cellar under his uncle's house. It was after curfew by then, so the Magistrate arraigned for us to be escorted to the temple of Peoni for the night where Terias and I got the worst of the stench of the sewers off of us and a physician came and attended to my wound."

"I've been confined indoors in one way or another since then. The rest of what I'll tell is what Terias told me. I'll tell it in case one of us forgot some detail that might prove important." Not having been told that she could sit in the Earl's presence while giving her testimony, Amyleryn will shift her stance a bit to ease a twinge.

Noticing her looking around, the Earl says, "Please be seated if that will make you more comfortable."

"While I was still in the temple of Peoni, I ordered Terias to get out and about to see if he could turn up any information on what was going on. On the evening of the 9th, he was confronted by some men bearing the rope and pulley badge and told to leave off." Smiling, Amyleryn goes momentarily off topic and says: "Terias is not accustomed to sneaking around and he was apparently noticed."

"As those men left, Terias noticed one of them drop a piece of paper. The paper mentioned a meeting at the hall of the Mangai the following evening and it was signed by your son, Karison."

"On the 10th, I was assisted to the townhouse I had rented. Later on that day, as Terias was returning to the townhouse, he encountered Herot. Herot had been sent to give added assistance to me. I sent the two of them to observe who attended the meeting at the hall of the Mangai later that evening."

"When they returned, they reported that there were twelve men who attended the meeting, each with a bodyguard. Terias recognized Magistrate Rudethe, a man wearing the badge of the mason's guild, and two men wearing your livery Milord. Herot also noticed that one man wore a badge with a wagon, and another with the rope and pulley."

"After all of the men had entered the Mangai hall, Terias and Herot crept in next to the hall and listened at an open window. They reported that they heard plans discussed that could only have been for a human sacrifice on...that would have been for the eleventh."

"We discussed what could be done and where this foul ritual could be performed. Different ideas about possible locations were considered and discarded. As there was likely going to be a fairly large group attending, I said that a warehouse was the most likely place...large enough and in an area with few prying eyes."

"I ordered them out to do the best they could to find the site and do what they could to foil the plans of this group..." and she is obviously struggling to come up with a suitable epithet, then gives up and says: "I didn't see either of them until Terias showed up with your guardsmen to bring me here. I was getting worried that they had fallen. That this inquiry is happening and the two of them are to be knighted, tells me that they were successful. I am happy for both of them and, I assume, the restoration of the King's Peace."

Amyleryn waits for the Earl to ask any questions or to dismiss her.

"You appear to have a remarkable memory for details," The Earl says, "You also appear to have an uncommon knowledge regarding pentagrams, gargun, khuzdul skulls, demons, foul rituals and the signatures of my kin during a time when magic and monsters have come to cause so much trouble to our town. Finally, you have shown an overblown sense of your own importance in thinking you can go anywhere and do anything necessary to solve problems which you yourself admit, nobody else even acknowledges. It is only by the greatest of luck that you have survived and that you have not created more problems than you have prevented. I still have a few more witnesses to interview and you may go until this evening's dinner when I should be able to bring this matter to a conclusion. As I have counseled your companions, I would ask you not to discuss this matter with anyone at anytime. Being of the nobility yourself, I am sure you understand how malicious gossip, about members of the nobility having dealings with magic and demons, can damage a family's reputation."

At the Earl's leave, Terias dashes off to Amyleryn's room and informs Felada when she answers, "The Lady has requested her pack."

Once he has the requested item in hand he sets off back to the

Earl's quarters and promptly hands it to Lady Odasart without a word.

When Terias returns with her backpack before the Earl dismisses her, Amyleryn digs out the bearer bonds and turns them over to him.

"Yes, indeed I do Your Excellency. I will not speak of this." Amyleryn will rigidly hold her expression in an emotionless cast as the Earl practically accuses her of being in league with the plotters. When he dismisses her, she nods her head and goes back to the quarters she was assigned.

When she gets back to the room, she wordlessly hands her backpack to Felada, takes and expels a deep breath, then gets out of her dress and gets into bed.