

**4-HALÁNÈ-720 KALDEL, KALDOR**

2ND WATCH [COOL, CLOUDY, SOUTHWEST WIND]

The rest of the night passes uneventfully, with clothes and belongings steaming before the fire.

In the morning, you awake to the rising sun. Looking outside you see the ploughman heading for the fields as well as most of the villagers. The exceptions are the shepherds, who appear to be examining their sheep and cutting notches in the sheep's ears, and the swineherds, who are driving the pigs toward the forest.

Quite suddenly, you hear an awful scream which, when you go to investigate, you learn is from a pig being slaughtered and hung to bleed. Berina can smell the blood from inside Rikoro's cottage and suddenly heaves the contents of her stomach all over the packed dirt floor. This continues for an hour before she can get herself under control.

Simply watching Berina vomit, Rikoro seems to grow more concerned as the hour passes. Finally when it tapers down, the Fyvrian inquires, "Mrm Berina, how hard were you hit in the stomach? I fear there could be more than bruising we are dealing with. If you would not mind I can spend a bit more time trying to examine the extent of your injuries rather than assume it was a superficial wound."

Looking up in alarm, Davas rushes to Berina's side, holding her hand and looking concerned. "My love, why did you not say?" Turning to Rikoro, he says quickly "whatever you can do to help her ... I would be in your debt."

Wearily, Berina replies: "Let's get this mess cleaned up first. The smell of it could start me in on another bout of heaving if it stays." She looks around, inside and out, for a shovel or something that will serve the same purpose [OO: She doesn't want to get too close to the former contents of her stomach.].

Rikoro joins in looking around for any sort of implement to clean up the mess, saying, "Yes, yes a valid point."

Whatever it takes, after the mess is cleaned out of the cottage, Berina will lay on one of the platforms and let Rikoro examine her.

Slowly rolling up Berina's white shirt, Rikoro mentions, "I shall try to discern if there was further damage and regardless of what I find I will endeavor to help expedite the healing process on your behalf."

Taking in a calming breath, Rikoro closes his eyes for a brief moment and then focuses intently on the bruise visible on Berina's abdomen. While muttering some words for the 'Eye of Perfection' spell and reaches out and rests his long spindly index finger on top of her stomach.

Rikoro can see that the bruise is minor and, if it does not worsen, will heal naturally in less than a tenday.

Rikoro glances around trying to focus on his surrounds, seeming slightly disoriented. He then pauses to consider something saying under his breath, "Hrmm..."

After several moments pass while the Satia Mavari prepares himself for another go, this time however he places an open

palm over Berina's injury. As he chants 'Balm of Gresan' his voice rises and lowers fluidly.

Berina can feel the warmth of his hand and her bruise feels slightly less painful. Rikoro feels very fatigued but this is only slightly less than the fatigue he was feeling last evening.

Rikoro lethargically moves to the nearest bed and lowers himself down, appearing quite drained. He over to Berina and calmly, but tiredly states, "From what I could tell it was a superficial wound. But I would recommend heartily that you avoid future dangerous conflict while with child. It sounds foolish enough rolling off my tongue to tell you this. Thus my suggestion is the next time you find yourself in a similar predicament you not defend yourself with your stomach."

A soft chuckle escapes Rikoro's lips as he takes in several careful breaths, and says "Give me several minutes and I will be ready to venture to Tashal."

After a ten minute period of recovery, Rikoro stands up with a nod and looks to the others, saying in a voice that is much steady than before, "I am ready to go. Those that are coming to Tashal let us make our way there now. Josrel a reminder in case you have yet to do so - you were to give your key to Qisse."

Slapping his forehead with the palm of his hand: " Oh! Sage of Heaven forgive me!" Josrel exclaims as he hands Rikoro the keys. "Thanks for remembering Rikoro."

Berina asks, "Who is going and who will remain here with me?"

"I will stay ... of course" Davas says quickly, before glancing quickly at the others. "... if that's all right?" he finishes a bit tentatively.

Berina says, "Well then, would one for you please return the pan and the lantern to the townhouse?"

Rikoro offers and takes the two items and stores them in his bag.

"Thank you, Rikoro." Berina says. "When you return, remind me to discuss an idea I have regarding our magic."

Davas says, "The lantern was useful last night my love. If you will, I will carry it".

"I think it best if it is returned to the townhouse. You are already carrying our travel rations as well as your own things." Berina says. Continuing, she says: "We have no idea regarding the availability of lantern oil between here and Minarsas, and I see no usefulness to your carrying anything that may turn out to be dead weight." Whispering in his ear, Berina says: "Besides, I can use Sphere of Shanakar if need be." and then takes this opportunity to nibble on Davas' ear again.

Davas giggles, then shrugs. "You are probably right my love. We have some torches ... and you .. though I don't want you tiring yourself out either".

Berina says, "I will take it as easily as I can. The tar that fuels the torches should shed any water that gets on them, so it should only take flint and steel to light them if we need to."

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The Fyvrian mage steps outside and waits for the others to gather before he makes his way northwards back to the city.

Once inside the city limits Rikoro informs the others of his intentions, "I plan to set up a meeting with Lord Odasart with regards to our provision funds and to see if he has any further information to give. I'm not sure if any of you wish to attend, but you are certainly welcome. If he is free to see me right then and there I shall, otherwise I will attend to my other tasks which include procuring travel rations for five days and then picking up my cloak and pack."

"I recommend we meet up Berina and Davas' townhouse when our tasks are complete and then return to my cottage together. If there's time left in the day we may be able to set out on the first leg of our journey today, so let us make haste."

Once all the details are settled Rikoro sets off in the direction of the Manor.

You arrive at the Ternua gate by the end of the third watch and at Lord Odasart's manor an hour later. The chamberlain tells you that if you wait, Lord Odasart will see you in two hours.

At the appointed time, you are shown into the great hall where Lord Odasart greets you and says, "If you have come here looking for your companions, you have missed them as they left yesterday evening."

Rikoro bows with debonair flare once he's presented to Lord Odasart, and then in a calm and pleasant manner he replies, "Greetings Lord Odasart. Ah, yes I managed to catch up with them by coincidence last eve. They are at my cottage in Kaldel, while I am here to finish up our preparations for the expedition."

Collecting himself and gathering his thoughts before continuing Rikoro starts with, "Because of Berina's.. 'predicament', I've taken the role of representative. I have requested your time for two reasons. First was for the funds required for the travel from Tashal to Minarsas. We have found that the journey will take five days of travel. I have estimated a six silver coin value a day per person for meal and lodging. As there are six of us traveling the total sum in my mind would be one hundred and eighty denarii. I understand you may have issue with the sum and I can gladly break down my reasoning."

Rikoro then continues inquiring with Fugys of Odasart, "The second item was to know if you had uncovered any names of Shek- P'var contacts in Minarsas? I know you mentioned the local apothecary whose name I believe is Anesa of Fayrl, but I was not sure if that was the sum of what you had available my Lord."

An angry look comes over Lord Odasart's face as he says, "Yes, that sounds a reasonable sum but I'm very disappointed to hear you still have not gotten more than an hour's walk down the road." He motions for the chamberlain to fetch the money and continues, "as to your continuous questions, if we knew all the answers you seek, we would not need to send you."

The chamberlain returns with the money and hands it to Rikoro as Lord Odasart says, "Now this is the last I expect to hear from any of you until you return from your mission. If I hear that you have not gotten on your way by the marrow, I will arrange for your long stay in the goal. I now bid you a good day."

Rikoro offers a bow with a flourish to Lord Odasart saying hastily now, "It shall be the last. My thanks and good day to you my Lord."

He then shuffles out of the mansion at a hastened pace to the clothier's shop.

### 4-HALÁNÈ-720 TASHAL, KALDOR

3RD WATCH [WARM, PARTLY CLOUDY, SOUTH BREEZE, LIGHT RAIN]

At the clothier, Rikoro finds his pack and green serge cloak ready for him. The clothier hands them over and returns to his work. When Rikoro returns to the street, he can see that the rain has started again...at this time but lightly.

Slipping his cloak on, Rikoro looks to the sky and says to himself, "No time like the present to try out the cloak. Now to see that young lad about the salted meat."

He then makes his way to the market square. Once he arrives he gazes around trying to locate the person in question. He does not see the lad.

Rikoro approaches one of the vendors and inquires with them, "Excuse me, might you know where I can find some salted meat or travel rations for sale?"

"Do I look like a priest uv Zave Knor?" the spice vendor says, "Dere cussen be more dan twenty ztalls een de market. Look vor yerzel."

Looking though the market, Rikoro finds vendors for bolts of cloth, pints of mead, three sellers of sheep, two sellers of swine, chickens, two sellers of clothing, ducks, two sellers of spices, pints of cider, warm bread bowls of pottage, two sellers of smoked meat, oxen, pheasants and leather goods.

Approaching the closest vendor, Rikoro looks over the stall carefully, while waiting his turn. Once the person is free, he states, "Good day to you. I will be traveling for the next five days and would like some cured meat for the trip during the afternoon meals. Can you provide me with the cost for such?"

[OOO: I'm assuming you mean the closest vendor of smoked meat. Otherwise, you'll get a similar rude response if, for example, you ask the swineherd for cured meat.]

"Well, I 'ave baiife, guze and cackling conycatch bit dey 'ave already bin zode – vor ee to 'ave dey, dere wud 'ave to be zomething vor de previous buyer's troubles. I s'till 'ave a voo zmoked ducks at four denarii, two farthings per pound – dey average ten pounds aich," the vendor says. Looking around and then drawing closer to Rikoro, he continues, "Ee be nat a member uv de witch be ee? Uv course ee be nat, a clain cut cuffin like ee. If ee want a rail delight, I 'ave pheasant at two denarii per pound ur rabbert at wan denarius two farthings per pound – dey both average vive pounds aich."

Pulling on the tip of his beard and doing the math in his head, Rikoro leans in and says, "So then for the rabbit it would be seven denarius and two farthing for the five pounds? How many meals could I make of that?"

"Dey depends on whether ee be zimplly 'unger'd ur want to zavor de tastes uv de nobility," the vendor says, "I figure two to vive meals."

Chuckling at the merchants words, Rikoro shakes his head and replies, "I am not nobility I fear. I need the meat for travel. Though it would be for afternoon meals so I believe I can safely portion it. If you could wrap the rabbit up for me I would appreciate it." Rikoro fiddles around inside his pack and produces the required coin, exchange it for the meat. He then makes for his cottage, tucking the meat safely at the bottom of his newly water-proofed pack while he walks.

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Afterwards, he makes his way to the townhouse of Berina and Davas and knocks on the door.

He says politely when answered without stepping inside, "Good day Qisse. I have some things to give to you; a pan and lantern from Berina, and the key to Josrel and Lilla's abode to be given to Lord Odasarts chamberlain when he visits.

Rikoro reaches his long arm into his pack and retrieves the items in question, passing them to Qisse. Nearly pleading to Qisse, Rikoro asks, "I have one last request if you wouldn't mind. Because of the rush to leave the city for the errand we have been tasked with, I did not have the opportunity to let my family know of my departure. Could I press upon you to pass on word on my behalf?"

"Dey weel be no bother tarl," she answers, "I can do it arter I gaw to de market on de marrow."

Rikoro says in response, "You have my sincerest thanks Qisse. I will see upon my return. All the best." He offers a nod and a wave to the housemaid and then makes his way back to the cottage.

**4-HALÁNÈ-720 KALDEL, KALDOR**

4TH WATCH [WARM, PARTLY CLOUDY, SOUTH BREEZE, LIGHT RAIN]

At the beginning of the fourth watch (midday), Rikoro comes strolling into his cottage to find everyone present.

Adjusting his cloak as he steps inside, Rikoro proclaims, "Good afternoon everyone. I received some coin from Lord Odasart for our journey and delivered the items to Qisse. We were given twenty five silver per person, a bit low for five days, but I did not wish to anger a noble. Now then, I would rather not be responsible for the full sum so let us each take care of our own. Not to mention it will lighten my load considerably."

Rikoro shifts his nearly bursting pack off his shoulders and places it on the table, then rifles through its contents to produce a large pouch of coins. He then carefully counts out six piles of twenty-five. "I shall take one for myself and the rest is for the remaining group.", as he says this Rikoro scoops up a single pile and stores it in his pack.

Berina says, "Davas my love, I'm at my limit until my wound heals. Can you take our 50d please? 50d weighs 1 pound."

With a grin, Davas nods and collects the money as asked.

After all the coins have been taken Rikoro pronounces, "If we wish to make Ternua by the end of light we should leave now."

Rikoro grabs his now lighter pack and adjusts it as he heads outside waiting for the others to gather. While waiting, Rikoro takes the cured meat out of his pack and fiddles with attaching it to the outside in an effort to make further space inside.

Repacking his belongings and seeing to Lillia's needs, Josrel takes Lillia by the hand and leads her toward the door : "Shall we my dear, let us not keep Rikoro waiting." Josrel smiles.

"Yes, let us not," Lillia answers.

Loading up with her things, Berina says: "By all means...let us go before they slaughter something else and set me to vomiting again!", and goes outside to join Rikoro.

**4-HALÁNÈ-720 TERNUA, KALDOR**

5TH WATCH [COOL, CLOUDY, SOUTHWEST WIND]

Your trip is uneventful and you reach Ternua just as the sun is going down (midway through the 5<sup>th</sup> watch). Along the road you saw plowmen doing their winter plowing, more animals being slaughtered and swineherds driving their pigs back from the forest pannage. At the edge of the village, you meet a farmer selling cider...

"May I interest ee een a pint uv cider to refresh ee arter yer journey...only a vard'n a pint," she says.

A smile creeping on Rikoro's face indicates interest before he speaks, "I shall have one please. And any information you can offer about an inn that can lodge us for the evening within the township."

He then swings his pack around and pokes around the bottom with his long spindly fingers, withdrawing the fathering for the cider.

Rikoro finds he has no farthings.

The farmer says, "Ah now, information weel cost ee extra."

Josrel, turning toward Lillia: "Would you like anything Lillia, I believe I am going to have one?" Turning towards the group: "Anyone else like something?"

Reaching over to Rikoro's arm that's in his pack: "I'll get this one Rikoro."

"Three ciders for three farthings," Lillia says, "give her a whole penny so she will give us directions to the inn, dear."

"Yes Dear" Josrel gives the Barmaid the penny then asks "Could you please give us the route to the closest inn?"

Berina "Why yes. Thank you Josrel." She then listens carefully to the response to the question about an inn.

Handing leather pints of cider to Josrel, Rikoro and Lillia, the farmer says, "Vor zitch gert generosity uv a vard'n, I can tull ee dey ee may find lodging at de Zilver Mead Club. Jist continny along dicky raud avore, jist avore, ee raich de river. De Zilver Mead Club be leff around de coander on de leff zide uv de raud."

Rikoro reacts a bit flustered to Josrel's offer, "Oh, erm, well you are my Haliki I should be the one offering a drink to you and Lilla. What would the Sage say to such a reversal of roles? Fine, fine this time, but the next two we share shall be from my

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purse." He then acquiesces and releases the pack from his grip, slipping it back over his shoulder.

Josrel says, smiling to Rikoro, "Ah, But is it not the role of the Sheppard to lead his flock to drink." Josrel motions to the bar. "But I will accept your offer on the next two for now." Josrel chuckles.

With a smile, Lillia says, "He would probably ask what information or story would we like in return but it would have to be a short one for just a farthing. How about a riddle? Do you know any?"

A bright smile forms on his lips and Rikoro nods with a reply, "Of course I do. Hrm which one. Ah. - 'I am not easily grasped, but once held I am difficult to let go. I am elusive to those that seek me, and sometimes I appear when you least expect it. Both too little and too much of me is dangerous if not handled with care' What is it I speak of?"

Josrel says, "Hmm, A couple of things come to mind at first." Looking to Lillia thoughtfully. "I going to guess Gold. What do you think Lillia?"

With a smile, Lillia says, "I am thinking 'the truth'."

Turning to the group, Josrel asks, "Anyone else have a guess?"

Thinking for a moment, Berina says: "I'd say the answer is 'The Truth.'"

Rikoro says with a sheepish grin, "Both responses would do quite well. Clearly the riddle itself needs to be tightened, but in my mind Lillia is closer. The answer I was thinking of was 'knowledge'."

Once Rikoro receives the container he raises it slightly in Josrel and Lillia's direction and offers, "Again my thanks. Sage guide us on this journey."

After waiting for the others to drink first, Rikoro starts slow taking a light sip and swirling it around in his mouth.

Berina gets out two farthings for a cider for Davas and herself. After the ciders have been handed over, she will get out a pence, and holding it out to the farmer, asks: "Have you seen any other people traveling toward Minarsas in the last tenday?"

Finding she has no farthings, Berina offers a penny for the drinks, saying to keep the change in return for the information asked.

Smiling as she fills a couple of leather pints with cider, the farmer says, "I zee travelers all de time bit dey niver tull me where dey be 'eading. Dere be all zorts uv foreign places zouth uv de ferry bit I 'ave niver bin outside uv de village."

Davas smiles, thanks her and drinks the offered cider enthusiastically.

With a laugh, Davas waves a hand. "What I know of riddles says It is more likely to be a thing that is not a thing ... like 'the wind' ... or 'fire' ... something like that". He looks thoughtful for a moment."... actually, it could be fire ... almost".

He grins at Josrel "I have a shorter, more rural riddle for you ... what is brown and sticky?". With a laugh at Josrel's expression, he adds quickly "no, not that, but it is a thing".

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After finishing his cider, Rikoro returns the leather to the farmer and offers his thanks. When everyone else is finished, he motions to the road onward and says, "Shall we carry on to the Silver Mead Club?"

Rikoro pivots and turn on his staff heading in the direction they were originally heading.

Raising his glass in toast to the Sage of Heaven, Josrel washes the dirt from the road out of his mouth. Checks that his belongings are still in order as well as Lillia's: "Yes lets to the Silver Mead Club." Turning to the barmaid. "Thank you for the cider and the directions. Have a pleasant day." Josrel says rather chipperly. Taking Lillia hand "Come my Dear." Josrel smiles.

Berina also offers thanks, and trails along after Rikoro.

Following the instructions, you reach a slightly run-down building with a sign showing a silver tankard. In the bottom right corner of the sign is a picture of a heather.

You enter the common room and all conversation stops. At one end of the room is a bar maid standing on an up-ended wooden bucket. At the other end of the room is a couple of farmers hefting beanbags and preparing to throw them.

Smoke, from the smoldering rush lights, fills the rafters and the floor rushes appear to have not been changed in weeks. The tables and benches are of rough, unfinished wood and are empty with the exception of a couple of wooden tankards near the farmers. The hearth has a low fire with a large cauldron of pottage.

Behind the bar, the innkeeper says, "How may I be of service to you folks."

Berina puts her arm around Davas' shoulder, and whispers in his ear: "I've seen livestock barns that are cleaner than this place appears to be. Still, at least we'll have a roof over our heads." Straightening up, she gives the innkeeper a small smile.

Berina pays closer attention to the surroundings and the people present. As Berina watches them, the other patrons remain where they are and watch her.

As he takes in the sights and smells, Davas grins, then sighs. "Now this is what I call an inn". As Berina looks at him, a bit surprised, he adds "... none of the city here ... just honest food, drink, benches and people ..." he looks around and says more loudly and with a nod "... good even to you all".

Berina DOES look at Davas in surprise for a moment, then smiles at him lovingly and says: "You can take the boy out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the boy." and she kisses him on the cheek.

The patrons relax a bit and there are some mumbled greetings. They then return their attention to their sport as one of the men hurls a bean bag at the woman on the wooden bucket. He almost catches her by surprise but she dodges the missile and maintains her stance on the bucket.

Speaking quietly so only Davas can hear, Berina says: "I've seen that...whatever game that is...before, and I can say that I don't much care for it. I don't know, but I'm assuming that there is

gambling involved and that the girl can win a little money by avoiding being knocked off of the bucket."

Davas shrugs and looks away, obviously embarrassed. "I ... I imagine there is money involved, probably ... but I ... well, I didn't stay when the bags came out ... not that I was there much anyway".

There is a long pause. "We could watch and see if you like?" he says diffidently.

Berina says, "No. Let's go find that other inn.", and she turns to leave.

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As he makes his way inside, Rikoro steps ahead of the group to introduce himself, "We just arrived and seek food and lodging for the evening."

"I am sorry, sir," the innkeeper says. "I can provide food and drink but I cannot provide lodging until the Happy Man is full. Have you been there yet?"

Rikoro shakes his head at the innkeepers question and replies, "Your fine establishment was the one we set eyes on first. Being traveler's we're not familiar with the town. Would you mind terribly pointing us in that direction? If they're full we will gladly return here."

"Go out the door, turn left and follow the road," the Innkeeper replies. "The Happy Man is just around the bend."

Berina chimes in with a question: "Pardon me, but why is it that the other inn has to be full before you can offer lodging?"

Speaking before the innkeeper has a chance to respond, Rikoro states, "Likely he is not a guided hosteller, but once the inn is at capacity, the tavern here can support the overflow."

"Quite right," says the innkeeper. "Good day to you."

Berina says, "Ah, I should have thought of that myself. Thank you."

"My thanks" says Rikoro as he turns to address the others, "Seems we have a bit more to trek. Shall we?" He then heads out the doorway turning a sharp left as he steps onto the road towards the next inn.

Berina follows Rikoro's lead out the door.

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Following the road, you come to another business on the same side as the other. This one has a sign with the broad smiling face of a man and a thistle in the corner. Entering this building, you see a very different sort of establishment with clean hardwood floors, a beeswax chandelier, a cheery fire in the hearth, and round tables with tablecloths.

The innkeeper approaches you and says, "Good evening. Are you looking for dinner and lodging?"

Speaking for the group again, Rikoro says, "We are indeed on both counts. And a good eve to you."

"Well now," the innkeeper says, "room and board will be 20d per person per night for a private room and 15d per person per night for a shared room."

Speaking to Lillia and Josrel, Berina says: "The two of you being husband and wife, I'm assuming that you'll want a room to yourselves."

Josrel, nodding slightly to Berina, says: "That is very generous of you Berina... But I can't in good conscience allow those arrangements. With you being with child I would imagine that all this traveling would be a little unsettling to you and some peace and quiet would be welcome."

Berina says, "Well, yes it would. Thank you."

Josrel turns to Rikoro: "No disrespect to you Rikoro of course. "

Turning to include Lillia Josrel continues "Plus being a fellow K'Norrian we can spend some time in prayer together." Josrel gives Rikoro a suggestive glance. "Of course if this arrangement is OK with you Lillia?" Josrel asks.

Changing subjects Josrel asks "Has anyone given any thought to a plan of action for when we get to Minarasas?" "We may want to start discussing what we plan to do when we get there as we travel ....No?"

Josrel continues, "If Armenton is in Minarasas and we happen to cross paths he could really be a thorn in our side while we are there. If he is there and our paths do cross...Save K'Nor help me..." Josrel voice gets an edge to it as he slams his fist into his hand. "... to control myself."

"Planning ahead is always a good thing." Berina says. "At the least, we'll need to find work. Our money won't last forever." Putting a hand on Josrel's arm to calm him down as he mentions Armenton, she continues: "If Armenton IS in Minarsas...as well as the fugitives from Holdan manor...we can act against him because he has been declared outlaw, but I remind you of two things. First, that he's outlaw means that his clan won't interfere to save him, but we are still bound by the King's Peace. If we attack him wherever we find him, we'll all end up in gaol...something I don't recommend." and she gets a wry smile on her face. "If we can get the stupid lout to attack us first, we can cut him down in self-defense. Secondly, we'll need to be able to recognize him. I'm sure he'll have changed his appearance by cutting or growing out his hair, letting his beard grow out, and so forth. This gives him an advantage...we're a pretty distinctive looking group of people, and he'll notice us before we notice him. We'll have to watch our backs at all times."

Calming down Josrel acquiesces; "Yes, Yes I am aware that I can't cause him harm without provocation, BUT... Seeing as we are a distinctive group, I suggest that when we do arrive at Minarsas we do it separately, and not enmass. You and Davas arrive together, Lillia and I will come in a short time after followed by Rikoro and Iseil."

Berina says, "That sounds like a reasonable plan, but I wonder how effective it will be. As tall as Rikoro, Lillia and myself are, we are sure to stand out."

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Turning to Davas and Rikoro, Berina says: "Davas, the two of us are as married as Lillia and Josrel...less the ceremony...so we should share a room as well. Rikoro, that leaves you as the odd man out. If Davas doesn't mind, I have no objection to sharing the room with you as well. I can maintain modesty." Narrowing her eyes and leaning toward Davas before he can reply, she says: "Don't say it!" and manages to avoid laughing out loud for nearly ten seconds.

Davas eyes widen in disbelief as she mentions modesty and as he begins to grin, he opens his mouth to speak. "... whatever it was that he was going to say is stopped by Berina's command and after a slightly surprised pause, he bursts into laughter.

After listening to everyone fuss over him, Rikoro finally speaks up, "I have never had so many desire my company and while I truly appreciate it I believe I have a companion for the night to share a room. If he will have me."

Rikoro glances over at Isiel with a wink and then regards the others again continuing, "He has been a bit quiet on our journey, but let us not forget him."

Turning to Isiel, Berina exclaims: "Forgive me Isiel! I forgot all about you." and she gives him an ashamed look.

Adding after a moments thought Rikoro comments, "Though perhaps we should simply dine here. The cost of an over night stay is well above our budget."

Berina says, "You'd prefer to camp?"

Before Isiel can answer, the innkeeper says "Two rooms for the ladies and gents." Looking askance at Rikoro and Isiel, he says "the evening meal is 10d and it is 1d per pint for ale, beer, cider and mead. You will not find other lodging at this time of night for five leagues as that is our franchise."

Begrudgingly Rikoro replies, "Hrm, very well."

Berina covers her mouth to hide a grin, but lets Davas see it.

With a confused look on his face, the innkeeper says, "Very well what? Will you be dining with us? Do you need lodging?"

"A meal and lodging please.", Rikoro states.

Allowing an audible sigh of relief to escape her, Berina says to the innkeeper: "It's settled then. A room for myself and my husband-to-be," indicating Davas "a room for the husband and wife," indicating Josrel and Lillia " and a room for the two unattached men." Indicating Rikoro and Isiel. "Davas and myself will also have a meal. Thank you." and she get's out the necessary money to pay for the two of them.

Josrel says, "Yes and a room and meal for my wife and I as well, please." Josrel puts his arm around Lillia pulling her in close smiling to her and kissing her softly on the cheek.

"Oh no, madam," the innkeeper says with a slightly shocked look on his face. "You pay in the morning before you leave. I will have one of the maids show you to your rooms and dinner will be ready as soon as you return."

"Thank you." Going into the room the maid indicates, Berina stows everything as securely as is afforded...taking with her only the clothes she is wearing and her pouch with the money.

Rikoro moves over to the table with the most available seats and settles down on a chair. Once the others have joined him he says, "We need to be more careful with our coin. This visit alone has taken us into day three from the funds Lord Odasart provided. Unfortunately the innkeeper here had us by the throats. Though it is a fine establishment, it is beyond our means. Well mine at least."

Berina says, "Yes, you are right. I suggest that if the weather allows it, that we camp whenever we can from here on out."

\* \* \*

When you return to the common room, you are served potrous (spicy egg in a coddler) for an appetizer; rota (barley fruit soup); a choice of entrée (nomblys de roo <venison>, "humble pie" <spiced tripe>, vyand de cypris in lent <almond fish stew> or nekkesan <swan-neck pudding>); accompanied by mary caboges (cabbage with marrow), cocket (cheap white bread) and ale (red-brown color, strong aroma of herbs, very soft, slightly oily texture, heavy vinous taste, rich fruity and warming. with bitterness coming through in the finish). Dessert is chardwardon (spiced pear sauce).

Berina has the venison.

Rikoro requests the stew and as is usual for him he waits for the others to begin before slowly picking at his own meal.

When the meal is over, Rikoro emerges from his contemplative state and says, "I think once we reach Minarsis we should to find employ and simply blend in. Separating will not do us much since we are known by some of those which we seek, and it will look more suspicious being apart. Perhaps we should look for a townhouse to rent while there, rather than stay within an inn for the remainder of the journey. There is no telling how long this task could take. Not to mention it will help us to gather centrally and discuss what, if anything, we have uncovered."

"Does employment not usually include room and board?" asks Lillia. "Perhaps what we need is employment with only one or two patrons."

Rikoro bobs his head in response to Lillia's words and adds, "Yes! Well thought Haliki."

Josrel has the Humble Pie. " Hmm, quite right Lillia. Perhaps we can find something within the Litigants profession." Josrel indicates Lillia, Rikoro and himself.

Berina says, "I should be able to find work as a scribe, although not likely at the litigant." Here Berina smiles and says: "I don't think a litigant would be able to employ four of us at once, and even the three of you would be a stretch."

Berina says, "Davas has experience working for an inn's ostler, so if he can find such work, we can all gather at his place of employment in the evening for a drink and to exchange information."

Davas also chooses the pie, eating well and enjoying all the courses. Once he finishes, he sits back, belches loudly and grins.

"Well, jobs are good ... yes, we need to live, of course. But arriving in a large group like this anywhere" he waves his arm inclusively "well, that is asking for trouble I think. Much more obvious than one or two at a time ... and it means we might all be seen instead of some of us drawing no notice". He grins "... means we don't show all our strength ... we might have other options if one or two of us" he glances quickly at Berina "are seen, others may not be. After all, those we seek know some of us ... but not so much others, yes?" He looks at Isiel with a smile. "No point in bringing trouble on all, when a few may suffice".

\* \* \*

After your dinner and conversation, you retire to your rooms.

Before he dozes off to sleep, Rikoro jots down a quick paragraph in his journal as usual detailing the days events.

**5-HALÁNÈ-720 TERNUA, KALDOR**

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

In the morning, you awake to the heavy rain. Arriving at the common room, the innkeeper serves beef steak, duck eggs, curds, a pear, coarse rye bread and pear cider, for you to break your fast. You continue your conversation as you prepare for your departure.

After performing his morning ablution, Rikoro makes his way downstairs for breakfast. He eats slowly and quietly and when the meal is complete begins with, "Well our first leg of the journey is complete. Just four more way points to go. I believe as the Haliki pointed out that the next stage will take us south of here to Qualdris." Rikoro glances over to Josrel for confirmation.

Both Josrel and Lillia perform an ablution as well.

As they eat breakfast, Josrel asks, "Rikoro would you like to perform the morning ablution with Lillia and myself? We could start tomorrow if you would like."

Rikoro's lips part into a full smile at the request from Josrel and he inclines his head respectfully, as he says eagerly, "It would be my pleasure to be in attendance of two Haliki's whilst I cleanse my mind for the day."

"Yes that is correct Rikoro from what I've been told three to four watches to Qualdris. Yes" Josrel confirms Rikoro's directions.

\* \* \*

Rikoro turns his sights to the innkeeper and asks, "Excuse me, goodman, you would not happen to have had word from anyone arriving from Qualdris as of late? We intend to make our way in that direction and were hoping to hear news of the road."

"No, I have not had any guest from the south last night," says the innkeeper, "perhaps you can ask the ferryman when you cross the river."

Rikoro nods to the innkeeper as he rises up from his seated position. He then looks through his pack and retrieves the coin owed and hands it over, with the words, "My thanks."

Looking out at the rain, Berina says: "Terrific. A long wet trek through rain and mud." Berina pays the innkeeper for her and Davas, then gets her gear together, draping the robe over it all to

keep it, and her, dry. "We have a long way to go today, so let's be about it."

With a grunt of agreement, Davas sits again and moves as much of the equipment he has that could be damaged by wet to his waterproof bag. Once this is done, he stands, shoulders his load, grins and heads out.

The Fyvrian Satia Mavari nods grimly and raises up his hood before stepping outside to begin the second leg of the groups journey.

**5-HALÁNÈ-720 TERNUA, KALDOR**

3RD WATCH [COOL, CLOUDY, SOUTHWEST WIND]

By the time you step out the door, the rain has stopped. You walk to the river and the ferryman asks for two farthings each for passage.

As they step aboard, Rikoro retrieves some coin from his pack and hands the ferryman the toll for himself and the two Haliki with him.

Finding only silvers, Rikoro breaks apart one of the two in half with a bit of effort and hands that and a silver to the ferryman.

Josrel smiles, "Thank you Rikoro."

Berina hands over a penny, indicating that it's for Davas and herself.

Once on the ferry itself, Rikoro inquires with the driver, "Would you happen to have heard anything about the roads from here to Qualdris and beyond?"

"Dere wuz a splits caravan coming up vrim de zalt route to de Dardic Republic bit Dey ded nat mention iny trouble. Mind ee, dey 'ad zivver guards to protect deir wares vrim bandits," the ferryman answers.

A peasant woman standing next to the ferry looks at Berina and says, "Wud ee need zomeone to 'elp carr' yer baggage? I work 'ard and do nat ax mort and I can cook and mend as well." Berina notices that she has a small brass bell on a leather thong around her neck.

Berina says to the peasant woman: "I'm sorry, but I can't use you." and she gets on the ferry.

Turning back to the peasant woman, Berina says: "I have not much money. What sort of service did you have in mind? We're on our way to Minarsas."

"All I be lukin' vor be bait and covert," she answers, "I can cook and clain and mend cloze." Glancing around at the others to see who is listening, she says more quietly, "At de aend uv de day I can 'elp way de bath, give ee a massage ur provide iny other little pleasures dey ee desire. I can even 'andle bit and bartering bit ee weel want to get to know me better zo I can earn yer trust vor dey."

Berina says, "I wouldn't mind traveling with a fellow devotee of the Maker of Bargains. What is your name?"

With a surprised and delighted look on her face, she says "Lysada uv Taamejin, if it please dee, milady. As a traveler and a devotee, ee must know iver zo many dings 'bout bit and

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pleasures. I 'ave niver bin out uv de village and I wuz initiated by a traveler zitch as yerzel. All I know be what 'e tull'ed me and dey wuz nat mort. I decided dey very darkmans, exactly wan tenday ago, dey I must travel and zee de wurdle and experience as many uv its pleasures as possible. Does wan ur more of daise mane worship way ee? 'ave ee experienced worship way more dan wan at de zame time?"

Laughing lightly at Lysada's enthusiasm, Berina says: "I can tell you more than the person who initiated you apparently did, but understand, I'm not a priestess. In the temple in Tashal, I have been with more than one person at the same time in the past." Pointing out Davas, Berina says: "That is Davas of Fainovirs. He's my husband-to-be. He worships Peoni, but has no problem with my worship of Halea. For me, every time I lay with him, I'm worshipping Halea as well as loving him. I'm carrying our first child." and she gets a contented look on her face. "Our biggest problem is finding a cleric from each of our faiths to marry us in a joint ceremony. We keep looking."

Pointing out the others, Berina says: "That is Josrel of Aswain and she is Lillia of Akar. They are man and wife. He is Rikoro of Drelin. He is not married. All three of them worship Save K'nor. He is Isiel of Laelin. As you might expect, he worships Siem."

Josrel acknowledges the woman by a nod in her direction as Berina introduces him.

Lillia nudges her husband and says, "Now be not impolite...just because she is a peasant is no reason to not greet her properly." Turning to Lysada, she says, "I am pleased to meet you and I hope we find you in good health. You are such a lovely that Halea must have smiled upon your birth."

With a sheepish look, Josrel says: "Yes Dear,"

Turning to Lysada: "Forgive me dear Lysada, My good wife and better half has reminded me of my manners. Please allow me to properly introduce myself. I am Josrel of Awain Haliki of Save-K'Nor my he grant you the wisdom to get through your trying time."

Out loud to himself Josrel continues "My he grant me the wisdom of my Manners as well."

With a grin at Josrel, Davas shakes his head, then glances at Berina. "Well Lysada, I think you will be coming with us ..." he takes another quick look at Berina " ... so welcome. I am Davas ... of Fainovirs ... a hunter by training and choice, but as you see" he indicates the others and their surroundings with a grin "sometimes the hunting is not so good".

With a big grin at Berina he adds "and sometimes it is excellent".

Berina sidles up to Davas and the two of them walk along, arm-in-arm.

Following suit, Rikoro offers a polite nod and smile as his name is mentioned.

Lillia regards Rikoro and Isiel's silence and then says, "The Sage says Larani gives us strength, Peoni gives us forgiveness, but Halea gives permission! Forgive these two as well. Rikoro never replies without thinking everything over...thrice. Isiel

seldom understands half of what is said. As to their habits in the bedchamber, I know not. I suspect Rikoro would spend too much time considering and not enough time in the action."

Berina grins at Rikoro and gives him a 'gotcha' chuckle.

Lillia continues, "Isiel would likely show you strange and foreign ways which may be delightful or frightening in their difference. If you get the chance to find out, you will have to let me know woman-to-woman so I can write a ballad...or a dirty limerick."

Berina laughs until she has to stop to catch her breath. Putting her hand lightly on Lillia's forearm, she gasps out: "I can hardly wait to hear it!" and chuckles for a while as they walk.

Rikoro chuckles lightly, but still remains quiet throughout the exchange. He then breaks his silence by saying calmly, "Here I thought it was a good quality to swirl around and take ones time rather than rush straight in and act hastily. Still from three woman's lips it would see otherwise." A half grin escapes Rikoro's lips, as he looks quite content with himself.

Continuing, Berina says: "I have lain with none of them. I will lay with no other man but Davas, as I want all of my children to be his. Other women, on the other hand..." and her voice tails off and she gives Lysada a speculative look.

A look of worry mixed with a little sadness comes over Berina's face as she asks, loud enough for the ferryman to hear: "I have to ask you...are you free to come with us? No liege lord to get permission from? No father to say no? No husband?"

Lysada answers with a pleading look on her face and in a quiet mumble that only Berina can make out, "Ah...well...ee zee...I baint marr'd bit my father wanted to marry me to de flogging cove who be old and fat and 'as warts. De manor lord agreed as long as 'e could volder de age aud custom uv being de wan to deflower me and, as I mentioned, my maidenhead 'as already bin taken by a traveling worshipper uv 'alea. Wain de lord finds dey out 'e weel 'ave me flogged and my father fined. If dey do nat kill me, dey weel zurely 'ave me drown out uv de village, so I jist decided to zkip all de pain and 'eartache, and gaw off to zeeek my voucher."

Berina gets a contemplative look on her face, obviously weighing the pros and cons of taking Lysada along. A smile then spreads slowly across Berina's face, and she says: "Well then, you can come along, and welcome."

Continuing quietly so only the two of them can hear: "Besides, if you were to ask Davas, he would tell you that I'm never one shy away from trouble, even if I should!" and she chuckles. "I like your spirit, girl."

Berina sweeps Lysada up in a bear hug, and after she lets her go, she gently brushes a lock of hair away from Lysada's face, then leans over and kisses her lightly on the forehead.

As the ferry gets across, Berina gets out a penny, breaks it in half to get two farthings worth, and pays the ferryman for Lysada. In a more business-like tone, Berina says: "Let's be on our way." As the rain has stopped, Berina take off the robe, rolls it up, and hands it to Lysada, saying: "If you would, please carry this for me."

**5-HALÁNÈ-720 QUALDRIS, KALDOR**

5TH WATCH [COOL, CLOUDY, SOUTHWEST WIND]

By the end of the fifth watch and as the sun is setting, you reach a town almost as big as Olokand. The milestone marker says "Qualdris" in Lakise. The day has been otherwise uneventful with pleasant conversation shortening the road.

Turning to the group Rikoro asks, "Should we endeavor to find lodging or shall we make camp? Davas is the outdoorsman amongst us so I think it best to leave it to him to decide."

Speaking to Davas, Berina says: "I'm up for camping if you think there are any suitable places."

Lillia turns to Josrel and says, "Husband mine, please tell me we have not been reduced to the level of beggars and poachers. I am sure all of the land around us belongs to one fief or another and we cannot just squat on it without permission. When we started, I did not foresee us eating like gentry one day and then starving on the next merely because we wish to live above our station in life."

Josrel says, "Quite Right, my Dear. I for one have had my fill of camping and outdoor life at Holden Manor." Josrel shudders as he mentions Holden Manor. "As my Dear wife has mentioned it would not be right to trespass on someone's land. Let us first see if suitable, affordable lodging can be found, before we have to sleep in the elements. Perhaps there is a Temple here in Qualdris that can accommodate some weary Pilgrims." Josrel suggests as he scratches at his chin. "It may delay us a day, for in return some sacrifice must be made for the accommodations...and it may give us a chance to refit ourselves for the next leg of the journey. What say you?" Josrel asks the group.

Rikoro inclines his head towards Josrel and Lillia, and replies "We can certainly check on the costs inside, but I do not wish to be held for a king's ransom in order to spend a night. Even gentry would balk at such fees as the Happy Man Inn."

Berina says, "I'm with Rikoro on this all the way. Our funds are limited, and we've already less money than I had hoped we would at this point in our journey."

With a thoughtful look on her face, Berina continues: "If no affordable inn is available, we ought to see if we can camp on one of the town commons. I don't know if it would be any less expensive, but it should be possible. After all, isn't that what merchant's caravans do?"

Davas stops and stretches. "Well ... our coin is probably better in our purse than in an inn keepers ... but are you sure you want to camp?"

He looks at Berina questioningly. "We can probably find somewhere ... but this close to the city? ... well, someone probably claims ownership of everything. Such is usually the way ... and we would be lucky if all we get are strange looks I fear". He looks around to see if there are any possibly suitable places. "I think we will either have to go past or go back a little way to make sure we do not offend anyone ..." adding quickly with a knowing grin "I mean, more than usual of course".

He takes care to look at everyone - except Berina.

"Caravans do get permission to use the commons but since they are many in number they pay much more than we can afford," says Lillia. "The only time a town lets a caravan camp for free is if the town looks to make a profit. Travelers who cannot pay for an inn either do not travel or they accept the hospitality of the temple of Peoni. For us to do that before we need to is possible but disgraceful...it is like robbing the poor."

Rikoro bobs his head and adds, "Yes, I will not be taking from those actually in need. Let us see what we can find in town."