

**7-HALÁNÈ-720 NUBETH, KALDOR**

2ND WATCH [WARM, PARTLY CLOUDY, NORTH WIND, ½ INCH SNOW ACCUMULATION]

Berina feels slightly better and has no morning sickness today.

Before heading down to join the others Josrel and Lillia perform their morning ablution.

Rikoro also joins in after retrieving his ablution bowl. He remains silent during the ritual, taking in deep calming breaths as he dips his fingers into the holy water and touches each of the six spots on his person.

In the morning, you break your fast with ham, sharp, goat-milk cheese, blackberries, pine nuts and cider while you make your plans for the day.

After dabbing his mouth clean, Rikoro sets down his hands on the table and inquires with the others, "Considering what we have uncovered with regards to these odd taxes and concern over Shek-p'var, does anyone have any suggestions on how to approach Minarsis? Should we continue as planned arriving at once or perhaps stagger our arrival as Davas originally proposed? Perhaps even trying to find a way around this 'toll'."

Berina says, "Well...I think we should arrive at the same time. If we come straggling in, each shortly after the other, it will make us suspect. People traveling overland, band together for protection from bandits and other hazards."

"We don't have to reveal that we're all friends...although Davas and I, and Josrel and Lillia should own up to being married. Lillia and I, being women, would be expected to travel with spouses and / or clansmen. That we're married has the added advantage of being true. We should try to keep our explanations, as much as possible, to the truth...reduces the possibility of being caught in a lie."

"Rikoro, you and Lysada are the odd ones out. As a commoner, I don't have the look of being able to afford a servant." Her attention focused on Davas and Lysada, Berina says: "Davas love, we could say that Lysada is one of your cousins, along to help us out in starting our household, and looking to her own future as well."

Addressing Lysada directly, she asks: "Well Lysada, what do you say to joining clan Fainovirs?"

Lysada answers, "I dink dey wud be gert. If I may be zo bold as to suggest, vokes be usually judged by deir cloze and deir manners. If ee be truly gwain to buy me new cloze, it wud cause less problems if dey be de cloze uv a freewoman and I better way cut as little as possible. Davas better way get new cloze as well to fit 'is new ztation as a freeman."

"Good thinking." Berina says. "Back in Tashal, it seemed like everybody knew Davas had bought his freedom, so buying new him clothes wasn't high on the list of things to spend our limited money on. Going to Minarsas changes that.

"Rikoro," Berina says, turning back to him "you could just say that since all of us were heading to Minarsas, you joined us for the added safety. As for being Shek P'var, we just don't tell anyone. If we're asked what brings us to Minarsas...and we will

be...we can say words to the effect that we'd heard that the streets of Minarsas are practically paved with gold and that we came to find honest work to get a share of that to make a better life for ourselves. Isn't that what most everyone tries to do anyway?"

"Or Rikoro, you could act as though you are with us.." Josrel indicates both he and Lillia ..."Being that you are an herbalist we can go under the rouse that we three are researching the herbs that grow around Minarsas for the Church. We three are K'Norrians, Rikoro does have a working knowledge of herbs so we can try that if questioned."

Rikoro inclines his head towards Josrel and in response says, "Yes a fine idea Haliki. Berina has provided some solid reasons why it is best to stick together and I agree on all counts."

Addressing Josrel and Lillia, Berina continues: "You two are going to have to decide what to do about the tax on vellum and such. Maybe your being clergy will help, but I don't know...I think you'll have to play it by ear."

"Having nothing to hide I see no other reason than to proceed through the gate and pay the tax. Whatever it is. I think that trying avoid or question the tax would only lead to trouble." Josrel states

Lillia says, "Josrel mentioned that, in your briefing, you were told that the Khuzdul, the Shek P'var and the temples were all being insulted so I think it would be safe to say that clergy get no special consideration and that you will be asked directly whether you are Shek P'var or not. I am trained to embellish the truth but, even for me, we have a lot of untruths to prepare for. I think we should dispose of as much of our writing materials as possible. We probably have as much writing materials among our small group as the whole town of Minarsas combined. That alone makes us very suspicious. Just like most things dealing with taxes, it will be difficult to keep the truth from them and evasion of taxes is a crime as well."

Rikoro's face falls aghast with either horror or terror at the suggestion of getting rid of their things, "Oh my, no, no."

The Satia Mavri shakes his head several times and in a firm voice states, "I'd rather pay the fine then rid myself of my tomes and journal!"

Then relenting a bit, "Well I suppose I could be persuaded to release a quill or two, but no more. Not a shred of paper or a drop of ink."

Then musing to himself Rikoro mutters, "Oh what would the Sage think of this barbarous treatment of scholars."

Davas says, "Perhaps you could sell it? ... better by far than the burning I think". He glances at Josrel. "... or give it away? ... or pay for its storage here or elsewhere? Surely there is a way my friend?"

Berina says, "I suppose you could sell it, but it would have to be to a merchant that deals in such goods. If you try to sell it directly, you'll have the guild after you right away." Berina says. "If you tried to give it away, the guildsmen would be unhappy because that would deprive them of a sale they might have

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otherwise made. That might not land you in gaol, but if, at a later date, you needed to acquire fresh supplies of ink and the like, they might not sell to you. Guildsmen have long memories. In my view, you really only have two options...sell your writing supplies to an appropriate merchant, as I mentioned, or destroy it."

"Surely there is a third option," Lillia says, "people in any village smaller than a full sized city such as Olokand or Tashal, do most of their business through barter and the guilds do not control those sort of exchanges. The inns and taverns, of course, deal in coin but that is because they cater to so many travelers.

"Ok, how about this?" Berina asks. "See about trading your things to the clothing merchant and the hideworker...either a straight up trade, or for a reduction in the cost of what we want. If they have no need for writing supplies, see about finding a third merchant who would be willing to take the writing supplies, and who has something the clothing merchant and hideworker want...a three-corner trade. If I've confused you, it's like this: we give the writing supplies to a merchant who wants them. He or she, in return, gives the clothing merchant and/or hideworker something they want. They, in turn, give us what we are after."

With a smile, Lillia taps Rikoro on the forehead and says, "He would probably say you should learn to use your memory through rhyme and rhythm instead of relying so much on tools that can be destroyed so easily. That is what we of the Rydequelyn are taught."

Rikoro grins sheepishly to Lillia and retorts, "Yes so too can my mind be destroyed. And with this group I sometimes think more readily. I prefer to have a backup system. How else would others appreciate my many meditations and rich reflections!?"

Cringing at the thought of losing his writing supplies, Josrel says, "I too am loathe to dispose of these things that I have spent most of my time researching. You see inks and writing supplies are what I have a specialty in, and nothing wounds me more than to see these precious items be mistreated. Now having said that, we were sent here on a specific task and the sooner said task is completed to sooner we can resume our lives back in Tashal. If that means I have to part with some ink and parchment, so be it. We could always get more. And as my eloquent wife has stated our most powerful weapon is here." Josrel taps his head.

"And I look forward to the challenge of committing our findings to memory. After we can collectively set down to paper our findings and between us we can fill in any missing parts." Josrel starts to gather his vellum, quills and ink and puts them on the table. Pausing a moment, he says, "Maybe I'll keep just one quill." and tucks one quill into his pack. Eyeing the fire in the hearth. "Anyone cold, looks like the fire could use some fuel. Anyone have anything to add." Josrel indicates the pile on the table.

Lillia says, "They only mentioned paper, parchment and such. I think there was no concern for ink and quills so you should probably keep them. I also think any paper that you have not used can safely be given away or put into storage until we return this way."

Josrel says, "I don't know Lillia...." Josrel shakes his head "having ink and quill could still land us in trouble. Why else would you have them? To me, if a knight has armor but no sword does that mean that he has no sword somewhere. I still can't get out of my head when the man who told us about the tax mentioned they were looking for shek pvar. I have a feeling they are looking for someone anyone as an example. If we get stopped will the person who stops us put together in his head that we have ink and quill that we must surely have parchment somewhere. "

Josrel squints towards the ceiling: "But I guess I can pose as an ink maker, maybe that will keep us out of trouble. What do you think Lillia could we pose as ink makers?"

Lillia answers, "There are a couple of assumptions in what you say: first, is that they seek Shek Pvar to harm them...they may just want to keep track of them because the ways of the Shek Pvar are strange. Second, that anyone with paper will be accused of being Shek Pvar...which I think is very unlikely as clergy, nobility and even shop keepers use paper. It is more likely that they assume anyone with paper is wealthy and can afford the extra tax. As to claiming to be something other than what we are, you have been trained to always tell the truth and I have been trained stay as close to the truth as possible at all times. It is doubtful we could carry off such a ruse, even without the mark of Save K'nor on your face. It is not evident that a maker of ink, or any other profession for that matter, would be less suspicious than what we are. The main problem with the tax on paper is not that it exists but the amount of paper we are carrying. You should carry a small amount just to allay suspicions. How much have you actually used?"

Rikoro lays his hand gently across Josrel's arm and shakes his head, then softly says, "Haliki, let us think of another solution. Perhaps the innkeep will be kind enough to let us store our things here for the duration of our visit to Minarsas. For a fee most assuredly, but surely better than the cost of these 'taxes' - not to mention saving us from drawing the suspicion and scorn of the town we visit."

"I don't know if I like that solution either Rikoro." Josrel groans. "I would not want to impose on anyone and if these people are on a hunt for Shek Pvar I certainly do not want to in any way draw attention to someone falsely. I still say better to get rid of it than to jeopardize some else to save a material possession. And do we trust the innkeeper to keep a secret." Josrel whispers into Rikoro's ear. "Think of it as a sacrifice to the Sage of Heaven. Destroying something so cherished and precious and then having to spend the time recreating it, better than it was before."

"I have not used any of the vellum I have yet, and I have 2 30" x 40" sheets so I will take your advice and leave most of the vellum with the innkeeper." Josrel says.

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Speaking to the whole party, Berina asks: "So, do we want to admit to all being friends, or not?"

Josrel says, "Did we not back in Tashal make a pledge that we consider ourselves a family/clan? These past few months have given me more family than I have had since I was a child. You

may chose whatever course you must, but I will always consider you all family, and admit it to anyone. For good or bad. I know I have said that we should go into Minarsas separately before as well, but having given it some thought I agree that entering together is probably best."

Berina says, "Well said, Josrel.....my brother!" Berina gives Josrel an affectionate hug, and kisses him on the forehead.

Speaking to everyone, but focusing on Davas and Lysada, Berina says: "We're going to have to get you two some warmer clothes on our way out of town." She gets up and goes to the innkeeper to pay the bill for herself, Davas, and Lysada. Speaking to the innkeeper, Berina asks: "You said that there were two people in town...Dyrrert the tailor and Rersil the hideworker, I believe...that could sell us additional clothing. Would they be open for business at this hour, and if so, where do I find their shops?"

She gives directions to the two shops and says, "Not at this hour. They open at the first of the third watch and, like most larger towns, foreigners have to wait until the second hour to give townspeople first choice."

Berina rejoins the party, relates what the innkeeper said about the clothes merchants, and says: "We might as well wait here in the warmth of the common room until the merchants will see us."

"We could use some warmer clothes as well." Josrel says to Lillia. As he follows Berina to the Innkeeper to pay their tab.

"New clothes are going to be expensive and our group is of limited means," Lillia says, "I think we can suffer through to Minarsas and any extra money we have should be used to help Davas and Lysada to appear to be freeborn."

After a moment's wistfulness, Davas gives a halfhearted grin. "Do we have that much coin?"

A little more seriously, he adds "I couldn't afford it before ... and our money has not grown, so I suspect I ... we" he glances at Berina with a grin "still cannot afford it".

Checking the money she and Davas have on them, Berina says: "We have about 110 pence between us."

Davas says, "... and some of that we will need for other things". After a thoughtful pause Davas suggests "perhaps a hat?" and with a grin "then my head at least would be free. Even so, warm clothes are more important I think".

Rikoro nods along with Lillia and adds, "I had taken the liberty of pulling an additional twenty silver as a reserve for any unexpected needs during the journey." Rikoro gives a quick glance to Berina, and then finishes speaking, "There is around eleven silver left for use."

Rikoro simply follows the others, reaching inside of his pack once they all reach the innkeeper waiting to hear the sum of what he owes.

"That is 6d for your room and 4d 2f for the extra drinks," the innkeeper tells him.

Rikoro returns to the innkeeper and inquires, "Would you be willing to care for some journals whilst we travel to Minsarsas? If so what would the cost be for such?"

"I can do that for 1d per tenday per pound." She answers, "by the way, those shopkeepers you wanted to visit should be open for business by now."

Rikoro ponders the choice a moment and then nods to himself after striking a decision. He then swings his pack off his shoulders and reaches inside producing two books (herbal and alchemical). After dipping the arm holding the two tomes, the lanky Fyvrian mentions, "I have these two which total a little over a pound I would estimate. I would ask you to care for them on my behalf. I believe we could be away for at least two months, though maybe more."

After exchanging the items, Rikoro turns to regard the others and mentions over their conversation, "The shops should be open to gather what supplies we need for the road. Or should we just brave the weather until Minarsas as Haliki Lillia recommended?"

Davas says, "Well I for one don't want to be that cold again for a while ... and we need to get something for Lysada at least. We were lucky this time ... we may not be again. I say we go and see what they have at least. How say you?" Davas looks quickly at the others and waits for their thoughts.

Seeming content to hear Davas response, Rikoro simply says, "Fair enough, let us head there now and peruse the goods. The remainder of our journey is short and we have the time."

"I agree." Berina says. "We need to see what, if anything, is available before any decision can be made."

**7-HALÁNÈ-720 NUBETH, KALDOR**

3RD WATCH [HOT, CLEAR, SOUTHEAST BREEZE]

Following the innkeeper's instructions, you reach the clothier's shop.

The tailor greets you, "Good morning folks. How can I be of service?"

Glancing around the shop with idle curiosity, Rikoro's eyes settle on the clothier as he speaks. After listening to the question, Rikoro responds in a pleasant manner, "Good morn to you as well. I am considering purchasing something to keep my hands warm during the winter months. Do you have anything that would freely let my fingers wiggle? I prefer the mobility." For effect Rikoro shows off his long spindly fingers, extending his arms out with a display of 'jazz hands' and a sheepish grin.

Looking at Rikoro's hands, the clothier frowns and says, "No, I have not your size in gloves. I have a pair of buckram gloves for 7d 1f and a pair of russet gloves for 13d 2f but both of those are small for your large hands. I have a pair of silk gloves that are too large for 41d 2f but they would provide little in the way of warmth. If you can wait a couple of days I can make some for you."

Rikoro simply waves his right hand slightly and states, "I appreciate the offer, but we will be travelling after this and as a

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result I won't have time to wait. I would also prefer to have a pair that fit."

"Good morning." Berina says, returning the tailor's greeting. "We're traveling in this cold weather, and my husband" indicating Davas "and my employee" indicating Lysada "are in need of warmer clothing. Do you have anything suitable that will fit them?"

"Erm, yes, they appear to be of like size," he says examining Davas and Lysada. "In serge for their size, I have a cap for 4d 2f and a robe for 83d 3f. I also have a leather surcoat for 136d and a linen vest for 24d 2f."

Lysada whispers in Berina's ear, "Zerge be peasant wool, milady."

"Davas has recently been able to purchase his freedom and is now a freeman, and Lysada, as my employee, needs to be dressed appropriately. What do you have in that line?" Berina asks.

"If your man can prove your claim, I also have in his size russet leggings for 127d and a russet robe for 217d 3f. However, unless you are claiming to be nobility and can prove your claim, the woman being in your employ is of no consequence. Aiding an escaped serf is against the king's law and I will have no part in it. Unless you continue to pursue the matter, I will assume she is with you by her liege's permission."

Speaking to Davas, Berina says: "Love, show him your Tashal citizenship ring." Turning back to the tailor, she says: "They don't hand those out to serfs. Still, we are not overly endowed with silver. Is there anything we can barter with?"

"Barter is always possible," he says, "what is it that you want and what do you propose to trade for it?"

Berina says, "My friends here," indicating Rikoro, Josrel and Lillia "have some writing supplies they've agreed to make available to us for barter. If you have no use for such things, perhaps you know of another merchant who does, and we could work out a three-way deal."

"As I just said," the tailor says, "it depends on what you have and what you want. So specifically what do you have in mind?"

As instructed, and with an overly meek grin, Davas extends his hand to show the ring. Quietly, he says "we should take the cap, should it fit one of us. It would keep the chill off one head at least". With a huge grin, he then says "I know ... I Know .. I say cool heads are better than hot ... but there are limits".

"Well the cap that I mentioned is your size," says the tailor, "but as it is serge, it would not be proper for a freeman. I also have a beaver skin cap for 16d 1f that is your size."

Davas says, "Well proper or not, I'll wear it if it's warm ... though beaver skin sounds rather ... well, rather ... luxyouious ... I think that's the word. Means rather more than you really need, I think ... yes?"

"Certainly not," the tailor says, "many freeman wear beaver skin for warmth in the winter."

He turns to Berina, a half smile on his face for confirmation and possibly approval, before turning to the merchant again. "Could I ... see the beaver skin cap please ?"

The tailor shows Davas a fur cap that would definitely keep his head warm.

"You said 16d 1f. How about 15d?" Berina says. "Do you have a cap that will fit Lysada?" indicating the shivering girl. "Also, do you have russet gloves for the two of them?"

"What? You think I am trying to cheat you?" the tailor replies, "16d 1f is already a rock bottom price. A cap of this craftsmanship would cost up to 22d in other places. The cap that your husband is thinking of buying is of serge and would fit your woman nicely. As to gloves, I have none of any material that will fit them."

Berina gives the tailor a broad smile and says: "A girl can try to bargain can't she? We'll take both caps at the price quoted."

He takes the 21d you offer him (unless you want to break one of the coins into farthings) and gives Davas the beaver skin cap and Lysada the serge cap.

Having tried to bargain the tailor down, and failed, Berina will break a coin down into the necessary farthings.

Looking at Davas, the tailor says, "It appears the master needs something for his arms and I have nothing in his size for that. In larger sizes, I have a linen long shirt for 45d and a worsted robe for 335d. The robe would be only slightly large on him and the long shirt would be too large even for you, madam. Your woman could use any covering and I would suggest a serge robe for 83d 3f. I have nothing for foot coverings in her size in a material to fit her station. Perhaps the hide worker could help you in that."

Josrel says, "I have these 11 quills as well as these 2 sheets of 30x40 vellum." Josrel shows the Tailor as he tells what he has.

"I could not give you more than 17d worth of merchandise for that lot," the tailor says.

"Well, I will make the trade with you. Please take the 17d as payment towards whatever is bought." Josrel tells the tailor.

"Lillia do you feel that you need some warmer clothes to get you to Minarsas?" Josrel asks Lillia

"No, I will be fine," answers Lillia. "As long as we try not to sleep outside," she adds with a sheepish grin towards Berina.

"I have a warm wool blanket that I can use to wrap myself in till we get there. If the trade is not enough to outfit the others I can use that." Josrel tells Berina

"That's very good of you, Josrel. Thank you." Berina says.

Josrel nods his head to Berina: "Merely a shepherd looking after his flock." Josrel snickers.

Rikoro informs Berina and the clothier of his situation, "Mrm well I gave two of my tomes to the innkeep to care for so I have nothing left save some spare quills. Though as I said earlier I made sure to keep some additional coin in case of an emergency and this does indeed qualify so let me know what is owed."

He then adds to the conversation, "In terms of warmth I only need something for my hands as the hood on my cloak does a fair job of keeping my head warm."

Having everybody show her what silver they have available for buying stuff, she counts it all up and turns back to the tailor, saying: "We have less than 300d between us. I'm afraid the worsted robe is too expensive for us. We could buy the serge robe. Do you happen to have a blanket that my husband could wrap himself in as the Haliki said he would do?" she asks.

The tailor tells you, "I have not any finished blankets but, in bolts of cloth, I have up to four square yards of buckram at 9d per square yard, nine square yards of course linen for 3d 3f per yard, eight square yards of fine linen for 22d 2f per yard, six square yards of russet wool at 10d 3f per yard, and six square yards of serge wool at 5d 2f per yard. It will probably take three square yards of cloth to make a long sleeved shirt"

Turning to Rikoro, Josrel and Lillia, Berina says: "The serge robe and three yards of russet wool will come to 116d even. If Davas and I contribute 50d, Rikoro contributes 20d, Lillia contributes 29d, and Josrel adds the 17d for the trade of the writing supplies, that will cover it. What say you?"

Berina whispers to Rikoro: "As the son and nephew of litigants, I'm guessing you'd be best at bargaining down the price from 116d. Will you try?"

Rikoro steps forward, and mentions to the clothier in a calm voice, "The road we take is to Minarsis. I am certain we will also find another clothier once there, but our needs at this point have placed us in your capable hands. Unfortunately our means do not give us the luxury of spending freely. The question for us is not if we will purchase, but where. Many of us present appreciate the life in a village and township and would much rather see their coin spent here than in a city. So I ask again on their behalf would you consider lowering the total cost to an even one hundred?"

"I am not concerned with your lack of funds to buy my merchandise," the tailor answers. "You should have considered that before you started out on your journey." [Rikoro +1 rhetoric]

Lillia speaks up, saying, "I can understand you not being willing to reduce your already very reasonable prices. However, if you could see your way to letting us have those items for 110d we could tell everyone we meet of the fine quality of your craftsmanship and you would have enough business so that you could charge more and, in the long run, profiting from our commerce."

The tailor thinks a moment and says, "when you put it that way, it makes a certain amount of sense. Very well, I will agree to 110d." He then takes 25d from Berina, the quills and vellum from Josrel, and 25d from Lillia. He then looks to Rikoro and Davas for the remaining 43d.

Rikoro reaches into his pack after Lillia successfully breaks down the clothier's defenses and retrieves the twenty silver from his pack and hands it to him.

Davas stands and smiles at the tailor for a few seconds, then the grin fades a little and he points vaguely at himself. "Oh, yes ... of course". He quickly turns his attention to his pouch, bringing out a handful of coins and putting them on the table. He counts out 23 pence and hands it rather sheepishly to the tailor. "And if we are to recommend you to others, we must needs know your name friend. I am Davas ... and will happily tell others of your skills". His hand goes unnoticed to the beaver skin cap as he speaks.

"I am Baleethtrasn of Dyrert but I am the only one of my clan in this area," answers the tailor.

"Thank you, Master Baleethtrasn." Berina says. She asks: "Where is the shop of the hide worker?"

Once outside, Davas turns to Lillia. "Thank you for getting us a better price. Coin does not grow on trees ... sadly ..." he grins "so any time we can keep some in our purses is very welcome. Thank you too Rikoro, for trying, and to everyone for contributing".

Following the directions of the tailor, Berina says, "Indeed. I add my thanks. Now let us go see if the hide worker has any footwear for Lysada...or any footwear we can afford anyway."

Entering the hideworker's shop, you are met by a large woman dressed in leather. "What brings you folks to my shop on such a fine morning?" she says.

"And good morning to you." Berina says. "We're looking for suitable footwear for my employee here." and she indicates Lysada. "Do you have anything that will fit her?" Berina asks.

Looking at Lysada's feet, the hideworker says, "I have naught that will fit her but I can make some sandals in two days or shoes in four days...if you have the time."

As Berina speaks with the shopkeep, Rikoro wanders about glancing over the displays and counters for any fingered gloves that may fit him.

He does not see anything openly displayed. The hideworker says, "You there! What are you about? Can I help you?"

Rikoro cranes his neck to regard the shopkeep, then turns to face them before speaking, "Apologies, I was just looking about for some gloves that would provide mobility for my fingers, I did not wish to interrupt your discourse with Berina. However, it seems you don't have any laying about. After your done with the feet wear we can speak further."

"Ah, a foreigner," she replies, "I do not lay out all my goods so that anyone can just stroll off with them and I make not leather gloves. I have some leather gauntlets but they are too large for you. I will be with you in a moment as soon as I finish with your companion."

The Fyvrian mage moves back to the rest of the group and idly leans on his staff by holding it directly in front of him.

Berina asks, "What do you estimate that either of those options?"

"Would cost?" the hideworker asks, "for her size the sandals would be 7d 1f and the shoes would be 12d 3f."

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Turning to the rest of the party, Berina says: "Shoes would be better, but sandals would be quicker. I don't know if we have even two days, much less four, because we'll have to pay to stay here in town while we're waiting. What say you all?"

"I also believe we have not the time nor the money," Lillia says. "When you consider the cost of food and lodging, those sandals would end up being very dear indeed. She can use some of our bandages or blankets to make some foot wraps that should work for the one day we have yet to our journey."

Berina says, "We'll need the blankets for keeping other areas of our bodies warm besides just the feet, but I can see sacrificing bandages for this purpose. Does anyone have any bandages?"

Rikoro simply adds to the conversation, "I agree with Lillia, unfortunately I have neither bandages or a blanket to spare. The next town will take us two watches to reach. Minarsas is three. If the weather grows worse we can stop and try to find boots before continuing on."

"We can also leave her here to her fate," grumbles Lillia, "It appears to me she is costing us much, possibly even our freedom if the law finds we are harboring an escaped serf. What benefit has she been to us? I am not asking what goes on in Berina's bed chambers as I do not want to know."

Josrel says, "Now Lillia lets not insult others practices. As to her Benefit to the group she has not shown anything as of yet but she has only just joined us." Josrel says. "As for her costing us money Lillia does have a point Berina"

Stating to Berina. "And we are harboring an escaped serf, and for what again? Because she doesn't want to marry if I am correct? I am not saying that we just leave her but we have a tendency to get ourselves into a lot of trouble on our own. And well now we are just waiting for the trouble to find us with this one. Not to mention when we get caught and you know we will, I don't think anyone will come to our aide. We have a flimsy relationship with Lord Odarsart now and he is our only ally who would be able to aide us. If we wind up in the gaol again why would he help us."

Berina gives Lillia an irritated look and says: "How do you know she's an escaped serf? For all you know, she's just a poor free woman looking to flee a marriage she didn't want. I'd think you, of all people, would have thought of that possibility." and she raises one eyebrow.

With an astonished look, Lillia replies, "by her look, by her dress and by her own admission, I can tell she is a serf. If she is here by her liege's permission, have her produce her proof. If you are referring to the affair of my abduction, I am grateful for Josrel's rescue and the way things turned out but, if things had turned out differently, I would have been married to who my clan said I should marry. I would not have run away from my clan or my liege, even though I am freeborn."

Turning to Lysada, Berina asks: "Do you think you could endure two or three watches with cold feet? We can always stop from time to time for me to warm up your feet before they get too bad."

"Ees milady," Lysada answers.

"And that is another thing," Lillia says, "If you do not instruct her to stop calling you milady, you will be arrested for impersonating the gentry as it is quite obvious that you are not gentry."

Berina says, "That's a point well taken." Berina says. Turning to Lysada she says: "Just call me Berina."

"Ees, mi...", Lysada answers, "ees, Berina."

Interjecting on behalf of the discussion going on, wishing to quell it a bit, Rikoro says, "Rather than remain idle. Let us combine two feats at once. Travel and debate. This way we can still make it to our destination." He then begins to take measures to walking away, staff firmly planted on the ground as he walks steadily.

Hustling Lysada before her, Berina sets out in Rikoro's wake.

Turning to the others, Davas gives them a lopsided grin, shrugs and, shaking his head, starts after them.

## **7-HALÁNÈ-720 NUBETH, KALDOR**

5TH WATCH [WARM, CLEAR, NORTHEAST CALM, FOG]

After an uneventful two watches of walking, your journey brings you to the village of Athelren just as the sun is setting – or so it says on the village boundary marker. During your journey you see peasants trying to plow the frozen fields to sow them with winter grains. Others are slaughtering livestock and hanging them to bleed. Swine herds are driving their herds into the forest to forage for acorns. Shepherds are selecting and marking their sheep for breeding.

Rikoro eyes over the village and then looks to the group, placing more of his weight than usual on his staff. He poses a question in a manner indicating his preference, "Likely if we rest here, we should find cheaper lodging than in Minarsas. So shall we press on or rest our weary bones and complete the journey on the morrow?"

As the group discuss the topic Rikoro moves towards one of the nearby shepherds and inquires, "Pardon me good man. Would you happen to know of the nearest inn one could stay at within Athelren?"

"Dere be de Purple Bow Inn over dere if ee need an inn," he says pointing to a large building in the village, "ur, if ee be jist lukin' vor a meal and a drink, dere be de Goodly Glass Tavern. Nither aw'mun be bene dough as us ant many travelers ztopping yer."

Berina says, "That sounds the sensible thing to do, and I'm sure Lysada's toes could do with being thawed out!" and she grins at Lysada.

\* \* \*

## **Meanwhile at the Silver Hammer Inn of Nubeth...**

"Fyna!" The innkeeper yells, "You spoke of safety in numbers and your wish to go to Minarsas to see your friend the physician. Well, those folks just leaving town are headed that way. If you hurry, you can catch them."

Fyna hurriedly puts her things together and rushes out the door to see them disappearing in the distance. For the next two watches, she follows them at a brisk pace and only catches them

when they pause at a village boundary marker to talk to some shepherds. The boundary marker reads Athelren in Lakise.

Glancing briefly in the direction she and the others had come from, Berina sees Fyna approaching. Over her shoulder to the rest of the party, Berina says: "What ho! Who do we have here?"

When Fyna gets within earshot, Berina asks: "And who might you be?"

Standing a fair distance from the others and caught in mid stride, an extremely tall green cloaked and hooded figure cranes his neck towards the commotion. Finally he brings his whole frame around, pivoting on a walk staff. Long spindly fingers firmly grasp the upper portion of the wooden staff. Dangling on the outside of his cloak is a hexagonal brass symbol. As he lifts his head slowly to regard the unfolding scene more of this gangly man's features are made visible. He sports a blonde full beard with matching hair that pokes out from under the hood - clearly in disarray. His eyes are water blue and set evenly apart over top a regal nose. Underneath lies two fine lips, curled into a half smile questioning gaze as his eyes probe the area curiously. His skin is fair and unblemished, but his cheeks are rosy - likely due to the cold weather and lack of covering on his face.

Off to one side engaged in a quiet but apparently intense discussion with a tall and striking woman is a man of average height and appearance and slightly scrawny build.

He is wearing leathers, some kind of fur cap that looks rather newer than the rest of his clothing and he is wearing a leather pack with a round shield strapped to it. A leather saddle bag is over one arm, an axe and a knife are tucked into his belt and he carries a long bow and a quiver of arrows.

He has brown shoulder length hair, brown eyes and a dark, possibly weather worn complexion. He looks around 30.

From his demeanor during the discussions, his almost constant smile is obvious, tempered with some apparent confusion. It may be that these two are more than traveling companions.

"Berina my love, might I have a word" says Davas through a fixed smile. Taking her elbow, he moves her away from the group a little and whispers. "The others have pointed out that Lysada could pose a problem for us". He raises his arms in surrender. "Yes I know, we could hardly have left her ... though we should have ... and she seems harmless enough, but that choice makes us dangerous to others". He grins "actually I should say more dangerous. Even so, are you so keen to pick up more strays that you would endanger us ..." he puts his hand reverently on her stomach and grins stupidly before waving at the others "and the ones that might travel with us? Please, let us ... " he gives her a look "think carefully before encouraging others to join us in our folly". His say finished, he smiles, kisses her and draws her back to the others.

Berina goes slowly in order to reply privately: "As far as this new person goes, I didn't say they were being added to our party, just that we seem to have been followed by her, and if so, we need to find out why." She arches one eyebrow momentarily.

"As for Lysada, you are now my husband, and if you feel that her continued presence with us is an unacceptable risk, tell her

that she must now go her own way. We did get her away from her immediate problems. I can see that it may be time for her to make her own way in the world. I just ask that you don't demand that she return the cap and robe...in this weather, she would be as good as dead, and in that case, it would be merciful if you just slit her throat and have done with it. Your decision." and she stops to wait on what he decides.

Momentarily dumbfounded, Davas splutters and looks quickly towards Lysada, obviously hoping she has not heard. After waving his hands and opening and closing his mouth for a while, he calms down, looks at Berina and grins suddenly.

"You are playing with me, aren't you ?" he asks half seriously, giving her a kiss and a half hearted tickle.

Quietly and seriously he says "I am not suggesting we send her away ... and certainly not without clothes". He looks at Berina with a wicked grin "although that suggestion from you would not surprise me were it inside in the warm".

More seriously, he continues. "I do think we should ask her again what she wants to do with her life ... if she has family or clan anywhere that could take care of her? or if there is anything she has always wanted to do". "Maybe we could take her there ... wherever 'there' is?" he adds idly.

"As others have said, she does carry some risk for us ... some greater risk".

A slightly taller than average woman approaches the group. One striking feature is her white hair. She has a slight frame but surprisingly she is equipped as a warrior carrying a long bow, a sword, a shield, and is wearing armor.

She walks up to the party and stands squarely, almost brazenly in front of everyone.

"Well me all! I am headed to Minarsas and the Innkeeper at the Silver Hammer said that you were headed in that direction. I figured that it was not only a good idea to travel the road with a group of people, I am hoping that I would find some good companions as well."

She taps her shield... "I am also adept at fighting and could help protect the part against any brigands who might think it a fair adventure to deprive the party of its possessions."

She smiles widely and friendly and then looks puzzled, "Why is that woman walking in the cold without shoes?! Is she one of those crazy worshippers of Ilvir?"

"I worship nat znakes bit de lady uv pleasure, 'alea. I be without zhoes cuz I be bit a poor peasant. Nat everyone can be zo zelf zufficient as ee and dey be no raizin to zpread insults," Lysada says with a proud look on her face. She is of average height, skinny as a sapling, with blonde hair and blue eyes. She is wearing a green dress, a cloth cap and a hooded robe, all made of the least expensive wool.

Standing behind the man in the green cloak, arm in arm with a striking woman a vertically challenged man in a gray robe and hooded leather cloak turns to the sound of the new voice. As he turns he removes the hood of his cloak to reveal a young mans face whose short brown hair has been the victim of the hood that

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he just removed. His gray eyes squinting, his left one through an oddly shaped tattoo over it, to see this new person. Slapping his forehead he mumbles "Oh not again."

The woman at his arm is slightly taller than average, with blonde hair and emerald green eyes. She is wearing a black dress of russet wool with white linen trim, leather shoes and a heavy-leather hooded cloak. The woman appears a bit thin but not enough to justify the overly attentive attitude of her companion.

Fyna says, "Oh I wasn't trying to be insulting, and I apologize if it was taken that way. I did mention it because I am concerned for you. There must be a way to rig something up to save your feet. I have some linen bandages, perhaps we could wrap your feet in them?"

Taking four of the bandages, Lysada sits on the ground and ties them around her feet as footwraps. "Dank ee, goodwife. I be zure daise weel fit my needs avore I can find better."

Lillia speaks up from Josrel's side, "Speaking of the fog...should we not be making our way through it and find this Purple Bow Inn before the weather turns for the worse?"

Still several feet away from the group, once he watches Lysada bind her feet with the bandage, Rikoro turns back in the direction he was walking and continues on to the location of the inn.

\* \* \*

Traveling through the village as night falls, you come to a building with a sign containing a picture of a purple bow and the thistle of an inn. There is a lantern hung before the door to light your way and to illuminate the sign.

Entering the common room, you find three tables each with benches to seat six comfortably: the first table is empty. The second has two men and a girl, each with a plate of food and a mug of ale before them. One man is of average size and is dressed in travel worn clothes. The other man is huge and is dressed in the robes of a priest of Peoni. The girl is dressed in fine clothes appropriate for a wealthy merchant's child.

The third table has a woman, a boy, a small child and a man, each with a mug of ale before them. The woman is dressed as a priestess of Peoni, the boy is dressed as nobility, the small child is dressed in rawhides and the man is dressed in travel worn clothes.

The overall appearance of the room is rather shabby due to the hearth and rushlights smoking and the floor rushes bad smell caused by them not being changed for some time.

A man approaches you and says, "I am Sedd of Sito. How can I serve you?"

Rikoro having been the first to arrive inside, speaks up and inquires with the innkeeper, "Good evening Sedd, I am Rikoro of Drelin. We were hoping to hear the cost of a night's lodging and food. We're a large group so hopefully you have space to accommodate us."

"Master Sito, if it pleases you good sir," the innkeeper says, "I do not believe we know each other well enough to be on first name basis. Our lodging is 2d for a shared room, 1d for the common room, and 1d for evening and morning meals. Most of

our drinks are 1f per pint. I believe we can accommodate you. How many of you are there?"

Seeming dismayed by his actions, Rikoro replies, "Please, you have my apologies Master Sito. We have been on the road for the past several days and my manners have been trailing behind it seems." He offers a soft smile to the innkeeper, then looks over his shoulder mouthing numbers and turns back to Sedd, "There are seven of us. I would like a shared room and an evening meal please."

With a quick grin in Rikoro's direction, Davas says "a shared room for me and mine" he indicates Berina with a smile "if you would be so kind and food too please. Ale Berina? I will ... though there was a road dust to speak of, I find myself dry none the less". With another quick grin, Davas pays and leads Berina to the empty table.

Covering her mouth to hide her grin at Rikoro's embarrassment, Berina says quietly to Davas: "Don't forget Lysada. We'll have that talk with her in the room later." Speaking to the innkeeper, Berina asks: "What's on the menu tonight?"

"Tonight we have nettle puree for an appetizer, stewed mutton for an entrée, accompanied by cheat (whole wheat bread) and ale (dark copper color. sharp aroma. creamy texture. well-balanced malty-bitter flavor. bitter-sweet finish). Followed by carrageen sweet mousse for dessert," answers the innkeeper.

Berina says, "Mmm, that sounds good...just the thing after a long, cold trek."

Rikoro then moves to the empty table finding a chair while the others trickle in and decide. A small sigh escapes his lips, his posture a bit hunched then his usual rigid sitting.

Fyna takes a seat next to Rikoro.

Glancing over to the woman mercenary, Rikoro mentions, "Mm, you may wish to inform the innkeeper of your plans for the evening. Unless you intend to rest a moment before continuing your journey to Minarsas this evening."

Fyna says, "Would you mind if I pitched in and shared your shared room? Master Sito, if you please, I would like to purchase a meal for the evening."

"A meal and a room, yes mistress," the innkeeper answers.

With a smile Rikoro retorts, "If you are willing to forgo modesty with the opposite sex, then I suppose I shall do so too. Though I think it only appropriate we exchange names. I am Rikoro of Drelin. Forgive my manners earlier on the road to the tavern. Introductions had to wait. My legs were aching and I was growing colder thinking of a hearth only a few yards away."

Facing Master Sito Josrel half turns to see Fyna and Rikoro making their plans smiling turns to Lillia "Well it seems that Rikoro may have found a better bed companion." Josrel whispers to Lillia. Then tickles Lillia's side "Maybe a night to ourselves my dear."

"Yes it would seem so," Lillia says. Lightly slapping his hand away, she continues, "Stop that unseemly display. After all we are not Haleans, are we?"

Smiling at Lillia, Berina asks: "Would you like to be?" Berina is only able to keep a straight face for a couple of seconds, then breaks out laughing. Through her laughter, Berina gasps: "Sorry Lillia, that's a joke. I couldn't resist!", then continues until she has to stop to breathe. Giving Lillia one of her signature hugs, Berina says: "Lillia, you are a delight. I'm so glad I have made your acquaintance...and I hope we are getting to be good friends." and she gives Lillia a warm smile.

Lillia starts for a moment until she notices Berina is joking and then says, "Well I must say that knowing you has never been dull. I could pass an entire theatrical company past the king's own guards with you acting as a distraction. It sometimes takes all my patience to deal with your disregard for the social proprieties but, yes, I think we are becoming friends...at the very least I know that you are a loyal friend at times of need, which is more than I can say of many."

With his cheeks turning red and rubbing his freshly slapped hand Josrel turns to Master Sito and chuckles: "We would have a room as well Master Sito." Josrel indicates himself and Lillia.

"Yes, master, a room for two," says the innkeeper, "and will you be dining with us tonight?"

"Yes, yes we will. Thank you." Josrel affirms. [Josrel +1 piety and he is now in a state of divine grace.]

Turning to Rikoro, Josrel continues, "Rikoro, will you be sharing a room with us or have you made other arrangements?" Josrel arches his eyebrows towards Fyna as he looks to Rikoro.

Rikoro says, "Indeed Haliki. I have appreciated the offer extended to me by you and your wife, but you deserve some time together. Though if you wouldn't mind I would still enjoy partaking of morning ablution in both your company.", says Rikoro to Josrel.

"Of course Rikoro you are always welcome to join us." Josrel replies.

Fyna smiles warmly at Rikoro.

While waiting for the others to decide on the menu and settle their accommodations, Rikoro inquires with Fyna, "May I ask what draws your attention to Minarsis? Or do you plan to travel beyond that and this is simply a way point?"

Fyna says, "I have a very good friend in Minarsas. What draws you and your friends there?"

Rikoro simply nods to Fyna and lets her know, "We are on errand. I believe we should be in town up until the Spring Wool Festival."

\* \* \*

After your dinner and some quiet conversation, you all retire to your rooms.