

**10-HALÁNÈ-720 MINARSAS, KALDOR**

5TH WATCH [COOL, CLOUDY, SOUTH BREEZE, HEAVY RAIN]

"My employer is the head scribe for the Miner's Guild. He told me that he requires a receipt for the room and board allowance. Can you provide that Mistress Melenda?"

"Playing at being a mercantylor again, are we?" says Melenda, "and now you want me to join you in the goal for usurping guild privilege. You had best learn respect for the Mangai or you soon will not need to pay for lodging as you will be staying below the castle in the dungeon. What your employer most likely wanted to know is that what he was paying for was food and lodging so that you would not be spending the money on something else and have to leave his employ due to lack of funds. I can speak with him and arrange to have him pay me directly but that still won't cover the extra 2d per day no matter how much you try to juggle the numbers and the only time I have seen someone who is not a mercantylor deal with so many numbers was when they were trying to cheat me. Should I raise your rent by the ten percent that will be necessary to hire a mercantylor to figure your bill to your satisfaction?"

Berina slowly stands, towering over Melenda and says in a very deliberate manner: "Every place I go, almost everyone assumes the worst about me, no matter how much I bend over backwards to do as they wish me to. I am heartily tired of such ill treatment. I am doing my best on behalf of this kingdom and Lord Odasart, and I'll have a little respect or I'll go back to Cherafir and leave you all to your fate."

Taking a deep breath, Berina changes the subject and says: "All I said to you was that my new employer told me that he required a receipt for the room and board allowance. He did NOT say I had a choice in the matter. He did NOT see fit to explain himself, and I was NOT about to question him about it. I'm guessing that your going to see him about getting paid directly should work too, but that part of it is none of my business."

"That I can do sums is a point of pride for me and I will not apologize for it. Nor is my ability with numbers a breach of guild privilege so long as I don't use it to make money until such time as the guild should see fit to grant me membership. I do NOT cheat people...you or anyone else...and I find your suggestion that I would, highly offensive."

and Berina's posture and expression clearly conveys that she expects an apology.

As Berina sets into Melenda, practically demanding an apology, Rikoro sits with the others, not in astonishment, but rather indifference. Whether he agrees with her or has grown used to her outburst is another matter entirely.

"That does it, I will not be spoken to in such a manner in my own home, You can pay the 12d you owe and get out. I care not if you go to Cherafir or elsewhere. You are rude, insulting, irreverent and threatening. How you think you can help anyone with such a manner is beyond me? I need not such help. Now get out! or do I need to call the watch to show you the way out of town. You are no longer welcome here," Melenda says.

Berina gets out 12d and gives it to Melenda. She then goes to her room, packs up her things...carrying and wearing them in

traveling order...and returns to the common room. Stopping at the table where Davas and the others are doubtless talking in astonished tones, she counts out half of the remaining money and gives it to Davas. Speaking to Davas, but not excluding any of the others, she says: "Davas, my love, I've had all of the rudeness and disrespect I can stand. I'm leaving.

I intend to follow the roads to Thay, and there take ship to Cherafir. You may come along or not as you see fit." She bends down, kisses him, then walks out the inn door.

All of this occurs far too quickly for Rikoro to react to. He immediately tries to play catch up. First he watches as the Peleahn storms out of the tavern. Once he has his bearings settled then inquires what he owes to Melenda, offering a mild apology for what has unfolded.

"It is no matter," Melenda says, "you are not responsible for the rash actions of your companion. You owe 12d same as the others."

After settling the debt he follows after Berina, trying to gain her attention, "Berina, a moment if you would. I realize you are fired up, but let us discuss this rationally." Rikoro appears out of breath or stalling for time as he speaks and walks at the same time, "What about the task at hand? Melenda though ..discourteous is not the reason we travelled all of this way. Remember you do this for safety and security of Kaldor - not the kindness of strangers." The Fyvrian Mage trails off hoping for a response from Berina.

Berina heads through the market square looking for any merchant selling travel rations. If she finds one, she will buy what she can reasonably carry.

She finds a late food vendor with travel packs of (a loaf of wheat bread, a loaf of rye bread, a quarter pound of dried cod, a quarter pound of beef jerky, a quarter pound of bacon, and a quarter pound of dried beans) each ration pack costs 3d, weighs one and a half pounds and will provide sustenance for one days (will not spoil for a tenday if kept dry).. Berina buys 10 of them since they will spoil in a tenday anyways.

Find rations or not, she continues to the Zoben bridge, pays the toll, and continues along the road until sunset, then makes camp.

She finds there is no toll for leaving, only for entering.

In her fierce concentration, Berina does not notice Rikoro trailing after her until she has gone a league (2.5 miles) and she is preparing camp just outside the boundary marker for a small village.

**Meanwhile, at the Green Dragon Inn...**

One of the other patrons of the Green Dragon Inn, leans over toward Josrel and Davas to say, "If your excitable friend wants to be of the nobility, she should travel to Chybisa. They have a bunch of empty manors and they will knight anyone who will pledge their allegiance to one of their lords, manage a manor and commit to providing a reasonable amount of force of arms. The amount of men-at-arms needed depends on the amount of land granted. Of course the applicants will need to gather their own peasants between here and there to work the land but she seems

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able to be persuasive when she needs to be as she has all of you following her..”

Looking up from a stunned silence Davas starts. "Nobility, no ... I ...". He sighs, obviously distracted, looks at the others and shakes his head. "This cannot be". He stands suddenly and seeks Melenda quickly.

"Mistress Melenda ... I'm sorry, but we ... she ...". He gulps twice, then steels himself. "I must go after her I ... I will return, I think. To pay you and get the rest of my ... our ... belongings".

“Just see that you leave 12d worth of your belongings for a pledge of your return,” say Melenda.

Davas looks blankly at Melenda for a moment, then grins, and reaches for his purse. "Of course ... sorry, here". He pays the 12d owing. I should be back within the week, if not ... well, you could give what is left to Josrel and Lillia". He grins at them. "If you could keep it for a while, that would be great. But do what you must ... and my thanks ... if that's alright ?" He looks suddenly concerned.

“Yes, thank you,” Melenda says, “that covers what you owe and we can settle on future amounts when you return.

He half smiles. "It is ever thus. She is good of heart ... but sometimes a little ... and I ... ". Again he stops, before continuing more forcefully. "We are married you know ? ... and a baby. Perhaps that's it. I know not". He wipes his eyes quickly. "I must follow ... and I ask Peoni that you will not think ill of us this night and might forgive ...". He stops again. "I will find her and I hope, return with her, hoping that you might. Thank you for your ... thank you".

“I would say from your appearance that you are an ex-serf or work in the woods, or both so I will allow that you may not know the rules of polite society. Innkeepers run what is called a hospitality business – meaning that we provide food, drink, lodging and sometimes entertainment for which our customers pay in coin or kind. While it is a business, it still follows the rules of hospitality – the main rule of which is that a guest does not cause a disturbance for their host or the other guests. I am afraid that for me to allow Berina to return, I will require an apology for causing a disturbance and assurance that it will not happen again. Good luck on getting her to agree on that but if she is going to interact with polite society, she will have to learn from her mistakes. It matters not who was ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ but one must be accountable for their actions,” says Melenda.

Davas says, "Of course you will ... yes ... of course. And you are right about me. Yes ... my thanks ... and I will try. I'm sorry."

Davas wipes his eyes again only partly aware that he is doing so.

He throws the others a look, and hurries to their room, grabbing warm clothes, axe and sheild, casts vaguely around the room and picks up his bow before lowering it again. With a nod, he lifts it again, recovers his quiver, then walks quickly to the common room.

He nods to Lillia, clasps Josrel's shoulder, then turns vaguely.

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Turning to Lillia, Josrel says: " Well, that was quite sudden. So it seems that we are all that's left to fulfill our obligations. I

think that we should redraft that letter in the morning to update Lord Odasart on the current situation. That is unless things change between now and then."

"We keep to the same plan and find this Rendig of Charaers fellow and see if he might be of assistance to us. Once that is done see if we can find some employment for ourselves."

“That sounds correct to me but just so I fully understand, what exactly is our objective and what is the plan that we are to keep to?” Lillia says and, as an after thought she adds, “We cannot ‘redraft’ the letter until we get the first draft. For now, why do you not pay your bill as well, go get the first draft from Rikoro, and find out what everyone plans then return post haste since we will need our rest for whatever the marrow brings.”

"Well our objective if memory serves me, was to see why the Khuzdal are being treated unfairly. As this is what we were told by Lord Odasart who felt that something was amiss here in Minarsas. Also we learned that Armenton had fled here as well. The plan was to send the letter to Lord Odasart updating on our progress till now and need for some type of frankpledge."

“In that case, I think we should find out how the khuzdul are being treated and what the reasoning is behind their treatment. For all we know they may deserve their treatment due to their actions. As to Armenton, what is it you plan on doing once you find him? Myself I consider that matter to be settled and Armenton being declared outlaw to be more than adequate punishment for any discomfot he caused. We are not, I take it, authorized by either of our families to start a vendetta. For a frankpledge we should be working to make friends and show ourselves to be dependable in being responsible for the actions of others. Joining a local frankpledge is all well and good but Lord Odasart back in far off Tashal is not going to be able to help us make friends. And most assuredly. Demanding respect that we have not earned and causing a disturbance wherever we go is not going to achieve anything either.”

Josrel says, "Tomorrow as we walk about town we can investigate about the Khuzdul." Josrel getting a little irritation to his voice: " As for Armenton I hope we don't run into him, but if he is here we may run into him and it is what he may do that has me concerned. I could only imagine what his feelings are towards me at this time." “I agree we will have to join a frankpledge and start building some credit here in Minarsas."

Lillia says, “Perhaps there is more than what you have told me but from what you have said I can understand him wanting to avenge himself against the hot-headed actions of Berina but I have heard not of him further threatening you or I. I am just concerned that you plan on some ill-thought actions. That may be the way of others be we have been taught to think before we act and I just ask that you mind that training so that you come to no harm by rash actions.”

"If you wish to meet up with the others so be it." Josrel tries to get Melinda's attention to settle his tab.

Melenda says, “You owe 12d each for your stay so far. If you are staying the night, you will need to tell me if that is one night at a time or if you are going to guarantee staying for a month.”

Lillia hands Melinda 12d and says, “that is my share.”

Josrel hands Melinda 12d "We will be staying for the month.."

Josrel informs Melinda " Melinda if I may ask, do you know how we go about joining a frankpledge here in Minarsas? Since we will be staying a while we should be active members in the local society." Josrel asks.

"Since a frankpledge helps other members with their problems and stands in pledge to each member's good behavior. The best way to win their trust is to not get into any trouble that results in fines or punishment and to help other members with their problems," answers Melinda, "For example, a member of my frankpledge knows of an ill-considered affair between a high member of the clergy and the mistress of a member of the nobility. The clergymen has made the situation worse by letting love letters get out of his control and he is now being blackmailed into advising others against his better judgments. You could help the frankpledge by recovering the letters from the blackmailer or think of another way out of their troubles. If that needs criminal actions, simply do not get caught in the act."

"Where is Rikoro ? ... well, I cannot stay. Say a farewell when he returns".

He waves, turns to the door and is gone, following the path that Berina said she would walk.

Davas finally catches up with Berina and Rikoro at the boundary marker for a village a couple of miles south-west of Minarsas, where they are conversing.

Having walked quickly since leaving the inn, Davas slows suddenly as he spies Berina and someone else talking. He walks hesitantly towards them, then recognizes Rikoro, smiles and approaches at normal pace, stops about 10 paces off and waits. "Unkindness?!" Berian says in a tone of astonishment. "How about spite, rudeness, and hinderance at every turn? I simply tell Melenda what my new employer told me and she gives me that snippy 'playing at being a mercantylor' comment. The problem here is that that was not an isolated incident! I try to help people and by their reaction you'd think that they just caught me trying to poison their ale! From nobles, I have to put up with such treatment...from anyone else, I most certainly DO NOT!" she fairly shouts the last two words.

When Berina sees him, he gives her a half smile and wipes at his eyes absentmindedly.

"There you are" he says quietly. Then he waits to see what reception he might get.

Spying Davas, Berina runs to him. Embracing her husband, her head almost hanging on his shoulderblade, she blurts out between sobs: "Oh, Davas! You came!"

Davas holds her tenderly for a while. As her sobs subside, he says quietly "... and what would I do else ? My family runs off and I should sit quietly when we are far from home ? ... I think not my love".

He draws back a little, still holding her, and smiles through quiet tears. "If this is truly what you want to do ... or what you must do, then I am with you. But I want you to be sure". He grins again. "Let us see what the morning brings, shall we ?"

He grins a little more. "And if it is what we" he emphasizes the word "must do, then so be it ... but let me return for the rest of my things, yes ? And I know not where we are going, but it would be good if ..." he hesitates slightly "... if we could see the rest of my family, and tell them where they will always have a welcome, yes ?"

He smiles at Rikoro, nods once and adds quietly to him, "thank you".

Visibly calming herself, Berina continues: "Rikoro, you seem ready to attribute my behavior solely to my being a Peleahn, but I ask you...if you were so treated by someone of your station or below, would you simply knuckle under, meekly allow them to walk all over you, strip you of every shred of your dignity? Or would you stand up for yourself and demand...at the very least...a little common courtesy? I'm hoping the answer is the latter."

Smiling still, despite Berina's vehemence, Davas shrugs, sighs, then says quietly "love, people are ... odd. Often kind I have found, sometimes short, and yes, sometimes perhaps rude or spiteful". He sighs again and shakes his head. "But love, ... " he hesitates before stumbling on "... why so many seem to offend you so often I know not".

He raises his hands to quiet her. "Yes, yes ... I agree that some are, perhaps rude ... but have you thought ... how many mean to be ? We are strangers. Do we deserve all their trust at once ? Perhaps we do ...but ..." again he hesitates "... love, how are they to know ?"

Berina says, "How are they to know that I deserve their trust? By the fact that I always try to be kind and helpful. If you feel that my actions are not being viewed in the way I intend, then I am truly condemned to a life of hurt, for I am incapable of knowing how I might change in order to get better outcomes. As to why I get offended, it's because for my offer of kindness and helpfulness, people all but spit in my face."

"But how quickly is trust gained ? You can't buy it ... or insist on it, or get it any other way than how it comes. It is given, by others, and usually, over a long period of time. This is the only way. Many do not give it at all ... and I think their lives the worse for their choice. Some" he looks at her, and gestures at himself "perhaps give it more quickly than we ought. But when it comes to trust, and friendship, all we can do is show we are trustworthy or worthy of friendship until it is given, or we see it will likely not be. Offence, however, isn't given ... it is taken".

He takes both her hands and stares into her eyes. "Love, if you knew someone that took offence at anything you said ... or at half the things ... or even at a tenth, how much time would you give them ...would you want to know them ?" As she tries to pull away, he holds her.

"No, love, I don't think you do that ... but you are ... sensitive ? Perhaps too sensitive ? Perhaps you could kick me - gently - " he adds hastily, grinning "instead. Would that help ?"

As Berina speak to her husband, Rikoro interjects, "Apologies for interrupting Davas, but Melenda nor any other you interact with has any idea of our intended purpose. We are simply

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outsiders meddling in their affairs and community. Trust is earned, not given."

Disentangling herself from Davas and grasping him by the shoulders, but at full arms length, Berina looks at Rikoro and says: "If you expect me hold my tongue when I am treated rudely and with disrespect, then the men in my life...such as you and Josrel...need to come to my defense at such times. Otherwise, I'll have to speak up and defend myself."

Looking Davas in the eyes, she says: "Davas my love, please don't be insulted, but as my husband, you most of all, need to defend me from such treatment. When you don't, anyone who witnesses me being so treated will have to conclude that either you think I deserved it, or you are too cowardly to protect your own wife, or both. As we have stood shoulder to shoulder in battle against the undead, I KNOW you are not a coward."

Davas grins and shrugs. "None of us" he says quietly, including Rikoro with a glance "are cowards. None."

He takes her hand gently. "But I saw only a disagreement tonight as sometimes happens in families or between friends ... not a fight - not a place where bravery was needed. Families" he smiles "... particularly large families, disagree often I think, but we always speak later ...often laugh about what we found hurtful at the time, yes ? I am sorry if you saw that not. Perhaps you found it otherwise, but I ask, was Melenda speaking as an enemy - meaning you harm ... or as a friend ? Was she not giving advice as a friend would do to a friend about to make a mistake ... before that mistake cost ... ?" He stops, looks wistfully into the distance for a long moment, then sighs again, looking at Berina hoping to see her listening. "Was this not, perhaps, a misunderstanding between friends ? And do friends not admit sometimes that they might be wrong ? ... or that what they heard, was not what was meant ?"

Berina lowers her head, pinches the bridge of her nose in her familiar gesture, sighs deeply, then raises her head and says: "No, she was NOT giving me advice. I merely told her what my prospective employer said to me. As a business owner, she knows...or should know if she's not completely incompetent...that what he told me is a common option for room and board. Her mercantyle comment was intended to bait me. Well guess what? I rose to the bait." Shooting a quick glance towards Rikoro, she continues: "I would think that you should know me pretty well by now...that people can get under my skin more easily than most. If you want somewhat quieter behavior from me, you need to recognize when people are provoking me and intervene before things get out of hand. That's something else people do for friends and family."

Davas nods quietly. "Yes .. yes, you are right. But by the time I see that things are going bad, it is usually too late". He shakes his head and stares at the ground. "With Melenda, I heard advice, and perhaps a slightly barbed jest. We were eating, and perhaps I was distracted ..." he smiles a little "but then ... well, we know what happened. I can try to do better ... but ... well, it might take me a while". He looks up suddenly. "Perhaps ..." he looks tentatively at Berina "perhaps I could apologize in your stead ?". He quickly shakes his head "no no, that would diminish you. No ... sorry .. a bad idea".

He grins at her "perhaps that kicking isn't a bad idea ?"

Rikoro looks skyward with a bit of a sigh, then back to Berina, "As I already said there is little I can do to aid in an outburst. When we were on the road facing those bandits I feel that words would have succeeded over our escalation to violence. Yet I could do nothing to curtail what transpired. There is always a tipping point beyond which one can return."

Using his large hands expressively and expands his long arms outwards as he talks, "A fire that rages out of control quickly burns out from lack of fuel. Yet a flame stoked carefully and under the right conditions can burn brightly indefinitely. You asked me once why I focus on life so much as a Fyvrian rather than the full cycle - so I ask you now why it is you focus so much on the explosive, destructive side of fire rather than the warming, nurturing side."

"When I left this evening, it was my intention to return to Cherafir and leave all of these 'people' to the fate that is coming for them. In spite of the way I've been treated at every turn, I WOULD prefer to save this kingdom. I DO love it. But I need at least a LITTLE encouragement now and then." Changing tact, Berina says: "If the two of you want me to go back to Minarsas, you're going to have to think of a way for me to do so without looking like I'm crawling back on my belly to kiss Melenda's feet. If you can think of a way that will preserve at least some of my dignity, I'll do it. It's up to you." and she waits for their replies.

"Hah ... !" Davas splutters a half laugh before controlling himself again. "Dignity". He shakes his head a moment, still grinning, then looks at Berina again. "Dignity, love is something that the unfree have little use for. I was lucky ... nay, fortunate indeed ... and had, perhaps, more than my lot. Lord Dasarayne knows people. He was ... as fair as he could be and fairer than he had to be for certain. When he saw what was happening, he did what he thought right ... and I can say nothing against his decision".

Davas looks determined and ploughs on. "And that has been the base of what I have now. I am free ... my family too. I have a beautiful and ...spirited wife" he grins broadly at her "a child on the way, friends I know I ... we ... can trust" he glances again at Rikoro "and the chance to see much of the world that I thought closed to me. I am happy just being here".

He shuts his eyes and just grins for a while, then speaks quietly, head gently nodding, eyes still shut. "I was content before ... but compared to that, I am rich now beyond imagining".

Berina gives Davas a wan smile and says: "That you can put up with what I do...and the trouble that seems to too often follow...and still be happy, is a major reason why I love you so much." and she kisses him deeply. When they come up for air, she says: "Do not disparage dignity. Do you know what Lord Dasarayne is doing when he treats fairly those who look to him? He is giving them their dignity. In doing so, he insures their loyalty. I wouldn't be surprised to find that many of them actually love him for it. I consider him to embody what all nobles should strive for."

Nodding, Davas says "yes he does, and fairness - perhaps more".

He smiles at her. "But he doesn't have to be as fair as he is. Nobles can be ... well ... quite unpleasant ? before anyone will

intervene to help the people. "Respect, perhaps ? A suggestion from him is usually taken up with enthusiasm. I have heard that in other places, orders by other nobles, while of course grudgingly accepted, do not have the same results. I think Lord Dasarayne, and his lady are ... a special case. Certainly an example I think".

His smile fades a little as he opens his eyes again and gazes at Berina. Almost in a whisper he says "I know little of your life before we met Berina. Perhaps I have been ... rude ? ... not asking ... perhaps you think, not caring ? But I do care my love. Perhaps the reason why dignity seems to matter more to you than ... ". He wipes his eyes absently "... than friends, than family ? ... perhaps it lies there, more real than I can understand for whatever reason ? Perhaps your family was ...".

He turns away a moment, then back to her.

"Well...," Berina pauses then says: "you've met my father, but I don't recall if you've met my sister Welusna. When I was eleven, a fire broke out and burned much of our neighborhood. During the fire, my mother...Evasa is her name...ran off and abandoned us. Father and I saw her go, but Welusna thinks she died in the blaze. We've never told Welusna the truth about my mother, and to be frank, I'm beginning to think we did Welusna no favors hiding it from her."

"As for the rest of my family, I have one set of grandparents still living...Haraendel and Sysylith...two aunts, an uncle, and two cousins. Aunt Minalyne cares for my grandparents and is a tradeswoman. Aunt Elealea is a fugitive from some sort of legal problems, and uncle Atamubain ran off with a lover. My cousin Cyben is a priestess of Peoni...in Kiban, I think. Cousin Jarek...well, I don't know what his situation is. Cyben and Jarek are the children of Atamubain and Elealea." "As you can see, several of my relatives don't qualify as upstanding pillars of the community. I hope that doesn't make you regret marrying me." and she hangs her head a little.

Davas nods seriously as Berina speaks, then takes her hand as she pauses. "I see. Rather complicated then, as families tend to be". He smiles. "As to regrets, none".

"But if dignity is truly as important as you suggest, then so be it. I will return, collect the remainder of my belongings, and we shall hence as you said, to Cherafir ... wherever that is". He grins and waits for her answer.

Berina says, "Dignity IS important...both generally and in the current case.If people see you as having no dignity, what you WON'T get is co-operation. At best, you will simply be ignored. Hardly helpful in trying to get to the bottom of things in Minarsas." "Cherafir is the capital city of the kingdom of Melderyn. It's where I learned my magic. It's a fair ways south and a bit east of here...about a month's travel I'd guess. If it turns out that we do go to Cherafir, first we'll need to deliver those two bonds to Lord Dasarayne and Lord Odasart. You'll have to deliver mine to Lord Odasart, as I think I'll still be banned from entering Tashal. Delivering yours to Lord Dasarayne would give you the opportunity to visit your family, which I believe you said you wanted to do."

Stepping back from Davas, Berina looks at him and Rikoro and says: "The two of you have still not answered my question. Answer me plainly...can you, or can you not, think of a way for me to return to Minarsas without becoming a complete laughingstock and looking like I'm crawling back on my belly? If you can't, I will be of absolutely no use for the task that needs to be done and I might as well continue on my way."

Davas says, "An apology is not crawling, love. Even if you feel you do not owe it. How often do we need to do so, to oil the wheels ... to try to get things we may need ? As a priest, Melenda is due respect however she may act". Again, a far off and wistful look crosses his face and he pauses a few seconds.

"Hmmm. And remember. We don't live here. Even if some here may think the worse of you, we will not ... and we will leave them behind when we leave. So, how say you ?"

Berina sighs deeply and says: "Making an apology when I feel I do not owe it, is a lie. Even the thought of doing so makes me feel dirty and ashamed." and her voice falters, her head lowering for a moment. "It is plain that you want to go back. As my husband, there is a certain expectation that I comply with your wishes. Therefore, I will go back. But know this my husband...I will always consider this to be an act of cowardice, a stain on my honor that I will never be able to erase. Know that my love for you is greater than any sense of honor I may have once had."

Davas steps forward and hugs her a while, then steps back, still holding her hands. He gives her a wry grin, shakes his head, then almost whispers "no one who knows you thinks you a coward ... and every that knows you thinks you honorable".

His grin broadens. "I am glad we will see this through love. I will do what I can to make this bearable for you. If there is anything you need, you need only ask and I will do my best".

His grin fades. "Know also that this will pass. A few weeks only perhaps, then we can put this behind us, yes ?"

Getting down to more practical matters, she goes on: "I will go to my job...if I still have one...and make use of the room and board it offers. I will remain there, not being a burden on the rest of you. When you have solved the problems in Minarsas, come get me so we may return to Tashal." and she sets out rapidly after Rikoro.

Davas says, "Never a burden love, never a burden". As she turns and sets off, he follows.

When Davas catches up to her, she says: "I don't think any of you fully realize the strain I'm under my every waking hour. With my spells, I could burn down all of Minarsas...castle and all...and no-one could stop me. Only the knowledge that Masters of the various convocations would hunt me down for such an act, keeps me from lashing out. That, and my desire to not have the rest of you caught up in such trouble, keeps me...barely...in line. I constantly struggle to keep my emotions in check. The rest of you may laugh at that, but the fact that I haven't left a trail of burned corpses in my wake, is testament to the success...so far...of my efforts in this regard."

Getting a wry smile on her face, Berina says: "For me...it would seem...facing the undead in battle is easier than interacting with

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my fellow man. At least with the undead, I always know where I stand...everything is clear cut."

A look of surprise crosses Davas' face briefly and there is a long pause as they walk. Then he smiles and says "no. To your credit, that you can destroy never occurs to me. Never."

He pauses, glances briefly at her and continues. " ... and there is no one I would rather stand against any foe with than you".

When she arrives at Minarsas, she will pay whatever taxes and/or tolls are required without comment, and hurry off to work.

Davas also pays any taxes due, then kisses her briefly, and hurries to his own job.

Davas pays the 2d toll an when he arrives at the castle he finds he is early and the Earl's huntsman is not there yet. [OOC: wait for the arrival of Josrel and company in the next post.]

As Berina turns and leaves without so much as acknowledging Fyna's presence, Fyna turns to Davas and says, "What arrogant rudeness! She must have lived a very sheltered or negligent childhood if she was given courtesy or respect for such an attitude. And she should remember that no matter how powerful she is, there is always someone bigger who can take her down a peg or two. She will not long survive if she continues like she is.

Davas stops and waits for Berina to get a bit ahead, then he sighs and turns to Fyna. He says quietly "please forgive her Fyna. She is ... having a bad day".

He sighs again, adding to himself "for a moment I thought I had lost her". "Please ... be kind to her as you can, she is struggling at the moment".

A brief pleading look is replaced by his customary smile as he shakes his head, gestures after Berina and says "I must go. Take care".

Berina pays the 6d bridge toll and continues to the miner's guildhall where she spends the rest of the day making copies of documents. At the start of the 5<sup>th</sup> watch she is shown to a pallet in the kitchen where she can sleep and told that dinner will be served shortly.

Appearing tired on top of soaked, Rikoro retorts to Berina's request, "Humble. Humility. These are two other words I give you. What you choose to do with them I leave in your hands. But there are always options. You seem to have this singular path defined upon which you try to fit everything. In this scenario I will provide you two quick alternatives. Return to town and apologize to Melenda for your outburst, then attempt to mend your differences or return to town and take residence elsewhere. Finally a motivating factor for you to weigh - if you ever wish to visit your family in Kaldor again - not as an outlaw, leaving Minarsas may not be the best recourse."

After Berina has exhausted herself of speech, Rikoro finally speaks in a calm manner, "Was Malenda's behavior less then civil? Certainly. Was it out of place? I would say not. Yes we have encountered those that are rude in our travels. But to them we are outsiders. Something to regard with suspicion and possibly scorn. Focusing on Malenda a moment I should point out that in her case while she may not be nobility she does

command an air of respect due to her status. Not only is it her home we reside in, but she is also a priestess. To be precise a Hlean priestess. I would sooner bite my tongue then speak back to one of the Sages clergy. As for defending you - in a physical confrontation you will surely have my aid, though I doubt you will need it much as evidenced by our last encountered.

However, during a verbal outburst - where words fly to insults and demands there is not much help I will offer. Save advice right now for you to always consider. In my mind there is little that can't be accomplished through civil dialogue and debate. As you mentioned pride in your skills is one thing. But one must note that open use of it can reveal arrogance. I believe the first of our code is relevant here - '.. nor make with thy art a place for thyself above them'. It does not simply refer to our powers, but encompasses our education. For those that are outside of our schooling it is difficult for them to comprehend how we can know such things - especially when we hide who we are. Again it goes back to suspicion and scorn."

Rikoro doesn't pause to answer the question he immediately starts as if expecting Berina to ask, "Firstly, they reside in tight knit community, with a deep rooted history in terms of genealogy with fellow neighbors who are also in a similar situation. Familiarity breeds comfort and tranquility - but also closed mindedness. When one hears of what occurs outside of their own village or town they shake their heads, but are glad it didn't disturb their peace. When outsiders show up they are unknown entities. Peoples way of life is disturbed at the least. At the worst .. well this is where one begins to see why there is suspicion and scorn. Especially because they can not hold anyone accountable for the individuals actions.

Taking this a step further we see Minarsas is currently imposing heavy taxes on select 'outside' groups of people. The citizens start to believe that there must be a reason they are being singled out and it can not be good. This leads to rumor, which is a result of ignorance, which can to paranoia. We both came from a transient community where people have such distinguished cultures that our acceptance of strangers is much higher. While we did not face as much prejudice as readily in the largest city in Kaldor - Tashal, it was still noticeable. Shrink it down to Minarsas and one can imagine containing those same fears in a smaller bubble the extent to which it will grow worse as the cycle has a much more limited net to continually feed itself."

Berina takes a few moments to digest what Rikoro has said, then says: "So you are saying that people's willingness to be rude at the slightest pretext...or even none at all...is the result of ignorance and a general pervasive fear that has no concrete object?! If that is true, I find that very troubling...breathhtaking actually. I've always thought...for the most part... that people are goodhearted. That you could give them the benefit of the doubt. But goodheartedness and fear cannot co-exist. If you are correct on this point, then I have been monumentally naive."

"No, love" Davas says quickly. "No. I believe most people are good hearted indeed ... but many of them fear something". He turns and looks wistfully into the still wet forest. "I know I did". He looks at Berina. "Well maybe not fear ... but I was often ... often not completely comfortable".

"And people fear the unknown ... which is us, in a new place - in their place. They don't know us and should be wary, as I am, hunting the forest. You never know what you might find. Yes, most deer are calm and flee, most ...".

He grins at her. "But once get between a hind and her young and you never make that mistake again. Flight is not a choice mothers make.

Perhaps ... " he grins again "perhaps your instincts are just a little early come ? And rudeness ... well that doesn't always come from fear either. Often thoughtlessness ... but rarely, very rarely love, from malice".

He looks at her intently.

"Think too. You may read more into a word than was intended. And you always have a choice". Again, he looks into the forest. "I often escaped, if it got too much for me. But I ignored it before that. Always a choice. Choosing to take offence ... well ... you can. But why not just let it go ? Will we ... will you ... be any the less for someone else's thoughtless word ?"

Again he grins, this time playfully. "Not to me". A little more seriously, he adds "not to Rikoro ... or Josrel or Lilia ... or to anyone that knows you. And to those that don't ... ". He waves his hand dismissively and makes a vaguely rude noise. "That for them".

"That suggests that the prudent attitude to take is one of complete cynicism...to expect rudeness at every turn. That way, when it happens, you are not surprised and can smugly pat yourself on the back and congratulate yourself for your deep understanding of human nature. The only alternative is to remain naive, to be constantly surprised at people's meanness, and come to expect that emotional pain is one's lot in life. I don't find either of those alternatives at all attractive."

Berina continues, "However, no matter which attitude you adopt, I feel that you can't afford to let rudeness pass unanswered, or you're inviting more of the same. You HAVE to stand on your dignity if you expect retain it...rather like wearing an appropriate weapon in order to assert your right to have it. Of course, you do have to accept rudeness from anyone of a higher station...but not from one of the same or lower rank. You just try and be rude to a noble and see what happens!"

The rain falls around the trio grouped outside, the tallest covered by his hood, begins to shake his head ever so slightly, but does not interrupt Berina, until she is at an end, "You seem to have extrapolated thoughts of your own from my words, wrapped them around your situation and taken only a narrow view from that point onwards. Davas, Josrel, Lillia, and myself have had troubles at times too, yet none of us fit this framework you present. One must bend to social customs otherwise risk breaking. I hold no air that I am to be treated in a particular way and understand others have their own unique personalities that I must handle appropriately. There are way to request apologies for being slighted that do not require ultimatums nor imposing threats. Diplomacy is not only to bind kingdoms its other form can be used as the grease to aid all manner of social situations."

When done the bearded gangly mage offers Berina one final point, "I recommend you simply apologize in a sincere manner."

**11-HALÁNÈ-720 MINARSAS, KALDOR**

2ND WATCH [COOL, CLOUDY, SOUTH BREEZE, HEAVY RAIN]

At the end of what seems to be a very long day, Josrel and Lillia retire to their room and sleep. In the morning, Lillia wakes Josrel and prepares for their morning prayers and ablutions.

Wide eyed and fully awake after morning ablutions, Lillia was eager to get the day started, but even so she had taken a moment to savor the sights and sounds of a strange place from a window. Lillia made sure that Josrel was ready for his day, even going so far as to wipe his face clean from any grime there.

"If I cannot make my usual preparations then I can at least do this." Lillia gave in the way of explanation with a smirk. Her green eyes betrayed a hint of playfulness behind her blonde hair.

Then she changed the subject and asked, "I hope this meeting fares well. When we see the priest how did you want to broach the subject of blackmail? Just so I know ahead of time to better follow your lead, dear."

Furrowing his brow as Lillia speaks Josrel returns: " Are you sure your feeling ok?" Then shrugs and answers:

Josrel says, " Is..everything...alright this morning dear? You seem out of sorts this morning."

Lillia grinned and then shook her head slightly. Then she had arched her eyebrows in thought and revealed, "Now that you ask. I do feel like a new person this morning."

Josrel says, "Our meeting this afternoon is with a member of the frankpledge who has knowledge of this affair between a Priest, a mistress and a Nobleman. From her we hopefully can get the names of all parties involved in this matter. Now what this person actually knows we first have to find out and verify if what she tells is fact. Then we proceed from there. We need to really get all she knows before we proceed. And to make sure that what she tells us in not biased in any way to her cause. That is the hard part of it. Getting to the heart of the matter and not choosing a side. If we find that this priest is truly being blackmailed and giving false judgment to people because of this blackmail then we can think about how to help. But first we have a lot of fact finding to do."

Lillia listened to Josrel's summation of the task at hand and had nodded her agreement in key places.

"Here is a wonder that I have: who is the most despairing and willing to talk? I would discount the Nobleman in that regard - anything he tells us might be misinformation to save face. The Priest? The same, but for him the embarrassment is already out. He may be desperate enough to talk to us, especially if he knows we are to lend him help, or if the matter has created much scandal. Ah, but you said not to reveal ourselves as choosing a side, and that I do agree with for now. However, more can be learned if others think we have chosen a side, don't you think? Hmm. Now, the mistress would be willing to tell much if she is in a bad position. After our meeting I think the ones we speak to first should be either the Priest or the mistress."

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With that, Lillia put her hand in the crook of Josrel's elbow and said, "Let's not think overmuch on empty bellies. Let's eat."

Josrel says, Leading Lillia downstairs, Josrels agrees " Yes I do seem to have an appetite this morning, and I am curious to see if any of the others have returned or have truly left for other lands."

" Well, first of all we have to be very careful about this. We cannot get caught in any criminal activity, nor get caught up in this feud if there is one. My goal is to help settle this situation without us being known to be involved." "Our meeting this afternoon is with a member of the frankpledge who has knowledge of this affair between a Preist, a mistress and a Nobleman. From her we hopefully can get the names of all parties involved in this matter."

"Now what this person actually knows we first have to find out and verify if what she tells is fact. Then we proceed from there. We need to really get all she knows before we proceed. And too make sure that what she tells us in not biased in any way to her cause. That is the hard part of it. Getting to the heart of the matter and not choosing a side. If we find that this priest is truly being blackmailed and giving false judgment to people because of this blackmail then we can think about how to help. But first we have a lot of fact finding to do."

Waking at Lillia urging Josrel joins her in the prayers and ablutions. After those duties have been performed Josrel says " I would like to reassure you my Dear that I have no intention of doing anything to Armenton as far as I am concerned, I was just mentioning the fact that he may be here and that if he holds any grudge that things may happen. Now I have not forgotten our teachings, and if a situation arises I will do all I can to peaceably handle a situation. I am interested in gaining favor in a frankpledge, I do have some apprehension to get involved with this blackmailed priest. I suppose a little bit of investigation of the matter wouldn't hurt. " Josrel says to Lillia.

"Now, dear, that's the kind of assumptions we cannot afford to make. Without knowing what he worships we know not that he has done anything wrong. People can be blackmailed for lies as easily as the truth, and some temples require deeds that we would deplore. We must, as we were taught remain as impartial judges of the truth," Lillia says s you enter the dommon room to break your fast with the fried perch, quail eggs, chicken eggs, and millet provided. Turning to Melinda, Lillia says, "Can you arrange for an audience between us and this member of your frankpledge with the problem?"

"Yes, I think I can have her here by the start of the fourth watch," Melenda answers.

Rikoro, Davas and Berina spend a miserable night sleeping under the stars in the heavy rain which continues through the night with only a brief halt around midnight. In the morning, Berina's wound feels no better but no worse either.

After gathering his wits, Rikoro bids the others aideu stating, "I have work this day at Master Ikabir's. I will try to meet up with you both later in the day." Staff in hand, the gangly Fyvrian mage makes his way back to the town to get to his first day on the job.

Davas bids farewell to Rikoro with a nod of thanks and a wistful smile. "I hope so my friend. I hope so".

\* \* \*

Coming up the road, Berina and Davas can barely make out the slight form of the mercenary woman Fyna. She nods at them and says, "Well met Berina, Davas. Was that my old roommate, Rikoro, I saw going off toward town. Why are you all standing around in this horrid weather? Well as they say, Harn does not have weather – it has climate. Are you still debating everything seven ways to Yelmar? Sorry I left without saying goodbye but seeing Sir Petral gave me a crisis of faith. I know not if you know this of me but when I last knew him, he initiated me in the worship of Halea. Then when he abandoned me because I was unwilling to be a part of his herd, I found solace in the worship of Peoni. Now with my chosen occupation of mercenary and the recent killings, I find that worship uncomfortable as well and seeing Sir Petral, brought it all back to mind and I had to have time to think things over. Perhaps I will return to Halea worship so I returned to get the priestess's advice. So what say you? No matter what the future will bring, standing in the rain will not make things better. Why do we not find some shelter?"

\* \* \*

Once again the guards stop Rikoro at the bridge, search him and charge him 10d to cross (5d and 3d for his two journals and 2d as a toll).

The Fyvrian mage nods in agreement, though a mild sigh escapes his lips upon hearing the total, and pays the taxes required. He then continues on his way to the Physicians to begin the days work.

With obvious sarcasm, the guard says to Rikoro, "Is there something that meets with your displeasure, Milord. Perhaps you feel the taxes to support our community are overmuch for such a world traveler as yourself." As he says this, the guard places his hand on the hilt of his shortsword and the other guards turn their attention to the conversation.

"I assure you the displeasure is not with the taxes. I paid them once already without quarrel and have done so just now in a similiar fashion. My preference would have been not to leave your fine town to be subject to them again as there was little cause to spend the night in the rain. If there is nothing further goodman my first day at work begins shortly.", Rikoro remarks rather stoically.

The "spend a night in the rain" and "first day of work" brings a smile to the guardman's face as he says, "No, that explains your fould mood adequately, you may be on your way and I will not keep you further."

The rest of Rikoro's journey to the physician's office is uneventful.

The tall gangly wet mage knocks politely on the door before stepping inside and announcing himself, "Good day Master Ikabir, it is Rikoro of Drelin. I have belongings to set aside and then I will be able to begin whatever chores are needed of me."

## 11-HALÁNÈ-720 MINARSAS, KALDOR

2ND WATCH [COOL, CLOUDY, SOUTH BREEZE, HEAVY RAIN]  
Rikoro spends the rest of the day until the start of the 5<sup>th</sup> watch, cleaning and transporting medical wastes to the embalmer to be disposed of. When Rikoro finishes his work, the physician

shows him to a pallet in the kitchen where he can sleep and tells him that dinner will be ready anon.

Rikoro quickly washes up and makes every effort to get any stains out of his old clothes. He leaves his pack and new clothes by the pallet and then makes his way to dinner.

Dinner consists of a patina of elderberries for an appetizer. An entrée of roast venison in hot sauce, accompanied by caudele almaunde (a nut dish served as a vegetable), manchets (hand-sized bread), and beer (reddish-brown color, fruity aroma, soft texture, full, sweetish taste, slightly carmelly but also with roastiness that lasts to the end), followed by carragheen sweet mousse for dessert.

The newly appointed cleaner to the physician eats his meal cautiously as usual. Midway through he begins to savor it and eat more quickly - likely because he missed dinner the night before. Once dinner is finished, Rikoro speaks to Barint, "Master Ikabir, since it was my first day I thought to ask where you felt I may have done a better job. My experience with cleaning is minimal at best, and I would prefer to maintain my position here."

"You did fine, lad," the physician answers.

Once the meal is finished and cleaning the dishes complete, Rikoro makes his way to his the pallet he was given and lies down. He spends his evening updating the note to the two nobles and when complete tries one last attempt at using psychometry on the staff.

The only impression that he gets is that he is wasting his time.

**11-HALÁNÈ-720 MINARSAS, KALDOR**

3RD WATCH [COOL, CLOUDY, SOUTH BREEZE, HEAVY RAIN]

At the start of the fourth watch a young woman approaches Josrel and Lillia where they are still loitering in the inn.

"Excuse me," she says, "I am Amarie of Harabor and Mistress Melenda said you may be able to help me with my problem and that as clergy of Save K'nor your discretion can be relied upon."

Turning from Lillia Josrel greets the new woman : " Welcome, Amarie of Harabor please sit..." Josrel rises and moves to pull a chair from the table for Amarie.

" I am Josrel of Aswain and this is Lillia of Aikar, my wife...." Josrel indicates Lillia.

"Yes we are Haliki's of the Sage of Heaven. What is spoken between us shall remain between us. Mistress Melenda has mentioned that you have an issue and we may be able to assist you."

"Would like something to eat or drink before we begin?" Josrel asks Depending on her answer Josrel will order whatever she wishes.

"Some small ale will be welcome," she answers.

"Are you comfortable discussing your issue here or would you rather some privacy? We have a room here and could move there if you wish?"

She looks around the otherwise empty common room and says, "No this will be fine as the only one who may overhear is Melenda and she already knows the details. What has she told you and what more do you need to know?"

Josrel says, "Very well, all we know is that a Priest and a Nobleman share a mistress. The nobleman has found out about the affair between the mistress and priest. This Nobleman has love letters from the priest to the mistress and is blackmailing the priest. We need to know names of these people, what evidence there is of any blackmail. If these letters are truly real. And more importantly if these people are involved with each other. These are just a few questions that come to mind quickly here. So whatever you can tell us no matter how trivial would be appreciated. "

"Oh, no, you have it all wrong," she says in obvious distress, "I thought that would happen if the story became known, it unravels at the seams like an old tunic. It all started about eight months ago. I was comforting the Earl due to his wife's illness and I was soon warming his bed in her place. The high priest of Larani, Serolin Margon of Irin, is the main representative of all clergy here as he is the Earl's priest. He came to the inn here to learn of Halea worship so he could represent it faithfully. As part of his education, he paid for me to begin warming his bed as well. He was so enamored of me that he sent several letters of affection to me at the manor where I am the Earl's house guest. A couple of months ago Serolin Irin received a message from someone saying they have some of those letters and that he was to support the new taxes for him to get them back. If he does, the letters will be returned to him after the wool fair in the spring. So you see the letters are real, they have been stolen by someone with access to the manor and the Earl does not know of any of it. If the Earl learns of this, he will, in his rage, shut down all the temples and throw out all the clergy or have them arrested for treason. For obvious reasons, Serolin Irin will not take kindly to this information becoming public knowledge. Can you find out who has stolen the letters and discretely get them back?"

" I see, One question jumps to mind quickly and that is why a High Preist of Larani would choose to represent another religion, when there is a capable Preistess here?" Josrel wonders "The letters that were taken, they were in your possession at the time?" Josrel asks

"I cannot speak for the Earl or the other grand folk but I suppose, the Earl finds it easier to speak to one priest regarding the interests of religious orders than to have a dozen clerics all clamoring for privileges for their individual religion," she answers, "Yes, I had the letters when they were stolen from my bedchamber at the manor, they were written to me. Which is why I must find help to bring the matter to a successful conclusion or I will be the one to be punished."

Lillia gives the woman a look over and to see if she notices anything about her that stands out. Her manner of clothing, her manner of speech, her complexion, hair, etc. Lastly, her jewelry: well made, average, or wearing none? Also, did the woman come with attendants/ladies in waiting or did she come alone?

Her clothing is well-to-do (upper middle class). Her manner of speech is freeborn. She appears to be Kaldorian and Lillia can

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hear the faint click and rustle of small vials and written materials but she can see no jewelry. The woman is alone.

Fyna enters the common room and bellows to Melenda, "How about a mulled ale over here?" She approaches the table where Josrel, Lillia and Amarie are talking and says, "Well met folks, What is up with our companions? I saw Berina, Davas and Rikoro and none of them are speaking to anyone, just strolled off without so much as a by your leave like I was a complete stranger. That is as expected from Berina with her usual lack of courtesy but the others? Who's your friend? Anything I can do to help?"

Stopping in mid sentence Josrel turns to Fyna still trying to finish his question to Amarie: "Hello Fyna, nice to see you. No not at this time, but thank you for the offer. This woman here has something that she needs advice on in confidence. Lillia and I have assured her that we will give that to her. So if you please, we would like to continue with our conversation. We can meet up a little later." Josrel politely requests.

"Not a problem," says Fyna as she takes her mulled ale to the other side of the room next to the hearth, "How is this?"

Josrel, nodding to Fyna, says: " Thank you Fyna for understanding."

Turning his attention back to Amarie, Josrel continues: " Sorry for the interruption Amarie. Now where were we? Ah yes these letters, were stolen from your bed chamber, did you leave them in plain sight or were they hidden somewhere? Was your room locked or left open? Who besides you would have reason to go into your room?" Josrel asks.

Looking close to tears at Josrel's manner of questioning, Amarie says, "They were in an unlocked trunk in my unlocked bedchamber (we have had no troubles with thieves before this and I could not report this theft without having a bunch of embarrassing questions to the Earl's inquisitor, such as those you are asking now. Were you an inquisitor before you became a priest? The ones who had reason to be there could be almost anyone who lives at the castle and there has only been one stranger I have seen and that is the woman who visits the chamberlain once each tenday and he has given her permission to pass the gate."

Lillia nodded to Fyna and raised a hand in greeting with a small smile but said nothing to interrupt.

Her eyes switched back to Amarie and she added the question, "Was this letter sealed? If the seal is still in place, broken or not, that may help to identify them once we find it."

"It was sealed but I broke the seal when I read it," she answers, "but the wax usually falls off after the seal is broken."

Lillia leaned forward and asked quietly, "However, I must clarify... are you asking us to steal the letters back?"

"Oh, that would be great!" Amarie answers, "could you do that?"

Lillia blinked a few times in mild surprise. "I. Well. " She motioned to Josrel, as if to show that he was the one to answer that question.

Reaching out with both hands to hold Amaries hands. Josrel says: " There is no reason to get upset. I am not here to judge you in any way." Josrel chuckles: " and no I have never been an inquisitor. But these questions need to be asked in order to get to the bottom of the situation. And rest assured that it will go no farther than this. Now you say that this woman who visits the chamberlain, do you know her name? I also have another question for you and please don't take this the wrong way I am just looking for other people who may have reason for taking these letters. Have you warmed anyone else's bed within the castle besides the Earls? The reason I ask is that jealousy can very very viscous and if you had warmed other beds one may find out about the other and could be using you to their ends unbeknownst to you."

"No, I know not her name but if we hurry I may be able to point her out to you as she leaves. I think that this day she visits the castle as usual." She answers. Wide eyed, she continues, "Oh no, I could not sleep with another at the castle. If the Earl found out I was doing that I would be punished for sure – possibly even killed."

Lillia looked at Josrel quite intensely as she tried to convey an unspoken meaning or clue. Her hand touched on his shoulder and rubbed gently there. "Maybe we should take a look, husband?"

" Yes, I would like to see this women. Please lead the way." Josrel says

Lillia looked to Fyna apologetically and made a curtsy. "I'm sorry, Fyna. We'll be back shortly. I would be most grateful to see you here when we return."

"Aye, I will be here, I have had my share of standing around in the rain to last me this day. If you get into any trouble send for me and I will have your back. I am getting soft, sitting around here and doing all this talking," she answers.

## **11-HALÁNÈ-720 MINARSAS, KALDOR**

4TH WATCH [WARM, PARTLY CLOUDY, SOUTHEAST BREEZE]

Amarie leads the way and, at the castle, points out a woman as she passes Davas, who has also just arrived looking quite out of breath, "That is her," Amarie says.

Turning to Lillia, Josrel asks, " What say you, shall we follow her to see where she goes?" Josrel asks Lillia as he starts to follow the woman.

Davas looks around quickly, then leans forward, putting his hands on his knees and tries to regain his wind. He straightens briefly, stretches, gives the others a smile and a wave, before resuming the position for a few more seconds. As they walk away, he stands and watches a little puzzled. Then he looks around, and shrugs to himself, before moving out of the way of other traffic to wait.

Davas turns to see the huntsman coming out of the castle.

"Oh good, you are still here," Eochiebin of Elwudadril says, "The Earl had some requests to make of me. Apparently, someone in the castle is being supplied with the drug fanosel and we are to keep an eye out for anyone gathering herbs in the forests while we hunt and report to him what we discover. Well, shall we be on our way?"

"Good morn to you Eochiebin. I am happy to wait of course" Davas says with a smile and a nod, and perhaps a little quickly. "Yes let us be about it then".

After they have been walking briskly for a few minutes, Davas says "farnosel ... I know a little of it, and but recently, through an accident as it happens. I know nothing of it's properties. It is a drug you say ? What does it do ?"

"It is a narcotic that allows you to forget your cares and responsibilities but is highly addictive from what I hear. I know naught of it myself and you had best stay well clear of it. Possession is illegal throughout Kaldor," says the forester.

Nodding, Davas says "so, should we be pulling up the plants should we find any? ... or just watch for others showing interest?"

"Oh, gods no," says the forester, "If others saw us pulling up plants they would assume we were harvesting them and we would be called before the hallmoot. If you see any, just note where it is and anyone else paying special attention to it so we can notify the watch."

Davas throws back his head and laughs. Once he recovers, he slaps the other on the back and says "of course ... of course. Yes, we would have to report ourselves". Still grinning and shaking his head, he starts to look around to see what else the day might bring.

It takes about 30 minutes for Davas to find the trail of a deer that he estimates is about five hours old. The two hunters spend another hour stalking their prey and find it about 100 feet away. They quietly approach another fifteen feet and both loose an arrow. Eochiebin's misses but Davas' brings it down. They then cut a pole, tie the carcass to it and carry it back to the castle. Arriving at the end of the watch.

Once they have finally set their burden down, Davas stretches, then turns to Eochiebin. " A good day, Eochiebin ... a good day. Same time on the morrow ?"

"Yes, certainly," he says as he hands you your 10d wages.

You step through the barbicon into the center of the courtyard. There is a stables to the right, a well house in the center and an entrance to the kitchens to the left. Which you can tell as two men dressed as kitchen help come out to take your burden and begin preparing it to be bled.

As he stretches and talks, Davas looks around, trying to note comings and goings and get a feel for the place.

"A mighty castle. The need for meat is constant I wager.

A third man comes from the kitchen, looks at Davas and says to Eochiebin, "who is this man and what is he doing standing in the castle gawking? You know the Earl does not like strangers to be in the castle. At least not since the incident."

"Sorry, cook, he was just leaving," Eochiebin says, turning to Davas, he continues, "I am sure you must have other things to attend to. Until tomorrow then."

Turning, Davas says vaguely "yes, yes I do." He smiles, waves to the others and says "farewell, until the morrow" to Eochiebin.

Once he has taken his leave, he goes to the temple of Peoni and spends an hour in prayer and contemplation, giving thanks particularly for Berina's acceptance of things he knows she would not usually put up with. Sighing gently and with a small smile, he thanks the priestess, gratefully donates 10 % of his coin, and departs. He goes to visit Berina, to ensure she is safe and well, then returns to the inn.

"Hello, my love," Berina greets him, "How was your day? Have any of you thought of a way for me to re-join the group without demeaning myself?"

Davas grins and hugs her, before holding her at arms length for a few seconds, just looking at her. Then he sighs and shakes his head.

"The group thinks as well of you as they did before". He grins at her and waves his arm vaguely. "That's how friends are. As for your priestess" he gives the word perhaps a little more emphasis than would be usual "well, Peoni teaches forgiveness and to be thankful for what you have. Is Halea so different?" He grins and looks away. "From what I've heard ... and the little I know, I suspect they too can be forgiving". He takes her hand and stares once more.

"No, Halea is only concerned with pleasure and profit," says Berina with a frown, "There are times she delights in humiliation to those who get pleasure in dominance. Profit, on the other hand, is a different matter. There is no profit in humiliation without me demeaning myself for pay and violating oaths I have given you regarding exclusivity. Her forgiveness is reserved for those, such as myself, who do not fully indulge in pleasure so to keep true to previous oaths. She can sometimes also forgive those who break a financial oath but only in circumstances that are out of control. There is nothing in Halea that preserves personal dignity and much that does not. I'm afraid I could only win her forgiveness for my actions if I were to win you over to her worship and away from Peoni. I would not ask that of you because it would prove you to be false to your own oaths."

Davas listens quietly to Berina, nodding occasionally. There is a pause after she finishes, then he sighs. "Ah, I see". He nods, then sighs again. "It seems .. it seems that the gods are sometimes ...unkind, my love. I ... I had not expected that, as Peoni ...". He stops and shakes his head. "My dealings with those of Halea" he flashes her a quick grin "except for you of course, have always been ... well ...difficult? I thought the priestesses - are they always priestesses or are there priests also?- were like that to point out the error of my ways ... though why they would think that making things harder than they needed to be would gain any converts I know not. From what you say, the worship of Halea is not as straightforward as is that of Peoni. We should consider further."

"Yes, there are priests as well, although they are fewer," says Berina, "What draws converts to her are wealth and pleasure and her clergy find restraint to be morally offensive. Which is why I would find being a follower of Peoni to be even more difficult. Simply turning the other cheek when I am insulted or attacked is not within my nature, as I think you have come to learn."

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"I have just been to give thanks to Peoni" he says quietly "but she offered no solution that I could see ... or hear. Perhaps I just cannot see it?"

"Something may come to me ... but I am grateful that you are here even if it does not.

He kisses her, turns and strides to the door, then stops and turns.

"Oh ... and Eochebin mentioned an incident ... at the castle with the Earl ? He seems to be wary of strangers for some reason. Anyway, if you should hear anything as to what that incident was, I would be grateful.

He grins at her, turns and goes.

"Yes, I heard rumors about that," Berina says, "I heard that there was an assassination attempt from someone who simply appeared within the castle, possibly coming through those underground tunnels that Fyna and Josrel were telling us about. The Earl has been suspicious of the Khuzdul (who built the castle) and the Shek P'var ever since and that is when the new taxes on them were introduced. I know not what he has against the temples. Perhaps he is taking advice from others with an axe to grind. That is also when his wife took ill with a mysterious illness which the temples have not been able to cure. She is still bed ridden."

Davas says, "Thanks love. That is news to me - I will take it to the others and give them your regards". He waits for her reply, a slightly quizzical expression on his face, then nods, grins, kisses her and departs.

"Yes, do that and keep safe," Berina says as she bids him farewell.

\* \* \*

Lillia nods quickly and lets her weight forward in order to walk quickly towards the woman, but not too fast so as to lose pace with her love, Josrel. "Thank you, Amarie", Lillia said gratefully.

It is difficult to follow the woman through the crowded streets of shopkeepers closing for the day and going home but Josrel and Lillia manage to not lose her as she goes north past the Green Dragon Inn and leaves the main village of Minarsas to go to a farming village to the north – the boundary marker reads Lothlarny. At the edge of the village of Lothlarny as they are passing the first cottage next to the well, Josrel's and Lillia's attention is drawn to a visitor leaving the cottage who looks like the one who made the announcement about the empty manors in Chybisa as he says to the person standing in the door, "It has been nice visiting with you. Have a safe journey." At a closer look the person standing in the doorway looks and sounds like Armenton of Soril as he says, "Does the Earl know that you troublemakers are in Minarsas. I will be sure to tell him when next I see him. If you are looking to cause more trouble for me and mine, you had best act fast as I am leaving the kingdom to become gentry in Chybisa. Then you will leave me be if you know what is good for you."

Double taking as Josrel recognizes Armenton he says, "Why Armenton how nice to see. You look well. Hope all is the same. Now why would we cause you trouble. We have no further

business with each other. We are just making our way in this world. You carry about your business I will do same."

"Gentry in Chybisa, I see things are turning out well for you. May the Gods pass their blessing on to you in your new endeavors." Josrel smiles and continues on his way.

With a confused look, Armenton says, "It appears that marriage has taught you a modicum of self-control. That is good. As to the Chybisians, they are just a better judge of character than the Kaldorians. As you say 'to each his own' and I will leave you be as long as you leave me be."

Continuing on, Josrel and Lillia follow the woman further into the village where she enters a cottage that is sadly in need of repair.

A man approaches Jethral and Lillia to say, "Excuse me folks, I am the beadle here. May I ask you what your business is here? If you are lost, how can I direct you? Otherwise I must ask you to be on your way, about your business and stop disturbing the honest folk of the village. They have work to attend to and I am sure you do as well."

Josrel says, "Oh, I am sorry my goodman, I had no idea we were disturbing anyone. My wife and I are newly arrived to Minarsas and wondered here just seeing what is around. So I guess we are somewhat lost. We will be on our way back to Minarsas. It is back this way correct." Josrel asks as he points in the direction he just came from. "Once again truly sorry for causing any disturbance to the daily routine. If there is anything I can do to help fix any damage I have done please just say the word and I will do what I can." If the beadle has nothing for Josrel and Lillia they will head on to Minarsas.

"Well that all depends on what damage you have done now does it not?" says the beadle, "where are you staying in case I need to find you later?"

Just as you leave the village and re-enter the town of Minarsas a man in rags and smelling strongly of the sewers approaches you and asks, "would you know, my Goodman, if the Green Dragon has any rooms available for the night?"

With a puzzled look Josrel answers: "I do not. Have you been there and asked of the innkeeper? If they have not any room I'm sure they can point you in the right direction. If I may ask why you ask me this question, when a simple trip there would be your answer."

"Why you arrogant young pup. I asked you because you are here, you look to be a stranger in town and not the sort to be sleeping in the rough," he says with a sputter, "I am terribly sorry I took up your time, my lord, and I will bid you a good day."

## 11-HALÁNÈ-720 MINARSAS, KALDOR

5TH WATCH [COOL, CLOUDY, SOUTH BREEZE, HEAVY RAIN]

[OOC: By request, I'm moving the game time up to the next morning. Feel free to reply to anything involving your character during this time and catch up as quickly as possible.]

Berina's dinner consists of patina of elderberries for an appetizer., an entrée of mutton olives accompanied by amyndoun seaw (a vegetable gruel), manchets (hand-sized bread), beer (copper color. rich fruity aroma. light texture. very

strong bitter taste , strong enough to linger in the aftertaste), followed by a dessert of stuffed dates.

Rikoro's evening meal consists of lentils with chestnuts for an appetizer, entrée of boiled chicken accompanied by vegetarian custard lumbarde (almond and fruit tart), cocket (cheap white bread), beer (brown-red color. fruity aroma with hint of perfume. soft texture. balanced malt-hop flavor with hops coming through in the aftertaste.) followed by a dessert of date slices with spiced wine).

Dinner for those at the Green Dragon inn (Josrel, Davas, Lillia and Fyna) consist of amondyn eyroun (almond omelette) for an appetizer., rota (barley fruit soup), a choice of entrée canelyne (caneline beef pie), saumon rosted (roast salmon in onion wine sauce), or blankmangere (chicken with cumin and cream); accompanied by lemonhyt (lemon rice with almonds), wastel (first quality bread), ale (red-brown color. light pear-apple aroma. slightly oily texture. sour palate that becomes refreshing and thirst-quenching. with citric tang and hops coming through in the finish) followed by a dessert of perys cofyns (lentil and berry filled pears).

Fyna orders the blankmangere for an entrée.

Josrel orders the canelyne for Lillia and himself.

Smacking his lips in anticipation, Davas orders the salmon, and eats with obvious enjoyment.