

10- ÁGRAZHÂR -720 TASHAL, KALDOR

6TH WATCH [COLD, OVERCAST, NORTHWEST BREEZE, HEAVY RAIN]²⁰

Josrel and Ibarti Erdaris travel the short distance to the temple of Save K'nor and go to their respective chambers. After hanging their clothes near the fire to dry, they retire to their very welcome beds.

After they had been dismissed on the previous night, Berina approached Rikoro and said: "Rikoro, we're going to need boarders to be able to afford the townhouse. Why don't you stay with us tonight and we can discuss it in the morning. I'm betting that we can make you a better deal than what you've got now."

Berina, Davas, Quenaline and Rikoro travel a much longer distance to the new townhouse. A woman answers their knock saying, "Ee must be de new lease 'olders bit I wuz only tull'ed to axpec dree. No matter, I be Qisse uv Quardin, as ee 'ave no doubt been tull'ed. Come een tu de kitchen and warm yourselves by de fire."

Berina says, "I'm glad to meet you Qisse. I'm Berina of Kyfa. My father owns the smithy across the street." After the others have introduced themselves, Berina puts a hand on Rikoro's arm and say to Qisse: "Rikoro is a possible boarder. He'll be staying here tonight, and we'll see about him becoming a boarder in the morning."

Qisse then goes off to prepare a fourth room and returns to lead you each to where you will sleep.

When Qisse goes off to tend to the fourth room, Rikoro turns to regard those present. "I just wanted to thank you for allowing me to stay here. Unfortunately my familial ties were weakened after I left for Gelimo and they would like little to do with me."

Rikoro's expression falls solemn with his last sentence before continuing on, "Let me know what it is I owe you for room and board and I shall gladly see it paid."

With a sheepish grin on his lips, "It's an honour to be your first tenant."

Davas shakes his head sadly as Rikoro talks of his family. He says simply "you are welcome ... we will discuss payment ... and maybe work" he gives him a grin "once you are settled".

"We'll discuss the terms in the morning, and..." Interrupting herself in mid-sentence, Berina asks excitedly: "You've been to Gelimo?!! You've got to tell us all about it!"

Shifting his weight a bit onto his staff, Rikoro offers a soft smile in response to Berina's questioning excitement, "For twelve years I lived there. Or more precisely the Fyvrian Chantry situated in Gelimo. My time was spent in studies I fear so my own personal knowledge is likely best probed then blurted out."

After a bit of consideration and a moment of lip pursing, Rikoro continues, "Though from the dealings this group has had I suppose what you would like to hear most is a little mystery from that area. Gelimo is home to a henge - which is five concentric rings of standing stones overlooking the rocky western coast of Melderyn. Many a legend or story has been bandied about, but there is no known answer. Even those within

the chantry have their own theories and explanations - mostly esoteric in nature. Some even write papers on the henge. I myself wrote a brief dissertation on its origins and purpose, but it is a conversation best saved for another time. I do not wish to bore you with minutia when we should settle in for the eve."

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2ND WATCH [WARM, PARTLY CLOUDY, NORTHEAST BREEZE, LIGHT RAIN]²

Josrel is awoken by the Tocsin bell when it rings at first light, an hour before sunrise. He performs his morning ablutions and realizes he will need to bless some holy water before the marrow.

Josrel blesses enough Holy Water to fill his Ablution Bowl before he breaks his Fast. He can tell that he botched up the blessing badly and wasted the water. However, he now knows one way to definitely not do a blessing. [+1 Blessing]

After a quick visit to the kitchen to break his fast, he heads off to the temple of Peoni to help out in their hospital. Even from this distance he can hear the moaning of the Heru gate as it is opened.

Just as he reaches Kald Square, a heavily veiled woman approaches and says, "Lillia has been kidnapped and will be forced to marry against her will unless you, and those you trust, can rescue her so that you can marry her first." She then turns the corner and disappears into the growing crowds before the surprised Josrel can respond.

Josrel stands staring after the women, stunned and confused, comes to his senses finally. Immediately heads back to the Temple and goes to Lillia's quarters to see if she is there. When he finds her not there, he searches the Temple asking all Haliki and other Temple Admins if they have seen her. When no one has seen her, he goes to the Ibarti : "Teacher, Something terrible has happened." Josrel declares visably upset. "A women came to me on the way to the Peonian Temple and told me that Lillia has been kidnapped!" Josrel voice quivers. "Have you sent her on any errands for the Temple for I can't find her anywhere in the Temple?" "The women said that she would be married to someone else if I don't find her and marry her first!" Josrel declares angrily, as he paces the floor.

"How dare you barge in here and address me in such a tone!" the Ibarti exclaims, "And how many times have I told you about not simply believing what some passerby tells you on the street! If you do not have enough to do, I am sure more work can be assigned to you. Now get out of here and do your own investigation if you feel the need. But do not come in here like this again."

Staring dumbfounded at the Ibarti Josrel closes his mouth..." I am Sorry, Teacher for the interruption." Josrel bows to the Ibarti and leaves the room.

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Rikoro awakens at dawn, breaks his fast with the porridge and bread Qisse has prepared and leaves to go to the temple of Save K'nor to pray. He arrives at the temple just as Josrel is being thrown out of his superior's office.

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Leaning upon his staff, Rikoro pauses in confusion over the events he has just witnessed barely able to string his initial words together, "Mrm .. good morn .. to you Haliki. I would ask how you are this day, but from what just occurred I imagine none to well. Is there anything I can do to help?"

Looking at Rikoro blankly then as Josrel recognizes him, "Oh Rikoro something terrible has happened!" Josrel states angrily "My Lillia has been Kidnapped and it seems that I am on my own to try and find her. " Josrel gives Rikoro a description of her. "You haven't seen anyone with this description have you?" Josrel asks hopefully.

A look of dismay falls over Rikoro as he listens to Josrel. As the description of Lillia is spoke, Rikoro shakes his head solemnly before speaking, "I fear Tashal is such a large place that even had I known her I would likely not have seen her. Though I imagine if she was taken unwillingly it would have drawn the eyes of others. Of course if such were the case I the kidnappers would not have made it very far. By the way you were just removed from the office is an indication of what you meant by being 'alone' in your search. Regardless, I will gladly assist you in anyway possible. Perhaps we should try to enlist the aid of the ones you have traveled with before? It seems they are more then capable and the added minds would certainly make for wiser decisions."

Obliviously crestfallen as Rikoro hasn't seen Lillia: "Yes, Yes your right so many faces in Tashal it would be hard to focus on just one." Trying to smile Josrel agrees: "I thank you for your help." Josrel grasps both of Rikoro's shoulders " May The Lost Guide bless us and guide us to her rescue!" He declares. "Our friends, yes maybe they can help. Do you know where the residence is that they newly received is?" Josrel asks with a glimmer of hope.

Without taking a pause as he is want to do, Rikoro states, "I do indeed, as I am a boarder with them. I arrived here for some meditation, but let us make haste there now to see if we can catch them before they part for their day's tasks. Though, Haliki, I am sure if they have gone we can start to piece things together and leave word on for them"

His words spoken to Josrel, Rikoro makes his way from the temple to the residence.

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When the dinner was over last night, it was too late to get into the barracks where Quenaline had been lodging so she came along with the others to sleep in this townhouse that she had turned down. This morning, she arose, broke her fast with porridge and bread and returned to find the physician and start her days work.

Rising early as is her wont, Quenaline offers to help Qisse in the morning preparations, making sure she follows any of the woman's instructions so she does not get underfoot.

Once complete, she consumes her meal, thanks her friends (any who are awake), commend the Housekeeper, and then takes her leave so that she can get to her muster in sufficient time.

She also leaves a few coins (4d?) for the room and meal...

[As an aside, I note that I missed confirming Quenalines' redeeming of the Usurers Note to buy the Robe and linen dress, could that please be done? (She will not be wearing them during her stint in the Militia, so there is no rush...)]

* * *

After Rikoro and Quenaline had left, Qisse approached Berina and Davas, standing by the table as they broke their fast, saying, "Now dey de others 'ave leff, I wud like to gaw over my duties if it be alright way ee. I prepare two meals a day: a cold meal uv porridge, braid and a beverage een de morning, and a 'ot meal way a vegetable dish, braid, dessert and beverage, promptly wain de Tocsin bell strikes an 'our avore sunset. I add a mate dish on de fourth, twelfth, sixteenth, twentieth and twenty-eighth uv aich month. I can prepare whatever ee want as long as I know avore I gaw to de market at de aend uv de sackon witch uv aich day. I cussen make separate meals vor aich person, so ee weel 'ave to decide on de day avore what ee want."

Berina says, "That sounds alright to me. When I get an urge for something in particular, I'll let you know beforehand. I expect to help with the cooking. I hope you can teach me to be a better cook. I could use the instruction!" and she gives Qisse a big smile. Looking at Davas, she says: "Davas?"

Qisse continues, "I can mend clozes if ee left dey way me during de day ur sew new clozes if I be provided way de materials ur de money to get materials. I clain de entire 'ouse aich day and I do laundry and prepare baths wance aich tenday, on de fifth, fifteenth and twenty fifth uv aich month. I normally work an eight 'our day vor twenty-four days a month. At yer command, I can work longer bit my work weel suffer accordingly. Iny uv de lodgers can 'elp with de work to reduce expenses bit only at my instruction. Otherwise, dey jist get een de way."

"Do ee 'ave iny disagreement way iny uv dey or 'ave iny additional instructions ur preferences?"

Davas listens politely to Qisse, nodding occasionally as she speaks. He becomes a little more interested when she says she has sewing amongst her skills. Once she has finished, he opens his mouth as if to speak, then stops and looks to Berina, with a nod and, perhaps a small shrug.

Berina says, "I also expect to help out with the cleaning each day when I'm not at work or out practicing with my weapons. In particular, I'll take care of cleaning out the cooking hearth and the fireplaces." Berina gets a wry smile on her face and continues: "As much as I dislike getting wet, with what I do, I'm going to need to bathe more often than once a tenday. I'll draw my own baths on those days I bathe other than the fifth, fifteenth, and twenty-fifth."

Davas nods. "Yes - I will help with the cooking ... and cleaning if you say what is needed". "I am used to work ... but a bit out of practice". Looking down at his clothes, he adds "I find I am unable to afford 'proper clothes'. If I can afford the materials, could you sew me a tunic or leggings perhaps? When ... if ... you have some time of course!" he adds quickly.

[OOC: Berina will switch between the white and orange shirts from one day to the next. At the end of each day, just before turning in, she will rinse out the shirt she was wearing that day

and hang it up to dry, wearing the other one the next day. If allowed to dry on the shirt, saltsweat is hard on thread.]

"Do you embroider?" Berina asks. "If you do, I have a plain white linen dress that could do with some decoration when you have time to do it. There's no urgency to it. Maybe you could teach me to do that too!" she says with a little excitement in her voice. "We could sit and talk when we're doing that, and get to know each other better. I'd like that." Glancing at Davas momentarily, Berina says: "There's nothing wrong with going around with men all the time," and she flashes a quick smile at Davas, "but I miss the company of another woman."

Lifting his eyes to the ceiling, Davas grins and shakes his head gently.

"No, I niver see'd mort use een sitch frills so I niver exercised in spirit to larn. I jist make cloze dey be sturdy and wear well," Qisse answers.

A look of disappointment crosses Berina's face momentarily, then her expression lightens again and she asks: "Do you have anything you do just for enjoyment...for those times when you're not working, eating or sleeping?"

Getting a shy look on her face, Qisse says, "Well I do enjoy playing de 'arp bit I baint very prapper at it and I ees fay want nat to disturb anyone."

* * *

After finishing up with Qisse, Berina asks Davas: "I know you're working for Quenaline's uncle, but have you thought about trying to make money at something you know how to do better? I was thinking that you could see if one of the apothecaries would pay you to find herbs for them. If one of them hired you, that should keep you out of trouble with the guild, and pay you more than you're making now. Or maybe you could do that on the side, and keep your current job. Have you looked into the possibility?"

"No I haven't thought about it" Davas says quietly "I am still realizing that I am a citizen of somewhere ... something that even a few tendays gone, had never been anything except a remote possibility".

He smiles at Berina, shakes his head and adds "and of course, I worry about paying my share". "What you suggest is a good idea and I will think further on it once things have settled a little."

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3RD WATCH [WARM, CLEAR, STILL]⁴

Josrel, Rikoro: Upon arrival at the townhouse [they need to name this place], Qisse tells them that Davas has gone to work at the Spurs, Berina has went to visit the harbormaster and she is off to the market.

Upon hearing Qisse words, Rikoro falls contemplative as if gathering his thoughts before speaking, "Qisse if we could ask a slight burden of you, to leave word for the others on our behalf. The Haliki and I would like their company on a matter of the utmost import."

"I weel give dey yer message wain I see dey next bit I axpec dey nat to be avore de aend uv de day wain dey finish deir labors like

most jonnick vokes," Qisse answers, the last with a bit of a inquisitive distain.

Craning his neck to regard Josrel and continuing, "We can begin the preliminary investigation without them. I doubt there will be much danger in that. This way the tracks do not get washed away with the sands of time so to speak. My suggestion would be to start where Lilla was to be today or her last known location and move from there. This way we can possible trace what happened and question those in the area for anything they have seen. Let us tell Qisse where that may be so the others can find us should they return."

"Well, You see a problem." Josrel states now turning angry: "When you saw me getting thrown out of the Ibarti's office. I had enquired about her duties for the day. Now I may have been a little excited when I asked him, but he just scolded me for barging into his office and questioning him. So I have no answer as to any errands that she may have been on. "

Rubbing his chin: " You know if I can get my hands on something of hers I can make a connection and divine some information on her.

After waiting for Josrel to answer, Rikoro returns his full attention to Qisse and asks, "Or if they return only at the fifth watch ask them to remain here in wait for us."

Rikoro says, "Hrm well then let us return back to the temple and try to engage the Ibarti with a bit more diplomacy. Perhaps we shall see better results. If not, then someone else may know where she was to be or at the least had seen her last."

Smirking Josrel replies: "I REALLY don't think that going to the Ibarti is a good course of action at this time. It may be best to let him cool down a bit. I seem to have fallen into some disfavor with him as of late." With a quizzical look Josrel continues:" Although, we could go and talk with the Olunar..." Josrel pauses contemplatively:"... he may have some information." Looking a Rikoro : " And I will try to be as humble as I can about asking him anything." Josrel chuckles to himself: "Lessons learned from my previous meetings." Now a bit enthused: "Yes, If the Olunar will let me into her sleeping quarters then I may be able to retrieve a personal item of hers that I can pray to Our Lord of Knowledge over to gain some information on her."

Turning to Qisse: "Can you tell Berina and Davas and Quenaline if she resides her as well to meet us at the temple of Save-K'nor please."

"Quenaline be nat lodging yer bit I weel tull de others as ee ax," Qisse answers.

Then turning back to Rikoro: "Does this course of action seem acceptable?"

Rikoro says, "Quite acceptable Haliki. Though how about we divide our efforts? You speak with the Olunar and I shall speak with the Ibarti. I will simply inquire from him where I may find Lillia as I have word to pass on to her. There will be no harm in that, nor would I be lying. Let us be on our way as we have already lost time"

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Rikoro offers his many thanks to Qisse and then sets off with Josrel back to the temple.

Smiling to Quisse, Josrel says: " Thank you for your help. May Save-K'nor blessing be upon you."

After Josrel speaks, Rikoro and he leave to return to the temple.

Berina: Traveled across town to the Kald gate to make an appointment with the harbormaster. To her surprise, she is immediately ushered in.

"May I help you, madam?" he asks.

Berina says, "Good day to you. Yes, I hope you can help me. My name is Berina of Kyfa. An acquaintance of mine, Captain Josriath of Coryerdan, operates a boat on the Kald. I know that merchant captains like to keep on the move, so while they don't linger in one place for long, their travels bring them to any given port frequently."

"The problem I have, is I haven't seen him in some time, and I'm becoming worried for his safety. Can you tell me when was the last time he put in, and where he expected to go next?" The expression on her face is one of genuine concern.

"Since you asked so nicely, I believe I can tell you that I saw him a fortnight ago and he was headed toward Kiban," the harbormaster says, "I am sure you will understand that I can give you nothing in more detail, though, as such knowledge could be used to his disadvantage and I would be at blame. Some time ago, he had returned from his first trip up the Kald to Olokand and he mentioned that he found that way to be unpleasant. He was going to stay with the Tashal to Kiban route in the future as that is what he is more familiar with."

A look of relief washes over her face, and Berina says: "Thank you, Master Kephis. When next you see him, please tell him that Berina of Kyfa was inquiring. If he doesn't remember my name, just describe what I look like...he'll remember." and she smiles widely. "Thanks again." she says, and then leaves.

Berina then goes in search of work, starting at the metalsmith next door to Rikoro's father's house. Addressing Master Uvienela of Dyselsen, Berina inquires about work and Uvienela says, "What sort of skills do you have?"

Berina answers, "Well, I like to think that my skills are better than that of an apprentice, but I don't know if I could be called a journeyman or not. If you could set me a number of small, increasingly difficult, tasks, you could accurately assess my skills. My skills as a weaponcrafter are about the same as my metalcraft skills, and I have some small skill appraising tools."

The smith sets forth a number of tests for Berina to show her abilities over the next few hours and afterwards tells Berina, "Being a journeyman is as much a matter of having the proper documentation as anything else. You do have some skills, as you say, which is good as you are too old to start from the beginning. I cannot hire you as a journeyman without evidence that you are one or I would get in trouble with the guild. If you are willing, however, we can go before the Mangai to swear you in as an apprentice since I am currently in need of one. At first it will be mostly housework and cleaning but you will get training as well. Are you interested?"

Berina says, "That is a most generous offer, and I accept, Milord. Thank you. Will I be working under your personal direction?"

"No," Lord Odasart answers, "you will be working under the direction of my chamberlain, Zehedan of Falesh," indicating the man who had answered the door upon your arrival.

Davas: At work at the Spurs.

Quenaline: At work assisting the physician.

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4TH WATCH [WARM, CLEAR, STILL]⁴

Josrel, Rikoro:

On the way back to temple of Save K'nor, Rikoro mentions, "When we arrive, I shall try to seek an audience with the Ibarti while you approach the Olunar. Again I recommend diplomacy in your efforts as a hot head yields poor decision making and favor. If the Ibarti is busy however, I shall speak with any other clergy I see in the halls. Hopefully we will pick up a thread to aid us in the matter."

Upon reaching the temple the two split to their respective tasks.

Rikoro endeavouring to find the secretary for the Ibarti's affairs and making the proper inquiry for a meeting. He is told that the Ibarti will not be able to see him until after he has had his dinner, perhaps at the end of the fifth watch.

Afterwards while waiting for Josrel he will speak with any Manidar, Falorin, Haliki or Rowanti milling around the church grounds inquiring if they have seen Lillia

One of the Haliki says, "I have seen her not since yesterday afternoon. As she was leaving the temple, she mentioned that she was to meet someone on an urgent matter. I asked if I could help but she had already gone out the door and heard me not."

Berina: After politely turning down Master Uvienela's offer of apprenticeship, Berina goes to Lord Odasart to see if he knows of anyone needing help with smith work. He tells her no but he could use her help in writing down reports from the various weaponcrafters in town. Since he knows of her townhouse, he agrees to pay her 157d per tenday for her work and as compensation for her providing her own room and board. He also knows of her desire to "play with fire", so, to sweeten the deal, he tells her he has an old forge out back that she can use for a few hours a day as well.

Berina answers, "That is a most generous offer, and I accept, Milord. Thank you. Will I be working under your personal direction?"

"No," Lord Odasart answers, "you will be working under the direction of my chamberlain, Zehedan of Falesh," indicating the man who had answered the door upon her arrival.

Berina says, "That sounds good. I can start right this minute if you'd like, Milord."

Davas: At work at the Spurs.

Quenaline: At work assisting the physician.

11- ÁGRAZHÂR -720 TASHAL, KALDOR

5TH WATCH [COOL, OVERCAST, SOUTHWEST WIND, HEAVY RAIN]⁷

Josrel: After chastising you for shirking your duties, the Olunar says that Lillia informed him yesterday that she would not be at dinner as she was meeting someone at the Red Fox Inn. Hearing the rain begin, you ask the Olunar if you can fetch a cloak from her room to bring to her. He agrees and follows along. You find her room to be neat and tidy with no sign of a struggle. Grabbing up the blue cloak that she always wears in inclement weather you return to find Rikoro talking to one of the Haliki.

Rikoro: Comparing what you have learned, you both decide to go in the direction of the Red Fox Inn to continue your investigation.

Berina: Finishing your work for the day, you decide to step to the door for some fresh air. Just as you do, you see Josrel and Rikoro strolling through the rain past the front gate.

Quenaline: Finishing your work after a visit to the hospital of the temple of Peoni, you head for your dinner at the barracks. Looking through the heavy rain, you are just in time to see Josrel and Rikoro passing the front gate of Lord Odasart's mansion.

Davas: Finishing your work at the Spurs, you return to the townhouse and are told by Qisse of the visitors asking that you meet them at the temple of Save K'nor.

"Who was it?" Davas asks "and has Berina come home from work yet?".

Assuming he recognizes the description (or Qisse can remember the name(s)), Davas will pause only for a quick wash before hurrying out.

Hurrying off in that direction, Qisse calls after you, "so 'ow many weel dere be vor dinner?"

As Qisse asks the question, Davas stops in mid rush. "Ah ... dinner ... yes". "I think, Qisse, that we had best make our own arrangements" he says thoughtfully. Then he grins at her as he adds "either we will eat out tonight, or we will be home soon to help with food. Wait an hour if you can, then eat without us. Sorry for the late notice". This is thrown over his shoulder as he hurries off.

Heading up Heru road and turning toward Kald square, you turn the corner in front of the Red Fox Inn just in time to see Josrel and Rikoro at the gate to Lord Odasart's manor.

Davas hurries towards them, greeting them as he gets closer. "Hail friends ... did you have business with us? I came as soon as I got the message. Berina is still at work I think. What can we do for you? ... and can we do it somewhere inside out of the rain?"

* * *

Walking through the heavy rain, hair and clothes soaked and weighing against his body, Rikoro let's Josrel know, "Haliki, I felt it prudent to make an appointment with the Ibarti at the end of the fifth watch. If we stumble across anything we may need his aid and it's best we follow proper protocol. Otherwise we can send word and cancel it."

With a look of grim determination Josrel purposefully strides towards the Red Fox Inn: " Yes, I guess an appointment would be appropriate." Josrel snaps at Rikoro. "I am sorry for that." Josrel stops and holds out his hand to Rikoro: "I do not mean to take my frustration and anger out on you Rikoro. In the short time that I have been acquainted with you, you have been a good friend and I appreciate this." Josrel apologizes. " It's just that every time I talk with the Officers of the Church its seems that I end up getting chastised. Hopefully when you meet with the Ibarti you will fair better. Yes. But, First let us find my Lillia shall we." With that Josrel strides toward the Red Fox Inn.

Spotting a really tall person who can only be Rikoro, Berina calls out: "Hey, Redmane! Hold up!" and walks over to him, a big smile on her face.

Recognizing Josrel when she gets close enough, Berina says: "Greetings, Haliki. What brings..." seeing an expression on Josrel's face she hasn't seen before, concern mixed with anger, Berina interrupts herself and asks: "What's the matter?" Before Josrel or Rikoro can reply, she says: "Hold that thought. Let's get in out of the rain." Looking quickly around, she says: "Quick, the Red Fox Inn."

Going between them, Berina puts a hand on each of their shoulders and propels them towards the inn.

Approaching the inn, Berina spots Davas and calls out: "Davas, love, care to join us?" and points toward the door to the inn.

As Davas turns to look around, Berina looms out of the rain. He gives her a grin, listens to what she says and as is left behind a little as they hurry towards the inn. With another quick smile, he shakes his head, spraying a little water around, and hurries after them.

Going into the inn's common room, Berina shakes herself like a dog that's gotten wet, and mutters to her companions: "I know the rain is necessary for things to grow, but I prefer to restrict my getting wet to bathing. OK. Tell me what you want to drink, give me the money to pay for it, and I'll go get the drinks while you find a place where we can sit and talk." Taking everyone's orders and money, Berina goes to the bar to get the drinks. She orders what each person asked for, and says: "And I'll have an ale."

Davas asks for an ale, then waits patiently and listens quietly to both Josrel and Berina.

Taking the drinks to wherever the others have gone to sit, Berina hands everyone their beverages, sit's down, turns to Josrel, and asks: "Now, out with it. What's happened?"

"I don't recall hearing you talk about a Lillia. If you're thinking of marrying her, then you've been keeping secrets from your friends." Berina says in a gently chiding tone and with a mock reproach on her face. "Tell us her full name, and describe what she looks like."

At this question, Davas nods grimly and mutters quietly "family ... or clan perhaps. Yes ... quite likely".

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With his hands folded on the table Josrel gives Berina a side glance and half smirks at her: "I don't recall having a discussion of your personal life either Berina."

Chuckling, Berina says: "You know that I'm a Hlean. That should tell you much."

Winking at Berina, Josrel says, "How you worship Berina is your choosing." Josrel emphasizes worship. Giving Berina a sideways squinting flirting look: "So how pious of a Hlean are you?"

Josrel blushes "I didn't mention it till now because my feelings for her I was not entirely sure of. Our relationship started out as a rivalry more than a love affair. It was just before I left to find you in Heru that I realized that my true feelings for her. Now that she is missing it only reinforces my belief in those feelings."

"Oft times, a good beginning." Berina says, nodding in approval.

With a broad grin and a little mischief in his eyes Josrel describes Lillia as 6' 3", 148#, skinny as a sapling, with blonde hair and blue eyes. "Her name is Lillia of Alkar."

"Do you know how she came to be a Haliki of Save K'nor?" Berina asks.

Josrel only remembers that she mentioned she was a very bright child and always curious about everything. The Ibarti recognized these traits and sponsored her for her training in the priesthood...he has always treated her with the respect of a foster father.

Berina asks, "Can you tell us anything about her family?"

She had told him that her father died when she was young...gored by a wild boar while on a hunt. Her mother is a butcher for a living, always seeming to take great delight in butchering swine. Her mother has always been aware of the family's poor status and the instability of their income. She has mentioned that one day she hopes that Lillia marries well to someone with a steady income. She would like Lillia to be happy but, in her opinion, that is no substitute for food on the table.

After digesting Josrel's answers for a few moments, Berina starts: "I think we can rule out her being kidnapped for the purpose of being sold into slavery somewhere." Ignoring any shocked response from Josrel about the idea of Lillia being sold into slavery, Berina continues: "There would be no talk about forced marriage in that case, and anyway, such a prospect should have sent that woman to the constable, not to you."

Josrel replies, "Well, the women who told me of Lillia gave me the impression that she may be in on the kidnapping. If she wasn't and was truly trying to help me why run and disappear after she told me without any clues. Another question is why come to me and not to the Temple"

"Have you stopped to consider that the woman is probably a commoner...perhaps Lillia's nurse or other family retainer?" Berina asks. "Setting aside the possible involvement of the Ibarti for the moment, given the way he reacted to you, one of his own Haliki, how do you suppose he would have reacted to a woman unknown to him, claiming the same thing you did? As for why the woman came to you instead of the temple...effectively the Ibarti...if Lillia sent her, who do you think Lillia would have sent

her to? You, the man she loves, or the Ibarti, the character of whom she knows as well as you do?"

Berina continues, "The suspicious part of this woman's account is, if she really was trying to help Lillia, why didn't she just come right out and tell you where Lillia was? The way you recount the meeting with this woman, it sounds like a way to try to lure you...and the rest of us for that matter...into some kind of trap. The kidnapping is probably real enough, but I remind you all that Tesial was not acting on her own. There ARE people out there who have plenty of reason to want to do away with us. As we look into this matter, we had best be on our guard."

Pursing his lips and shaking his: "I was thinking along those same lines of trapping us. She did mention getting my friends involved to help. "Looking apologetically to Berina, Rikoro and Davas: " If I have brought you into a trap please accept my apologies and I would understand if you did not get involved any further."

Providing no one leaves: " Thank you for helping me."

"To my mind, that leaves two possibilities, or maybe a combination of the two. The only way a forced marriage can stand in the eyes of the law, is if it is arraigned by the head of her clan...or..., given her status as a Haliki of Save K'nor," here Berina pauses for effect "the Ibarti."

Upon hearing Berina's claim, Rikoro purses his lips and shakes his head.

Davas nods again as Berina talks of clan heads and adds "clan head ... or father. I think that would stand as well?" He looks to the others for confirmation. When Berina speaks of a priest as though they could be involved with kidnapping, Davas is obviously shocked. He recovers slowly as Berina continues and obviously starts to accept the possibility that the priest knows ... even if he isn't involved. He sits quietly, shaking and nodding his head occasionally at her words.

Berina waits until any reactions to her comment die down, and then continues: "If it is just her clanhead, this whole thing is understandable. Clanheads are always looking for matches for the maidens in their clan which can bring influence and wealth." A speculative look comes to her eyes as she says: "It's the possible involvement of the Ibarti that intrigues me."

"If this marriage is arranged..." Josrel shudders "then there is really not much that we...I...can do but accept it. I have nothing to offer the parties that arranged the marriage financially."

"Nonsense. From your description, Lillia's of an age that makes an arraigned marriage against her will almost unheard of...especially if the man she prefers actively objects." and Berina gives Josrel a pointed look.

Berina looks around at the others before returning her attention to Josrel. "It is possible that the Ibarti wants her for himself, but I consider that to be unlikely."

At listening to this Rikoro rubs slowly at his forehead with his large right palm seeming a bit dazed by what's being said.

Josrel glares at Berina and says under his breath: "I consider nothing unlikely lately. Master of knowledge forgive me."

Berina says, "You're a man in love. The object of your love has been wronged. I see nothing that needs forgiving."

Again, Berina lets any muttering die down before continuing: "As I see it, the most likely thing going on here, is that Lillia's clanhead has found the prospect of a very good match for her, but since she's a Haliki, the Ibarti would have to give his permission for this.

If her clanhead offered a large donation to the church, the Ibarti may have agreed. But the Ibarti is not an oblivious man, or he wouldn't have risen to the position he holds. He can't have failed to notice the feelings that were growing between you and Lillia.

You, my friend Josrel, got in the way. If I'm right, this would explain why the Ibarti has become so hostile to you, and expressed so little concern over the possible kidnapping of one of his Haliki."

Rikoro pinches the bridge of his nose with his thumb and spindly index finger before finally breaking to articulate in a calm tone, "The Ibarti's involvement in such a manner is highly unlikely. This is not how the church of Knowledge operates. This is something I would expect from the Lady of Opulence. That said, the Sages faith respects order. This comes in many forms - from being law abiding through to following the proper protocols. It is the latter case that our Haliki here broke from in his understandably emotional state when he approached the Ibarti. On top of which we are thinkers, not quick to act. For the Haliki to react so quickly to this situation without much proof other than an unidentified witness's claim - to the Ibarti would seem absurd. This to me explains the Ibarti's discontentment. Once we have gathered enough evidence I trust he shall act and justly."

Ignoring the slur against her Religion, Berina says: "You, my friend, are much too naive. The Ibarti is just a man. He is as subject to temptation and all of the other human failings as are any of us here. History is full of accounts of high-ranking priests and priestesses abusing their power and authority. A person in the position of Ibarti is due respect, not blind, uncritical obedience. The Gods expect us to do our own thinking, not abdicate that responsibility to someone else."

Thinking on Rikoro's explanation "I believe you may have a point Rikoro. That I acted on emotion not knowledge when I brought this to the Ibarti." Josrel lets his head drop a little: "But what's done is done and I will learn from this mistake. As for the Ibarti having any involvement....." Josrel shrugs his shoulders and holds his hands up.

Rikoro retorts with a soft smile, clearly enjoying the topic they've ventured into, "I do not deny that there is temptation, but one must put trust and faith in those of power. If you examine every leader or person of power with skepticism you're bound to find a flaw. Perhaps I am naive for having faith. The point I wish to make is that the Pantheon ask us to worship them, but if we slight against their way we will be punished for it. All the more so for clergy. This is what is called blasphemy. And yes in some faiths they allow for free thought - the Sages obviously included, but there are others that require blind obedience. Decisions exist to choose your religious path - this is our free

will you speak of, but once you walk down a road, if you stray you will find yourself in a good deal of 'danger'."

Josrel, turning his head to Rikoro, says, "The Ibarti is a good Teacher and I have nothing but respect for him. I pray that the reason the Ibarti threw me out of his office is due to me emotional outburst. Which is a problem that I struggle to control." Josrel confesses.

"Your father's profession as a litigant has rubbed off on you, I see." Berina says, smiling. Diving into the topic, she continues: "I most emphatically disagree with your statement that 'one must put trust and faith in those of power.' My faith is reserved entirely for the Gods...not for men as mortal as myself. As for trust, it has to be earned. It is not automatically bestowed by virtue of the accident of birth or the acquisition of a title...respect yes, trust no. One injudicious act...or failure to act...and trust is then easily lost and hard to regain. This is as true for the powerful, as it is for you and I."

Rikoro says, "Hrm I see respect as being gained through the act of trust. For myself I trust first. If it is broken then I will rescind such trust and thus respect."

Berina continues, "I actually hope to find flaws in people...within limits. When I see a person with flaws nevertheless become a good person, make sound judgments, and rise above their flaws...that person will gain my respect. I find it a good feeling...to be able to respect someone. It gives me hope that I too may one day conquer my own shortcomings."

"I want to continue these sorts of discussions, but we must get on with the task at hand. Once you and I have asked the staff here about Lillia, I suggest that we take Josrel to the townhouse for the quiet he'll need to do his 'seeing'."

With a bob of his head, Rikoro, steps back from the topic, "I concur, there is a more pressing matter to tend too, though I did enjoy this exchange."

Here Berina pauses to let everyone digest what she has said. "Now what I've said is just speculation. The Ibarti is an important man, and you don't come right out and accuse someone like him without proof, unless you want to wind up in prison. So, we need to proceed with looking for Lillia without expecting any help from the temple."

Acquiescing to Berina rescinding her original statement, Rikoro adjusts himself, "Fine we can take this as one of many hypotheses, but without support to the claim it is just that. As you stated one must watch that they do not slander one of rank and privilege without such."

Looking at the blue cloak that Josrel is carrying, Berina asks: "Is that Lillia's cloak? Thinking about using it to 'see' her?" She gives Josrel a lopsided grin: "You may be able to see if she's alright, and that's a good thing, but you may not be able to tell where it is that she's being held if you've never seen the place before, or there are not some identifying things about the place, like banners on the walls, that sort of thing. You go ahead and use the cloak."

Questioningly Rikoro mentions, "Mrm if the Haliki's own ability is similar to something I am familiar with then I believe we

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should not make a public spectacle of it. Perhaps back at the townhouse would be best. Not to mention one requires focus and the uproarious nature of the inn is not conducive to such. I can also endeavor to offer my own aid once we are alone."

Smiling at Rikoro, Berina says: "He's a priest. Priests pray. I don't think anyone here will have a problem with that. Your point about the noise is well taken, though." Turning to Josrel, she says: "Your call."

"When I used it back at Holdan Manor to see if Tesial was in there did you notice anything out of the ordinary when I used it?" Josel questions Berina.

Berina says, "I'm afraid not. I was busy keeping a look out to keep us from being seen, and I wasn't watching you."

Looking at the cloak that he is rubbing absently with his hands, Josrel continues, "Oh... yes Rikoro you have a point some solitude would be beneficial to me to try seeing Lillia. Once we ask around here I will go back to the Temple to meditate there on it. Unless someone has any other ideas. I open to anything."

Berina says, "I advise against you returning to the temple. If the Ibarti IS involved, he could disrupt your attempt to 'see' Lillia. I suggest that after we're done asking around here, we go to our townhouse where you'll have all the solitude you need."

Staring off at nothing, Josrel says, "What have I gotten into that the place I hold most sacred is not a place of solitude." He continues to stare at nothing.

Speaking to Rikoro, Berina asks: "You? I know what Josrel can do. What can you do that applies to the current situation?"

Rikoro grins a bit sheepishly to Berina, "One doesn't reveal all their secrets in a single sitting. Needless to say I believe it is something similiar to what you have described of the Haliki's own abilities. And not something to be discussed so openly here."

* * *

"Rikoro, I'm going to see if the innkeeper has seen Lillia. You work your charms on the serving girls. Davas, when Rikoro and I start asking about Lillia, we'll likely be overheard by other people in here. I'd like you to watch those people and see if any of them have a suspicious reaction."

Rikoro simply bobs his head in response taking in what Berina has asked.

Shaking his head as though to clear it, Davas looks up, smiles quickly and nods. He then leans back in his seat, holding his ale with his eyes half closed and begins to look around the room, taking in the others present while keeping a surreptitious eye on Berina and Rikoro.

Looking at Rikoro, Berina asks: "You ready?" and then she gets up and goes to talk to the innkeeper.

Stating confidently, Rikoro rises, "I am."

Speaking to the innkeeper, Berina asks: "Excuse me, but have you seen a [OOC: Fill in the physical description of Lillia here.] in the last day or so?"

With that he begins to approach each of the tavern wenches in turn. Rikoro approaches in a friendly manner offering a soft smile and an inquisitive look. His efforts are two fold - to be direct with the servers in a polite manner and to inquire about Lillia, also giving a description of her and time of arrival. The questions he is after are - who was she with, how did they look (or names if known), how long did she remain here, was anything overheard and where did they go. His attention focused on their voice for the responses.

Once you look around the common room you notice that this tavern is much quieter than most, appearing to cater to craftsmen wanting quiet conversation and dinner before retiring for the night. The staff that you can see include a rather large man at the door who gives your group a stern glance whenever your conversation gets louder than normal, a few overworked barmaids who don't appear to have time for casual conversation and a bartender who appears eager to talk to anyone taking the time to listen.

The latter tells you that, yes, he did see someone of that description meet with the innkeeper's son (he informs you that you were mistaken in thinking he is the innkeeper) and they left together shortly thereafter. The lady looked decidedly unhappy but not to the point of fearing for her life. He asks you not to reveal where you got your information as it would cause him to lose his job.

"Hmm. The innkeeper's son might have brought her bad news. That could explain why she was unhappy." Berina says, trying to allay the bartender's worries. "Perhaps I could be of assistance to her. Do you know where they might have gone?" After he answers, she'll ask: "What's the innkeeper's son's name, and what does he look like."

"Oh, that would be Armenton of Soril," answers the barkeep. After describing Armenton, the barkeep continues, "he and his wife run the pawnshop behind the tavern. I am sure the young lady is not in harm's way. Even though he and his wife have some violent arguments, he always appears to be very polished to everyone else."

"Thank you, you've been very helpful." Berina tells the bartender. She returns to the table where the others are seated, in an unhurried manner.

Noticing from a side long glance Berina return to the table, Rikoro finishes speaking with the final barmaiden abruptly. Deciding that Berina has had more success he also makes his way back to the table, joining the rest of the group.

Speaking in a low voice to avoid attracting the attention of the large man by the door or be overheard by the other patrons, Berina says: "The bartender saw a woman fitting Lillia's description come here and then depart in the company of the son of the innkeeper of this inn. The bartender said that she looked unhappy, but not fearful."

After Josrel or any of the others have commented, Berina continues: "The innkeeper's son is named Armenton of Soril. He and his wife run the pawnshop behind this inn. The bartender said that Armenton and his wife have some pretty violent arguments, but that he shows a smooth front to everyone else."

Addressing Josrel directly, Berina says: "If this is true, it's possible that the woman who told you about Lillia being kidnapped is Armenton's wife. Her motive in telling you is likely not to protect Lillia, but to get back at her husband by ruining some plan he's got going."

Talking to everyone again, Berina says: "So...here's what I suggest. It's pretty quiet in here, so while the rest of us sit around Josrel finishing our drinks...to avoid giving suspicion..., Josrel can try to 'see' Lillia. Josrel," speaking to him directly again "if you are successful in getting a vision of Lillia, pay attention to her surroundings. There may be a collection of things that you wouldn't expect to see in a typical residence, but that you would see in the residence of a pawnbroker. Also, take note of anyone with her, and if they're armed. The bartender said that Armenton looked like..." and here Berina repeats the description the bartender gave of Armenton. "I don't know if it helps or not, but I'm thinking that if Lillia is somewhere in Armenton's residence, our being this close might help Josrel's 'seeing'."

"I'm also thinking that a visit to the pawn shop is in order. If we can talk with Armenton's wife, Josrel might be able to recognize her voice if she is, indeed, the woman who told him about the kidnapping. Any other thoughts and ideas?"

Davas continues to watch the room and the people as Berina begins speaking. As he realizes that she has found names and possibilities, he sits forward, listens quietly and loses interest in the room's other occupants.

As she finishes, he nods, then quietly says "the visit to the pawn shop will have to wait until tomorrow - it will be closed by now". "The ... 'seeing' ... here ... is a good idea ... if it is not obvious". He turns to Josrel questioningly.

While idling over the table top, Rikoro contributes, "I concur with Davas. However, time is of the essence. Let us return to the townhouse where both the Haliki and I can spend some time in peace with the cloak. If we 'sense' no urgency we can wait until the next day to speak with the Pawnbroker in a civil manner. However, if what is revealed to us requires immediate attention we shall move with haste to this Armenton of Soril."

* * *

You reach the townhouse by the end of the 5th watch. Qisse greets you with an unhappy look regarding the extra guest for dinner. She tells you she can only serve what she has prepared so it will have to be smaller portions for everyone.

When Josrel uses Lillia's cloak for his clairvoyance, he sees her in an attic room (indicated by the sloping of the roof) with no windows. A woman enters the room and serves her dinner. Lillia does not appear to be mistreated and the furnishings of the room are comfortable but she is also not allowed to leave.

When Rikoro uses the same cloak for his talent, he knows the cloak belongs to a woman fitting the description of Lillia and she last wore it to go to the market several days ago.

After his meditation is over Josrel slowly opens his eyes blinking rapidly to clear them: " May I have some water please?" Josrel whispers.

After drinking the water Josrel addresses the group: " I did not have much luck with my mediation. The only vision I had was of Lillia in an attic with no windows. She seemed comfortable and is being feed by a woman. Maybe before we leave to go there in the morning I can try again to get another vision."

Upon breaking from his own meditation, Rikoro rubs at each of his temples with his hand, trying to ease his mind. He regards each of those present trying to focus his attention back on his surroundings seeming a bit disoriented, "I.. I have seen how she looks, wearing the cloak in a market - though it was likely several days past. If it as Josrel speaks then we do have a small luxury of time, so come morning I shall endeavor to focus on her current whereabouts and perhaps find something further to add."

Drawing in a weary breath Rikoro continues, "Though before retiring for the evening perhaps we should formulate a plan. I do not believe all of us rushing into the Pawnbrokers shop will reveal what we wish to know. Perhaps some guile shall do. I propose a three fold plan. One person speaks directly to Armenton of Soril. A second team seeks out his wife. While a third endeavors to reach Lillia's family. Through this effort we can cover the most ground and possibly postpone the wedding. In terms of bands I believe it best to have myself be the one to approach the pawnshop because in this case if he brutalizes his wife he may not respond well to a female presence and the likely scenario is we won't gain much from him. Davas and Quenaline should be the second team to approach his wife early in the morn with the knowledge she could be involved somehow. And the last, Berina and Josrel speak with the family. In doing so Josrel can proclaim his love for Lillia and intention, Berina acting as a commanding presence to force her way into any situation would certainly help along with her silver tongue. Not to mention if they are unaware of what is occurring it will certainly be revealed in their voices and manners. Once each of us completes their given task we should arrive to Lillia's families abode to share what we have gained."

Rikoro spreads out his large palms upwards offering some final words, "My ideas are of course malleable or can be discarded should something else be presented of better worth. You are all aware of your own strengths and weaknesses better than I, after having traveled together in the past."

Speaking to Josrel, Berina says: "Josrel, you said that the Ibarti sponsored Lillia into the priesthood, so to my mind that likely removes him from involvement in this matter...he's just a disagreeable man." and a wry grin passes across her face.

Looking straight at Berina: "I believe that his disagreement is a result of my actions." Josrel states flatly.

Berina gives him one of her trademarked raised-eyebrow looks, but says nothing.

Turning to Rikoro, Berina says: "Until Josrel can tell us more about Lillia's family, you're operating on an assumption...that assumption being, that Lillia's family is here in Tashal. Up to this moment, nothing has been said regarding where Lillia's family is. They could be in Olokand or even in another kingdom for all we know."

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"Unfortunately I have told you all I know of her family. The little time we had to nurture our feelings for each other left little time for idle chit chat." Josrel smiles wolfishly and blushes.

Berina says, "Well, that rather proves my point about her family, doesn't it? We're on our own for this one."

Mustering her thoughts, Berina begins again: "Josrel, I really need to know more about Lillia's family. You said that her father was killed while hunting, and that her mother is a butcher. That seems to imply...but does not prove...that Lillia's mother has not re-married, so there may be no step-father. Her mother seems, by your account, to favor an arraigned marriage, so I don't think there will be any help from that direction."

"Is it possible that Armenton's father, Melin of Soral, is Lillia's uncle...her mother's brother? That would make Armenton her cousin. If that's the case, Melin of Soral would likely be her clan head, and within his rights to force a marriage in the absence of a suitor agreeable to Lillia...Isn't that right, Rikoro?" she says, turning to Rikoro again.

Seeming to ponder the inquiry from Berina, before speaking, "Well when it comes to marriage, it is a purely customary act. The potential bride can accept a suitor, but there is nothing in the law to guarantee such. Thus, it is feasible that Haliki Lillia was abducted and placed into betrothal under the assumption of carnal knowledge."

Berina says, "Then we're right...time is of the essence. Sadly, it's so late that there is nothing more we can do today without being arrested by the town guard for violating curfew. We must find Lillia at all costs tomorrow before the assumption of carnal knowledge becomes provable fact!"

Berina continues, "Again, if what I've said is the actual situation, then the thing that needs to be done, is for us to get Josrel to Lillia, for him to formally ask her to marry him, and for her to accept. Even then, that may just delay things, and it may be necessary to get your father involved."

"If we go in a group to the pawnshop, we'll have an imposing advantage if Armenton's wife turns out to be the one who told Josrel about this abduction in the first place, or is the woman he saw in his vision. I disagree that a female presence would be counter-productive when it comes to getting information from Armenton. Remember who I worship...I can be VERY convincing."

Pulling on the tip of his beard, Rikoro acquiesces, "Yes you do raise some excellent points. Perhaps the Haliki can tell us more of Lillia's family history. And I did not know you followed the Maker of Bargains. I had been thinking from the antagonistic side rather than the intimate when dealing with this Armenton. But you're taking a gamble that his wife was the one to approach the Haliki. This is why I suggested a bit of guile first to see what we can find. Not to mention a married man may be put off by such...", Rikoro pauses as if searching for a word, "...advances."

Vamping Rikoro in a very exaggerated way, Berina says: "Just a little harmless flirting?"

Getting serious again, Berina continues: "What I had in mind was to distract him. If his wife is not in view, my little act should

bring her running so that Josrel can get a look at her, and maybe hear her voice. If she's the one that Josrel saw in his vision, then we've got them. If not, then you can act stern with me and tell me to go outside...which I will do...while you then try your bit of guile on Armenton. How does that sound?"

"After we've solidified our plans I have an appointment with the Ibarti I do not wish to be late for. The Haliki is aware of the reasons and if he wishes me to simply cancel it I shall. But I do not desire to simply leave a member of clergy lingering." After finishing his statement to Berina, Rikoro turns to regard Josrel with a soft smile.

Josrel nods to Rikoro: "By all means, please meet with the Ibarti. He will be very upset with you if you miss your appointment. One word of advice, be as humble as you can." Josrel smiles

Listening to the plans laid out by both Berina and Rikoro, Josrel says, " If Armenton is involved and is holding Lillia, as much as it pains me to say this, I think it unwise that I go into his shop. It is very obvious that I am a Haliki." Josrel points to the tattoo on his eye. " Armenton might get suspicious as to why the three of us decided to pick the day that he is holding a Haliki against her will to browse his store and one of the us is a Haliki." Josrel with a thoughtful look, then smiles to the group: "None of you would have an eyepatch, would you?"

Berina says, "Actually, we probably could fix you up with some sort of eyepatch, but I think I have a better idea...wear Lillia's cloak and keep the hood over your head so that your tattoo remains in shadow."

Berina continues, "You can keep the cloak pulled around you to hide your robes. If you stand at the door and don't enter all the way into the shop, you can see Armenton's wife and whatever else goes on in the shop. If Armenton should ask why you're not entering into the shop, we can say that you think you're coming down with something, and that you think closed-in spaces make an illness worse. The rest of us can make a couple of jokes at your expense and get on with our subterfuge."

Josrel stands and puts Lillia's cloak on, pulls the hood over his head and adjusts it to cover his eyes and nose. Then hunches his back a little and bows his head: "Well, how does it look?" He asks as he coughs feigning a cold.

Berina says, "Looks alright to me, but don't overplay the cough. If you're sick enough to be coughing, you should be home abed, not wandering the streets. Try a quiet snuffle."

Smiling, Berina says: "Gods, all this sneaking and deception feels so absurd, it's all I can do to keep a straight face. I'm afraid I'll never be much good at it. Direct action for me!"

Speaking to Rikoro, she says: "Rikoro, as the son of a litigant, I suspect that you're the one most qualified to dissemble. I leave it in your hands, but we can't take too much time, or we may be too late."

Rikoro chuckles lightly, "Well my own litigancy education is something I acquired as a boy and has not seen much practice in years. Not to mention one is not taught the means of guile when it comes to law. Still what I suggest is that we approach subtly at first, then if that fails you try your own charm and if still we

do not have what we need, then I can endeavor to persuade this Armenton to the truth with words of law."

Berina says, "OK, I'll follow your lead until it produces results or it becomes obvious that it's not going to."

Thinking about being too late jogs Berina's memory, and she says: "Gods! I'm missing Sir Arylen's funeral! I've got to go now! I'll be back soon." and she rushes off toward the temple of Larani.

As she goes to rush to the temple of Larani for the funeral, Berina almost shouts over her shoulder: "Come to the townhouse tomorrow as soon as the curfew is lifted."

Starting, Davas says quickly "that is today? ... Wait for me ..." He leaps to his feet and follows quickly.

Turning to Josrel, Rikoro raises from his seated position at the table, "Care to join me for the meeting I have with the Ibarti? We are verging on being late as the end of the fifth watch is upon us, though if we rush we can make it"

"Now that I think about it, maybe I should accompany you. I should get back to the Temple anyway. I can spend some time meditating on Lillia's robe. I would not want to be present at the meeting though. You just requested to meet with him alone? Right. If that is the case he would not be expecting me so it might irritate him if I am there. But, I will go back to the Temple for the night." Josrel gathers his things and leaves with Rikoro.

After she has had her brief meeting with the Obasaron, Berina asks Davas: "Would it be possible for you to escort me back to the townhouse? You can stay the night, and I'll treat you to breakfast." Berina gives Davas pleading puppy dog eyes that should send him into gales of laughter.

Davas begins to speak seriously as Berina asks him to escort her home. As she finishes, he grins, begins to speak, then can't hold his laughter as she makes faces at him. "Of course, of course ... though I think that I will be making the breakfast ... as usual ... thou late riser". Still chuckling, quietly, he takes her arm and walks her into the street in the direction of home.

* * *

Rushing to the funeral, Berina is obviously flustered at missing most of it. Berina tries to speak to the Obasaron (working through channels if necessary), and is granted an audience.

Not quite stammering, Berina says to the Obasaron: "I'm so sorry that I missed most of Sir Arylen's funeral, Milord. My friends and I are in the middle of trying to solve a kidnapping."

Getting to the point, Berina continues: "Milord, just before Sir Arylen and the rest of us entered the Holdan temple, he blessed or prayed to Larani to enchant his sword. I know it was successful, because in the dark of the tunnel, it glowed a bit. I know little of that type of enchantment, but I was wondering if that enchantment might have forged a connection to his soul? If so, then he might not be free of this life. I'm hoping that my worries are groundless, but, given the possible stakes in this matter, I felt that I had best say something and risk being thought a fool, than to keep silent and make a ghastly omission."

Here her voice trails off. Her expression is a combination of grief and worry, and her eyes are moist with tears.

"Do not worry yourself my dear," the Obasaron says, "What you describe is a common invocation used when going into a dangerous situation. It gives the blade extra impact, especially against the forces of evil, but it only lasts a few days. The enchantment has worn off by now and Sir Arylen's soul is under the protection of the Lady of Paladins."

Berina says, "Thank you, Milord. I can say goodbye to him in my heart and let him go to his duty in the Lady's host."

Quenaline

Quenaline prepares the following missive to be delivered to the temple... "Esteemed Maidens of the Silken veil, I find myself writing to you regarding a subject which all deem to acknowledge yourselves the accepted experts; namely matters of the heart and the associated 'functions' that accompany such.

I call upon you as I find that this is a field of study in which I currently have minimal to no current experience beyond the hearsay knowledge of my peers and, as I have recently found myself suffering the interruptions and distractions brought about by my ignorance, have decided to seek out what information I can from those whom I know are 'informed' in the subject at hand.

Would you be amenable to discussing the possibility of an arrangement that can be to both our benefit?

Either way, could you please pass on your response to the bearer of this missive, and she will ensure that I receive it forthwith.

Yours in anticipation, Quenaline of Falesh."

11- ÁGRAZHÂR -720 TASHAL, KALDOR

6TH WATCH [COOL, OVERCAST, STILL, HEAVY RAIN]⁷

Josrel, Rikoro: Trudge through the pouring rain back to the temple of Save K'nor. After the 45 minute trek (with another 15 minutes getting the porter to open the door), Josrel goes to his bed and Rikoro meets with Ibarti Erdaris.

Upon entering his bed chamber Josrel moves to his bed sits on the edge elbows on his knees and head in his hands. Sits for a minute then swings his body to lay in bed. Gripping Lillia's Cloak he closes his eyes: "Sage of Heaven guide your lost servant. Look over my friends whom I have involved in my personal quest. I humbly beg of thee to show me the way to my love. "Josrel vows to himself and to Save-K'nor to fast and give up sleep in sacrificial penance till Lillia is found.

* * *

The Ibarti says, "What can I help you with, my son? Please be brief though as you are late and I was about to retire after a trying day."

Upon entering Rikoro inclines his head respectfully to the Ibarti, "I do apologize for my delay, Ibarti and I thank you for granting an audience to a humble follower of the Sage. As you've requested I shall get straight into the matter. Though I doubt you remember me, we had met at Lord Odasart's manner; I was attending to my Uncle - Charance of Drelin. This morn I arrived

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at the chapel to prepare for ablu­tion and quiet meditation to help begin my day. Upon my arrival I was met by another in attendance at that dinner, Haliki Josrel. He seemed distraught and when I inquired he immediately told me of what was wrong. I believe you had an ear of it just prior, though likely because of his emotional state and the lack of evidence he presented were not swayed. Such is completely understandable. I offered to assist in the matter so that we could prepare a factual account and uncover the truth.

With almost a dramatic flourish, but more for catching his own wind, Rikoro takes in a quiet breath before continuing, "What was discerned thus far is that in the morning Haliki Lillia made her way to the Red Fox Inn on an errand unknown. Once there she was met with Armenton of Soral, a pawnbroker by trade. His father is Melin of Soral and owner of the Red Fox. They had a brief exchange of words whereupon Armenton and Lillia left together, she quite unhappy with the current situation. Unfortunately because the day had worn on, we decided to pursue another avenue. Haliki Josrel had in his possession a cloak of Lillia's and so he used it to try and divine her location. The Lord of Knowledge hearing his request offered a preview of where she may be. Though it was scant, he was witness to her in a room with no windows, being brought food, but also kept locked in."

Rikoro raises two of his long spindly fingers as he speaks his first two sentences to emphasize his point, "While what I bring to is not much in the matter of information. It provides what I believe are two key facts. First, that Ibarti Lillia is not in the temple this eve. A simple head count would reveal that. This alone is cause for concern as she could be in some danger and I imagine a member of clergy going missing is no small matter. Second, it shows the extent to which Josrel loves Lillia. In this case would it not be best to see the union of two devout followers who mutually agree to be together both here and in Inor Teth, rather than torn apart under an ill-conceived forced wedding that would also smear her name if it was done so under the pretense of carnal knowledge. I shall admit for the latter, the assumption she is to be forced into marriage comes from rumor dropped by another. However, seeing as how the former has been proven true, one can tacitly accept such until proven otherwise. I believe from my lay understanding of the faith that choice is always paramount in any decision. Whether it is right or wrong it is ours to make and governs what we learn and how we grow."

With his final words spoke, Rikoro bows his head to Ibarti Erdaris, then places both his hands on his staff, gripping it lightly. His eyes remain downcast and his person pensive as if it finally sunk in who it was he was speaking with.

Ibarti Erdaris says, "Let us examine the logic of what you have said. First you tell me that Haliki Lillia went on a personal errand, met a pawnbroker and was unhappy with the results of their conversation. It has been my experience that people who meet with pawnbrokers are frequently in unhappy circumstances."

"Next you tell of a vision Haliki Josrel assumes came from the Lord of Knowledge. Such evidence can point us in the way of truth but they are never to be taken as truth without other facts to

back them up. I also do not understand what part of his vision made you assume that she is locked in."

"Then we have Haliki Lillia being out of the temple without permission as told by Haliki Josrel, who himself is out of the temple without permission when he should be attending to his chores. We would like our clergy to do their share of the work and we would like to know where they are but they are not slaves that we can force to our will – we can only refuse to support those who continue to shirk their duty. Whether he loves Haliki Lillia or not, is not proven by your statements but, in any case, is not relevant to the truth."

"I do not follow your leap of logic from the little evidence you have presented to an 'ill-conceived forced wedding' since rumor is also not evidence."

"I disagree with your statement that we always have a choice in our actions but that is of no matter as we do not concern our selves with right and wrong, good or evil. We have had some lengthy and interesting discussions on just what those concepts mean. The only truth in an action is in its performance and in the taking of responsibility for ones own actions."

"In conclusion, I would be interested in what you learn and I will be happy to marry the couple if that is what they both desire but I do not see what else you desire of me. Is there anything else before the porter sees you out and we can get to our respective beds?"

Keeping his emotions flat, Rikoro offers a slight nod after having let Ibarti Edrais speak, "You are quite right to doubt the words I have spoken, Ibarti. All of what you have said speaks true. My main intention was to keep you informed of our actions and what we have gathered. I could have gone a stretch further and claimed her life was in peril, but such would not be true, though a part of me wished to sway you with an argument to find the wayward Haliki. I suppose the knowledge that Haliki Josrel, myself and a few others have undertaken the chore will suffice. I thank you for your time, and again apologize for my tardiness this eve."

With that said, Rikoro dips his head reverently. After being dismissed he casually makes his way from the temple before rushing back as quickly as he came to the townhouse.

Berina, Davas: Returning to the townhouse through the pouring rain, they eventually wake Qisse to grudgingly open the door so they can retire to their beds.

Quenaline: Retires to her bed at the soldiers' barracks.

12- ÁGRAZHÂR -720 TASHAL, KALDOR

2ND WATCH [COOL, OVERCAST, NORTHWEST GALE, LIGHT RAIN]⁸

Josrel

In the middle of the second watch, Josrel spends an hour at his prayers and ablu­tion. When he goes to where the other residents of the temple are breaking their fast, Ibarti Erdaris refuses to allow him any food, saying, "We share our hospitality as we share our labors. If you do not do your assigned labors, you can find your food elsewhere. If you continue to shirk your duties, you will be finding your lodging elsewhere as well."

"Teacher, and my fellow servants of Save-K'nor." Josrel addresses the room of gathered Clergymen. "I humbly ask your forgiveness for my absence in these past and future days. I understand the strain it puts upon us and I am sorry." Bowing Josrel speaks to the Ibarti. "Teacher Erdaris, I willfully accept your decision to ban me from the temple for not performing my duties and any future penance you feel fit to put upon me when I am able to return. I believe that Lillia has been taken against her will and am trying to bring her back to the Temple. I hope that when this matter has been resolved that you can accept me back into the temple family." Josrel still bowed to Ibarti Erdaris awaits his rebuke.

With stern visage, Ibarti Erdaris says, "From the account your friend gave me last night, your belief that she is in any sort of danger comes from unproven assumptions and rash conclusions. Be that as it may, we will not force you from following your own mind. Gather your belongings and be on your way."

"Thank you Teacher, for understanding my situation." Josrel bows and goes to gather his stuff. He then heads to Berina's and Davas's townhouse. He arrives at their door just as they are leaving.

[OOO: Morning prayer gained no benefit (die roll). Malnutrition / Starvation will take effect after 24 hours without food. Fasting only gains benefits with willful lack of food AND continuous prayer so, while your fasting, you can do nothing else. I haven't found any acceptable rules for sleep deprivation so, until I find or develop some, you will accumulate your fatigue rate for each watch that you're awake beyond 24 hours (in addition to any through strenuous exercise and psionics use). As soon as you rest to recover fatigue, you'll fall asleep.]

Berina, Davas, Rikoro

As Qisse is serving you porridge, bread and small ale to break your fast, she says, "I ees fay awp yesterday wuz nat a typical day vor ee volks, way de returning late to meals, unexpected guests and visiting vokes een de middle uv de night! And een spite uv all yer promises, I got no 'elp vrim ee way de 'housework aither. 'ow many better way I be preparing dinner vor tonight?"

Looking quite shamefaced, Davas nods quietly. "You are right ... apologies are due ... and I am sorry Qisse". With a quick glance at the others, he adds quickly "... and if you say what you need done, we will do it right?" He nods quickly and sounds enthusiastic.

Berina says, "I'm sorry Qisse. Yesterday was very hectic, and today may be much the same. The reason Davas and I were out late last night is because we were attending the funeral, at the temple of Larani, of a comrade-in-arms of ours who was killed recently."

"As to the rest, we've discovered that a woman beloved by Josrel...he's the Haliki of Save K'nor we brought here yesterday...has been abducted and is to be married against her will. We're trying to find a way to stop it, and in turn, get her and Josrel married to each other." Looking at Qisse with her eyes narrowed just a bit, Berina asks: "You wouldn't happen to know anything we could do to make this go a little easier, would you?"

I've never been mixed up in something like this before, and frankly, I'm running out of ideas."

Qisse says, "I be sure dey wan uv my station needs nat an explanation uv yer comings and goings. I jist need to know yer plans far 'nuff ahead uv time so I may sar ee as well as I may." She thinks for a moment and replies, "I 'ad a cousin dey wuz een a similar situation and I wud advise ee to find de lady and, way er ascent, abduct er rate back. Concern yersel nat way de law ur er kin as dere be no laws dey pertain and er kin be most likely concerned way profiting vrim some dowry ur inheritance. If ee plan doing anything agin de lady's consent, I want to nat know 'bout it."

Berina continues, "As for dinner tonight, I was thinking that if you could gather up some things that could be eaten cold... maybe some smoked meat, cheese, and a bit of ale to wash it down with..., then we could eat that whenever we have the time, and you wouldn't have to wait for us." Turning to Davas and Rikoro, Berina asks: "Is that acceptable to you?"

Davas says, "Of course, yes, of course ... good idea".

Qisse says, "Ees, dey weel be praper and I can get what I need vrim de market today."

Not knowing whether to hug Qisse [OOO: Berina tends to regard Qisse from a motherly point of view, even though Qisse is older than Berina.], or give her a sheepish look, Berina says: "While we're waiting for the curfew bell, I'll clean out the fireplaces and the cook fire. Davas, could you please clean any [OOO: What would there be? Utinsils, plates, pots and pans?]? Rikoro, could you please do something to help Qisse? I'm sure she can direct you."

"Of course ... and there is probably sweeping to do, yes?" Davas grins suddenly, shakes his head and adds "... of course there is...there is always sweeping". Looking to Qisse and giving her one of his smiles, he says "say what you need me to do and it will be done".

Turning his attention from Berina to Qisse, Rikoro adds, "Whatever is required of me I shall endeavor to do, though I may need guidance. Also Qisse you have my apologies as well. I had set an appointment to meet with a high clergyman of my faith at the end of the fifth watch. As Berina stated this is not usual behavior, but I imagine there will be times were such will happen. To balance it out, from the tales I have heard we will not always be in Tashal so you will have this place to yourself. A bit of piece and quiet after the storm has come through so to speak."

Suiting deed to word, Berina gets going on cleaning out the fireplaces. Once that's done, she will clean herself up, put on her boots, the linen dress, and the belt with her knife and the pouch with her flint and steel (her money will be left at the townhouse).

When Berina is dressed and ready to go, she will find Davas and Rikoro and ask, with a smile on her face and fire in her eyes: "Are you guys ready to go rescue a lady in distress?"

Davas laughs and says "it will make a change to rescue someone else, Berina".

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"Oh, ho!" Berina exclaims, and reaches over to tickle Davas on the ribs, laughing.

Tasks complete, Rikoro offers a nod with a bit of a grin to Berina, "I feel in this case it is uniting two of the Lost Guides lost Halikis"

After cleaning the fireplaces and herself, Berina says to Davas and Rikoro: "Qisse is right. If we can find Lillia, we'll need her assent to remove her from wherever she is. On the surface of this matter, it seems that, that would not be a problem, but if Lillia is convinced that her abduction and the proposed forced marriage is in the best interests of her family, she may refuse our offer of assistance. In other words, she may be willing to sacrifice her own happiness for the good of her family. If that's the case, then there's nothing we can do, and Josrel will have to accept a broken heart. But, we still need to find her and ask. You guys ready? Let's go."

A smile appears on Rikoro's lips as he takes notice of Josrel approach, "Ah good morn Haliki. We were just off to meet you at the temple. Grand timing"

Pausing to consider something Rikoro asks, "Have you had a chance to try and discern Lillia's whereabouts?"

Motioning back inside the townhouse the group just stepped out of, "If not perhaps we should both endeavor to do so before setting off in case she has moved to a more recognizable location. We may even learn something more this time, as my own attempt yielded little last time"

With bags under his red eyes Josrel puts ALL of his belongings down: "Good Morn to you as well and all in this house. Although I can't vouch for how good it is." Josrel says critically. "I have been kicked out of the Temple." Josrel says casually with a smile. "I did try to meditate on the cloak last night, but to no avail. I certainly would like to give it another try though." He pipes rather cheerfully, without dwelling on his previous statement.

Somewhat dismayed by what he just heard and noticing the Ibarti's current state, Rikoro ushers Josrel over to a table in a serious manner. Then he takes a seat himself leaning up against the edge of the table, "Alright then let us both try at once to discern Lillia's present location from the cloak, to save time. Hopefully we will have this resolved soon so that you're welcome back into the temple...and with a new bride by your side."

Obviously listening more to the tone than the words, Davas smiles and nods, then looks quickly at Josrel as he realizes what he has said. "... ah ... did you say kicked out? ... What did you do?" he blurts, then blushes and looks away again. "Sorry ... I didn't mean to ... sorry".

Looking very tired now but managing a smile:" Please, don't be sorry Davas. I think by now we are close enough to ask some personal questions of each other. You see I was really told to leave because I haven't been keeping up on my chores at the Temple due to Lillia's absence. So I had a choice stay and do chores or search for Lillia." Josrel puts one cupped hand up then the other motioning then up and down like a scale. "I chose to search for Lillia. It was then that I realized that I can worship and service the Sage of Heaven anywhere. If the Ibarti is more

worried in the daily running of the Temple that's his mission, his way of serving Save-K'nor then fine. Personally I think he is a shepherd of us his flock and should look after us...but I guess that's what I'm doing." Josrel finishes with a broad grin.

Davas grins at Josrel. "Ah ... chores ... yes ... Qisse said something similar to us this very evening - very guilty we were". He lowers his voice to a stage whisper and adds "I'm not sure that Qisse could be considered a priest of any sort ... but I think she might be in that slightly scarier category ... of mothers". He grins again, saying "... and yes, you are right. We need to do some tending. Let us do so."

Evero

After returning from your training at the chantry in far off Melderyn, you have been relaxing and visiting with your family for the last tenday. This morning while you are breaking your fast, your mother says, "I has been very nice having you back again but should you not begin looking for ways to support yourself. After all, you are not by any means needy like the rest of the supplicants supported here at the temple. I met a nice young man the other day who mentioned in casual conversation that he too had just returned after years of training in foreign lands...although he said not what he was trained in. Perhaps you can get to know him and swap advice...safety in numbers so to speak. His name is Rikoro of Drelin..." and she gives you directions to where he said he was staying and what he looks like.

The young man groans softly at the thought of finding something to do, but smiles affectionately at his mother. "Yes, I suppose you have the right of it mum." He chews on his bread reflectively for a while before he clears his throat and slowly stands up.

"I'll look this eh, Rikoro up. Perhaps he could help." With that he bends forward, kisses her on the cheek and leaves 20 pence on the table. "For the temple" he mumbles vaguely.

12- ÁGRAZHÂR -720 TASHAL, KALDOR

3RD WATCH [COOL, OVERCAST, NORTHWEST STORM, LIGHT RAIN]⁸

Josrel sits at the trestle table and concentrates on Lillia's cloak. An hour later when everyone else is beginning to assume he has fallen asleep, Josrel realizes that he is going to get nothing for his effort. [+15 FP, +1 Clairvoyance]

Rubbing his eyes and cracking his neck Josrel disappointedly says: " I still can't get a vision of Lillia. I think we should carry out our plan."

Taking his turn with Lillia's cloak, Rikoro tries to discern Lillia's location. Fourteen minutes later, he decides that he too has failed to learn anything. [+13 FP, +1 Psychometry]

* * *

Evero follows his mother's directions to find Rikoro. "Filthy weather." he grumbles and draws his cloak tighter around him as protection against the wind and rain. Eventually he finds what looks like the place and knocks on the door.

"Excuse me," he says when the door opens "I'm looking for Rikoro of Drelin, I was told he stays here?"

The woman answering the door looks to be on her way out to visit the market, judging by the basket on her arm.

"Come inside out uv de weather," she says, holding the door for him. Leading the way to the small common room, she says, "Rikoro dere be some gent yer to see ee."

"I be off to de market now," she adds as she leaves, "be sure to lock up if ee left."

Rising from the table to regard the newly arrived man in the doorway Rikoro offer his thanks to Qisse. He then turns his attention to the fellow looking at him curiously, but also appearing a bit disoriented, "Erm, you will have to forgive me, but you seem to have me at a bit of a disadvantage, as I do not believe we have met. I am Rikoro of Drelin, and yourself? Is there something I can aid you with?"

Evero steps aside to let the woman pass and smiles a polite thanks as she passes out the door. Then he turns to the man with a slightly embarrassed smile.

"Ah, well. Forgive my lack of manners, I am Evero of Hurone. I am from these parts, but have studied in Melderyn for a few years and just got back." His voice is a pleasant bass, soft but with a hint of strength behind it.

"My..." he catches himself, he was about to say that his mother sent him, but that wouldn't sound right he thinks. His easy manner turns unsure and he flutters a little nervously with his hands. "Ah well, this is a little embarrassing. I'm not really sure _why_ I'm here, but it was suggested by the Lerovana at the Peoni temple I see you." He eyes Rikoro as he says this.

"She seemed to think we might have some things in common and that you might suggest a place to stay." He actually blushes slightly and then assumes an air of friendly briskness. "Perhaps you and your friends would join me for a meal and a glass?"

Rikoro's eyes widen a bit as if realization dawns on him before he utters his first sentence, "Ah you are the son of Lerovana Apryle of Hurone. I had spent some time in the Peonian temple and got to know her quite well. I was there to help those in need of healing until I fell sick myself. The Lerovana was a very patient teacher and an even kinder physician."

The young man still looks faintly embarrassed but replies calmly enough if a little stilted "Yes, I am and I thank you for the kind words about my mother."

Switching topics quickly, Rikoro speaks with a bit more urgency, "While I would like to sit and speak with you further since it seems a number of us have ties to Melderyn and the surrounding area, we have a pressing matter that requires our attention."

Evero's face betrays interest at the mention of Melderyn but he remains silent as his new acquaintance presses on.

Rikoro motions to Josrel, as he communicates to Evero, "Haliki Josrel here has had his love taken from him. She is another Haliki by the name of Lillia. For what purpose we do not know precisely, but we suspect marriage to another. We were in the midst of making our way to a lead on her possible whereabouts.

A plan has been exacted, but now needs to be carried out as time is against us."

Upon hearing his name Josrel gets up and heads toward Evero. Extends his hand to him: "Well meet Evero, may Save-K'nor grant you the knowledge you seek."

As the man approaches, Evero turns to him with a concerned look on his round face and grasps the offered hand in one of his own meaty ones. "Evero of Hurone. What a terrible thing, if there is anything I can do." he says with obvious sincerity.

Opening up his large palms to Evero in an effort to apologize or appease him, Rikoro states, "Thus we will need to postpone your offer of some bread and wine, but we would welcome your company in the meantime – that is if you have no other errands to tend to this day. Also your request about lodging, you can speak with the lease owners Berina and Davas .."

Rikoro motions to Berina and Davas respectively with a tilt of his head, "... as they hold the townhouse we are currently standing in. If I am not mistaken they have need of a few more tenants."

With all of that said Rikoro takes in a breath of air, taps his staff once on the floor and makes his way westwards, "Let us not tarry here further"

"Oh, ah - yes. I see I have come at a bad time, but if there is anything I can do..." He doesn't finish the sentence.

The woman indicated as Berina says: "By all of the Gods, another one?"

She stands up, and she may be the tallest woman Evero has ever seen. Berina is a good four inches taller than he is, but at that, she is a good head shorter than Rikoro. Berina has long blond hair pulled straight back and done in a braid that reaches almost to the small of her back. She has a fair complexion with blue eyes and is built proportionally to her height except that her breasts are somewhat on the large size.

Berina is wearing a plain white ankle-length linen dress with a black leather belt. A knife and pouch are hanging from the belt, and a pair of black shoes or boots are visible under the hem of the dress.

Evero eyes her a bit shyly but appreciatively and manages a weak smile as she greets him.

She holds out her hand in greeting, and says: "Welcome.As Rikoro has said, we'll have to discuss lodging later."

He simply nods in mute agreement.

When Evero shakes her hand, he discovers that her grip is crushing, and that she has calluses on her palm and fingers. "Everyone ready? Lead on, Redmane!" she says smiling, and pokes Rikoro gently in the ribs with an elbow.

Evero says, "If I may, where are you - we going. How can I help?"

Berina says, "The missing woman...Lillia...was last seen in the company of a pawnbroker. We're going to his shop to see what we can learn. We really don't have time to bring you up to speed

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on how we're going to try and get information from the pawnbroker, so when we get there, just hang back and keep your eyes and ears open...oh, and act like you've never seen any of us before."

Evero says, "I see. Very well." he replies a bit dubiously, but then flashes her a quick smile "I can always see if he has anything worthwhile to buy while I'm there."

With Berina's final words, the group sets out for the Pawnshop.

Along the way Rikoro fills in the gaps for Evero, "Our plan thus far is a layered three attempts to find Lillia. Since our thread of investigation has guided us to Armenton of Soril, Berina, Davas and I intend to engage him at his shop, whilst the Haliki waits in the wings outdoors to overhear the conversation."

Puffing slightly to keep up as they make their way through Tashal in the biting wind, the young lyahvian listens intently as the tall man explains.

Listing off each attempt as Rikoro speaks; he raises a single spindly finger in turn from his right hand as if itemizing their goals, "I shall first arrive and use a subtle amount of guile and pressure to try and see if we can uncover what we need. If this should prove unsuccessful Berina intends to use her `charms' to wile the shop keep into opening up to her. Lastly if this somehow fails we may try to use my meager knowledge of law to motivate him to speak."

A quick glance at the woman is followed by a slow smile. He begins to say something, but after a second glance at his companions he simply gestures for Rikoro to continue. "Go on"

Glancing over to a passing individual in the street, Rikoro resumes filling in Evero on the details, "There is one other possibility left to us should we gain nothing from Armenton. There still remains the catalyst behind this investigation - a veiled woman that approached Josrel early yesterday morning. Our hypothesis thus far is that it was Armenton's wife - so if we are able to find her, we may be able to leverage Lillia's whereabouts. However, for now we will stick with what we know before"

Turning to Josrel abruptly as if a thought struck Rikoro, "Speaking of, keep a watch for the woman you heard .. and then `saw' as she may be within the shop assisting her husband, and if such is the case it could tip the scales in our favor. I remind you though, do not do what your heart wants, but what your mind dictates."

Offering a final piece of advice to Evero, Rikoro mentions in a calm manner, "I would suggest giving us a few minutes yourself before entering the shop so that we do not seem both suspicious and overwhelming to the fellow. If you're good at reading a persons `tells' though feel free to keep a subtle watch on his responses to our inquiries. Beyond that if at any point you feel we've missed something please do join in, especially if we are getting no where with him. It may even put him off balance being pestered by a second hand witness."

Ever so slightly out of breath, Evero is obviously not the fittest person in their small group, replies slowly. "I'm not sure of what assistance I can be, but I'll certainly do what I can." He smiles his shy smile again. "At any rate, I'll stay out the way."

12- ÁGRAZHÂR -720 TASHAL, KALDOR

4TH WATCH [COOL, OVERCAST, SOUTHWEST WIND, HEAVY RAIN]⁷

You reach the shop as the rain begins in earnest. Just as you arrive, a woman is leaving, "I am off to the market...is there anything I should get for you?"

"Not now, woman! I am with a customer," comes the answer within.

Arriving at the head of the group, Rikoro watches the woman as she leaves and then subtly motions to the hooded Josrel before stepping inside the shop himself.

Josrel strains to get a look at the woman as she leaves for any sign of recognition. "Excuse me Miss." Josrel summons to the woman trying to keep his head back in the hood concealing his face. "Do you work in this shop?" Josrel asks.

"The proprietor is my husband. Why do you ask?" she asks.

Josrel does not see anything familiar about her nor does he recognize her voice.

"Well you see miss I do a lot of writing and am in need of some inks, quills, ink wells and other tools of the trade. And if you knew if those things could be purchased here or not." Josrel asks still trying to keep his face concealed.

"No, I am sure he deals not in such small items unless they are quite valuable. You will have to take it up with him," she answers, "and now I must bid you good day and be on my way."

* * *

Evero moves past the shop and group of people outside it, but stops a little way up ahead well within earshot. With a grunt he bends down in the rain and pretends to examine his shoe. "Bloody cobbler."

* * *

At the same moment, a farmer and a young lad arrive with a cow in tow. "Witch de kae zo dey it does nat wander off," the farmer tells the lad as he enters the shop ahead of you.

Entering the shop, you see the pawnbroker behind the counter, a guard at the door, a man dressed as a goaler at the counter selling or pawning jewelry, and the farmer awaiting his turn.

Looking about the suddenly crowded room, the goaler says, "we can discuss the value of these at some other time...when you are less busy," and he leaves the shop.

Berina makes sure to get a good look at the goaler, to remember his face.

Looking sternly at the farmer, the pawnbroker says, "what is it you want?"

The farmer says, "I wuz wondering, zir, if I could get a lent avore de aend uv de month. I `ave a kae I can left as collateral."

"I deal not in livestock," the pawnbroker replies, "so if that is all you have, take your business elsewhere."

With a desperate and disappointed look on his face, the farmer leaves.

Berina says to Rikoro: "Excuse me for a moment," and follows the farmer out of the shop. Catching up to the farmer as he rejoins the young boy, she says: "Pardon me, but just why do you need a loan, if you don't mind my asking?"

"well, pintle maid, de 'arvest be nat ready eet and dere wuz nat zufficient bait ztored vrim last yer to last," he answers.

"Where do you farm, and how much do you need?" Berina asks.

"Us be vrim de village zouth uv de city – our's be de cottage jist zouth uv de deatre. Us were 'oping to get at least 1500d, which be a tenth uv what it be worth, bit us could use dey to 'elp de whole village," the farmer answers.

"1500d?!" she says. "Wow! I've never seen that much money in one place before. I'm afraid that I'm in no position to help you." Getting a look of suddenly having the import of something said rising to the top, She asks: "Help the whole village? Is the village having problems? If I remember correctly, the village is held directly of the Crown, and administered by someone at Cair Elend. Have you gone to the castle to ask for help?"

Getting a suspicious look on his face, the farmer says, "Just who be ee dey ee know zo mort 'bout our liege and what business be it uv yours who us 'ave axed vor 'elp? I be a loyal zubject uv 'is majesty, I be."

A frown appears on Berina's face and she says: "I work for Lord Odasart, the Royal Weaponcrafter, and I was just trying to be helpful." Finishing with a distinct lack of sincerity, she says: "Good luck to you."

* * *

"Now what can I do for you folks?" the pawnbroker says, looking at the rest of you.

Once in he waits patiently as the farmers are being dealt with, glancing about the shop.

Rikoro steps up towards the counter he countenance on Armenton, with a vague expression of consideration "Hrm apologies you seem somewhat familiar...Nonetheless Tashal is a large city we have likely bumped into one another at some point in time. On to the matter at hand; these two individuals with me are Berina of Kyfa and Davas of Fainovirs. And I am Rikoro of Drelin, my kin are litigants by profession. Lord Odasart recently granted them a townhouse, though not fully furnished. Not being of much means themselves we decided to come to your fine establishment in the hopes of finding anything to help make the place their home. After all secondhand means there is a deep history behind such goods."

"As you can see," Armenton replies, "I have very little in the way of furniture but I do have dishes and bedding available. The price would be the amount I gave for the loan plus a little extra to cover my expenses..."

After allowing the shop keep to speak some about his wares, Rikoro interjects with a sudden look of realization, "Apologies, but I managed to place your face. I had seen you yesterday at the Red Fox Inn. You were with a Haliki. Haliki Lillia. I was there myself and saw the two of you leave. I had thought it odd

to see her out as they clergy of the Sage rarely leave the temple grounds."

A frown then slowly grows on Rikoro's features, "Do you happen to know her current whereabouts? I am but a simple member of laity, but when I was at the temple this morn I had heard she did not arrive before the last watch. There was talk by the Ibarti .. the High Priest, of informing the Tashal Watch of her disappearance. I will gladly pass on word for you if you do know anything. Likely save you the hassle of closing up the shop and losing a days worth of business over the affair."

With a sudden frown, Armenton says, "I certainly hope that was not intended as a threat. I know of your father – he is the one who does more arguing of his cases than he does in presenting of evidence. If we are to present our patronage like arrow shots, I must inform you that my father is Melin of Soral, city alderman, counter-speaker, and administrator of Meyvinel district. With a brief word to him, I am sure that it can be arranged to cause your entire clan to re-locate to a healthier climate. As to my whereabouts and who I associate with, I am equally sure that is none of your concern. Since I visit my father's inn from time-to-time and have never seen you there, I can only assume that somebody has been saying things they should not be discussing and when I find out who that is, I will deal with them accordingly. I believe that you have now out-stayed your welcome and you should take your commerce elsewhere."

Rikoro lets out a faint sigh, shaking his head towards Armenton, "I apologize sincerely if you felt I was making a threat of some sort. I was simply offering my aid, for your benefit and my own."

"As I said I am a follower of the Sage, thus I would make gains by informing the church of her whereabouts or last known location. By circumventing your own involvement I could save you some trouble."

"If you do not believe I was present, but rather some others that did witness you there in converse and leaving with the Haliki then your position is no different. I see this as a win-win for us both - in a business arrangement there can be no better situation. However, if you still wish me to leave I shall as I have no desire to draw your ire."

"I do not see us having any 'business arrangement' and I see no advantage to our continued association," Armenton says, "so I would still like you to leave and do not darken my doorstep again."

* * *

After Josrel has finished with Armenton's wife, and Rikoro has been thrown out of the pawnshop, Berina will turn to Josrel and say: "Josrel, put your hands on the wall of the shop and see if you can get a vision of the attic, just like you did at Holdan Manor. With Lillia's cloak, it might be easier. If you DO get a vision of the attic, and Lillia's not there, then try the Red Fox inn."

As the others speak their piece, Davas looks around the shop, watching the happenings in silence.

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After Josrel has seen that the women has left: " Good enough I ll give it a try." With that Josrel places a hand on the building, leaning on it as if to support, Josrel tries his Clairvoyance.

Josrel sees nothing and is feeling very tired.

* * *

Approaching the gathered group, Rikoro shakes his head somberly his stature hunched somewhat. Clearly the events inside the shop did not go as he wished or hoped for. Summoning his voice Rikoro says, "Apologies Haliki, Armenton would have nothing to do with me. "

"Berina's plan is certainly feasible. Should neither of your attempts produce anything, I still have one trick left up my sleeve. You see in order for a marriage to take place it needs more then a union of souls. It requires an individual to bind them."

Rikoro offers a reserved grin to the hooded Josrel, while leaning upon his staff, "If you catch my meaning, you shall have to play the part of the bumbling clergyman and inquire with Armenton where the two parties are as some documentation has to be completed before you can perform the ceremony."

Berina says, "That's a good plan. If Josrel's attempts to 'see' Lillia don't work, he can try that."

Rejoining the others as Rikoro leaves the shop, Evero looks decidedly uncomfortable. "I understand not a thing of all this. How do you know that a marriage is intended here? Would her captor not be content just to keep her locked up to do with as he pleases?" The sheepish look on his face clearly betrays his confusion.

Josrel says, "I catch your meaning, I see two flaws. If the groom is of another religion then he may have his own priest perform the ceremony. The other is if they do seek their ceremony at the Temple of Save-K'nor here in Tashal, I doubt that the Ibarti would have me perform it. Given my current relationship with him." With a thoughtful look: " If, Rikoro what you mean is that the Temple require that some papers are needed to be completed I would advise against that also. If the Ibarti would ever find out that I was using the Temple to further my personal gains he would be furious."

Listening to Josrel, Rikoro bobs his head slowly in understanding, "I don't wish to put you into any worse situation then you already are Haliki."

In a considering tone, he adds, "Though I imagine to the untrained individual they'd not know the exact rules and requirements of the church, and it is entirely possible they do not know of your relationship with Lillia. Not to mention Lillia being clergy herself one would think she would have someone from her own faith hold the ceremony. Nearly squinting as if he was trying to force himself to the point, "However, if this approach does not suit you I suppose one can try the more direct way. Simply tell Armenton that you wish to wed Lillia and see where that gets you. She may not be fighting this decision as she does not wish to force marriage upon you and our entire effort could have been for naught."

Leaning against the building with his hands on his knees, Josrel says, "I can not get a vision into the building." Josrel barely

manages to get out. "We can't be sure that this is the building she is in. If I go in and tell Armenton my intentions toward Lillia he can play ignorance again about her or he may not even have her." Josrel holds his head now: " This is starting to make my Head hurt." Josrel stands rubs his temples: "Well, I guess I could just go in there and tell him my plans and intentions and ask if he's seen her. And then I could see if he is lying about her whereabouts. But before I can do that I must rest. I do not have the strength left in me to attempt another meditation like that. I haven't slept in a couple of days. Besides it seems that you may have irritated Armenton already so best not to get him beyond approach." Josrel tries to smile at Rikoro.

Looking over to Berina and waiting till she is finished with the farmer:" Berina may I rest in your house for a while my strenght is waining and I have a plan to use something the Temple has taught me but I must rest first?" Josrel asks.

Berina says, "Certainly. We can..." and then the scream.

* * *

As Davas watches the crowded street, he notices a cloaked and hooded form approaching the pawnbroker's wife from behind...and briefly sees what could be the glint off an unsheathed knife blade.

Without thinking, Davas cries a warning and moves to sheild her as fast as he can. "Assassin! ... there ..." he yells, pointing at the figure as he moves.

At this moment, you hear a scream in the direction that Armenton's wife had left. You turn just in time to see her fall to the ground and a cloaked figure hurry off into the crowd.

As the scene unfolds before Rikoro he suddenly exclaims with a hue and cry, "Oh my! Stop that cloaked person!"

"Damn !" hisses Davas quickly as he moves towards the falling woman. "Too slow and late".

Taking steps towards Armenton's wife without hesitation, Rikoro speaks loudly, "Berina, Davas see if you can catch up with the one making an escape. The Haliki and I will tend to the woman. Evero I'm not sure if you have any abilities in the healing arts, but if you do join us - otherwise assist Berina and Davas in capturing the cloaked figure"

Doing her best to keep the assailant in view, Berina sets off at a run after the figure. "Stop that person!" Berina hikes up her skirt for the chase. Berina, weaving her way through the crowded streets almost catches up to the figure but, as they round the corner onto Kald street, the fleeing figure is just enough ahead that they disappear before Berina can catch up to them. Berina returns to the scene of the crime to see how the others are doing.

As the woman goes down, Davas silently gives chase to the cloaked figure, saving his energy for running. Davas catches up with Berina in their chase, just as she loses the fleeing figure in the crowds of Kald Street.

"Damn". With another quick look around, Davas turns quickly to Berina. "Let us make haste to give what aid we can". As he turns, Davas mutters under his breath "damn. So close".

* * *

Evero quickly turns to Rikoro leaving the chase to the others and replies calmly "I have some small skill in this"

Rikoro says, "Ma'am. Are you alright? Can you tell me where you have been hurt? We have some experience in the healing arts and can help."

At his side Evero kneels and places a leather pack on the ground. He starts to rummage in it with calm but efficient haste and after just a moment produces a pouch with what looks to be an assortment of small jars and boxes. With a small frown opens the pouch and mutters "Let's see." Looking up briefly he asks "How is she?"

"May Morgath take his soul, I did not think he had the courage to do something like this," she replies. Coughing up blood, she continues, "You must save the woman...she is being held above the stable..." and, with that, she dies.

One of the people in the crowd says, "I will fetch the guard." Pointing at Rikoro before departing, he says, "As first finder, you stay here to answer to them."

"Murder in broad daylight" Mutters Evero as he rises again and looks down on the dead woman. His lips move soundlessly as he makes the Peonian Sign of Passing over her, to ease her way.

Looking to the rest of the group, as Berina and Davas arrive back, Rikoro says, "I shall remain with the woman to speak with the Watch. I suggest you all head to the Red Fox Inn's stables. Once this is resolved, I shall endeavor to bring the guard with me as this matter seems to have grown to something far more sinister. Considering what just occurred here, time may be of the essence."

As she arrives back at the crime scene, Berina says: "The assailant got away." Seeing that Armenton's wife has died, she swears: "Damn."

Finishing a prayer for the dead woman Josrel nods to Rikoro with a hopeful look: "Yes, She did say the Stables? Do you think the stables at the Red Fox Inn?"

"Come on lets go." Josrel states with a renewed sense of energy as he heads for the stables of the Red Fox Inn.

Glancing quickly at the pawnbrokers before turning to he others, Davas notes "well there are no stables here .. and the only other building linked to all this" he nods at the pawnbrokers and indicates the body "is the inn". With a grim look he adds "and they do have stables". He starts in the direction of the Red Fox as he says "it is the best ... the only lead we have. Let us make haste".

Returning to his new companions Evero nods and prepares to follow the others to the inn.

"What's this about the Red Fox Inn's stables? I'm going to look in on Armenton. He may be the one who did this. I'll join you at the stables in just a couple of minutes." Berina will hurry back to the pawnshop.

She will see if Armenton is there. If he is, she will look at him with an eye to assessing his height and build to see if he could have been the one wearing the cloak. Also, she will see if he is

sweaty and/or out of breath. If he was the one who did this, I'm assuming that the cloak will be nowhere to be seen...but who knows?

12- ÁGRAZHÂR -720 TASHAL, KALDOR

5TH WATCH [COOL, PARTLY CLOUDY, SOUTHWEST STORM]⁹

As Berina enters the pawnshop, Rikoro waits at the body and everyone else heads in the direction of the Red Fox Inn to find its stables, several guardsmen arrive. The apparent leader says to Rikoro, "I hear you are first finder. Tell me exactly what you witnessed and keep to the facts."

Looking to the leader of the guard, Rikoro offers a slight somber nod, "Of course, my name is Rikoro of Drelin, and unfortunately what I witnessed was not much. My original position was outside of the pawnshop, when I heard a piercing scream. I turned in the direction it came from and saw a woman crumple to the ground and a cloaked figure rush off through the crowd. I yelled out a hue and cry to stop said person and then made my way to the woman to see if there was anything I could do, as I have a small amount of knowledge in the healing arts."

His own disposition grows graver as Rikoro continues on with recounting the unfolding events, "Regrettably she was upon deaths door and I could do nothing in time to help her. However she did manage to speak a curse to the one that I believed had attacked her. Then whispered quite clearly, 'You must save the woman.. she is being held above the stables'". With that she passed on."

Rikoro motions in the direction of the pawnshop as if to reinforce what he is speaking about, "The woman I believe is Armenton of Soril's wife. The Pawnshop owner nearby."

Then turning back to the Watchman, stating simply, "What the woman uttered as her dying words I believe I can offer some amount of clarity in, but that is not pure fact."

"I see," says the guardsman, "and, to your knowledge, she did not mention a name of the person she was cursing or the location of the stables?"

A spark of remembrance crosses Rikoro's face as he responds, "She did not, but I did accidentally exclude the fact that she appeared to know her assailant, as the curse was directed to a 'he' stating she did not believe 'he would have the courage to do such'".

Looking at Rikoro's hands, the guardsman asks, "Who is your host or patron in Tashal?"

Caught a bit off guard by the question, Rikoro takes in a slow breath before speaking, "Mrm, I arrived in Tashal nearly a month ago. My family resides in here and makes their living as litigants, but I am not on good terms with them. Current I am residing with friends - Berina of Kyfa and Davas of Fainovirs in their townhouse. As well I have been aiding Lord Odasart on a matter, though it seems to have cooled for the moment."

"Very well," says the guardsman, "I will need to speak with this Berina and Davas to see if they will provide their pledge to your good character and your appearance before the court."

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Pointing again to the pawnshop with his long spindly index finger, Rikoro states, "I understand. Berina is currently within the Pawnshop. I believe she went to inform Armenton of what just transpired. While Davas should be at the Red Fox Inn, with two other individuals. A Haliki with the temple of Save-k'nor named Josrel of Aswain and another called Evero of Hurone."

"Let me see any weapons that you have on your person," he says to Rikoro."

"Certainly, I carry this blade", Rikoro motions to his belt showing an unconcealed kitchen knife, and then taps his staff on the ground twice "... and I suppose you could consider this staff a weapon. Inside my pack I have nothing further." With that Rikoro swings his pack from his shoulder and hands it to the lead Watchman for inspection.

"And we were doing so well," says the guardsman, "do not get coy with me and hand over the knife."

"My apologies, I did not wish to draw the weapon and have you think it an act of aggression." With that said Rikoro carefully pulls the weapon free from his belt and takes hold of the blade with his large palm, passing the hilt to the Watchman.

He examines the knife closely and hands it back. "You may keep it for now," says the guardsman.

Finally he instructs his companions to question the others in the crowd to get their version, "While I fetch the pawnbroker to identify the body. Nobody is to leave until I return."

* * *

Entering the pawn shop, Berina finds Armenton relaxed and apparently unaware of what has happened. "Was it not clear that I do not want any business from you or your rude companion?" Armenton says.

"You seem to know rudeness rather well." she says with acid in her tone. "It might interest you to know that your wife has been stabbed and killed just down the street. The authorities will be here momentarily. They'll want to talk to you." With that, Berina turns and leaves the shop to return to the scene of the crime.

Encountering the guardsmen, and being confronted/questioned by them, she says: "I'm Berina of Kyfa, daughter of the weaponcrafter Obras of Kyfa and scribe to Lord Odasart."

"I didn't see the actual stabbing, but had the individual who did it pointed out to me by Davas of Fainovirs who did see the attack. I gave chase to the person, but I lost them in the crowds in Kald Square. The attacker was wearing a cloak, so I didn't get a look at their face." She'll describe the cloak if there was anything about it that could identify it.

"I will need to speak with this Davas as well. Do you know where he is at present?" the guardsman asks.

"I believe he's gone to the stables at the Red Fox inn." She says.

Berina produces her knife as required, as Rikoro did.

He looks over the knife carefully and hands it back to her saying "you may keep this for now."

Berina says, "Thank you."

"Yes, this is Rikoro of Drelin. He's a boarder at my townhouse, and I'll stand surety for him if you require such."

"I will," he says, "wait over there with the rest of the witnesses while I fetch the husband to identify the body."

"Certainly." and she goes to where the guardsman indicated.

The guardsman enters the pawnshop and then returns with Armenton. The pawnbroker locks the shop in an unhurried manner and follows the guardsman to the body. Glancing at the body, he wails, "Oh, my poor wife!" pointing at Rikoro, he exclaims, "What have you done!" and turning to the guardsman, he says, "I demand you arrest this man on suspicion of murder. He was in my shop earlier making threats and now here he is at the body of my foully murdered wife!"

While Berina does not see anything unusual in his manner, Rikoro thinks there is something false about what he says or in the way he says it (other than the obvious fact that Rikoro did not kill her). [Rikoro +1 intrigue]

"There is no evidence to support your claim and Berina of Kyfa has made her pledge that he will appear at court when required, so I must let him go for now," says the guardsman.

While the lead guardsman is busy with other matters and directing his men, Rikoro turns and speaks quietly to Berina, "Something is not quite right; the manner in which Armenton locked the door and then tranquilly made his way here coupled with his artificial reaction at seeing his wife was not consistent. Come to think of it why lock the door? Was his shop sentry present when you went inside?"

Berina had not seen him during the brief time she was in the pawnshop. [Berina +1 awareness]

Berina says, "No, he was nowhere to be seen. I take it that you suspect that the sentry committed the murder on Armenton's orders?"

A helpless look overcomes Rikoro as he explains, "I can not say for certain, but it is certainly suspicious. Murder for marriage? There is clearly something more afoot that we are unaware of. We need to tread carefully."

Berina says, "Then as soon as the guardsman let's us go, we should hurry to the stables of the Red Fox inn. Davas and Josrel may need help. I don't know if either of them is armed."

In response, Rikoro offers, "That may not be a bad thing - especially if the tavern is the not the location of the stable Armenton's wife spoke of. In Josrel's present state I worry he may do something rash. Of course Davas and Evero should help keep the matter settled."

After pulling on the tip of his rain drenched beard, Rikoro consults with Berina wiping some water away from his face, "Hrm, should we inform the lead guard of what we are investigating? He wishes pure fact on the murder. Our own search, while tangentially related, bears no evidence other than a missing Haliki. Still it could unearth further information."

Berina says, "No. If we pile on more things for him to deal with, he may just become more suspicious of you." A wry smile passes over her face as she says: "It has been my experience that the typical guardsman prefers his mysteries one at a time. The

added complexity of two or more things to deal with usually results in him falling back on a course of action he thinks of as tried-and-true...arrest everyone in sight, and let the local magistrate sort it all out."

Rikoro attempts to hold back a smile due to their current circumstances, but his lips betray him because of Berina's words, "Agreed, it is why I did not speak of it originally. I gave the Guardsman a piece to nibble on, but he chose to ignore it so I did not press the matter."

The guardsman instructs a couple of the on-lookers, to bring the body to the temple of Peoni, "they are to do nothing with it until the coroner has had a chance to inspect it and then it will be prepared for burial."

He tells the rest of the crowd to disburse, saying to Berina, "have this Davas to come to see me as soon as he can...ask for Arkalin Lodezas of Varsin." Looking at Rikoro, he continues, "you are not to leave town without notifying me first."

As Armenton goes to the Red Fox Inn, he is almost run into by a teenage lad rushing into the inn.

Seeing Armenton head for the inn instead of back to his shop, Berina says to Rikoro: "Look. Armenton's heading for the inn. Get to the inn's stables quickly! Davas and Josrel may need help." Rapidly catching up to the guardsman, Berina says: "Arkalin Lodezas, a moment please. Davas of Fainovirs is right over there at the stables of the Red Fox inn." and she points to it. "Also, I think your services will be needed to keep the King's Peace in just a few minutes." and she tentatively starts toward the stables with her body language saying 'please follow me'.

"And what makes you think that?" he answers as he and his guardsmen stop to hear her out, "are you some sort of soothsayer or are you planning to cause some trouble."

"Well, Rikoro of Drelin has gone to the stable of the Red Fox inn to talk to Davas of Fainovirs, and I saw Armenton of Soril go that way. You heard what Armenton said, accusing Rikoro of the murder. I think he intends to take the law into his own hands and revenge himself on Rikoro." Changing tack slightly, Berina points out: "You have to go right past the Red Fox inn to get back to the castle, so stopping by the stables to make sure the peace is being kept, should cause little inconvenience to you and your men." By the time she gets to the end of what she's saying, her eyes are pleading.

Starting to look sympathetic until Berina tells him what he "has to do", the Arkalin turns to the other guardsmen and says, "You two go on back to the castle and tend to your duties. I should be able to take of this." Returning his attention to Berina, he continues, "Very well, lead the way."

And Berina proceeds to do so. As she is wearing the linen dress, the Arkalin is getting a good look at her backside with the long braid swinging back and forth.

* * *

As Berina approaches Arkalin Lodezas, Rikoro swiftly makes his way to the stables, suppressing his urge to run and draw

unwanted attention to himself, instead utilizing his long stride as effectively as possible as the rain washes down relentlessly.

As he draws even with the entrance of the inn, three men burst out the door followed by the teenage boy, who had so recently entered the inn. Plowing through the puddles left by the recent rain [OOC: which has now stopped], they are apparently unaware of the muddy water which splashes over Rikoro's feet and legs.

Sighing to himself either at the unfolding scene or his wet boots and hose, Rikoro cranes his neck looking over his shoulder to try and make eye contact with Berina. Then continues on in the same path the three men and the boy went.

* * *

As the group (Josrel, Davas, and Evero) round the corner at the Red Fox Inn, they see a crowd at the left side of the inn. Upon getting closer they notice the juggler which appears to be the focus of the crowd's attention. However, the crowd appears to be mostly amused at this fool trying to juggle with such high winds.

Josrel moving about the crowd trying to see if he can locate the stables for the Red Fox Inn, says to Davas and Evero: "Can anyone see the Stables? If we can find them we may be able to slip into them with all this confusion out here."

Easing his way through the crowd, Josrel finally gets to the point where he can see a stable behind the inn – on the ground floor of one of Tashal's few three-story buildings. (This is on the opposite side of the inn than where the murder occurred and behind the pawnshop.) The entryway is open and he can see a stable boy feeding hay to some horses in their stalls.

Davas gives a wry smile and shakes his head. "Giving himself a handicap ... not good for juggling money ... but he might get some entertainment or sympathy coin".

Turning to his companions, he finds they have moved on a little and he hurries to catch up. When he does so, he speaks quietly to them alone. "Perhaps if one of you say you have a horse you wish to stable and wish to inspect the premises, that might draw less attention than if we demand to search the place". Davas grins broadly, then allows it to fade. "We have already drawn too much attention to ourselves ... though it was not of our choosing ... and as you see, there is a crowd". "Perhaps ... " he looks Josrel and Evero up and down, assessing them. "Hmmm ... " he points to the best dressed or most imposing one. "You I think. I will play the part of servant ... that shouldn't be too hard for me". He grins. "Come ... let us be about it ... and keep your eyes and ears peeled for anything unusual".

So saying, he strides into the stables looking around himself with obvious disdain, picking up and inspecting anything that he finds and trying to look as though he knows what he is doing.

"Hey! Put that down!" exclaims the stable boy, "what do you want in here?"

Josrel strides into the stables as the boy makes his demands on Davas: "Boy, He is with me, are you the stable hand here?" Josrel commands still hiding his face in his hood. "I am looking

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for a potential place to stable my horse. Is this all there is to the stables?" As Josrel confidently speaks to the stable boy he is wandering the stables looking for the attic, loft or another floor to the stables and access to get up into it.

With a suspicious look on his face, the stable boy says, "Just who might you be and, more importantly, where is this horse you speak of? What you see is all the stables you need concern yourself with."

At the back of the stables, Josrel notices stairs leading to the next level.

Davas turns at the stable boys called instruction, locks gazes with him for a moment, then turns away dismissively and looks quickly at Josrel as he enters. While Josrel speaks, Davas continues to "inspect" the stables, trying to pick a different area to Josrel so that the stable boy can't watch both of them at the same time.

He is looking for ladders, doors or trapdoors (in order of preference) and if he finds any of these, he will try to look at what's on the other side of them, still using inspection as a pretext (and without breaking anything).

Spinning around trying to watch both, the stable boy says, "That tears it! I will fetch my master and he will show you the way of it," as he rushes out the door.

Davas also notices the stairs at the back of the stables.

As the boy leaves the Stable Josrel rushes to the stairs saying to Davas; "Davas, stairs leading upstairs see them? Quickly let's get up there and look around before anyone comes back." With that Josrel slowly goes up the stairs.

At the top of the stairs, Josrel sees a hallway that spans the length of the building and ends in another stairway going up. There are doors on either side of the hallway but it is otherwise empty.

"I will look here master" Davas says loudly as he moves quickly to the stairs. As he does so, he flicks a quick glance over his shoulder to Josrel "... and you can negotiate with the stable boy's master". Flashing Josrel a wicked grin, he runs up the stairs, trying to make the most of what uninterrupted time he may have left.

Evero, noticing that Josrel has already started climbing the stairs says, "You two go ahead...I will try and delay the ostler when he arrives."

Squeezing past Josrel on the narrow stairway to reach the top just moments ahead of him, Davas also sees the empty hallway ending in another stairway.

Turning to Davas as they stand in the hallway, Josrel points to the door on the left: "Well how about you take the left side I'll take the right we meet at the far stairwell." With that Josrel moves to the door on the right. As he comes to the door he puts his eye to it to try and hear anything. He puts his hand to the knob to test if its unlocked if it is he will open it.

Listening [OOC: with his "eye" at the door?], he hears quiet voices on the other side. Opening the door, he comes upon a family sitting at their evening meal. The man at the end of the table starts to rise, yelling, "What in the pits of Balgashang are

you doing coming in like that and interrupting a man's dinner! Get out of here!"

* * *

"Check these doors .. I'll look up stairs" Davas says as he hurries on. When he arrives at the top, he looks around and checks any doors he can find. If any are locked, he will pound on them, hoping to get a response from anyone inside.

Proceeding to the next floor, Davas sees another hallway spanning the length of the building with doors along either side. At the far end of this hallway, is a ladder leading up with a guard seated on a stool next to it.

Grabbing up his club, the guard asks, "Just what is your business here?"

12- ÁGRAZHÂR -720 TASHAL, KALDOR
5TH WATCH, 3RD HOUR [COOL, PARTLY CLOUDY, SOUTHWEST STORM]⁹

Almost at the same moment, Rikoro, the unidentified three men, the teenage lad, Berina and Arkalin Lodezas all reach the stables where Evero awaits. Before Evero can say a word, the lad points at him and exclaims, "'ere, 'e be wan aw'mun."

The leader of the three men steps forward, looks at Evero's clothing and says, "You will not get stabling for your horse here by pushing your way in and looking for things that are none of your business. I am Rемаik of Falesh, the ostler of this establishment. What is it you want here and where have you sent your men? We will have no trespass here."

Clearly rolling something over his mind, Rikoro mumbles the word inaudibly to himself "Falesh". Then with a touch of hesitation in his voice, Rikoro inquires, "... Ostler Rемаik are you related to Quenaline?"

While forming the question Rikoro takes a glance between Rемаik and Berina in an attempt to bridge the two.

"Just who are you and what business is it of yours who my relations are?" the ostler asks.

Berina leans casually against a door post and asks: "Would you be related to Quenaline of Falesh?"

"Another one! What business is it of yours?" the Ostler asks.

Berina answers, "I accompanied her on her return from Melderyn."

Speaking over everyone's heads, Berina asks Evero: "Where are Davas and Josrel?"

Without saying anything, Evero nods his head upwards.

Ostler looks sternly at Berina then at Evero (just missing Evero's answering nod). "You two are together? Well I am going to have to ask you all to leave before I charge you with trespass." He says. Spying the guardsman, he continues, "Guardsman, you have heard me ask them to leave. If they do not do so immediately, I demand that you arrest them."

Arkalin Lodezas says quietly to Berina, "I think that would be best. Your friend is not here, Armenton is not here and the only trouble I see is if you remain."

Berina says, "You're probably right."

As Berina turns to leave, Rikoro reinitiates conversation with Rемаik, "Mm if you'll indulge me two more questions and we shall be gone without further bother. I simply wished to ask if any of you had seen a Haliki .. a clergywoman of Save-k'nor, evident by a marking around her eye by the name Lillia?" Rikoro goes on to describe her as best he can while not only looking towards Rемаik, but also the child and the two men to see if any of them show a spark or hint of knowing. Rikoro also tries to determine if one of the two men present were the guardsman within Armenton's shop. Once his limited description is given Rikoro immediately goes into his second question, "And my other is simply if this is the stable that Armenton of Soril and his wife uses?" With that last remark Rikoro takes a step back and to the side as if he were a door opening between those he put the inquest to and Arkalin Lodezas.

"I see not why I need indulge you anything as I find you a nosy bunch of gossips, meddling in what is not your business. I have not seen any missing women of your description but then I work for a living and have no time for such pursuits. As to who does and does not stable their horses here, I see not that is any of your concern either. Now, as I have told you twice before, and I feel I have been very patient in this, it is time for you to leave. Not one more word if you wish to stay out of the goal. I am sure the Arkalin here will tell you, I have every right to protect my property by use of force if necessary."

Arkalin Lodezas merely nods at this. The ostler's two associates keep a straight face (other than appearing a bit eager at the suggestion of the "use of force") and neither looks like the bouncer at the inn. The boy has gone off to do his work and is no longer paying attention.

Seeming somewhat somber by what was just said to him, Rikoro nods his head slightly then says sincerely, "Well then you have my humble apologies for disturbing you and your business. I appreciate your patience."

With that said Rikoro turns and makes his way out of the stable yard. Once outside and several feet away he turns and looks up at the building in an effort to see if there are any visible windows from which he can see through.

He can see a three story building with the stables being the bottom floor. On the two floors above the stables, he can see windows of small, colored-glass panes which let light through but no images. (At the moment, there is no light coming from either of them.) The attic has no gables or windows that he can see.

After soaking in a long gaze at the stable yard, Rikoro turns to Arkalin Lodezas, "You have my many thanks for allowing me leeway inside Arkalin, you were well within your right to drag us out. My curious mind started to think that was the 'stable' in which Armenton's wife was referencing when she spoke her dying words to 'save the woman'. I realize this is not my station and shall refrain from doing so in the future. I fear the events of today have me a bit shaken."

As an aside, Rikoro also adds, "Oh. And this may prove to be nothing, but when Armenton had left his shop he locked the door. I felt it was odd because he had a sentry standing guard

inside when I was within. However, when I inquired with Berina she had noted the absence of said person after his wife's death. I only bring this up because as I said before Armenton's wife seemed to know her murderer."

"I will take note of that in my investigations...and you can be assured I will be investigating her murder," Arkalin Lodezas says, "as everyone appears to have regained their composure and are not planning any further rash actions, I will be about my duties. I bid you good day," and he heads off in the direction of the castle.

Berina moves outside with the others. She listens to Rikoro's discussion with the Arkalin, but continues to watch the ostler and the others. Her gaze is pointed and intended to be seen by those she is watching.

The three men at the stables have a short, quiet conversation. Then one stays at the entryway while the other two go further inside.

* * *

Bowing to the man "I am very sorry I have disturbed you good sir. But my most beloved has been taken against her will. I have reason to believe that she has been put here in these very stables. Have you seen her? A tall women skinny as can be blond hair blue eyes. She is a Haliki as myself. Please sir tell me you have seen her?" Josrel pleads to the man.

"I know not where your tart has run off to and she most certainly is not here," exclaims the man, "Now for the last time, get out of here and stop disturbing my family."

As Josrel backs out the door, he says: "Once again Goodman I am sorry for the intrusion. I leave you in peace and may Save-K'Nor bless you." With that Josrel closes the door and heads to the one across the hall. This time he knocks on the door first. When there is no response, he heads up the stairs to catch up with Davas.

Reaching the top of the stairs, he can see Davas grappling with a guard wielding a club.

* * *

Slowing from a run to a quick walk, Davas flashes the guard a grin. "Inspecting the stables my friend ... for my master". Grinning again, while continuing to approach, he adds in a conspiratorial stage whisper "you know what masters are like I'm sure. Leaving you all alone here to guard some store house of grain ... or something else of no consequence or value I'll be bound". He waves his arms in a dismissive gesture towards the ladder and masters in general.

"You are a long way from the stables and you have no business here," says the guard. [Davas +1 rhetoric]

Should he get close enough to the guard, he puts his arm around his shoulder and says loudly "what say you and I go for and ale ... my treat? We can talk of masters. No one will miss us for a quarter of an hour".

If the guard looks to be waving his club in a threatening manner, Davas steps back a little and puts his hands in the air, saying

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loudly "wait a minute friend, I mean you no harm. Surely you do not fear an unarmed man?" If the guard advances, Davas slowly retreats until close to the stairs, when he will turn as if to go, then try to make a dash past the guard to the ladder and up it if he can.

When Davas gets within reach, the guard swings the club at him saying, "and I suppose that you eat with that axe at your hip?"

With a small start, Davas glances at the axe he carries as the guard swings his club. Quickly looking up again, he dodges desperately aside.

And the guard misses him by a hair.

His intention next round is to close with the guard so that he cannot properly wield his club, throw the guard to the ground and run to the ladder before he can recover his feet. If he is successful, he will try to climb the ladder and find out what (or who) is there.

Davas manages to shove the guard aside (but not knock him down) and he reaches the bottom of the ladder. The guard prepares to strike him from behind as he climbs the ladder.

* * *

Upon seeing Davas struggle with the guard Josrel Shouts: "What is going on here!? Stop this at once! How dare you attack my man! Is this how the Ostler treats potential customers by attacking them!" Josrel then moves to break apart the struggling men. [Josrel +1 Rhetoric]

"I am not an ostler, this man is not a potential customer and since when have beggar priests had servants?" the guard responds, "My job is to guard this ladder and prevent unauthorized entry. If this is indeed 'your man', take him and both of you be on your way!" He continues toward Davas to press his attack while watching Josrel out of the corner of his eye.

Clearly spent, Josrel hunches his shoulders and slumps his head slightly. Lifting his head to the guard with tears starting to well in his eyes he pleads to the guard. "My goodman you are correct we are not potential customers. Yes I am a priest and he is not my servant though I never said he was." Pausing, he sighs deeply: "I am searching for my love Lillia. She was taken against her will and I have reason to believe that she is held here. Perhaps you have seen her, she is also a Haliki, tall, blonde, blue eyes, her name is Lillia. "Pausing again and shuffling a little closer to the guard. "The fact that you are guarding here in a stable only reinforces my belief that she is here." Standing a little straighter now: "Now I have been searching for her for what seems an eternity now, have been removed from the church, the stable boy probably has the Ostler and the guards waiting for me downstairs. My friends whom I have involved in this matter are probably in as much trouble as I am so they probably have an issue with me. So I don't have much left."

Josrel folds his hands in front of him, looks the guard in the eyes: "I ask you, Please stand aside so I can be reunited with Lillia." With that Josrel moves to walk past the guard.

Blocking Josrel's way with his club, the guard says, "That is a very pretty story but I still cannot let you past and will have to attack you if you persist. If I fail in my duties, I will lose my job

and then how will I feed my family? If you or your 'man' take one step further, I will have to stop you as best I can and, since you outnumber me, one or both of you will be severely injured. Now I ask you, is it going to help you in your mission to be injured or killed? Both of you back off!"

You can hear footsteps approaching on the floor below.

As he climbs the first couple of rungs, Davas draws back his foot to shove the guard away. His climb slows as he hears Josrel speak and he glances quickly over his shoulder to see what is happening.

If the guard's attention has been drawn to Josrel, Davas will continue to climb, but slowly and quietly to avoid drawing it back to himself. He tries to get to the top without being further noticed and to see if there is anything blocking his way - trap door or locked door in an alcove. He will also be listening carefully (during any quieter moments) for anything at all.

Davas gets to the top of the ladder, without the guard's notice, to find a locked trap door. He does not hear anything from above. [+1 stealth]

Still at the top of the ladder, Davas breathes "she is here isn't she?" so saying, he braces himself and tries once to force the door.

When it doesn't budge, with a quick glance at the locked door and a rueful rub of his shoulder, Davas descends the ladder quickly. Once standing on the floor, he speaks calmly and clearly to the guard. "She is here, isn't she? You have not denied it. It is true ... and now you have a choice. Think carefully. Would you rather have no job for failing to do your master's bidding ... or have no job and be locked up for kidnapping?"

With a sudden thought, he looks to Josrel. "What money do you have?" He then looks quickly back to the guard and raises his hands placating. "Friend, why not have the best of all - whatever you are being paid, we will double it. Work for us ... and if you have a key ..." he gestures to the locked trapdoor "there may be a bonus". "A job ... and freedom. What do you say?"

Glancing quickly at Josrel for confirmation, Davas steps aside and waits for the guard's decision, prepared to dodge if it goes against them.

* * *

There's really nothing for Berina to do until something happens that can be responded to. She hangs around outside in sight of the 'guard' at the entryway. At least this will occupy the 'guard' so he won't be able to go inside and worsen the odds against Davas and Josrel. Turning to Rikoro and Evero, she asks: "Isn't there something one of you can do here? I could try to use my Immolation spell to go in without being stoppable, but that's pretty extreme."

As the Arkalin walks off, Rikoro moves between Berina and Evero his face lined with concern and says, "At this point let us assume the worst case. Haliki Lillia is not within the stables. Either this is not the 'stables' Armenton's wife had meant or Lillia was moved just prior to our arrival. Considering the Haliki and Davas' time in there I fear they may have been found or captured. Easily they can be charged with trespass, but the matter can quickly escalate should they do something rash. We

are therefore faced with two problems. The immediate is retrieving the two men and the second is picking up a new thread for Lillia."

Rikoro looks to the ground contemplatively as if searching for an answer there, "Our best choice right now is to have Evero enter the Red Fox Inn and keep a watch on Armenton. He and Josrel are the only two the pawnbroker has not seen or if he has will likely not have made much of a connection that Evero is with us. We have no way to signal to Davas and the Haliki and so we must rely on their own wits to find an escape as returning to the stables will certainly find the law against us."

Now he glances from Berina to Evero, with some hope in Rikoro's eyes inquires, "Do either of you have any contribution to the matter? Perhaps something I have not seen or considered?"

Berina says, "I disagree. I think this is the place. Stop and consider...the stables are a business. They should have been trying to fleece us for all they could. Instead, they act like we're trespassing on sacred ground. Their reactions are those of people who have something to hide. I ask again...is there something either one of you can do? Why did you spend all those years studying if you're not going to use your abilities in a situation that cries out for the use of those abilities? I'd do it myself, but I could burn down half the city if I do."

Pursing his lips at Berina's words, Rikoro shakes his head, "My own abilities are to aid not harm others. We need to ground our emotions here. Going off with fiery temperament will yield little in terms of positive results for many reasons. Had I the cloak of Lillia's I could try again to uncover her whereabouts. The same is true for Josrel and Davas, but I need something personal to do so."

"In other words, no, there is nothing in your training that is of any use right here, right now." The look that Berina is giving him is one of disappointment.

Switching topics, the Fyria Satia Mavri returns back to his original idea, "If someone had barged into my place of business with no intent to purchase and was acting quite oddly I would also ask them to leave."

"You and I weren't here when Davas and Josrel arrived. You have no idea what intent they were projecting." Berina is now starting to become agitated.

Rikoro continues, "I do not deny what you say may be possible. However, I see Armenton as our only known thread right now, especially so if Josrel's love is not within these very stables. Clearly he is involved. If he does hold Lillia one would think he would either go directly or short thereafter to her."

"Armenton got a head start. He came this way. He may very well be upstairs right this minute. If so, that makes at least three of them against Davas and Josrel...and since Josrel couldn't do damage to a leg of mutton, that leaves Davas to face them by himself." Berina is now talking through clenched teeth.

Rikoro says, "Otherwise if he is a bit player I am certain he would be quite upset with what has transpired with his wife and

make haste to those that do have her. With Evero inside of the Inn, you and I remain here to keep watch of the stables"

Doing everything she can to avoid shouting at the top of her lungs, Berina says: "Keep watch!?! I'm not going to stand around until someone comes to tell us that Davas' and Josrel's lifeless bodies have been found somewhere! You can remain and try to think of a shop where some courage might be bought, but I'll be damned to the Halls of Balgashang if I'll just stand here and lose another man I love...I'm going in!" With that, Berina turns and walks toward the entrance of the stables with a hand on the handle of the knife in her belt.

Grabbing up a pitchfork, the guard says, "and just where do you think you are going?"

Clearly lost by how quickly the situation has spiraled out Rikoro stammers out some words trying to persuade Berina to do otherwise as he moves to keep pace with her, "Um.. no.. wait.. you love the Haliki? Or no Davas! Well regardless that is neither here nor there. There are laws to be followed. Not just of Tashal, but of our -own-. Come to your senses. If you do this and are wrong you've now placed yourself in a perilous predicament. There is always more than one solution to a problem. Something better than a head-on conflict. We just need to think."

Rounding on Rikoro, Berina says, with fury in her voice: "Has a lack of courage made you dimwitted? There is no time! I have no doubt that Davas and Josrel are in mortal peril right this moment. I'm giving you three seconds to come up with, and implement, a different course of action." As she's saying this, Berina hikes up her dress, tucking it into her belt to give her legs freedom of movement (she will be careful that the tucking does not impede access to her knife). While she's tucking up the dress, Berina takes a couple of steps away from Rikoro in case he decides to try to grapple her.

Dismay crosses Rikoro's features, as he begins in haste, "Come now Berina, courage is not rushing blindly and without thought into a situation. I've already said what we should do in the time you've just given me. Evero to see about Armenton's current whereabouts and activity inside of the Red Fox Inn, while we stand watch of the stables for any trouble. If we go your way I'll not use my abilities to take advantage of another least we're certain of their complicity. I may be willing to break the laws of Tashal, but I shant break 'our' laws by bringing scorn to our order through wrong deed. You would be wise to hold to the same. Emotional attachment or not we have a higher responsibility to maintain. Josrel is facing this as well and I have faith he will not falter. Trust your companions and not your heart. From your tales you have made it through far worse than this, but you know them best. Thus, I leave the choice to you."

Rikoro then waits for Berina's reaction and decision. He steels himself for the inevitable by taking a firmer grip of the staff he holds, no longer using it as a tool for walking, but careful not to carry it in a menacing way while he follows after her as they near the guard.

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Decisively turning to Evero, Rikoro says, "Go to the Inn. See if Armenton is there. Then let us know what you've found. I do not wish to see you involved in something you've just stepped into."

With dismay clearly written on his round face the young mage looks at the two of them. "The inn?" He hesitates a moment then seemingly coming to a decision shrugs his wide shoulders. "Very well, I'm not sure what use I'll be but I'll see what I can do." With that he turns and heads back towards the Red Fox, shoulders slumped.

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Slowly placing his open hand on the club, but not moving the club, Josrel turns to the the guard, a compassionate look on his face. "Good Sir, I mean no harm to you or your family. You are truly blessed to have them. I envy you that the Gods have given you the gift of a family. I have devoted half my life to service of Save-K'Nor and am this close to sharing in your bliss." Josrel points to where he is. "On the other side of you could be my future..." Josrel's voice starts to quiver. Facing the ladder, Josrel cocks his head toward the guard: "If your wife was taken and held against her will and forced to marry another, would you be here now trying to get up that ladder?" Josrel lets the question hang there a moment.

"As you said I am a simple Priest, no weapons, couldn't hope to best you if I tried. But..." Josrel closes his hand around the end of the club. " ... I AM going up that ladder. You could explain to your wife and children, and brag to your friends how and why you killed a helpless unarmed Priest trying to get to his love!"

With that Josrel move the club out of his way and strides to the ladder.

With a quick jab, the guard hits Josrel a powerful blow to the stomach, stunning him into inaction. Two men enter from the other end of the hall and one yells, "What is going on here?"

Getting no answer, the speaker says to his companion, "take that man out of here and see that he does not return" pointing at Josrel. The guard takes the unresisting Josrel down the first flight of stairs.

Turning to Davas and placing his hand on his shortsword at his belt, the speaker says, "Are you going to come along peacefully or are we going to have to help you along."

Looking from the short sword carrier to the guard and back again, Davas sighs gently and raises his hands in surrender. As he walks past the guard, he says quietly "remember my offer ... and think carefully before you decide".

He edges carefully past mister short sword and says loudly "of course - you are right, I am leaving" and makes his way carefully down the stairs, glancing over his shoulder regularly to make sure he is not being threatened from behind.

The two men follow along behind to make sure Davas leaves the building.

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Saying nothing, Berina...watching the guard like a hawk...moves to enter the stable. If he tries a thrust, she will dodge, try to grab the handle of the pitchfork (pulling it past her

in the direction of the thrust...possibly pulling the guard off balance, or yanking the pitchfork out of his hands), and attempt to plant a haymaker on his jaw.

If there is an opening without sound or sight of what is unfolding Rikoro tries flank the guard in the current scuffle with Berina to give him a good crack over the head with his staff in an attempt to knock him out.

The guard thrusts his pitchfork at Berina. She steps aside to avoid his attack and grabs at his weapon to pull it from his hand. However, in doing so, she unbalances herself and falls to the ground. The guard also staggers slightly but recovers in time to avoid Rikoro's blow.

Berina rolls / crab-walks / or whatever is necessary to avoid getting pinned to the ground like an insect on a specimen tray, as she gets to her feet. If a choice of directions is available for her to go while getting up, Berina will move toward the stairs. If the guard is still between her and the way up, then she will follow the same course of action as the previous round.

While Berina is prone, Rikoro makes every effort to get between her and the guard. His focus is on straight melee to avoid being hit, looking for an opening himself to take against the guard with a high vertical swing from his wooden staff.

As Berina gets to her feet, the guard stabs at Rikoro with his pitchfork. Rikoro dodges out of the way and swings at the guard with his staff but the guard also dodges out of harm's way.

At this moment, the guard that accompanied the ostler, returns leading Josrel by the arm. Soon after, Davas enters the stables followed by the ostler and another guard.

Keeping a watchful eye on the party's 'enemies', Berina moves to Davas' side and whispers: "Are you well my love?" As she is keeping her eyes on the ostler and the two guards, she does not see Davas' reaction to her last two words.

With a quick start and a slower grin, Davas says quietly "I am unhurt. Look to Josrel". After a pause, he adds very quietly " and she is here. I do not know how I know ... but I know it".

With an audible exhale, Rikoro steps back from the guard he is engaged with. He levels his staff at his side to keep the man with the pitchfork at a distance, looking over to the group that has emerged from above. Noticing that Josrel is being aided and is likely injured, Rikoro's face contorts into dismay. He then speaks up, mild disgust in his voice, "Harming a man of the cloth? For trespass? Sickening. It seems we are at an impasse. You likely wish the Watch or Guard as much as us, however, in order for the law to be brought into the matter it brings risk of exposing whatever it is you desire to secret away. Leave the two in our care and we will be on our way. We have no other business here."

"Dekejis got your brains, that is all we ever wanted," replies the ostler, "just leave and do not return or we will have to return the favor by going to the homes of you and your's to force our way in and snoop into your affairs." With that said, the guard leading Josrel gives him a shove in Rikoro's direction.

Rikoro reaches out to his wide spanned arms to embrace Josrel gently. With a whisper and air of concern Rikoro inquires into his ear, "Haliki.. are you alright?"

Taking one of Davas' arms, Berina moves with him to Rikoro's and Josrel's side...pointedly not turning her back to the ostler and the two guards.

Being lead out of the stables Josrel stops just outside the door. Leaning into Rikoro Josrel whispers to him: "I am not leaving. The guard was guarding something in a locked room up there." As Josrel indicates to the floors up above the stables, "If I leave now I know I will never see her again. I have to get up into that room." Looking around trying to locate his companions: "I fear now that we have been here they will move her, whomever they are. We may have to watch the stables and come up with some sort of plan to get in there. Right now my head is spinning, and I'm having trouble thinking straight." With that Josrel leans a little heavier into Rikoro.

After hearing Josrel, Rikoro cranes his neck to look over his shoulder to Berina, then without saying anything further he begins to lead the Haliki out of the stables.

Continuing her not-turning-her-back-to-the-enemy movement as they leave the stables, Berina moves out into Kald Square with the others.

As soon as everyone leaves the stables the ostler's men close all the doors and you can hear the thud of them being barred from the inside.

Helping Josrel as best he can manage, Rikoro leans more heavily upon the staff he holds and then offers in response, "As you've just said you're head is not clear. What we need to do is regroup. I agree with you that if we leave and Lillia is within they will move her. Right now we are outnumbered. I suggest we station someone here to watch the stables and inn. When you were inside did you see any other ways out? If so another we will need to position another there too."

Looking over the Haliki, concern lined on Rikoro's expression and voice, "You need to be examined and tended too. Not to mention I have some further ideas and we should formulate a new plan."

Berina says, "Then use your abilities to heal him. What you do can't be anywhere as noticeable as what I do."

Rikoro shakes his head slowly at Berina's request, "We have certainly drawn enough attention to ourselves this day. My standing here chanting and gesturing will certainly appear odd enough to draw the eye and possible ire of others. This is one of the reasons why I suggest a retreat to the townhouse, including the fact the eve draws upon us."

Glancing around to those present before continuing, "The question is who shall remain behind to keep watch. Whoever it is, I recommend doing so subtly too. This way if they do decide to move her we can shadow them to their new location."

Standing on his own now, Josrel nods in agreement to Rikoro: "Yes, I agree, Hopefully Evero will return and be willing to watch. I could try my clairvoyance again but I have not the strength for it now. I haven't slept in almost three days now..." Josrel squints and rubs his head "... Has it been three days." As Josrel rubs his head he slowly stops and lifts his: "Those

barmaids went into the stables with food, what about questioning them, or seeing if we can gain entry by using them."

Berina says, "Rikoro, you sent Evero into the inn. I suggest that you go fetch him. We hardly know him, but I'll grasp at any straw now." Getting a thoughtful look, Berina says: "Evero is a Lyahvi. I wonder if he is able to do anything that might help us out here. He might very well not want to get all mixed up in our crazy adventure, but we can at least ask him."

Stealing a glance over to the inn itself, Rikoro bobs his head in response, "Hrm agreed. He should have returned by now. I shall make my way to him"

In the darkness after the setting sun, you almost miss the stable boy coming out of the door and running to the inn. A short while later, he leads a couple of the barmaids, all of them burdened with enough food to feed several people. They enter the stables and then the barmaids return to the inn.

A guard comes out of the building at your left and approaches, "I am going to have to ask you people to move on. Many of our students are of the nobility and their parents get very concerned about suspicious people lurking about."

Berina says, "Lets move over by the pillory. We can keep an eye on the stable and the inn from there." and she goes over there.

There is nobody currently in the pillory.

After watching the events unfold and listening to the guard speak, Rikoro offers, "Certainly my good man. We were waiting on a friend who is within the inn. I shall go and fetch him and we will be on our way. Offer my humblest apologies to the nobility and family for disturbing their conscious."

Before Rikoro heads to the inn, Berina says: "You better think of your alternate plan quickly. We're running out of time. Curfew will be coming fairly soon. We'll have to leave here, or risk the gaol. Once we're gone from here...one way or another...they'll move her." Taking over holding up Josrel, Berina looks around for a place for him to sit down.

Davas flashes Berina a quick smile and a nod of thanks, then turns pensively to the others. "Berina is right, they will move her ... probably tonight. I will have to hope I can evade the curfew ... as they will have to". Turning to Berina, he asks quietly "... do you know the penalty for breaking the curfew? ... in case I do not succeed". He grins quickly and adds "I hope the fine is not more money than I have".

That being said, Rikoro heads over to the inn and once at the door way looks inside for Evero's position and then glances about discretely to see if Armenton or his shop sentry are present.

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Arriving at the Red Fox Inn, Evero enters to find the common room crowded but orderly. A barmaid approaches him and says, "Are you here for dinner, master? Tonight we are having tansy pudding for starters, followed by stuffed hare, amyndoun seaw and cocket bread. I can find you a place to sit if you like."

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As Rikoro enters to find the common room crowded but orderly, a barmaid approaches him and says, "Are you here for dinner, master? Tonight we are having tansy pudding for starters, followed by stuffed hare, amyndoun seaw and cocket bread. Some of the diners are finishing up so I should be able to get you a seat for a late meal."

Rikoro's eyes on the barmaid as she speaks, Rikoro slightly raises up his left hand to her and shakes his head, "My thanks, but I have just come to collect a friend and be on our way for curfew." He then breaks his attention on her and looks around the inn again hoping to spot Evero or spy Armenton.

He quickly finds Evero and at his approach, Evero says, "I am sorry my friend but you and your companions appear to be involved in issues of a personal nature and have no time for us to get to know each other. I am afraid I will have to bid you adieu and perhaps we can get to know each other at a later date."

With a slight frown as Evero speaks, but turning to a knowing smile Rikoro says, "I understand Evero, the days events have been quite overwhelming. Even for myself. You know where to find us should you have a change of heart. Hopefully we will not always be in such a current state of affairs"

Just then, Rikoro spots Armenton at the bar having a drink with several burly companions. At the same moment, Armenton spies Rikoro and, with a slight smile on his face, says something to his companions, which Rikoro cannot overhear from across the room.

Rikoro rubs the back of his neck slowly with his large left palm, glancing back to Evero in a haste, "It seems I have drawn the eye of the pawnbroker and several of his 'friends'. I shall leave you now to avoid them drawing a connection between us. Farewell Evero."

With that said he pats Evero on the shoulder, then brusquely makes his way out of the tavern, not bothering to look back, but listening closely for the sounds of footfalls approaching.

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Once they have left the stables, Davas turns and says quietly "the watch is mine. Take Josrel and look after him". He pats Josrel on the arm then turns to look at the stables again. "Return when you can ... and you are right ... she is here".

He stares at the stables a moment, then shakes himself. "I had hoped that the guard might take our offer ... but I fear he had too little time to consider. He may yet decide that his current job is too risky ... and I should be here if he so chooses". Turning to Rikoro, he adds quickly "... and I should have some money in case he does. What do you have on you?"

Berina says, "I didn't bring any with me, sorry."

He feels his own pouch of coin and shrugs. "It may be enough ... but I would not like to miss an opportunity if one arises". If anyone offers money he will take it with muttered thanks and secrete it about his person.

Then he turns to look for a place to stand so that he may watch the stables door and if possible, the tavern as well. Once he has found his place, he waves at the others. "Go. I will be fine".

He turns to begin his vigil.

"I'll stand watch with you." and Berina gives him that 'Don't even think about arguing.' look. "Besides," she says with a knowing smile "I have ways to keep you from falling asleep on watch."

Davas lifts one arm and opens his mouth as if to speak, before dropping the arm and turning it into a shrug. "But ...". There is a pause before he takes a deep breath and is obviously about to speak again, when Berina suggests she know ways to keep him awake. His breath comes out in a chuckle and he grins at her quickly. "You are right. Two would be better than one ... but I think that in separate places might be better than in the same one". He gives Berina a regretful smile. "That way, one of us might evade the patrols even if the other is taken."

He turns to look around the area for a spot or spots that might escape the notice of passing patrols.

[OOC: The only place you can stand that you can see the front of the stables is right next to the fence around the Enclave of the Holy Oak.]

A guard from the Enclave of the Holy Oak approaches and says, "I am asking you nicely only once more, move on and be about your business."

Before they can answer, the bell in the castle begins to toll the start of curfew.

Taking Davas by the arm, Berina starts forward and says: "Lets see where that ally goes. If it doesn't serve our purposes, we'll continue on back to the townhouse because of curfew."

Davas nods. "It will serve ... it will have to."

Just as they turn the corner into the alley, they see the ostler (still armed with a shortsword) leading a woman fitting the description of Lillia in the opposite direction. At the moment, she appears to be resigned to her fate and is not struggling. He is followed by two guards, both now armed with clubs. The third guard goes back into the stables and you can hear the door being barred.

Davas pulls Berina back as he spots the group and signals for quiet, obviously hoping that they hadn't been seen. Whispering, he says quickly "let us follow". Pausing a moment, he slowly looks to where the group was seen. If they are still there he quietly withdraws and signals Berina to wait. If they have gone, he signals her to follow him and moves quickly to the corner where they were.

[OOC: The current situation is that Rikoro and Evero are inside the door of the common room – and must respond to the barmaid before doing anything else. Berina and Davas have just turned into the alley to witness the scene above. Josrel is sitting on the ground leaning against the pillory, almost totally exhausted.]

Just before heading for the ally, Berina says to Josrel: "Davas and I are going to go down that ally." and she points it out to him. "When Rikoro and Evero return, follow as best you can."

Berina nods in the affirmative, but says nothing and follows Davas' lead.

Groaning slightly as he stands Josrel looks to Berina: "Thank you Berina for all that you have done for me." As Berina heads down the alley Josrel moves to where he can see down the alley.

Find a comfortable position and try to regain some strength, while watching Davas and Berina creep down the alley.

Just as Josrel stumbles into the fence, the guard of the Enclave of the Holy Oak exclaims to Josrel, "By the Gods, do you people not listen! Be off with you before you force me to do you an injury."

Still keeping an eye on the alley Josrel says to the guard: "Please sir, as you can see I am a Priest of Save-K'nor and pose no harm to anyone. I am only resting here a moment, I will be on my way momentarily."

"I care not who you are – move on I say!" the guard says.

Frowning to the guard: "Fine I'm on my way then." Josrel groans as he gets up. Josrel heads down the alley Berina and Davas went down.

At this disturbance in the quiet evening, the ostler and his companions turn and spy Berina and Davas. "Deal with them!" the ostler commands. He hurries on, almost dragging Lillia, and turns right at the next road. The two club wielding guards turn to confront Berina and Davas.

"Lillia! Fight them! We're coming!" Berina shouts.

The ostler says something to Lillia, she briefly glances around, screams and follows him around the corner.

Speaking to Davas loud enough to be heard by the thugs, Berina says: "Remember, we've faced the undead. These two should be no problem." Berina tries to cast Sphere of Shanakar but fails. The guard facing her notices her gestures and waits to see what will happen next.

With a quick glance at Berina, Davas draws his axe and advances on the club wielding guards at a run, axe high. His intention is to dodge and/or parry any incoming attacks and try to get past both guards as quickly as he can (i.e. he does not intend to stop moving unless he absolutely has to). If he can shove one guard into the other as he does so, causing confusion or even one or both to fall, so much the better.

The guard on Davas' side swings his club but Davas dodges the blow. Davas tries to shove the guard but the guard does not move – it is like hitting a wall and Davas is unable to get past.

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5TH WATCH, 3RD HOUR [COOL, PARTLY CLOUDY, SOUTHWEST STORM]⁹

It is the fourth hour of the fifth watch. The sky is partly cloudy but there is an almost full moon - giving almost daylight conditions at times and then plunging into total darkness as it is hidden by the clouds. The wind is very strong coming from the southwest but at least it is not raining.

The ostler has rounded the corner, Lillia in tow, and is no longer in sight. There are two guards, armed with clubs, blocking the narrow alleyway. Also, blocking the alleyway are Berina and Davas, the latter ready with his axe. At the edge of the alleyway nearest the College of Herald's is Josrel dragging along as best he can. Just coming around the front of the stables to the side of the alleyway next to Josrel is Rikoro.

Upon catching sight of Josrel struggling on his own, Rikoro takes quicker strides towards him to offer aid. "Haliki, please allow me to help you. Where has everyone else gone off too?" Rikoro glances around as concern begins to draw on his face.

"ummphh!" Taking a step back and giving the guard a quick grin and a nod of respect, Davas says quietly "let us pass friend. Our business is not with you ... but business we do have".

His intention this time is to parry the club with the axe and try to hook it or the guard's leg and again, knock him down and get past.

Seeing Davas failing to get by the guard, Berina calls out: "Davas! Disengage and come here." Assuming he does this, she will say: "We've failed. By the time we could get past these two, Lillia could be anywhere in Tashal. Let's gather up the others and go back to the townhouse." She backs away from the guards, avoiding presenting her back to them, then turns and goes back along the ally to Kald Square. Encountering Rikoro and Josrel on the way, she says to Josrel: "I'm sorry, but I think Lillia is lost to you," her voice heavy with bitterness.

A look of surprise appears on Rikoro's expression, "So she was there? Oh my. Was she alive? If she was, then we can still find her. The day may be lost, but the outcome not over."

Trying to offer a supportive smile to Josrel and the others Rikoro continues, "I think it best we retreat for some rest. We are worn, cold and wet not to mention the Haliki has some injuries that need tending too. This will also allow us the opportunity to replan. I have some ideas myself that I can share."

Straining to see past Berina and Davas Josrel questions them: "You actually saw her with your eyes?" Upon hearing their confirmation Josrel prays "Thanks to the Knower of Ways she is alive." Turning slowly to head down the alley with the group Josrel pulls the hood of his cloak over his head, crosses his hands into his sleeves and follows his friends: "Thank you all for helping me. I will do whatever I can to repay you all for the kindness you have shown Lillia and Myself. She may be lost now, but We'll find her." Josrel states confidently as he follows behind.

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6TH WATCH [COOL, OVERCAST, NORTHWEST STORM, LIGHT RAIN]⁸

Practically carrying Josrel, you all return to the townhouse by the start of the sixth watch and you bang on the door to awaken Qisse.

Before she can get the door unlocked, an obviously drunk man with the badge of a freemaster woodcrafter approaches you and says, "If you do not stop banging on my door, I will be forced to thrash you." In his current condition, it does not appear that he could even "thrash" the weakened Josrel.

Keeping Josrel propped up with some effort, Rikoro's gaze turns to the woodcrafter and then he says, "You've our apologies goodman. I realize it may infringe upon your artistic sensibilities, but one must knock on a door to rouse another's attention. Though it is of fine craftsmanship, we shall rap lightly upon it in the future to avoid irreparably damaging it."

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2ND WATCH [COOL, OVERCAST, SOUTHWEST BREEZE, HEAVY RAIN]⁷

After convincing the woodcrafter that the house and the door were not his, you entered the townhouse. Josrel immediately fell asleep where you lay him. Everyone else ate some of the food that Qisse had laid out and retired to their beds as well.

By the middle of the second watch, everyone has awakened from a full night's sleep and are sitting in the common room. Qisse puts bread, gruel and small ale before you so you can break your fast and discuss your plans for the day.

As the meal is served Rikoro offers his thanks to Qisse for the morning meal and apologies for the late night arrival. Before eating he turns to Josrel and asks.

"Haliki you seem to have regained your strength this morn. Would you like me to examine whatever injury you took yesterday and see if I can help expedite the healing?"

Rikoro then eats his gruel and bread while offering discourse with the group, "I think it is also prudent at this time to discuss our abilities. Not only will we get to know one another better, but we can more prudently strategize a plan for what to do about the Haliki's love and for any future .. predicaments."

Leaning forward on the table Rikoro commences with his own personal details, "Since it was my suggestion I shall speak first. As you all well know I am a Santa-Mavri with the Shek-P'var. Much like Berina. Only where her convocation is within fire, mine is with the cycle of life and death and bound to the earth – known as Fyvria. As a result my powers focus mainly on the healing arts. Though I have a few tricks up my sleeve. One that would be useful in dire situations is the ability to force one into slumber. Another I have is an enchantment to cause any maturing thing to grow. Then there is a spell to enlarge wood, which is an excellent technique to allow one to break into doors that are locked. Lastly and it seems from your tales something I will see some amount of use in is the spell to increase the decay of rotting matter."

Qisse, who is beginning her housework for the day, gives a small gasp and looks back and forth between Rikoro and Berina. However, she remains silent and continues working – while obviously paying a bit more notice of the conversation.

Rikoro takes a slow sip from his weak ale and then continues on, "As for my education I can read and write in Lakise and Runic. While my tongue is strong in Harnic, I can just manage to twist it for some Sindarin, Khuzan and Jarinese. I have a rudimentary grasp of alchemy, herblore and in the healing arts. I have some knowledge the law from my upbringing in a litigant family. But I would not rely on that particular skill to get out us out of much trouble. Finally I can forage for food and herb as well as track."

Giving his staff two thumps on the ground, Rikoro mentions, "Combat wise I can hold a knife or dagger from my military training. Though I imagine we all can. And I also have some handiness with staves. So my thanks to Berina for granting me this."

As if remembering something he appends what he was saying with, "Ah yes and I have additional power which you have witnessed and that also seems to be shared by the Haliki. That

of divining information from an object – present up until the past. It is called psychometry."

Heaving a big sigh, Berina closes her eyes and pinches the bridge of her nose between a thumb and forefinger™, then opens her eyes and asks Rikoro: "Did your chantry not teach you any circumspection?"

Turning to Qisse, Berina says: "This is one of the reasons I work for Lord Odasart. My 'special' abilities are at the disposal of the kingdom through him. My usefulness to the kingdom is best served if not everybody knows what I can do. I'm sure Lord Odasart would prefer that you keep what you know and what you've heard to yourself."

Qisse answers, "Ees miss, discretion be pert uv a servants job and I do nat gossip."

Rikoro's eye widen as he marvels at Berina's words, a snort initiating a chuckle begins, but quickly ceases as he shakes his head at a lose for words as he starts, "Me.. prudence? .. caution? Last night... last night I was the only one that managed to keep my head amidst the on goings around us. You were ready to burn through the stables to 'get your man'."

Taking in a single steady breath through his nose and then exhaling, speaking calmly, "If my words offend one who is trusted to keep your abode in order then you and Qisse have my apologies. If we can not find sanctuary here to speak on matters of import... then where?"

Addressing the others, Berina says: "I was completely useless last night. I'm going to do some housework, then I'm going to work...if I still have a job after skipping all of yesterday. If any of you come up with anything useful with regard to Lillia's kidnapping, let me know." She then proceeds to cleaning out the fireplaces and doing the other things she does around the house. After that is done, she goes off to see if she still has a job.

While Berina cleans Rikoro continues, looking at Davas and Josrel, "If you both will indulge me I still feel it useful to know our strengths and weaknesses. I have the beginnings of a plan, but not enough to guarantee much results. I had hoped we find something more in this discourse. If you both wish to see to your daily employ or routine first so be it. We can finish the matter anon."

Consuming the Lions share of whatever food is left Josrel leans back in the chair and rubs his belly. "My stomach is a little tender now that you mention it." Continuing to rub his belly with his left hand Josrel right hands moves to rub the back of his neck as he smirks: "I don't know if I have any strength...really... Um I do get visions of people and places when I hold something of theirs but I wouldn't exactly call it a talent."

Still rubbing his belly: " Most of my time is spent keeping the temple clean and polished, cooking for the other Brethren, and of course my religious powers that Save-K'Nor has granted me."

With a groan Josrel gets up and moves over to Berina: "Here let me take your household duties while you go back to your work. It is the least I can do for taking the time to help me."

Giving Berina a look, a quick grin and a shake of his head, Davas turns to Rikoro. Shrugging, he says simply "well, it may be that both of you are right. But in any case, we may or may not

have jobs now ... and a reputation". He gives Berina's retreating back a huge grin. Shaking his head, he says quietly "to your question ... I am ... was ... a hunter. I have skills in the outdoors. Survival, foraging, tracking and discovering the whereabouts of plants probably the most useful, with some knowledge of fletching, the working of hides, animals, agriculture and fishing". "I know a little of herbs and their use in healing and cookery and a little of weather watching". He sits back and stretches.

"As to combat, I have some skill with the bow and can handle axe, knife and shield, should it come to close quarters. I would appreciate someone to practice with, if you are so inclined".

Giving the others another quick smile, Davas says "and now I must to my housework, before Qisse properly mentions my failings". So saying, he stands and turns to find Qisse to ask her what is needful today.

Rikoro says, "Hrm then I'll have a look at your stomach."

Rikoro then crouches down beside Josrel and begins to eye over his abdomen looking for a visible wound. If he manages to find the location by sight or by sound from Josrel as he probes about the area Rikoro will cast Balm of Gresan to an effort to try and speed up the healing. "I hope that did some good. Only time will tell I am afraid."

Examining the wound, Rikoro can tell that this is a serious bruise and there will be some permanent impairment. [Josrel -1 endurance, -1 IP]. Rikoro casts his spell and, no doubt due to his nervousness and lack of experience, the spell misfires. He struggles to keep the spell from doing more harm and, in that respect, he succeeds but it takes an enormous amount of energy. [Rikoro -21 fatigue]

Once Rikoro is finished tending to the Haliki he returns to his seat at the table and speaks of his plan, "Well my ideas are by no means complete, but it is a start. First either Davas or you Haliki should seek out Quenaline. Since a Falesh is involved perhaps she can be of some of aid."

Rikoro continues on with a bit of mild distaste, "Also because a Falesh is involved it means that this matter is somewhat seedy in nature. However by our experience yesterday I did not need to indicate that. If any of you have any friends or contacts in the underworld now would be an excellent time to see what we can find."

Finally Rikoro adds one last comment before finishing, "Lastly I believe Armenton to still be complicit in the affair. With his wife now deceased he is free to marry again. Though it will not be for some time as it would surely draw the eye of many. For us, there lies an advantage of time being on our side. Thus I recommend keeping a watch on him from a distance on occasion. I for one shall make it a point to pass by his shop sometime today."

Rikoro rotates out his head, tilting his head to the right, then back and to the left before raising himself up from his seated position and stating, "For now though I should see to some matters. First to the temple for morning prayer and if possible to make some purchases as I am need of a hyvrack for the laity and

an ablution bowl. Haliki you are welcome to join me if you plan to make amends. After that I need to procure a journal, quill and ink from the local lexicography. The rest of my day will be spent gathering herbs as I need to pay my way for the board here. I do not wish to be a layabout."

Davas says, "... and if I find I am ... no longer wanted" he flashes a rueful smile "then perhaps I could help you?"

Josrel says, "Yes, Rikoro, I would like to accompany you to the Temple. I myself need to get back and, as you, make amends with the Ibarti." Josrel says the last of this half heartedly. "But, I really need to spend some time in prayer and meditation."

Taking out his Ablution Bowl, opening the lid Josrel discovers it almost empty: "Oh my, I'd almost forgotten." Looking to Rikoro: "If you want Rikoro when you get your Ablution Bowl I can bless the water for you. I need to do this as well when I get back to the Temple. Shall we be off then? "

When Rikoro and Josrel leave Josrel embraces both Davas and Berina: "I will remember your help to me in prayer this evening. Thank you."

13- ÁGRAZHÂR -720 TASHAL, KALDOR

3RD WATCH [COOL, OVERCAST, NORTHWEST WIND, LIGHT RAIN]⁸

When Berina arrives at Lord Odasart's manor, the chamberlain asks her to wait in the entryway and goes to enquire if Lord Odasart will see her. He returns a few minutes later and leads her into the great hall where Lord Odasart is breaking his fast.

"Would you care to explain your absence yesterday?" he asks.

Berina answers, "Yes, Milord. My friends and I were trying to solve a kidnapping, and stumbled across a murder."

Berina pauses a moment to gather her thoughts, then continues: "I trust that you remember Josrel of Aswain, a Hiliki of Save K'nor, from the debriefing of the Holdan affair? It happens that he's in love with a fellow Hiliki by the name of Lillia of Aikar. He discovered that she's been kidnapped for the purpose of being forced into marriage."

"The investigation my friends and I were conducting, led to Armenton of Soril, a pawnbroker and the son of the owner of the Red Fox inn. When we confronted him over this matter, he denied having anything to do with the matter and threw us out of his shop. While we were standing around outside thinking about what to do next, Armenton's wife came out and started down the street toward the marketplace. Just down the street, someone in a cloak...I couldn't see their face as the cloak had a hood...came up behind her and stabbed her, right there in broad daylight! I called a hue-and-cry and gave chase, but I lost him in the crowds in Kald Square. When I rejoined my friends...they stayed behind to try to give aid to Armenton's wife and possibly save her...she had died. My friends said that her last words were 'I didn't think he would go through with it. The stables...save the girl.' "

"Arkalin Lodezas of Varsin and some guardsmen arrived in response to the commotion and Armenton also showed up. Armenton showed a decided lack of emotion with regard to the death of his wife, but he was quick enough to accuse Rikoro of Drelin of having murdered her. I know that Rikoro didn't do it,

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as I was with him the whole time. Still, Rikoro stood accused of the crime, so I stood surety for him."

"Armenton then left in the direction of his father's inn." A look of disgust crosses Berina's face as she continues: "Thinking about it just now, what with all of the excitement going on, it occurs to me that Armenton simply left without any concern for his wife, leaving her body laying there in the middle of the street."

Visibly getting her emotions under control, Berina continues: "We all went to the stables at the Red Fox inn, and after some confrontation, we went off a ways where we could watch the stables. After a time, the ostler and two thugs with clubs came out of the stables dragging a woman matching the description Josrel gave us of Lillia...a thin blond slightly taller than me. Davas and I gave chase, but the two thugs barred our way while the ostler dragged Lillia around a corner and out of sight. We were unable to dodge past the thugs to pursue the ostler, and getting into a pitched battle with them wouldn't have changed the fact that we were delayed enough that the ostler made his escape with Lillia. I suppose that we could have gotten some satisfaction in beating the stuffing out of the thugs, but that would have been disturbing the King's Peace and probably landed us in gaol." Berina gives Lord Odasart a sheepish grin and adds: "There was a time, not long ago, that I would have done it anyway, but I guess some of Sir Arylen's 'teaching' has sunk in."

Berina continues with a puzzled expression: "I'm convinced that Armenton is at the center of this mess, but I don't know how or why. From what I've been able to find out about Lillia, while she's attractive enough, she doesn't seem to have high marriage prospects. Her father was killed years ago, and her mother now runs a butcher's shop. She's a simple Hiliki, and the Ibarti has been a father figure to her. I must be missing something important, but I don't know what to do now."

Looking at Lord Odasart with pleading, almost puppy-dog-eyes, Berina says: "I want to help Hiliki Josrel and rescue Lillia, but I don't know what to do. Should I just give it up as beyond me? What should I do?" and she lapses into silence finally.

"I see," says Lord Odasart. "As to your employment here, you are normally allowed six days off each month for holidays or personal reasons. What I am more concerned about is that you did not inform me. Do not do that again...at the very least, any urchin in the street will deliver a message for a penny."

Berina "Yes, Milord. I'll see to it that you are kept fully informed."

Lord Odasart continues, "As to this other business, you appear to have two different issues that may or may not be connected...a murder and a kidnapping. Murder in the streets is, of course, a matter of the king's justice and, I am sure, will be investigated by his guardsmen. Whether it is related to this kidnapping or not, you will only cause yourself grief by interfering in that investigation so you had best leave it alone other than answering questions of what you actually witnessed without any speculation."

"Kidnapping, on the other hand, is a family matter and, in one form or another, happens all the time. If Josrel has no intention

of marrying her and thereby bringing her into his family, then he should leave the matter to her kin...no matter what his feelings are for her."

"If he plans on rescuing her for the purpose of competing for her affections and marrying her, he should first consult with his family and her family to see if that is agreeable to them...to proceed without the acceptance of family, he would need to have some way of supporting a family...something more stable than simply being clergy can provide."

"Once he has family permission or a stable income, there is the need to find the young lady and get her acceptance...from what you have told me, she may not even know Josrel wants to marry her or what his motives are. If he has not discussed it with her, she may believe his motives are no better than her abductors."

"Finally, there is the question of the motives of her abductors. I know of Armenton of Soral and of his father, Merlin of Soral. Armenton is gutless and would not do anything without first consulting his father. Merlin, on the other hand, is powerful, greedy and very persuasive. He does not give a fig for emotions but he has the locals convinced of how good and honest he is. Therefore, if Armenton is involved, it is through the direction of his father and it involves money or power. You might learn his motives by asking Lillia's mother but you would just do yourself harm, socially and physically, by going against Master Soral directly. As with most powerful men, he pays mercenaries, or what you refer to as thugs, to protect him."

"So, would you like another day off work to pursue this matter or will you attend to it at days end?"

Berina says, "I'll deal with it at days end. I need to do some work to calm down and get focused. Besides, Josrel's going to have to check with his family before anything further can be done. Thank you for your advice, Milord. You are most gracious."

Berina immerses herself in her scribal work until 'quitting time', then goes home.

* * *

On their way to the temple, Rikoro and Josrel stop at the Lexigrapher, Saryse of Naradas. Asking about a journal, quill and ink, Rikoro is told the price will be 57d for a 25 page journal, 18d for a dozen quill pens and 13d for a pint of black ink.

Rikoro nods as he's told the prices, then looks to Saryse and counters with, "Well I'll gladly take all of it if you would be willing shave eight silver off the total for a price of eighty five. I know you have no reason to do so, but I will make it my solemn effort to continue to procure supplies from your shop now that I have returned to Tashal."

"Very well," says the shopkeeper as he sells you the goods.

When they reach the temple, Rikoro is told an ablution bowl is not available at this time (check back in the next tenday). A brass hyvrack is available for 2d.

With content smile and incline of his head, Rikoro says, "Quite understandable. For now then the hyvrack will be enough. My savings have dwindled this day so perhaps it is a small blessing from the Sage to have to wait for the bowl."

Upon entering the Temple Josrel finds the nearest Haliki and asks if he/she can set up a meeting for him with the Ibarti and with the Olunar. He will spend whatever time it takes to wait for the meetings to take place in prayer at the main hall of the Temple.

Josrel is told that Olunar Cyzaesir will see him briefly now, if Josrel does not mind the Olunar continuing to do his work. Ibarti Erdaris will see him in a turn of the glass.

Bowing respectfully to the Olunar, "Olunar Cyzaesir, may I help you in your work?" Josrel asks. When the Olunar agrees, Josrel helps him with his task: "Is it possible for me return to the Temple. I have a meeting with the Ibarti at the turn of the glass and to see if he would let me in. Can you offer any advice? I've had some time to think and realize that my actions have been done in haste and as a result I believe the Ibarti sees me in an unfavorable light."

"I am sure you can, if you remember to heed your teachings," the Olunar answers, "when you act rashly without learning the facts and without thinking things through, you provide a bad image for the temple and of the Ibarti's teachings. That is probably what causes Ibarti Erdaris' despair. When you speak to him, stick to the facts that you know and any logical arguments that you have. Make not assumptions or un-provable speculations and you should do all right."

Josrel continues to help the Olunar until his meeting with the Ibarti.

After the Olunar estimates an hour has past, he tells Josrel, "Off you go now for it is time for your meeting."

Bowing respectfully to the Olunar "Thank you Olunar for your patience and for guiding me through my errors. I will be off then to meet with the Ibarti." With that Josrel goes to meet the Ibarti.

As Josrel enters the door of Ibarti Erdaris' chambers, the Ibarti looks up and says, "What can I do for you?"

Bowing respectfully to the Ibarti, Josrel says, "Ibarti I have come to ask if I still welcome here at the Temple. I wish to return to my studies and services here if you deem me worthy. I know in the past my record has not been favorable, but I hope to have learned from mistakes in my past."

Ibarti Erdaris says, "So is the matter if the missing Haliki resolved to your satisfaction? In all honesty, I do not see you being able to concentrate on your duties while you are thus distracted. Once that matter has been resolved and you return to the temple, you will need to spend several days in seclusion away from the outside world to regain your focus."

Bowing respectfully to the Ibarti, Josrel says: "You are correct Teacher. Your patience and experience once again are an example that I strive to attain. The matter with Haliki Lillia is not resolved so yes I would be distracted. I will pursue the matter to completion and as you wish return and refocus. Thank you again." Bowing Josrel leaves his office to return to the townhouse.

* * *

After the purchase Rikoro, offers support and parting words to Josrel and then heads into the ritual hall for quiet meditation and prayer. Finishing with that he makes his way outside the gates of Tashal for some herb gathering for the rest of the day. While in the wilderness he stays attentive for signs of recent animal movement endeavoring to avoid tracks that could indicate dangerous creatures in the area.

Walking the roads along the "wilderness" of cultivated fields during the four hours of the forth watch, Rikoro finds six ounces of agrimony, two ounces of bugloss, seven ounces of burnet, one ounce of comfrey, two ounces of horsetail, four ounces of madder, seven ounces of mint, four ounces of nettle and two ounces of pennyroyal. The one time he tried to venture off the road, the peasants of the field told him he should stay on the roads or he would be fined by the manor lord for trespass.

Stretching out his long frame, Rikoro looks to the sky, noting the position of Nolomar, he decides to venture back into Tashal. On his return he takes his time walking languidly as he soaks in the sights and sounds of the rural area.

Once arriving back through to the city gates Rikoro makes his way over to the nearest apothecary, alchemist or physician to preview the herbs he has gathered and see if there's any interest in purchasing them. His intent will be to sell two of the agrimony, four of the burnet, all of the burgiooss, two of the horsetail, one of the nettle, four of the mint and two of the madder.

Rikoro stops at the apothecary of Lorin of Lorinsen and shows what he has gathered. Master Lorin says, "I can give you 34d 2f for the lot but not a penny more."

Holding up his left hand with a mild shake, Rikoro replies with, "I shall hold off on the sum you are offering me, Master Lorin. You likely do not need these herbs and are simply being kind to me as a result. While I appreciate it I believe I could sell them for at least 50d elsewhere. However, if you let me know what you are in need of I can make an effort to procure that for you in the next few days."

"Harrumph," sputters Master Lorin, "Then you obviously know those who are willing to throw their money away – perhaps those also willing to risk charges of usurping guild privileges. I can assure you that what I offered is a generous price and you will not find better in the legitimate market. I will bid good day to you." [relationship -5]

Rikoro lowers his head slightly at Lorin's words, then says, "I apologize if I have offended it was not my intention. I merely wished to try to barter further. A good day to you Master Lorin."

Rikoro turns and leaves with a bit of a sigh escaping his lips, and heads out onto the streets. He then looks skyward to determine if he can make it to another shop or should be on his way home for evening supper.

He decides that Qisse will have dinner ready before he can find another apothecary as Master Lorin is the only one he knows of in the guild – to find another legitimate apothecary, he must search the markets and surrounding villages.

* * *

When Davas arrives at the The Spurs, the staff is just beginning the days cleaning and shopping. Halime of Falesh greets him with, "and just where have you been! I like you but I have to have someone who is reliable."

Davas says, "I am truly sorry Halime. A friend ... well, his lady was kidnapped and as is often the case, I think he did not realize how much he cared until she was gone. I fear he panicked ... and we caught some of his fear I think. Worse, we found her but could not free her".

He sighs gently, then looks shamefacedly at the floor. "I am sorry. I got caught up in the chase and forgot ... well, I am usually reliable. Very".

Davas grins ruefully and mutters "my mother says it is my one strengths" shaking his head as he does so.

Looking back to Halime, he adds quietly "I hope you were not too overworked ... and I promise, it will not happen again."

He then waits to see what Halime has to say.

With a smile, Master Halime says, "Ah the rashness of young lovers...I know several who make a business out of taking advantage of such situations. You should have come to me with your problem...I can arrange to have the lady free without undo bother. Of course, such favors are a type of currency and you will owe me in the future but I will not ask anything too onerous of you. Since this is the first time you have been away without notice and you say it will not happen again, we need not speak of it further. Just tell me where the lady is and her appearance, then go about your work. I will have her lodging here in safety by the marrow."

Davas stares at Halime as he not only lets him off lightly, but says that Davas should have come to him for aid. After a longish pause, he begins to speak. "Owe you ... yes, of course. I already do for your understanding. But ...".

He looks intently at Halime. "You can do this ? ... you can find her ... and free her ? ... Oh".

His shoulders slump as he realizes that is not what Halime said. "Ah ... I only know where she was". He recounts the tale, adding "her name is Lillia, a haliki ... some kind of priest I think" before describing the glimpse he had of her as she was hustled away.

Turning earnestly to Halime, he says "I ... we ... would be very grateful if you could discover anything of her ... and if you could rescue her ...". His look turns to one of admiration. "It would be a great favor".

"Consider it done my friend," Halime replies.

Davas nods and hurries away to begin his work, apologizing for his absence to the other workers as he sees them. He tells the tale to the others as work allows.

13- ÁGRAZHÂR -720 TASHAL, KALDOR

5TH WATCH [WARM, PARTLY CLOUDY, SOUTHWEST GALE]⁹

At the beginning of the fifth watch, you all return to the townhouse. Qisse has prepared lentils with chestnuts as an appetizer, followed by amyndoun seaw (vegetable gruel) and carragheen sweet mousse for desert. There is also plenty of

small ale and tourte bread for trenchers. The ale has the dark copper color, light citric aroma and powerful taste of almonds of the Ghost and Langlah Cellar.

Davas says, "Thank you Qisse. The food is excellent". He flashes her a grin before turning to the others again.

Upon his return to the townhouse, Rikoro offers Qisse a greeting, finding himself the first to arrive he begins a conversation, "Good eve to you Qisse, I was out herb gathering this day and found some mint, would a stalk of it be of use to you for cooking? Also is there any small task or chore I can perform before the others arrive and dinner is ready or would you prefer I remain out of your way as mother oft did when I was a child."

Rikoro musters a rueful smile at his final words seeming to grow a bit distant within his thoughts, but still regarding Qisse sincerely.

"If ee know anything 'bout cooking dere be a voo dings ee can do to 'elp," she answers, "otherwise it wud be best if ee bide out uv de way, please ee. Ee can sit over dere and spake if ee be uv a mind too. As to de mint it be prapper to add to peas pudding bit wan sprig wud only be 'nuff vor two. Do ee know 'ow many dere weel be vor dinner tonight? It appears to be different ivery night and nobody lets me know een time to prepare."

Rikoro's face lights up a bit as he replies "I'm afraid the only skill I have with cooking, is eating. And even that I fail at sometimes when I miss my mouth. So best I sit out of the way."

With that Rikoro chuckles merrily at his own words, clearly amused with himself before moving to the table out of Qisse's way "I can give you a couple of sprigs of mint then."

Reaching inside of his pack he produces two mint herbs and lays them out atop the table.

"As to who is coming tonight that would likely be everyone. So four of us. And they should arrive on time as we've not found ourselves engrossed as yesterday. Part of the reason I wanted to speak with you was to let you know that I would not be in attendance for dinner on Peonian Holy Days. As I will spend that time with my family. Thus tomorrow I shall not be here".

Qisse says, "Dey be a shame, dey be. Peoni 'oly days be wain I usually zar mate way de meal. Does yer vam-lee already know ee be coming ur wud ee like me to send a messenger to let dey know wain ee weel be arriving?"

Perking up a bit, Rikoro offers, "That is a shame. I have felt your meals were already of fine calibre. Perhaps one day I will skip a visit to sample your dinner. Though for now if you could send a messenger that would be grand. I imagine it will cost a few pence to do so? Let me know and I shall leave it with you."

Gearing up again to inquire with Qisse, Rikoro asks, "On separate topic I wanted to know if you knew of any alchemists, apothecaries or physicians in Tashal that would be interested in purchasing herbs. I fear my years away from Tashal has dulled my memory, not to mention I am sure locations and shops have changed. I tried with Master Lorin, but it seems my bartering skills leave much to be desired."

Qisse answers, "Other dan Maister Lorin, the only other wan I know uv be 'olik uv Asaner at de coander uv 'eru ruad and Myselbane Way. 'e be new een town and 'as some very foreign ways, even more foreign den yersel, so I ant dude iny business way'n and cussen tull if 'e be prapper at 'is work."

"More forgein them myself hrm? Sounds interesting. Here I thought I still fit in Kaldor. Seems my time away has changed me more then I thought. Could explain why I've been rubbing people wrong." As he ponders that for a moment, Rikoro pulls on the tip of his beard. "I'll have to be more aware of my actions in the future. If you find my behavior odd please feel free to point it out. It will go a long way towards me settling back. Well you have my thanks Qisse. If he is new to town he will likely be in need of herbs."

Hearing an arrival at the doorway, Rikoro glances over his shoulder to see who has returned back to the townhouse.

* * *

Berina immerses herself in her scribal work until 'quitting time', then goes home. When everyone has returned from their days activities, she relates what Lord Odasart has said. She then says: "Josrel, Lord Odasart is right. You will need to get your family involved...I doubt you'll be able to arrange a stable income on such short notice."

Upon entering the townhouse, Josrel says, " Hello everyone, thanks to the Knower of Ways you have all made it through another day."

Turning to Berina Josrel frowns : " I really don't have a family Berina." Josrel sadly states. "Both my parents died of disease when I was young. Save-K'Nor guide their souls. A distant Uncle took us in, but that's all he did for my two sisters and I. Goshal, my great uncle hired a nurse for us and she is the one who took care of us." Josrel explains as he scratches at the table with his finger. "I highly doubt that Goshal will want anything to do with this matter. But I guess I can try."

"Also, you and Rikoro will have to find out where Lillia is being held. She could be anywhere in Tashal, or even outside of Tashal, so it's going to take your 'special' talents to find her. You need to talk to Lillia's mother as well. Davas and I can accompany you for that...I'll just need you to let me know when you intend to do it so I can make arraignments to not lose my job!"

Wiping the table of its shaving that he scratched up, Josrel says: "I will meditate on the cloak tonight and see if anything comes to me. I'll ask around the Temple if anyone knows where her family can be found. Then we can formulate a plan of action."

"Rikoro, Davas, why don't you two look into Lillia's background more deeply. Rikoro, your exposure to the litigant's trade should give you some ideas about where to start looking. I suggest trying to find out more about Lillia's father. What was his background?"

"Davas, Lillia's father was killed in a hunting 'accident'. You're a hunter. How and to whom would his death have been reported? Would some sort of record have been made?"

Davas looks up in obvious surprise at Berina's suggestion that he find out about Lillia's father, but the surprise is quickly replaced by confusion. After a pause, he says "to find out about another ... why, you would ask their family". He pauses, then shakes his head quickly. "I mean ... we can ask her family ... if we can find them. But they may not answer of course ... or if they do, they may not tell the truth". Again he pauses, a wistful look on his face. "Families" a slow grin crosses his face before he continues "... they can be wonderful". After a moment, he shakes himself. "Sorry ... I was dreaming. Hunting accident. Yes, well it depends I suppose on her father's rank ... and where it happened. If he was a commoner, probably it would be reported to the village reeve who would make a note ... somewhere ... if he lived in a village of course".

Davas looks flustered and starts to wave his hands. "If he was a person of rank well I don't really know. His family would be told? ... then they would tell ... whoever needed to know I suppose " He stops and stares into space for a while.

Speaking slowly and punctuating each point, he resumes. "It may be important to find out if anyone was with him ... and yes, what sort of accident it was".

"If ... ". He shrugs suddenly and laughs. "Isn't it odd how quickly everything becomes suspicious - if you are in a suspicious mood". "It may truly have been an accident of course". He turns to Josrel. "Do you know how long ago it was?"

Berina continues, "If so, Rikoro, where would that record be kept, and would it be possible for you to see it? Such a record might contain more than just the fact that he died...but what his social standing was, and if Lillia might have a dowry or some such. If that record doesn't have that sort of information, it might point you to another document that does."

"Davas, sweetie, I'm counting on your common sense to keep the 'big picture' in view in case Rikoro gets all absorbed in details."

Davas nods at Berina's suggestions and laughs when she suggests he supervise Rikoro. "I will try".

Rikoro laughs contently in turn at Davas' response, "Trying to pry a follower of the Sage away from a tome is like trying to lure a Laranian away from smiting a darkness. Neither can be done without losing a limb."

Attention then on Berina, Rikoro adds, "Berina I am more then willing to pour over some of the public records if such was kept, though it will be an arduous task. Whilst I have no quarrel with doing so to aid the Haliki, I do question the merit behind such an endeavor. Certainly understanding our history can reveal much about present and future course, but in this case how does the life and death of Lillia's father tie into her kidnapping? If anything I would focus our attention on the mother as the living can influence the present far better then the dead. Unless you have reason to suspect otherwise that is."

Berina says, "Think about it. Lillia's a simple Haliki. You do remember that we were told that her mother runs a butcher shop? Not much potential there I'd say. Yet Lillia's been kidnapped for the purpose of being forced into marriage. A marriage so important that it was worth it for someone to murder Armenton's

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wife. That just leaves Lillia's father. That he's dead doesn't mean his influence died with him. I'm guessing that something of value goes to whoever marries his only child. Maybe a dowry, or perhaps a lucrative hereditary position. Murders and forced marriages, with their attendant risks, don't occur without the prospect of substantial reward. I did mention that we could go see Lillia's mother if Josrel is up to it. Beyond that, if you think you've got a better idea, I'd love to hear it."

Turning to Berina, Josrel says: "I will try to determine her whereabouts."

Berina says, "I'm going to go talk to Quenaline. I think that ostler was her father. Maybe She can shed some light on what's going on here."

Davas says, "If you see her, please wish her well from me".

Turning to Josrel, Rikoro asks, "Haliki two things. First, may I look at your wound? I wish to see the progress and try again as I did not feel ... comfortable with the results this morn. Second, do you still have Lillia's cloak? We can begin the 'search' anew for her whereabouts after I have had a chance to tend to you"

Rubbing his belly, Josrel says: "Yes it is still very tender. I still do have the cloak, and we meditate on it later. "

Upon hearing Josrel's response, Rikoro crouches his gangly frame down by the Haliki, and then begins to inspect the wound readying himself. After placing his large palm on Josrel's abdomen, the Fyvrian Mage tries to focus on weaving 'Balm of Gresan'.

After Rikoro has placed his hand under Josrel's robe to touch the wound for almost a full minute, he realizes that it is again not working. [-7 FP, +1 Balm of Gresan]

Looking a bit weary from the process, Rikoro shakes his head glancing up to Josrel, "Apologies Haliki, but it seems today I am having difficulty grasping the elements. Come morning I shall tend to it as a physician would and try again."

Qisse passes by muttering, "foreign, foreign ways," and shakes her head.

As he rises up, under the aid of his staff a slight grin appears on Rikoro's lips as he looks to Qisse, "I would never do such in public unless it was extremely necessary, but much like Peonian prayer can help the healing process so to can I .. on certain days that is.. and I would be remiss not to aid a friend. I appreciate you pointing out my behavior though."

* * *

Davas laughs loudly at Rikoro's jest, then as the conversation progresses, looks more and more uneasy. Finally, at the mention of Lillia's cloak, Davas blurts out "perhaps we should wait?"

As the others turn to him, probably with various looks of surprise, he continues quickly. "Sorry ... I mean ... when I told Halime the tale and asked his forgiveness for not turning up yesterday, he said ...". Davas turns to them, sudden realization on his face. "You won't believe it ... I'm not sure I do either ... but he said that, if I said who it was and described her, he would ...". He stops briefly, before plowing resolutely on. "He said that she would be at the inn on the marrow".

Looking at Davas, Berina raises one eyebrow at this statement.

He looks from one to the other. "He seemed to think that it was no great matter. Perhaps ... we should wait and see if he can do this thing? I cannot see how ... but he seemed ... very confident".

"That's a very...interesting...claim your employer has made. For Josrel's and Lillia's sake, I hope it's true, but..." here Berina pauses. She re-starts: "The only way a commoner could have that kind of influence, is if he were highly placed in the Lia Kavair." Looking at Davas with slightly narrowed eyes, she asks: "What do you know about your employer?"

"If he is able to produce Lillia as promised, then if, as I suspect, he is an important person in the Lia Kavair, you, and possibly Josrel and Lillia, will be in the debt of a very dangerous man."

Berina's expression turns to one of worry, and she says: "I heard an expression somewhere that says something about leaping out of the frying pan and into the fire."

"Lia Ka ... Halime? Oh please!" Davas disbelief is plain on his face and his laughter, following quickly, simply reinforces his dismissal of this idea. "Halime is a good man ... probably a well known business man ... 'been in the trade for years' ... you know ... like a ..." he looks around, gesturing and obviously searches for a comparison "... like a midwife. You know ... they know everyone and everyone respects them".

He chuckles again. "Of course, a midwife tends to know you rather too well. No, no ... I'm sure Halime means well and it would be marvelous if he did help. I'm sure he will try ... he may even succeed".

Turning to Berina, he adds quietly "... though he did say something about owing him a favor, that would only be right and proper for his help". He smiles at her. "And I would be very willing to help him in return, should he ask".

Turning to Davas, Josrel says: "Well, I still would like to meditate on the cloak anyway. The information we get the better. Hopefully the information Halime can get will pan out for us."

Rubbing his long fingers through his beard at his jawline and chin as Berina speaks, Rikoro seems reflexive on the matter being discussed. "I echo the same sentiment as Berina. Who is this Halime that he can perform such a 'miracle' and what has he asked in return? It would do us no good if the 'price' he asked was too steep or if we had to betray who we are."

Davas says, "No friend, I'm sure all is well. Halime means well ... as I said, he probably just knows a lot of people. He may have knowledge of this pawnbroker through his business. Maybe he is related in some way? ... most people usually are". He looks thoughtful for a moment. "Well, most were related at home. In the city? ... well ... it is possible I suppose". He pauses for a few seconds, then turns to the others. "I should ask him ... I'm sure he will say and it will be something simple. A cousin that knows an uncle ... or some such". He waves a hand dismissively.

Berina looks at Rikoro, catches his eye, then rolls her eyes up towards the ceiling. Turning her gaze fully on Davas, she says: "Davas, my love, you are too trusting by half. Am I going to have to marry you just to keep you out of trouble?" Looking back at Rikoro, she says "Imagine ME having to keep someone

else out of trouble!" At this, Berina starts to laugh so hard, she nearly falls off the bench she's sitting on. The laughter falls off to a chuckling because of the need to breathe, and she manages: "Oh, that's good!" between gasps.

Davas looks at Berina blankly as she suggests he is too trusting, then in amazement as she suggests marriage to keep *him* out of trouble. He just watches as she starts laughing, then, realizing she is teasing, joins in heartily. "Good one. You had me a while there".

When he recovers, he takes himself off to work. "I will let you know how Halime's cousin" he pauses and gives Berina a look "has fared when I return".

When he arrives at Halime's, he not ask how he has got on. If Halime has succeeded, he will let his surprise show and ask "how is this possible?" ... and then express his thanks volubly.

"Of course I have her," says Halime, "She is upstairs in one of the rooms. You can go up and ensure yourself that I have the right one but I think she had best stay here until the marriage for her own safety. As to how it is done...that is a matter of a very large family (I have been told you have met some of them) and shared favors...you do something for someone and later they do something for you in return. The people who had her decided it was not worth my displeasure for them to keep her. The only thing I ask of the happy couple is to be invited to the wedding and to be introduced to some of your fine friends, of which I am told there are several."

Davas looks from Halime to the stairs and back to Halime, disbelief plain on his face. Then he smiles broadly. "The right one ... yes of course. I should talk to her ... make sure she has not been abused".

Realizing what he has said, he starts and turns quickly to Halime, his grin slipping from his face. "Not by you ... or your family of course ... by the others I mean ... the ones that took her ... you know". He stammers to a halt, then takes a deep breath and turns away, then back.

"My apologies. You have done us ... me ... a great service. I will go now to talk with her if I may, then begin my work. Your request will be our pleasure". His grin surfaces again as he says simply "thank you, truly"

He turns and begins to climb the stairs. Stopping part way up he turns again to Halime. "... um ... which room?"

With a smile, Master Halime says, "I am sure you will be able to tell," and he returns his attention to his work."

On hearing Halime's answer, he smiles, nods his thanks and goes to greet Lillia.

At the top of the stairs and sitting on a chair across from one of the guest rooms, Davas finds Remaik of Falesh, the ostler from the night before.

With a chuckle, Master Remaik says, "Well, well, well, if it is not the farmer with the axe. You could have saved yourself a lot of trouble if you would have just arranged a meeting through my cousin, Halime. Anyone who changes their allegiance to our family due to a bribe, like you offered last night, will soon find

themselves permanently unemployed, but family is another matter. I care little for the Soril clan but the only thing I will betray my liege for is clan. Enough advice...I am sure you know your own mind best. I hope there are no hard feelings from me performing my duties as I was told. Actually, I rather like you but I can do without any more visits from your rash, blonde Amazon. No doubt, you will be wanting to see the lady now. Well go right in."

* * *

As the evening wears on and the ebb and flow of the conversation begins to wane, Rikoro looks to Berina and Davas, "I wished to ask about the matter of payment for residing here. We had spoken on it briefly when I first arrived, but nothing was ever settled. I do not wish to take advantage of your hospitality and I also worry that I will not have the proper funds on me when the time does arrive."

Rikoro then turns his attention to Josrel inquisitively, "Haliki those notes you made during our first meeting in Lord Odasart's company. I was wondering if perhaps I could review them? With my journal in hand I too would like to document the groups experience as I found some of the events rather insightful. I should have it back to you by morning."

14- ÁGRAZHÂR -720 TASHAL, KALDOR

2ND WATCH [WARM, CLEAR, NORTH GALE]

After the conversation last night and a restful sleep, you once again find yourself seated around the table discussing your plans for the day, while Qisse serves gruel, bread and small ale. She tells Rikoro, "I sent de neighbor's biy to yer parents way de message us discussed and 'e sed dey weel be zpectin ee at de start uv de fifth witch. I gave de biy a vard'n bit ee need nat concern yersel way dey avore de accounting at de aend uv de month. Jist consider it wan uv my services to a guest uv de 'ouse."

With a contained smile Rikoro nods to Qisse, "Well you have my sincere thanks Qisse as does the lad. Let me know if there are any herbs I can find for you whilst I am out and I will keep a watch for them. Consider it part of my contribution as I am not a cook."

Qisse answers, "Iny uv de cooking herbs wud be nice, sitch as basil, chervil, mint and dyme. Also asarabaca ur pennyroyal to strew on de planch among de rishes to kill fleas. Most uv dey be usually found een vokes' gardens and I wud nat want ee to get een tu trouble."

With a polite smile Rikoro nods to Qisse's words, "I would not stoop to thievery, but I shall keep my eyes out for any that may be growing wild on their own."

Davas recalls that this was the time of the year when he would normally be accounting to is liege so the annual report could be prepared by the end of the month.

Rikoro looks at Josrel's wound and changes the bandages. He tries his spell again but it still does not have any effect. By the time he has finished breaking his fast, he has recovered the fatigue expended on the spell. [Josrel -2 IP, Rikoro +1 Balm of Gresan]

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Shaking his head with a bit of a rueful grin towards Josrel, Rikoro says, "Your wound is quite persistent, but hopefully the bandage change will help ease your discomfort, until I can examine it again tonight. I believe we planned to try our hand at Lillia's cloak to divine her current whereabouts and condition, if you have it on you we can do so now."

Stretching slightly in his new bandage, Josrel says, "Yes, still a little tender, thank you though for your efforts."

Wrinkling his nose, "About the notes on the meeting with Lord Odasart, they are the property of the Temple now. I donated them to the Temple. I suppose one could ask to see the notes. "

Grabbing Lillia's cloak:" Sure lets try it. I really don't have any control over my visions but I guess I can try to concentrate on it."

Josrel concentrates for an hour but to no avail. [+14 FP, +1 clairvoyance] Next, Rikoro concentrates for 14 minutes on the cloak but it tells him nothing that he had not learned in previous attempts. [+13 FP, +1 psychometry]

Josrel leans back in the chair: "I didn't get anything this time. How about you Rikoro?"

With a bit of a weary sigh, Rikoro shakes his head, "I myself saw nothing new unfortunately. We can try again this eve. For now we can rely on good old fashioned foot work amongst ourselves to see what we can uncover. Let us be on our way, I myself have some matters to see to today."

Rikoro rises from the table, using his staff as leverage and makes his way from the townhouse with Josrel. Clearly the Sati-Mavari seems content being in the Haliki's presence as his eyes seem to twinkle with a bit of pride as they leave together.

After Rikoros answer, Josrel says: "Well maybe later, we should get to the Temple I have a few things I need to do there."

Speaking to the group Rikoro, brushes at his beard clearing away a few bread crumbs he felt, "Well my plan today is to try and sell some of the herbs I have gathered after a visit to the temple for prayer and meditation. Then I shall see what I can find surrounding the death of Lillia's father until Josrel has had a chance to uncover what he can of her mother. Time permitting I may see to some further gathering."

Rikoro glances in Josrel's direction, "If you are ready we can make our way there now Haliki"

As the pair walk towards the Save-k'nor temple, Rikoro begins speaking with Josrel, "I was thinking Haliki. The best place to start a proper investigation into Lillia's family would be at the temple. Berina asked that I look into her father's death, while you inquired about the mother. The problem is that beyond the Aikar family name, I do not know a scrap more about her father. Even his first name for that matter. Not to mention even if I did, I doubt there would be anything available on the Watches records as the death was ruled a hunting accident. Compound that problem with the fact they likely wouldn't even allow me near their documentation. "

Rikoro pauses to gather himself, as he spirals from his original point, "What I am saying is that we should build a foundation and that would start at the temple. Perhaps the Ibarti or the

Falorin would know more about her family relations. It is also possible they have something in the archives and here again you would be best suited to gain access to them. I will gladly aid you in the research should you want it and are allowed it. Therefore after ablution I will grant you some time in your efforts as I have some needs to take of myself and then I shall return and see how you are fairing."

Smiling back to Rikoro as they walk Josrel replies: "You and I are of the same mind Rikoro, I dare say didn't 'The Lost Guide' himself send you to me to aide me. I was planning just as you say, I really don't think that the Temple officers will let you see any archives, or for that matter any information on Lillia. We Clerics of the Keeper of Knowledge are pretty reluctant to give out information, and when we do it usually comes at a hefty price."

Pausing he continues: "I will see if I can talk with Falorin Harar'bis first, then Olunar Cyzaesir. I will also ask if there are any records of her family to see. Depending on what I can gather from them will depend if I need to meet with the Ibarti. " Taking Rikoro by the sleeve Josrel stops walking leans in close to Rikoro and whispers to him: "Between you and I Rikoro something doesn't sit well with me about the Ibarti." Josrel backs away from Rikoro and shrugs his shoulders : "Heh, maybe its just me.... Anyway first thing that needs to be done when we get to the Temple is to get some Holy Water for our Ablutions. If you want Rikoro I can bless some for you when we get there." Josrel states rather matter of factly.

Rikoro seems to nod uneasily at Josrel's words about the Ibarti, but at the end replies with, "Your words are too kind Haliki. I shall certainly accept your blessing for ablution, though I have yet to obtain a ritual bowl. I believe in a few more days the temple will have some available."

As soon as Rikoro enters the temple, one of the Halaki approaches him and says, "I am Haliki Kvar'ld of Arnimen and I was asked to tell you we have found an ablution bowl for you, which you can have for 14d 2f. The first filling with holy water is provided with the bowl." He then shows you a wooden bowl with a tight fitting lid which is turned to lock it into place. The size of the bowl gives the impression that it holds enough water for a tenday.

Rikoro inclines his head respectfully to Kvar'ld as he accepts the bowl, and while he speaks fishes for the coin to pay, "My thanks Haliki, I appreciate the aid in the matter"

Turning to regard Josrel with a bit of a grin, "It appears I will not need a blessing today or for I would estimate tenday. Though you also have my thanks Haliki. Let us attend to ablution and then we can tend to the rest of our day."

Smiling and nodding knowingly, Josrel takes his ablution bowl and removes the lid, goes to get some water and returns to sit next to Rikoro. "First I need to bless some water for myself." Josrel takes a deep breath to center himself and begins to bless the water.

[OOC: I'm going to use Blessing for this and the number of piety points will determine the effectiveness – 10 days worth of water and each piety point represents 10% chance of a luck blessing. In example, if you put 5 piety points in, each day of

ablution has a 50% chance of resulting in a luck blessing. CS will double the chance, MF results in no luck and CF results in bad luck.]

Once inside the ritual hall, Rikoro closely follows Haliki Josrel's movements and prayers endeavoring to perform the morning ceremony correctly. Afterwards he meditates for twenty minutes in an effort to centre himself.

Once broken from his peace Rikoro rises up bows towards the altar and any clergy present and then quietly slips out of the ritual hall and temple. Rikoro then sets a course heading to the alchemists shop Qisse had informed him about with plans on his mind to try and sell the herbs. As he does so he observes the sights, sounds and smells of Tashal with a relaxed smile playing on his lips.

The shop is empty when Rikoro enters, except for the apothecary, and the room is heady with the smell of various herbs. "Can I help you?" the apothecary asks."

[OOO: He offers 1f for each dose of agrimony or bugloss; 2f for each dose of burnet, comfrey or pennyroyal; 3f for each dose of horsetail, madder or mint. How much and of what do you want to sell?]

Rikoro glances curiously around the shop before settling his gaze on the shopkeep, "Good day to you Master. I have the following herbs for sale." Rikoro swings his pack around and then carefully lays out all of what he has, "Would you be interested in the lot?"

At that moment, a very beautiful but obviously native woman steps out of the back room. Master Holik appears to not notice her as he examines the batches of herbs, "six doses of agrimony for 1d 2f, two doses of bugloss for 2f, seven doses of burnet for 3d 2f, one dose of comfrey for 2f, two doses of horsetail for 1d 2f, four doses of madder for 3d, five doses of mint for 3d 3f, four doses of nettle for 2d, and two doses of pennyroyal for 1d, coming to a total of 17d 2f." He counts out the money from his cash box and makes the exchange.

Once they've finished speaking on price Rikoro inquires about any other herbs the apothecary may have need on. "I do not have steady employ myself so hunting for herbs is a way for me to earn a keep until I find such. From your the looks of your shop you are just establishing yourself so my assertion would be you could use a steady supply. Though starting fresh is a rather taxing thing on ones own purse, so if it is not the case I understand."

"I would prefer to go on a day-to-day basis and decide on what you have found," Master Holik says. Noticing the woman at his side, he continues, "As you have said, my wife and I are new to this town. In deed we are new to this culture since she is full-blooded kath and I have lived among them for some time. I have not had time to learn what is needed so feel free to return with whatever you find and we will discuss it."

As Rikoro listens to Master Holik speak about his wife he steals another glance at her then looks back giving his full attention, "Fascinating. If it is not too much to ask what brought you both into the city from the Kathela Hills?"

Master Holik answers, "My wife had shown me the delights of her culture for many years and I wanted to return the favor by showing her the delights of Kaldorian culture." Frowning at the direction of Rikoro's glance, he continues, "Although, I must say that there are those within Kaldor society that pay too much attention to her beauty and trying to win her affections for my comfort."

At that moment a customer enters the shop and Master Holik says, "Now if you will excuse me, I must be about my business."

Glancing over his shoulder towards the arriving customer, Rikoro turns back and dips his head to Master Holik, "Certainly, a good day to you"

Rikoro makes his way from the shop then looks around once on the street appearing to ponder something, then in a low whisper to himself, "Hrm .. a Vintner .. a Vintner" He glances around the street as if searching for something.

Rikoro seems to have a spark of realization, "Ah yes, the Garb and Flail should have a moderately priced wine." With that he heads off in the direction of the tavern with purpose in his stride.

* * *

When Josrel asks to meet with Falorin Harar'bis_of_Aweil, he is immediately shown to the Falorin's study. Asking about records of Lillia's family, the Falorin answers, "We have copies of birth records, death records, apprenticeship papers, and master's franchise records for all the town's residents. It will take a bit of searching but I am sure we can find what you need...and while I search, we can talk...what have you been up to since I saw you last?"

Leaning back in the chair Josrel says: "Well I have been in search of Lillia." Josrel states. "I don't know if you have heard but it seems that she has been kidnapped, and is being held until a marriage can be arranged." A hitch in Josrel's voice suddenly makes its presence known.

"Falorin, I don't know if you are aware of this but Lillia and I have become quite close to each other in our time here. And her disappearance has me a little at wits end." Josrel says as a tear rolls down his cheek.

"I was on my way to the Peonian Temple to study the healing arts, when a cloaked and hidden woman came to me and told me that Lillia had been taken and that if my friends and I don't get to her first and I marry her then she will be married to someone else." Josrel states a little irately.

Settling himself Josrel continues: "Sorry Falorin, I came back to the Temple and inquired of the Olunar and Ibarti if they sent Lillia on any errands trying to retrace her steps but I instead annoyed them I fear and they were of no help. So I went to my friends and spent the next two days trying to track her down."

"If I may tell of some of what transpired, We tracked her to a pawnbroker who was rather displeased with us asking him about Lillia and then the strangest thing happened. I was outside the pawn shop when the pawnbroker's wife came out of the shop. I greeted her trying to see if I could recognize the voice for I had a vision of Lillia being attended to by a woman. This woman

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spoke to Lillia and I heard the voice in my vision. As she passed by me she was murdered in the street. As she lie dieing in the street one of my friends knelt to her aide when she whispered that Lillia was being held in the top floor of the stable. Now what I have yet to mention is that this pawnbroker has connection to an Inn that has a stable. This Inn is also the last known location that Lillia was at before she went missing. So off to the Inn I went with another of my companions. To the loft we went where we encountered a guard guarding a ladder that lead to a locked door. Unfortunately we were unable to gain access to the locked door. We waited in front of the stables till evening when Lillia along with a few of her captures appeared in an alley. They were spiriting her away and we could not get to her." Josrel pauses.

"Those are the high points of what happened, I don't want to waste your time with to much of this." Frowning Josrel says:" I fear that I have disappointed the Ibarti in my search for Lillia. I let my feelings get the better of me and barged into his office asking him questions of Lillia."

With a slight chuckle, the Falorin says, "Yes, he can be a bit...umm...curt when people get emotional around him. All of his life he has studied logic and information. I sometimes think he needs to get out more to see how much people are motivated by their emotional sides."

Josrel gives a heavy sigh of relief: "I was beginning to get the impression that he was really displeased with me. Its good to know that that is his personality and that I will heed what he says to me but not take the manner in which he says it to me to heart so much."

After searching through books and scrolls, stored in no particular order, he finds what you want by midday, "Her mother, Lolise, is a butcher by profession, living and working at the corner of Medrik Way and Kalabi Street. Her other living relatives are an elder brother (Eteeke, the tavernkeeper of the Ghost and Langlah on the end of Querina Road at Mangai Square), a married uncle (Feljyakal, an engineer, living down the alley behind the Litigant Charance of Drelin), and a recently widowed aunt (Baris, wife of a clothier across Malshi Way from Litigant Drelin). Apparently Lillia is soon to receive a lease to a townhouse as an inheritance from her clothier uncle. Her uncle died a month ago and the investigation is on going. Once the cause of his death has been determined, Lillia will receive her inheritance. Her father died in a hunting accident, six years ago but there was nothing suspicious about it. Do you need directions to this Litigant Drelin?"

Sighing and relaxing a bit, Josrel says: " Yes, please if you don't mind. So I wish to marry Lillia, " Josrel pauses " Although Lillia doesn't know it yet, I just realized my feeling for her when I was told that she was taken. I don't have anything to offer her though... just a life with me that will probably be rough and rocky. If this marriage is being forced upon her does she have a choice in who she marries or is that it for her." A thoughtful of look comes to him. "Could she be getting married as a payment for something? If that is the case do I stand any chance? Whether I do or not I am still going to confront Lillia and her captures and make my feelings known."

"Go to Mangai Square and take the road at the southeast corner heading south. When you come to an alley on the left hand side,

that is the house of the litigant. I have heard that his son, Rikoro of Drelin, has recently returned from his journeys and is a worshipper here at the temple. Perhaps if you find him, he can aid you in your directions. He is a rather tall man with a beard."

Slapping his palm to his forehead and chuckling to himself, Josrel says: " Rikoro...hmmm that name rings a bell to me." Still chuckling "Rikoro is one of the people who has been helping me find Lillia. He may still be here in the Temple. He has been a great asset to me and I consider him to be a close friend. I have been so caught up in find Lillia that I didn't see the connection. Blessed Save-K'norr there is a lesson to be found in the simplest of everyday activities."

The Falorin continues, "As to Lillia, I think you need to find out more about why she is marrying. If you quite suddenly announce your wish to marry her, she may get the wrong impression and assume you want to marry for the same reason as her captors...women seldom enjoy being trophies or rewards."

Josrel says, "I didn't even know till you brought it to my attention that Lillia is going to be getting an inheritance. It seems to me that maybe she doesn't know either. I have to believe that Lillia knows that I am unaware of it. But, I will investigate this more." Josrel scratches his chin "Now how to convince Lillia I'm not after her wealth. Perhaps going to her Mother and tell her about us and explain what has happened to her and ask her permission to marry Lillia. "Josrel stares at the Falorin in thought a moment. Stands and extends his hand toward the Falorin: "Thank you Falorin who have been very helpful to me. Not only with the information you have given me but as a friendly voice in times of trouble. Save-K"nor Bless you." Josrel bows respectfully to the Falorin and leaves his office.

* * *

Berina awakens with a sneeze, headache, red eyes...it appears she caught a cold from traipsing around in the rain yesterday.

"Oh, great." she says as she gets up and dressed. After breakfast, and struggling through her chores, Berina goes off to work. Checking in with the Chamberlain, she tells him: "I've come down with a cold." and she turns away from him to stifle a sneeze. "I'll try to get some useful work done today, but if I feel like I might end up ruining whatever I'm working on, I'll leave and go home to bed." With that, she turns to her work.

"No, miss," says Tikitan of Aweil, Lord Odasart's chamberlain, "You had best go see a healer and get some rest before you pass on your ailment to me or his lordship."

Berina says, "Very well, I'll do that. I was thinking of staying home, but his lordship did say he wanted to be informed in advance if I were going to take any more time off from work. I know I could have sent someone to let him know, but I thought that I'd better see if you felt I could work through this. I'll be off until I know I'm on the mend. Thank you."

Berina goes back to the townhouse. If Rikoro and/or Josrel are still there, she will ask them, as well as Qisse (you never know if housekeepers have effective cures for simple illnesses [chicken soup anyone?]), if they have a reliable treatment for a cold. If not, Berina will ask them all if they know of a healer who can do the job. After either Rikoro and/or Josrel, or Qisse, does some

treatment, or after a trip to a recommended healer, Berina will be off to bed.

Seeing that Josrel, Davas and Rikoro had all left and Qisse had just gotten back from the market...

Qisse answers, "I can gaw to de apothecary and get some apothecary's rawze so I can make ee some rosehip tay. Dey better way 'elp way de fever and de pain and een a tenday us weel 'ave ee fixed rate up. De apothecary weel charge me 3d per day's worth uv apothecary's rawze. As to a 'ealer, if ee dink it be dey bad, dere be Seperlyne uv Kail at de Kald get."

"OK, get the stuff from the apothecary." Berina fishes out 30d from her money pouch Berina will do what she can by way of chores around the house, and offer advice to her friends if they ask for it, but she will NOT push herself if that would risk her recovery. A lot of sack-time will be the order of the day for the tenday.

14- ÁGRAZHÂR -720 TASHAL, KALDOR

4TH WATCH [WARM, PARTLY CLOUDY, SOUTHWEST BREEZE]⁹

At the start of the fourth watch, Josrel has just finished his research, Rikoro has finished his conversation with the apothecary, Berina has finished her rose hip tea while lying in bed, and Davas has finished his conversation with the ostler.

* * *

Josrel attends the daily mass at the temple till dinner and then returns to the townhouse. [+2 piety]

Josrel returns to the Townhouse. Seeing that he has arrived before Davas and Rikoro he approaches Quisse: "May I help you with some of the Chores about the house Quisse? I do have some experience with cooking and taking care of the house. It is one of the jobs I perform at the Temple."

Noticing that Berina is here and feeling ill: "May I get something for you Berina?"

Berina says, "Thanks, but unless you can cure the common cold, no. Qisse has been plying me with rosehip tea. That, and plenty of bed rest, should put me to rights in the normal course of things." Changing the subject slightly, she says: "I should be in bed right now, but I'm anxious to see Davas as soon as he returns and hear what, if anything, he found out."

Smiling to Berina, Josrel says: " I also have some news to report, but I shall wait till we are all together. "

* * *

Arriving at the Garb and Flail by the end of the lunch crowd, Rikoro enters to find the innkeeper, Jaril of Varsin. The innkeeper says, "Rikoro of Drelin, you are Berina's friend if I recall. What can I do for you?"

A mix of confusion and surprise washes over Rikoro hearing his name spoken by the Innkeeper, managing a stuttered response, "I, um, yes I am. I suppose Berina has mentioned me, it is a rare person that fits my frame. And your name Master Keep?"

"Yes, she did and at the time she had just met you but she was quite impressed," he answers, "I am Jaril of Varsin, innkeeper of this establishment."

Rikoro pauses to hear the name and bobs his head as Jaril replies, then offers, "I came because this evening I am having dinner with my family to celebrate Saint Rogin. A day late I realize, but it is still Greater Sapelah. As I am not on good terms with them I had hoped to help ease the situation with a bottle of wine." A sheepish grin forms on Rikoro's lips keeping his attention on Jaril, "Mind you I am not wealthy, but had hoped there was something you might have that I could afford."

The innkeeper says, "I am all out of the moderately priced wine at the moment. I can give you a bottle of our best wine for 15d or our cheapest at 6d."

With less then a moments consideration, Rikoro states, "I should get the best then, no sense in starting off on mending feelings with a lower quality wine." He swings his pack around and shuffles around inside of it for the coin to pay Jaril, "My many thanks Master Innkeep."

On his way out of the tavern, Rikoro safely tucks the bottle into his pack and makes his way to the gates to finish off the rest of the day before visiting the Drelin family with some herb gathering.

Walking the roads along cultivated fields, again, during the four hours of the forth watch, Rikoro finds two ounces of agrimony, three ounces of comfrey, five ounces of fanosel, one ounce of fennel, seven ounces of madder, seven ounces of mint, two ounces of pennyroyal, three ounces of sanicle and one ounce of wylorafina.

Rikoro glances into his pack near days end, repositioning the items to keep the herbs safe from damage and then saunters back to Tashal.

Once inside the city walls, his posture seems to grow more rigid, tensely holds holding his staff while making his way to the Drelin house. Arriving at the homestead door Rikoro pensively gives it a knock with the wooden shaft, then takes a slight step back seeming to prepare himself.

After a tense, but not too unpleasant evening, Rikoro returns to the townhouse to arrive towards the end of the fifth watch.

[OOC: +10 estrangement - now you are simply unpopular.]

* * *

As he spots the ostler, Davas takes a few steps backwards, reaching for his axe, before relaxing and approaching once he realizes that no violence is in the offing. With a quick glance towards the stairs, he smiles quickly. "Thank you Halime ... yes ... I can tell. Cousin ... of course" he mutters quietly, with a small smile and a shake of his head.

Though still wary, he nods at Rемаik as he approaches. He listens quietly as he speaks, a look of understanding crossing his face as Rемаik mentions bribes. Davas nods once when he says clan is the most important and after a small pause, shakes his head and extends his hand when Rемаik hopes there are no hard feelings. At mention of the rash blonde amazon, Davas laughs aloud and says "I will enjoy telling her what you say. Yes, I had better talk to Lillia". Still chuckling, he takes one step towards

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the door, then turns back. "How is she?" After a thoughtful pause, he adds, "... is she ... held here?"

Master Remaik says, "You had best ask her how she is but as far as I know she has not been mistreated and I can guarantee none of my men have mistreated her...they dare not. As to being held here, yes, for the time being she is held here for her own safety. I need not tell you that there are those who want to lay their hands on her and some of them are quite ruthless. If they find they can no longer get her cooperation so that she may protect her kin, they are likely to take her against her will by any means possible. At this time, the only ones allowed to see her are those that Halime and I trust...meaning you and no other."

Davas listens to Remaik, then nods his head before doing a double take. "Me ... ? I ... I am honored".

Obviously still flustered he nods to Remaik and turns to the door again. He squares his shoulders, knocks and waits for an answer.

When he is asked to enter, he does so, smiling at Lillia and trying to gauge her demeanor, before turning and closing the door behind him.

She appears anxious and curious but not mistreated.

Turning again to Lillia, he tries a half bow, then speaks in a calm voice.

"Haliki Lillia?" There is a questioning tone in his voice as he says Haliki. "I am Davas, friend to Josrel ... as I hear you are". He glances around the room, then back to her as he asks "are you well?"

Cautiously she answers, "Yes, and how is Josrel?"

Smiling and glancing up and left, Davas raises his arms in a shrug and says "he is ... tired I think ... and worried. But more of that later. He is well enough and will be better once he knows you are safe". He gives her a reassuring look and a nod.

"We heard you had been kidnapped, but after last night I am not sure of that. We sought to rescue you ... but you seemed to be leading - or at least, not struggling against your takers. Please, will you tell me your tale?"

He sits if invited to do so and will listen attentively to her story, trying his best to answer any questions she has.

Appearing to suddenly recognize who Davas is, she says, "Why should I struggle? It would only cause trouble with my family. I have been told by Master Soril that if I marry as he requests, it will greatly benefit my family...and if I do not, he will cause them great harm. He is a powerful man and I know he can do as he says. He also told me that Josrel will try to marry me just to get control of my inheritance. I found that hard to believe until the ostler told me he heard Josrel hired you to kill Master Soril's daughter-in-law and I saw you coming after me, weapons in hand."

"Then last night, the ostler brings me here and, this morning, lets you see me alone, still carrying your axe. At the moment, I feel like a carnival prize and I know not what to think."

As Lillia speaks, Davas appears more and more confused. He waits until Lillia has finished speaking, opens his mouth and lifts

his hand as if to speak, then shakes his head, lowers his hand and closes his mouth.

He stares at the floor for a moment, then sighs gently. Looking up at Lillia, he speaks. "I had forgot what a ... trial ... families may be". He smiles ruefully. "Truly my family has been quiet ... stable ... well, there have been no plots for a few years ... to my knowledge". He smiles gently, then begins to pace quietly.

"I will tell you what I think and what I know and you may judge what is true and what is not from what you hear. I have known Josrel ..." he looks up briefly, then continues slightly surprised "less than a year, now I bethink me. Some tendays. Anyway, I find him honest and faithful and he has, to my knowledge, tried to do his best". He chuckles and shakes his head. "I fear that his master does not always see it that way, from what he has said". He looks up at Lillia again.

"Anyway, Josrel heard that you had been taken by ... well ... he did not know and we could not find out who had taken you ... but you were suddenly not to be found. This knowledge came to us through a cloaked, hooded figure who rushed away before we could do anything - a woman we think. Josrel realized ... ". He looks a little embarrassed, then with a quick glance at Lillia, continues quietly and quickly. "It is not my place ... but sometimes a man does not realize what he has ... or might have perhaps ... until it is lost". He pauses looking at the ground before beginning again.

"We sought to find where you were and you were last seen near the inn. We went there and asked after you, hearing that you had gone with ..." he pauses, trying to remember "the pawnbroker I think". "We went to visit him and Josrel ... or Rikoro ... I forget which ... thought you were held in an attic somewhere. I am sorry, I feel I am leaving things out and jumbling others. Anyway, as we were leaving the pawnbroker's shop, a cloaked and hooded assassin rushed upon the pawnbroker's wife in the street as she went to market. She died, saying only 'I did not think he had the courage' ... or something similar". "We wondered if she was the unknown person who told us of your plight. We were there ... when she was killed, yes ... but I am no murderer". He looks a little unnerved briefly as he says this, then a distant look crosses his face.

"How we discovered you were ... or might be ... in the stables I do not recall, but we watched ... and Josrel and I tried to gain entrance to see what might be seen and perhaps rescue you before anyone knew we were trying. We were discovered. Rather than injure those in their rightful dwelling, we left ... though we feared you were indeed in the attic. We watched, in case you were moved and tried to rescue you when you were ... but that you know".

He pauses and looks at her. "You should ask the ostler ... one Master Remaik ... he who guards your door here" he points "whether he still thinks that I or any of us, let alone Josrel, had been hired to kill anyone. His story may now be different. If he knew the truth it certainly would be. The master here trusts me ... though he has known me for but a short time ... and I like and respect him. I believe you are safe here ... and Halime may be able to ... persuade Master Soril that his intentions are ... well ... that they will come to naught". Davas looks a little uncertain through this last sentence. "You will be able to decide for

yourself when ... and who to marry". He gives her a knowing look.

Davas turns to the door. "As to any inheritance you may have ... I can assure you that Josrel knew of none ... or he is an excellent actor".

Turning and giving her a huge grin, Davas adds "and I think if he were, his master's opinion of him would be higher ... yes? ...and we would not have been caught as quickly when we entered the stables".

"I will leave you to rest and think about what I have said. If you like, I will return when my work is finished for the day. You can say what you wish to do and, if you like, I will arrange a visit from Josrel tomorrow".

As he reaches for the door, Davas stops and turns suddenly. "My apologies ... do you have questions? ... and is there anything you need?"

Davas stands and awaits her answer.

She ponders a moment and then answers all that you have said, "Do not misunderstand me when I speak of my family...my mother cares for me very much and would do anything within her power to ensure my happiness and well being – even to sending mysterious messages in the street – but our clan is not powerful enough to confront the Sorils."

"While he has been caring and attentive, Josrel has never spoken of his intentions and I knew of no other suitor. My only way out of this situation, that I can see, is to marry quickly to someone interested in me for more than my property. Even though Josrel is frequently impulsive and does not have any means to support a family, I would be more than willing to marry him would he but ask."

"I trust that Master Remaik respects you or he would not rescue me and then let you in here alone to possibly do me harm. However, nothing you have said convinces me that one of your companions has not ulterior motives. For the time being and until this matter is resolved, I should only be visited by you and Josrel."

"I think we should best proceed by you bringing Josrel here to come forth with his proposal while you are witness. Then the two of you should go to my mother and to the Ibarti to arrange for a marriage in secret. Master Halime has treated me well and does not appear to have his own intentions so it would probably be best if I remain here until it is arranged."

"It would certainly help if Josrel had some means of support other than the charity of the temple but that is probably too much to ask for in the short term. If he has any intentions along those lines, he should inform my mother to persuade her in her decision. I thank you for your help but all my needs are being provided for at the moment."

After listening carefully, Davas smiles and nods. "It shall be as you wish".

14- ÁGRAZHÂR -720 TASHAL, KALDOR

5TH WATCH [WARM, CLEAR, NORTHWEST GALE]¹⁰

Josrel helped in the kitchen, swapping small talk with Qisse, while preparing truffles for an appetizer, stuffed hare accompanied by lemonhyt (lemon rice with almonds), havercakes (barley bread) and small ale. This is followed by sweet wine cakes for dessert.

As they have been taught is proper, Josrel, Berina and Davas kept the conversation on the lighter side, saving discussions of business until after the meal. By the end of the fifth watch, Rikoro returns from dinner with his family to join the conversation and after dinner drinks.

Upon entering the townhouse Rikoro's demeanor appears a bit less rigid. This is noticeable by the slight spring in his step and his jovial greeting, "Good eve to you comrades. I hope the day has found you well?" With those words Rikoro reaches the table and then he settles down on a chair, his content attitude still maintained, "I did not think I would arrive so late from my family's home. With my penchant for rubbing people wrong as of late I thought I would have a taste of the first meal and then be shown the door. Never underestimate the value of a good wine to help ease old tensions. Master Jaril has a hearty thanks coming."

Once finished Rikoro leans back in his chair to listen to the others speak, a soft smile remains on his face visible through his beard.

After the meal is finished and properly put away Josrel sits at the table with a small ale. Smiling to the Group, he says: "Well I guess I'll start. I had a very encouraging meeting at the Temple with Falorin Harar'bis. I told him our plight and some other things that have been vexing me and he was very helpful. "

"I found some history on my beloved Lillia. Her Mother Lolise is a butcher she has her residence on the corner of Medrik and Kalabi way. Lillia has an Elder brother who is the tavern keeper of the Ghost and Langlah on the end of Querina road at Mangai square. Also a married uncle Feljyakal who is an engineer down the alley behind..." Josrel glances at Rikoro Charance of Drelin the Litigant."

" Also a widowed aunt Baris was married to the clothier across from Litigant Drelins shop."

Josrel folds his hands around his cup and stares into a moment: " I also found out that Lillia stands to inherit the lease on a Townhouse from her clothier Uncle who died a month ago. When the cause of his death has been determined she will receive her inheritance."

Josrel stops short as he finishes his sentence pops his head up suddenly. "Say does anyone here besides me see something amiss with what I just said?"

"We've already witnessed one murder involved with Lillia's marriage, could her uncles death be part of it as well? Could someone have known of Lillia's inheritance and had her Uncle killed and then planned to marry her to get it?" Josrel lets the question hang.

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Berina says, "That's certainly a possibility, and warrants investigation, but for now we need to concentrate on getting you and Lillia married." Turning to Davas, she asks: "Well love, what did you find out?"

Able to contain himself no longer, Davas grins broadly, then says quietly "Josrel ... I have good news". Clapping him on the shoulder he says "Lillia is well ... and wonder of wonders, appears ready to marry you ... if you ask". He stands back and looks at Josrel's surprise.

Josrel abruptly stands straight up and turns to Davas with eyes and mouth wide open.

Davas continues, "Yes, I have seen her ... talked to her. Halime has done the miracle he said he could ... she is at the inn and yes, she is well. All this for a wedding invitation". Still grinning, Davas shakes his head quietly, then looks up at Berina. "She is, however, somewhat loathe to meet the rest of us until this business is done ... something about 'unknown intentions' if I remember aright".

Josrel surprised look turns to confusion: "What unknown intentions?" Also looking to Berina.

Davas chortles, still looking at Berina, then turns to Josrel. "Josrel, I have arranged that you visit her on the morrow ... and you can tell her what you have told us. I feel she will want to be convinced of your intentions ... I have done what I can".

Clasping his hand, Davas adds "I wish you well".

Josrel takes Davas's hand and pulls him into a huge embrace as Davas pulls away from Josrel tears can be seen in his eyes. "Thank you, thank you all." Josrel says to his friends.

Laughing, Davas returns the embrace and claps him on the back, saying nothing more.

Davas turns to the others, a smile on his face. "And now I think, a celebration ... yes?"

Berina says, "Lord Odasart told me that Armenton's father is a powerful and ruthless man. That Halime was able to so easily bring Lillia under his protection, tends to lend weight to my suspicions. I worry about the price that will have to be paid for this." Berina's somber mood visibly lightens, and she says: "Still, that's for the future. For now...congratulations Josrel! I hope I'm not being too premature." She leans over and kisses Josrel on the cheek, then gives him one of her bear-hugs.

Josrel turns to Berina a look of concern on his face, then blushes as Berina kisses and hugs him. "

Rikoro rolls his neck slowly as if in deliberation on what Davas has just offered to the group before broaching the subject, "I do not wish to dampen our spirits, but I too share some of Berina's concerns. I still question the ease with all of this unfolded. You mentioned this 'Halime', your employer, was successful in retrieving Lillia. Where is it that you work? I believe I have pieced together an inn, but I do not know which one. I apologize I am not one that easily swallows the direct approach to anything. Perhaps if there were more people like Davas here we would face fewer issues in life."

Berina looks over at Davas and smiles, giving him a wink.

Rikoro allows himself a brief chuckle through his nose at his own words continuing on immediately following, "Looking past the price yet to paid for Lillia's freedom as Berina has pointed out. What guarantee do we have that there will not be repercussions against Lillia's family or Josrel? After all I can not imagine the Sorel clan standing idly by considering all they have gone through and their nature."

"Well, we can and should warn any family members, such as Lillia's mother." Continuing, Berina says: "We may have to rely on my suspicion about Halime being high up in the Lia K'vir to be true. That being the case, if Josrel, Lillia, or any of their family members should be harmed, those who were responsible would likely not live very long. Harming anyone the guild has taken under their protection, would be a challenge that couldn't be allowed to stand. That's small consolation to anyone harmed, but it is a great deterrent."

With a slow nod of his head, Rikoro offers, "This too is my suspicion Berina it is why I inquired."

Determination on his face. "Although you have brought us joyess news Davas. Berina and Rikoro do have a point. As well as I still have this feeling that the Murder of Armenton's wife and Lillia's Uncle are connected. "

"Now wait a minute." Berina says. "All I heard was that Lillia's uncle had died. Nothing was said about him being murdered. Given our experiences during the last couple of days, that's an easy assumption to make, but before we go jumping to that conclusion, it would pay us to inquire as to how he died."

Suddenly serious, Davas nods grimly at Josrel's suggestion. "It is so ... or it may be so. Of Armenton's wife I am certain ... but I have no proof. Of Lillia's uncle? ... well before all this I would have thought you raved". He gives Josrel a quick grin. "Now, though, I think you may be right ... and cities are insane places. Even if true, it would be very difficult to prove, let alone link it to anyone I think". He sighs gently.

"I agree." Berina interjects.

Rikoro says nothing, but simply bobs his head in response at the end of Berina's statement.

"As to what the Sorel clan may do ... " he shrugs "I do not know". "Anyway, there is little we may do now ... warn those who may be in danger perhaps. What's done is done". He turns to Josrel. "You should discuss that with Lillia tomorrow when you see her at the inn". "Oh ... Halime runs the spurs ... and is a relative of Quenaline I think. Uncle?" With a wistful look he adds, "I wonder how she is".

Berina says, "I heard that she is serving a stint in the city guard, in what capacity, I don't know."

Rikoro mills over Davas' words while Berina speaks, then his expression changes slowly from puzzlement to eye widening understanding, "You mean to say that Halime is a Falesh? One of the same clan to the Master Ostler Remaik we encountered two days prior? Well then that explains much of the success for me. I fear Berina's suspicion is true the family does have deep ties to 'the Guild'. The price we'll pay for Lillia's freedom will be thrice more than is fair. Not to diminish your own friendship with Halime, Davas, but he clearly saw utility in going against

the Soral clan on your behalf." Pulling on the tip of his beard, Rikoro continues, "I do have a good measure of trepidation over what that could be considering what has already unfolded."

"Trey ... ? Oh ... you mean you are worried"? Davas puzzled look is replaced by one of understanding. "But you said it yourself ... if Remaik and Halime are family, Halime probably already knew about Lillia. His family ties would not let him speak of it ... but when he heard the full story and promised to get her, he already knew that he could! Don't you see? You are making this into a miracle ... instead of a bit of a joke really". He grins ruefully. "That Halime ... no wonder he thought he could help".

Wistfully, Davas adds " ... Quenaline in the guard ? ... well that should make a man of her ... or of them". He flashes Berina a quick grin.

When Davas says this, Berina was taking a drink and nearly chokes in her effort to not spray everyone as she dissolves in laughter. Berina again laughs so hard that she can't breathe, and when she regains control, she gives Davas a weak hug and says: "Twice in one night. Thank you. It's said that laughter is good for you. If so, I should be completely recovered by morning." and she smiles broadly.

Davas says, "I forget myself. You are ill ... and ale will not help, though it might lessen the pain. Let me see what I have in my bag". So saying he hurries off to get his bag of herbs to see if he has anything that will help Berina.

He finds himself at a loss as he does not know that much about colds. The aches and fever can be helped by apothecary rose but Qisse is already giving her that.

Visibly crestfallen Josrel replies "It seems when we make some progress towards our goal some new obstacles get in the way. Oh I see the Master of Puzzles is at work again."

Josrel turns to Davas "Davas did this Halime ask for any payment for delivering Lillia?"

Laughing, Davas says "he asked for an invitation to the wedding Josrel".

Confusion on his face, Josrel starts to laugh as well : " An invitation, PHEW..." Josrel wipes his brow " ... that I think I can afford."

Still grinning, Davas adds "and I would be happy to help you in weapon practice if you wish it, though I have no knowledge of the use of the staff, I have had some practice against it".

Still chuckling, Josrel says, "Well since the only weapon I am skilled in is the kitchen knife anything would be welcome. Thank you Davas, what are you skilled in? I could take notes on what you teach me and donate them to the church as a cover as to why I am learning the use of weapons. So Davas I am your eager student." Josrel smiles.

Returning his smile, Davas says "do not under estimate the kitchen knife! It has caused many bad injuries ... and I have a little skill with the dagger ... no great difference. I also know of axes, bows and shields .. though if you wish to learn staff, a shield might be a little ... hopeful". Davas raises one eyebrow

quizzically and glances at Berina. "Of course, you could try the ball and chain ... but it is known to be as dangerous to its wielder as to its foe in untrained hands". He gives her a grin. "Or a spear perhaps? Like a staff in many ways, but perhaps a little more ... versatile?"

He sits and leans back. "What would you feel comfortable with? I'm sure whatever you choose, a little practice would help".

Josrel says, "Well, It would have to be something that a priest would have. I think a Haliki of Save-K'nor walking around with a sword and shield might draw some attention. Also whatever weapon I choose should be easy enough to learn fairly quickly. A staff as Berina suggests or a club/stick might be good. Some training with the Knife also since I already have one. "

Nodding his head Josrel confirms "Yes I think I will start with a knife it is inconspicuous, and who would think of me as a threat so I'll start there."

With a grin, Davas nods. "Very well ... but remember ... a knife can cut deep. Perhaps we would be better to start with sticks of knife length? ... until we get the measure of each other. I would hate to hurt you ... " his grin broadens "... or you me".

Nodding, Josrel says, " Yes sticks would be appropriate. I think you have nothing to worry about sometimes I think I'm my worst enemy." Josrel returns the grin

Speaking up quite hesitantly Rikoro glances between Davas and Josrel, "I do know a bit about the staff, but I have never taught one in the arts of weapon training nor am I certain what I do know is strong enough to pass to another. Added to that, I certainly do not relish the fact I would be assaulting a Haliki in the process. Though if you truly wish it and there is no other recourse I shall aid in the matter. After all a bruised Haliki is better then a dead one. And I would rather be responsible for the former then the latter."

Chuckling, Josrel says, "I agree, I am better bruised than dead. But, you would not be assaulting, rather instructing. And as I said before together..." Josrel includes everyone "we can publish notes on the subject."

* * *

Berina says, "I believe Remaik is Quenaline's father."

Davas exclaims, "He is? " He is obviously suddenly concerned. "We could have hurt him ... killed him!" Davas stands and begins to pace thoughtfully, muttering quietly to himself.

Changing tack, Berina continues: "Gentlemen, as individuals we have gotten ourselves right in the middle of a contest between two powerful groups. As soon as our 'protectors' have gotten what they want, or think they can get, out of us, our lives could be snuffed out like candles because we'll have learned too much."

Taking a deep breath, she says: "What we need is a powerful clan that can give us protection. From what I know of each of you, our individual families are fairly small and couldn't stand up to 'The Guild' or a clan like the Sorils."

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"I propose that we form an association structured like a clan. We won't be related by blood or marriage," here Berina gives Davas a pointed look, "but if we relate and behave towards one another as we would if we were all members of the same clan, and this relationship is known to those who might wish us harm, then harm to one of us would bring concerted retribution from the rest."

"As a Peleahn, and with some martial skill, I'm dangerous in my own right. Through my father and my employer, I have connections to the weaponcrafter's guild, and my employer also gives me a contact who is an important person in the Royal government."

Turning to Rikoro, Berina says: "Rikoro, you're a Fyvrian and I've heard that Fyvrians can cause disease as well as cure it. If that's true, but you personally don't know how to do that, I suggest that you learn to do so. Additionally, your father is a well known litigant who will, himself, have many useful contacts. I understand that you are working on getting back into his good graces. Pursue that with vigor."

"Josrel." she says, turning to him: "You, and hopefully your soon-to-be-wife Lillia, as Haliki, have access to a place with much useful information. I assume that you're working on improving your relationship with the Ibarti. If he really does care for Lillia, then your marrying her should help a lot. Just in case though, be sure to cultivate good relationships with the other temple officers in case you find yourself needing to get around him. And for crying out loud, learn some weapon skill! I suggest learning to fight with a staff. A priest walking around with a staff will elicit no concern from those around him."

Nodding his head to Berina's words, Josrel says, "I would be honored to be part of your family. Having only siblings that I have not seen for a time it would be much welcomed. As for a weapon, well I understand your concern Berina, but I feel that I am mightier with the parchment and quill than with a staff. If I do engage in combat even with a little training I fear that I will do more harm than good. But, for the sake of the Family..." Josrel engages the group " ... I will enquire at the Temple if someone can guide me in some kind of weapon training."

Turning at last to Davas, Berina smiles at him and says: "Davas, sweetie, your relationship with Halime has already yielded benefit even if there are strings attached. I recommend that you do not turn to him any further except in the most dire of circumstances. You're a good fighter too. Also, your family back in Ovendel could provide us with a refuge in case we ever need to lay low for a while."

Addressing the three of them together, she says: "I heard a saying somewhere that goes: 'We must all hang together, or we will most assuredly hang separately.' What are your thoughts?"

Davas stops pacing and turns to look at Berina as she speaks. At her mention of a clan-like structure, he nods hesitantly. "Surely ... surely such a thing would be a guild ... of a sort?" He takes a couple of steps as if to resume his pacing, then turns. "We could call it the guild of hurried investigation?" He grins quickly, then hurries on. "... but ... is such a thing allowed? To be of use it must be known ... and if it is known, it will be known by guilds and temples and lords ... eventually. Can we do this? ... will they

allow it " He turns to the others, his eyes finally turning to Rikoro.

Butting in before Rikoro can answer, Berina says: "I said a clan-like association, and that's exactly what I mean here. As long as none of us are outlaws wanted by the authorities, we can associate with whomever we please."

As Berina continues, Davas eyes widen when she mentions causing disease, blurting out "anyone causing disease in the village, on purpose I mean ..." it is obvious that he cannot comprehend the purpose of doing this "anyone would be ... well, told to leave". He turns away as he adds "if they were lucky". He turns to the others. "Surely in a city that would be a crime?"

Rikoro sits silently taking in all he's heard from Berina and then once Davas has finished begins to speak, "Yes Davas has a point, being known as a plague spreader will surely find me on a nooses end. So too would you be wise to keep being a fire wielder quiet. As to forming a non-familial clan ..."

Glancing downward then upward, collecting his thoughts for a brief moment Rikoro pauses.

"I can think of nothing really in terms of laws that would grant us any sort of legal standing. Such a relationship would be common socially, and I believe several circles already know we share it. We have been in Lord Odasarts company twice now and with our dealings with the Falesh and Soral Clans we shall have both ends covered in this regard. I would imagine our continued unity will only strengthen what Berina has described."

When his skills are mentioned, Davas shakes his head. "You wrong Halime I am sure ... but it is wise to use caution where you can ... and I admit, the ways of the city are ... new to me. I will do as you say".

"I am an ordinary fighter Berina - I do well enough if I have to, if there are others to back me up" a sad look crosses face "and if luck and the grace of Peoni are with me, but there are many better than me. At a distance ... " he grins "the odds in my favor improve".

"As to hiding out should we need to ... well, I would not like to take trouble home unless I had to ... there are many that might think to look there" he glances quickly at Berina "but if it is needful, then yes, we could".

"As to hanging" he waves an arm expansively "I would much rather try to avoid it entirely". He grins at the others, then adds quietly "and if it must be so, I would prefer not to take others with me". "But, I will most happily agree to act as a group ... if we are able to do so".

Looking at Rikoro but speaking to Davas, Berina says: "My comment about Rikoro giving someone a disease is just idle speculation anyway, as I'm pretty sure he wouldn't do it no matter what. I think he would consider such a thing a perversion of his craft." Addressing Rikoro directly now, she asks: "Wouldn't you?"

Rikoro nods slowly, offering a quick response, "Not a perversion no, but I would be loathe to do it as you said. Not that I am a pacifist by any means, but I would prefer to use my art to heal. I see the dark road one could take and Lothrim is always in the back of my thoughts... as I am sure he is yours."

Turning back to Davas, she says: "A crime? If done for no reason...certainly. But if someone were trying to kill you, or a person you cared about, would you stick a knife between their ribs? If you had no skill with a knife, but you could give them a disease that would leave them just as dead, the end result would be the same. Is there a difference between the two methods? If it would save someone you love?" Berina looks down for a moment, clearly uncomfortable, then looks back up at Davas and says in a whisper: "If someone were trying to kill you, I wouldn't hesitate for a moment."

With a chuckle, Davas says "a great difference I think. A knife between the ribs? Well, that man will take no interest in anything from thence forth. A disease?" He looks uncomfortable. "Well, should that man discover ... whence it came, what damage might he do in the time that remains to him?" He looks at her. "Een so, your point is a good one ... and you are right in spirit ... and were the threat real ... well . we have done as much for each other afore now. I feel we will again".

Berina turns her head away. Davas has never seen her as she is now...she seems to him to be struggling with a kind of fear. Finally, she regains just enough composure to turn back to him and say: "Davas...what I'm going to say...the forwardness of it...is unseemly for a woman, but I must say it or else I risk going through the rest of my life regretting the chance not taken."

Clasping her hands in front of her and shifting her weight from foot-to-foot, Berina says: "Davas, I...I love you. I would very much like to be your wife...if you'd have me." She lowers her head, closes her eyes, and tenses as if about to take a blow from a weapon.

As she hesitates, Davas looks concerned, redoubling his efforts to find a useful herb in his bag. When she says 'unseemly' he grins broadly and shakes his head gently, still engrossed in the bag. Once she has stated her love, he lets the bag fall from his fingers, looks up and just stares at her for a while. Then shaking himself as if from a dream, he says quietly hesitant "... you ... do? I ... really? ... but ... but I am a peas ..." he lifts his head a little, then continues more confidently. "I am a free man, able to do what I choose, and where I choose ..." he pauses, looks at the others, then back to Berina "... and with who I choose. I never thought ...". Looking at the floor a moment, he pauses.

Once again hesitant, he says "but ... well ... I am no catch. I am little to look at ... my family is, well you know some of them so you know what we are. You ... you could have anyone you wish". He waves his arm vaguely, stands and crosses to stand in front of her. "Why ... would you choose me?"

Rikoro's mouth gaps open in shock and fascination studying Berina and then looking to regard Davas. He eventually closes his mouth and straightens up, likely realizing his own appearance and waits silently for the outcome.

Looking up with an almost comical expression of hopefulness and relief at not being rejected out of hand, Berina says: "To my eye, you are handsome almost beyond belief." Berina reaches up and touches his cheek lightly with the tips of her fingers "I

despair of my sisters in sex that they are not all over you...but grateful that they are not."

"Appearance is not the only thing that makes a person attractive. Your bravery is unquestioned. We're comrades-in-arms, remember? We have stood shoulder-to-shoulder in battle against gargun, mutants, and even the undead."

Josrel shudders as Berina mentions the undead, looks around nervously then sighs.

Berina continues, "You are ambitious without being greedy, and you place family above all. With your share of the booty we earned, you purchased your freedom and that of your whole family, then provided them with a freehold suitable to their new status. You diligently work for a living, not being content until you're making your own way in the world. There's many a wife that would wish for that."

"As for our families...well, the Kyfa clan is not large. You've met my father and my sister. I have two cousins...in Kiban, I think...but I haven't seen them since before I went away to Cherafir, so I don't know what's been happening with them." Berina smiles at him, and continues: "Yes, I've met some of your family. They are what some people call 'The Salt of the Earth', but whatever others may think about them, that they produced you is good enough for me."

"You say that I could have anyone I wish. I certainly hope so, because you are the one I wish for."

Taking his hands in hers, she says: "The world can be a harsh place. Life can throw many obstacles and difficulties in anyone's way. We must all face these problems...no exceptions. But facing all that life can throw at you, is so much easier to bear if there is that someone in your life that has your back...not just literally, as in combat...but in everything else as well. You and I have already been doing that for each other."

"Davas, my love, you are a kind and gentle man, but also strong in all the ways that count. You are thoughtful, and wise beyond your years, although you deny it."

"For all of these things I've said, I'm hopelessly in love with you, and I want to spend the rest of my life at your side. Will you grant me such a boon?" and the look on her face is not quite pleading, love practically pouring out of her eyes.

Looking at Berina as she lays her feelings on the table, frowning to himself, Josrel says, "You know that probably was the bravest thing I've seen you do since I've known you. If only I had the courage to express my feelings to Lillia we probably wouldn't be mixed up in this mess."

Turning to Davas Josrel clasps his shoulder a sympathetic look in his eyes "My friend, don't let this woman suffer with her feelings. If you have feelings for her don't wait on them but act on them. Or else you may share the same fate as I have."

Davas stares at Berina as she speaks, occasionally nodding as she speaks of their times together, or shrugging and looking embarrassed as she praises virtues that he does not, perhaps, believe that he has in large measure, if at all.

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When she says that she wants him and not another, he looks up sharply, obviously still surprised. There is a small pause, then a huge grin blooms on his face and he just stands there, only starting to believe his luck.

As Josrel begins to speak, Davas turns to look at him, a hint of surprise obvious as Josrel suggests that what she has just said was truly brave.

Then, as he considers that, still listening to Josrel, another grin slowly forms and he nods once. Reaching for Josrel's hand, he clasps it, turning to Berina.

Looking at her, he says quietly to Josrel "you are right friend". Giving her a lopsided grin, he adds quietly "and you were right to say that was a brave thing. Can I be less so?" Without waiting for an answer he plunges on quickly.

"If as it seems you truly want me, then have me you will ... though Peoni alone knows why I should be so blessed. I have admired you since we met, never thinking that you might ... that we could ... Well, enough. If there is a boon it is mine to beg."

He takes her hand in his and looks deeply into her eyes. "Would you, before these here who I count friends" he gestures vaguely behind him, looking only at her "do me the great honor of becoming my wife and join our families with our love?"

He waits expectantly, a silly grin on his face.

"Yes, Davas of Fainovirs, with all my heart." She reaches out with her right hand to touch the left side of his face and neck, and leaning forward, kisses him lightly on the lips with all of the sensuality her experiences as a Hlean will allow.

Smiling and nodding confidently: "Hazah!!! " Josrel throws up his arms and cheers the happy couple. "Although we worship differently, May Save-K'Nor bless this happy union. Now for a drink!"

When the kiss concludes, Berina stands up straight, her eyes still on his face, a smile of happiness making her more beautiful than he ever imagined.

Davas stands quietly, apparently slightly stunned as Berina kisses him and for a little while afterwards. A silly grin remains on his face as he turns to the others, then back to Berina as she begins to speak again.

While still obviously very happy, her manner comes back down to earth as she says: "We will have to ask my father's permission, of course, but at my age, and with my younger sister about to be wed, it should be just a formality." A brief flicker that might be a bit of doubt passes across her face, and she adds: "The only delay I can imagine would have to do with a dowry. My father has just had to come up with a dowry for my sister, and I imagine he would be hard pressed to come up with another so soon. At the same time, if I know my father, he will insist on providing one. That being the case, while we should tell him right away, we may have to wait awhile before having the wedding to allow him to be able to afford a dowry without it ruining him."

Her smile gets more worldly as she says: "Still, you and I have the lease on this fine house, and both of us are gainfully employed and not lacking for any of life's necessities."

Nodding and smiling, Davas listens to her flood of words and just looks at her. Taking the opportunity of a pause, he says simply "we do. Yes, I must ask your father. And I am happy to wait if that is what is needful. I am just happy that ... well ... that you really do want me".

Elation setting in again, Berina exclaims: "Oh Davas, my love, I had no idea it was possible to feel this happy!" and she takes him in her arms. Strangely, to Rikoro, Qisse, and Josrel as they watch, even though Berina is five inches taller than Davas, when she snuggles up against him, she almost seems to shrink so that she appears completely protected in his embrace. With her head nestled against his neck and shoulder, Berina whispers: "I love you Davas of Fainovirs, my husband-to-be!" her eyes close, and a look of pure contentment envelopes her.

"And I you". He looks up, surprised, then grins. "That is the first time I have said it I think ... but it will not be the last". He turns to cuddle her again and as the knock on the door comes, gives her a tickle and a grin.

The moment ends when there's a knock on the front door. Berina disentangles herself from her embrace with Davas, gives him a quick kiss, says: "I'll get it.", and goes over to the door and opens it.

As Berina goes to the door, Davas sighs gently and turns to the others, grinning as they congratulate him. "Thank you ... and yes ... drinks ! Definitely. Come ... let us see what we have to drink ... and make a hole in it".

* * *

As the group retires to their beds Rikoro spends some time working on his journal filling in the past few days events, but leaves several pages blank at the start. He writes in Harnic tongue and Lakise script for the entries. Once complete he takes hold of the staff and focuses on trying to use his psychometry to determine it's powers and/or properties. He has a vision of it being used as a protection from the undead – they appear to be very reluctant to come near it.

15- ÁGRAZHÂR -720 TASHAL, KALDOR

2ND WATCH [COOL, CLEAR, NORTHWEST GALE]¹⁰

After a late conversation and a night's sleep, you break your fast and make your plans for the day. Qisse serves porridge, bread and small ale.

Rikoro as usual starts off eating slowly waiting for the others before beginning himself. Once again he turns to regard Josrel, inquiring about his abdominal wound. Then positions himself to looking over it carefully.

While tending Josrel's stomach wound, Rikoro learns a bit more of the treatment of serious bruises. [Josrel -1 IP, Rikoro +1 Physician]

Once the group has finished eating their meal, Rikoro wipes a few crumbs from his beard and then states, "Well my plans this day are the same as usual. Ablution with the Haliki followed by some herb gathering and sales. If there is anything I am needed for do let me know. Though I imagine Davas and Josrel will be tied up in the joyous reunion." Rikoro offers a broad smile to Josrel upon speaking.

Before leaving the townhouse Rikoro reaches around into his pack and shuffles about producing one dose of Pennyroyal and one of Mint, handing it to Qisse, "I believe you had mentioned you had use of these. If I find anything more this day I can spare I shall pass it along to you Qisse."

"Peoni's blessings be upon ee," she replies.

* * *

Thinking back, Isiel, the glassblower, remembered staring at the ruin of the shop where he had spent years as an apprentice. Smoke drifted on the wind, carrying the smell of burnt wood and the ashes of his exquisite, crystalline glass. So much of his work, for so many years, gone. The delicate swans, bodies spun into candy dishes and salt servers, shattered and melted. The stand of graceful, colorful trees, each leaf a teardrop, each root lovingly rendered, all of them slag now. His heart wrenched to see it. His fine-boned hands itched to put it all right.

Isiel could not attribute the fire to carelessness on his own part; he was as meticulous about banking the coals each even' as he was in grafting goblets for the High King's table. No, someone had done this to him.

With the toe of one boot, he turned over the leg of one of his benches, revealing globs of red, yellow, and blue tinted glass run together, forever. He had just started a centerpiece, with golden lemons, bright red and green apples, and grapes of royal blue spilling over a web of rose tinted basket. His eyes welled to see the work of his hands destroyed. But he swallowed the tears, his face remaining impassive, for such a display would not change what could not be undone. It was an old saying among his family, and one he followed fervently.

But he could find the arsonist and exact payment for this loss. That, he could do.

He then remembered his long journey that brought him to this stranger's doorstep. First there had been the witnesses who told him of the stranger seen just before the fire started, a Kaldorian knight wearing the emblem of a red griffon on a yellow field. Then there were the stories from his family about how a similar knight was seen fourteen years ago after his aunt was killed and his cousin Divlena was taken to be sold to the Chelini as a slave.

So the journey began...first to the Chelini where he was told that his cousin was set free two years ago and was last seen headed to Tashal in Kaldor to search for her parents killer. At Tashal, Isiel learned of Divlena working for the Garb and Flail inn as a kitchen servant.

Jaril of Varsin, innkeeper of the Garb and Flail, told him that Divlena had left with Berina of Kyfa for parts unknown. "I saw Berina just recently," Jaril tells him and gives him directions to Berina's house.

Which brings him here, standing in front of a stranger's doorway.

After shifting the edges of his cloak so they better cut the wind, Isiel lifted one hand, hesitated only a moment more, and knocked.

Isiel is about to knock again, when the door opens. Standing in the doorway may be the tallest woman he has ever seen. She's a good four inches taller than he is. She is attractive, her body being proportioned accordingly, except that she's got somewhat larger breasts than would be expected otherwise. Her hair is blond and pulled straight back, and when she moves, Isiel can see that the hair is done in a single long braid that reaches nearly to the small of her back. The eyes are blue. She is wearing an orange shirt, leather pants, and thigh-high leather boots. It seems that she's wearing two belts with a single pouch, but a second look reveals that one of the belts is actually a whip, wrapped around her waist.

The woman takes in Isiel's appearance and blinks in the manner that indicates surprise. After a momentary pause, she says: "Yes? May I help you?"

Isiel takes a deep breath and seems to weigh his words, or perhaps look for the right ones. He is quite definitely Sindarin, fair of complexion, with that race's sharp, angular features. His light brown hair is not quite as long as Berina's, but close, tied with just a leather thong at the nape of his neck. He carries no weapons, and is dressed plainly, in a long shirt, hose and leather shoes, but his eyes are somehow ethereal, distant, as if he is older than his apparent years. And his voice is arresting, at once both powerful and deferential. "I am hope so. You are being Berina?"

Berina says, "Yes, I'm Berina of Kyfa."

"I am being Isiel of Laelin," he tells her and bows his head slightly. "I am look for *muintheild* to my mother." He shakes his head and gropes for the right words. "Her sister-daughter, naming Divlena. She is being with you?"

At mention of Divlena's name, Berina visibly starts. After a moment to collect her thoughts, Berina says: "Let me see if I understand you correctly. Divlena is the daughter of your mother's sister? That would make your her cousin?"

Isiel says, "Yes, I am . . . that is the word, yes. She is cousin."

At Isiel's affirmative, Berina sweeps Isiel into a bear hug, then just as quickly lets him go and steps back a bit and blushes. "Oh, I'm sorry. It's just that Divlena is dear to me, and meeting a relative of hers, I, well...my friends will tell you that I tend to be impulsive." and she gives him a shy smile.

Looking almost startled, a rare feat for one of his race, Isiel quickly recovers and smiles gently back at Berina, murmuring something quietly in Sindarin.

Turning to shout back over her shoulder into the house, she yells: "Davas! Could you come here, please?" Looking at Isiel again, Berina says: "I'm afraid she parted company with us some time ago, in Olokand. We became good friends, and I miss her." Switching mental gears, she says: "Where are my manners. Please, come in." and steps back and to one side so Isiel can enter.

As Isiel accepts Berina's offer to come in, he gives her a quizzical look. "Divlena is not being with you?"

Berina answers, "No, I'm afraid not."

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With a barely audible sigh, Isiel bows his head to Berina. "I am to be going. Many sorrows. You are giving me direction to Olokand?"

Rikoro watches the scene unfold between Isiel and Berina with a bit of intrigue lines on his features. He glances over to Qisse and finishes handing over the herbs offering her a polite smile as he does. Then Rikoro returns his attention to the doorway.

"I can do that, but please, won't you break your journey with us for just a little while?" and Berina again steps aside, gesturing for Isiel to enter.

He did so, with only a moment's hesitation, and removed his cloak.

After a moment, Davas appears at Berina's left, looking somewhat cautious, his hand resting on his axe. "... What is it? ... and who is this?" He looks the stranger up and down, then turns back to Berina.

Turning to a young man who is looking a little stunned at the moment, Berina says: "Isiel, this is Davas of Fainovirs. Besides myself, he's the only one here who knows Divlena. Davas, this is Isiel of Laelin, Divlena's cousin. He's come looking for her."

Relaxing a bit, Davas takes his hand from his axe, grins and nods at Isiel. "Welcome. We must talk of Divlena ... if you have time".

With a like smile, Isiel inclines his head. "Time have much of. Plenty time."

Indicating Rikoro, she says: "This giant" she says with a grin, "is Rikoro of Devlin, son of a noted litigant here in Tashal."

Taking a step forward, Rikoro offers a dip of his head and in practiced Sindarin with a clear Harnic accent says to Isiel, "*A pleasure.*"

Isiel looks more closely at Rikoro, and his eyebrows lift slightly in what could be surprise. "*An unexpected one,*" he says in Sindarin.

"I'd like you to meet Josrel of Aswain, a Haliki of Save K'nor." grabbing Josrel by the arm and pulling him over close to Isiel. "He is at the center of our activities just now." and her smile becomes wry.

Josrel bows in greeting a hint of redness on his cheeks as Berina states the center of the activities : "Well met good friend. May Save-K'Nor grant you the knowledge you require."

"And finally, last but not least, our housekeeper, Qisse of Quardin." Berina says as she indicates Qisse with a sweeping gesture.

"I am happy being greeted to you," Isiel says, and nods at each of them in turn, speaking their names. He had looked a bit perplexed during Berina's cascade of introductions, but he appears to have the names down at least.

"Another gob to veed, I spo-as," mumbles Qisse as she turns back to her hearth.

Berina grins at Qisse and says: "Why Qisse, you sound like a long-suffering wife! Say...have you ever been married?"

Qisse answers, No, mam. I guess dere be dey who wud refer to me as a 'ousewife. I grew up een dicky 'ouse and 'ave cared vor it all my live."

After all of the introductions have taken place, Berina gives Josrel and Rikoro a look that starts out speculative and changes to one almost of dismissal. While she's looking at the two of them, she says to Isiel: "Divlena could be anywhere by now. I don't suppose you have some 'special' way to locate her do you?" Dismissing that thought before Isiel can reply, Berina turns to him and says: "Of course you don't, or you wouldn't have come here." and she smiles at him.

Josrel looks to Berina confused at her expression then crosses his eyes at her then smiles.

Isiel smiles, looking wistful. "To locating a person is more hard, mm, difficulting for me. Seeing you me? I am hin. Young still. Small distance, some places, I can. Not Divlena, not yet."

Catching Berina's eye and words, Rikoro speaks up himself, "If Isiel has a personal article of Divlena's I could endeavor to locate her, though with the results as of late it may take a few days."

"*Alas,*" Isiel says, and again there's that taste of wistfulness in his voice and mien, "*All was destroy--*" then shakes his head and switches back to halting Harnic, "I am having nothing to belong to Divlena. She is much young hin when she is being capture."

As Berina listens to Rikoro and Isiel, her eyes get wider and wider. She blurts out: "You mean you can..you might..." then fairly shouts: "Nobody move! I'll be right back!" and she runs from the room.

As if trying to understand her reaction, Isiel looks from one person to another, searching for clues.

Watching Isel's expression, Rikoro simply shrugs with a grin on his face as he watches Berina move off.

In almost no time, Berina comes running back into the room, nearly running over Qisse, saying: "Oh, sorry Qisse." And literally sliding to a stop in front of Rikoro and Isiel. She is carrying her beaverskin robe.

"This robe is mine, and Josrel has used it to 'see' me at a distance. The point of this to the present conversation is that..." here Berina pauses to take a breath, "Divlena made this robe for me! I don't know if my having worn it would interfere with 'seeing' Divlena, but as the creator of this garment surely there should be a connection to her that you could use to find where she is?" and she holds out the robe to Isiel.

A look of understanding falls on Rikoro's face as he exclaims, "Quite ingenious. Yes I suppose the crafter leaves as much a mark on the object as the owner."

Taking the robe carefully, Isiel caresses the fur like petting a cat, then rests the robe against his cheek, breathes deep. His voice is low and sweet, tinged with sadness. "Divlena. She is making the *ant aglareb*, to giving of splendor." Unaccountably, his eyes fill, and he turns his head away so the others can not see.

"*Limb nienor.* Much sorrows." Isiel makes a frustrated motion with his hand, clears his throat, and continues, "She being child, young, so smaller, when she is taken. But is making such beauty. *Limb ennin.* Years pass. Much years. I am surprising."

With another pat on the robe, Isiel offers it back to Berina. "Finding with robe? Mayhap. I not trying before."

Rikoro says, "I have never tried before to look to the one who created something, but it is certainly the worth the effort if Isiel does not have much success. Though I've not met this .. Divlena, she is obviously Sindarin too which is clue enough."

Berina says, "Well, I think all three of you should try it," turning to Josrel "but I think YOU won't have the time for it for a while." And she gives Josrel a big grin.

Rikoro's eyes flicker on Josrel for a brief moment then back to Berina, "Yes, I believe the Haliki does have pressing needs to attend to this day. Perhaps I should go first as between the two of us I have found it takes me little time to focus. Then he and I shall head to ablution so that Josrel can spend the rest of his day with Lillia."

Speaking to Isiel again, Berina says, "Even though it was many years ago since you last saw her, you're the only one of the three of you that knew Divlena, so I think you have the best chance of success."

"I try, certain," Isiel says, with a small smile.

Including both Rikoro and Isiel, Berina continues: "I seem to recall that Divlena was half-Sindarin...her father I'm thinking?" and she raises one eyebrow as she glances at Isiel.

His smile giving way to a look of puzzlement, Isiel says, "Half? What means? Both *adar a naneth*, mm, muther an father of Divlena, both are being Sindarin. How could not be so?"

Berina says to Rikoro: "I don't know if that makes a difference, but I thought I'd better mention it."

Berina says, "I'll give you a more up-to-date description of her to help you out." Holding out her hand parallel to the floor, she says: "She's about this tall." indicating that Divlena is about five feet tall. "She has long black hair that hangs about half-way down her back, and brown eyes. She wore greyish-brown hide pants, shirt, and light shoes, with a dark brown belt. She had a dagger she wore hanging from the belt on her right hip, and, when she could do so without getting into trouble, a long, thin-bladed sword on her left. Over all, she looked to be in her early to mid teens, but don't let that fool you, she's a grown woman now." When Berina finishes her description of Divlena, her eyes get that focused-on something-in-the-distance look, and a smile spreads across her face as she's remembering her dear friend.

Shaking herself slightly to bring her awareness back to the present, Berina says: "Anyway, when any of you are ready to try your 'seeing', let me know, and I'll get out the robe for you to focus with."

"Of certain." Isiel's face is calm, but his eyes are very bright with excitement.

As Berina describes Divlena, Rikoro strokes his beard listening closely to the details then says, "The description will help I believe, if not just knowing I have 'seen' the right person. If you would let me focus on the robe I shall make the endeavor"

Berina's eyes flash a 'Thank you' look to Rikoro. She hands him the robe.

15- ÁGRAZHÂR -720 TASHAL, KALDOR
3RD WATCH [COOL, CLEAR, NORTH WIND]¹¹

Standing in front of the shop of the weaponcrafter, Obras of Kyfa, Thridd of the Tynath clan thought over his long journey to Tashal.

It all started back in his home town of Habe, when the head of his clan, great uncle Rymakel, told him of the cowardly masons in Owendel who were being chased away from their work by ghosts, when a tall, blonde human female named Berina of Kyfa, killed the undead and restored the signal tower to the Khuzan.

Then he told of the reckless miners of the Ambarin tin mine, who lost their mine to gargun and were being accused of murders they did not commit. Again, Berina of Kyfa, not only restored their mine but their reputation as well.

At the end of the story, Great Uncle Rymakel commanded Thridd to travel to Tashal and contact Obras of Kyfa, who is a weaponcrafter that the Khuzan have done business with and Berina's father. Thridd was to then to locate Berina to serve her in whatever manner is necessary to restore the reputation of Khuzan in general and so that the Kyfa clan does not get the idea that Tynath clan specifically is either cowardly or reckless.

At the same moment that the door to the weaponsmithy was opened by the smith, a crowd of people gathered from both directions to listen to minstrels playing in the streets. Shouting to be heard, Thridd asks where he can find Berina and the smith points to a house across the street.

Thridd offers his thanks to Obras and ducks back out into the square. Shutting the door behind him he makes his way back out into the square and moves through the growing crowds, pausing for a few moments to listen to the minstrels. When he's heard enough, he asks a passerby in broken Harnic, "eh you...Scuse me, but, where can I find food an' drink at?"

With a slight smile, the peasant says, "Voller Querina raud south and ee weel find de Spurs. Dey weel 'ave bait, drink and a little excitement vor ee."

* * *

Rikoro takes the poorly made beaver-skin coat and concentrates on finding its maker. Fourteen minutes later, after seeing visions of the Sindarin girl spending hours making the coat while traveling up the river, he gets a vague notion of her currently being northeast of Tashal approximately half-way to Azadmere.

Rikoro's gaze falls on Berina and Isiel. He seems queasy and flush as he speaks, leaning more heavily on his staff for balance as he gathers himself, "Well.. If the one I saw was Divlena. She was on a boat crafting this overcoat for many hours... many many hours." Rikoro swallows down hard trying to regain his composure. "I feel she may be northeast of here. Half way between Tashal and Azadmere. I can try again later this eve once I have regained some of my sense, perhaps I shall be able to discern a clearly sense of her whereabouts."

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Glancing over his shoulder, towards the door, he turns back to say, "For now though I should be on my way to tend to the day's affairs as it grows quite late. I shall see you all this evening"

Watching Rikoro very closely, Isiel's brows rise at his words. "Much thanks," he says when Rikoro finishes, and he watches in bemusement as Rikoro leaves.

Giving the coat back to Berina, Rikoro reaches the door just as minstrels begin drawing a crowd and one of the town watch approaches the townhouse.

"Is Rikoro being good for walking after?" Isiel asks Berina as Rikoro heads into the street. "Not rest?"

Rikoro offers a pleasant nod of greeting to the watchman in passing and continues on his way to his day's plans.

"He'll be alright." Berina says, watching Rikoro's retreating backside. Before the guardsman gets to the townhouse, she asks Isiel: "I expect that you'll be off chasing after Divlena very soon. As this is not an inn, if you're going to stay a day or two here in Tashal, do you have any idea about where you'll be staying?"

Isiel shakes his head, still looking rather puzzled. "I am not knowing," he says, but whether he means about not knowing anywhere to stay, or his plans to stay at all, is not certain.

Berina says, "Well then, go west along this street, across the square, and continue west along the street that exits the far side of the square. A little ways beyond the square, on your left, you'll see the temple of Halea and cross the street, on your right, you'll see an inn that occupies the corner where another street branches off to the northwest. That's the Garb and Flail. The quality is decent and the prices are very reasonable."

"That being is where Divlena did work," Isiel says, nodding. "Jaril there, did tell me she go with you, maybe being back here. *Erin*...morning, tomorrow, can be telling me on Silver Way?" He paused, looked around the vestibule and added, "Am not having many coin, but could me pay some for your telling."

Speaking to Isiel over her shoulder as she goes to see who's at the door this time, Berina says: "You can come back this evening after dinner, and try again."

* * *

"You're married to this house! Wow!" Berina's eyes narrow a bit as she looks at Qisse, then asks: "Have you met my father, Obras of Kyfa? He's the weapons crafter across the street."

"I know uv 'im, as I know uv most uv my neighbors, bit I 'ave niver actually met 'im. I 'ave niver 'ad a raizin to," answers Qisse.

"Well, you'll get the chance fairly soon." Berina says. "I'm going to tell him of my betrothal by inviting him to dinner. Don't worry, it won't be tonight. I wouldn't do that to you. I'll find a good time for it soon, and give you plenty of notice."

Grining at Qisse and waving her over, Davas says "Qisse ... join us in a drink ... I know it be not proper ... but today ... it is!"

She answers, "Well perhaps a splits drap uv sherry. I 'ave some saved away vor special occasions and dicky be ees fay wan uv dey...bit no more dan a drap as I 'ave work to do and so do ee."

* * *

Berina finishes her share of the chores and is just preparing to do some study when there is another knock at the door. Answering the door, she greets the guardsman standing there.

"Hello, my name is Bareobron of Falesh. We met some time ago at the Heru gate...although you were distracted with other things and do not remember me. There was a Sindarin came into Tashal a short while ago and said he was looking for you. We were to busy at the time to lead him here. I am here to ask if he has arrived all right and if you are willing to pledge for his good conduct while he is in town."

Berina can barely hear him over the crowd and minstrels in the street and she does not remember his face...but that deep rich voice...that she could never forget.

"Please, come in for a moment." Berina practically shouts. Once he steps inside, she closes the door...shutting out the bulk of the noise. "Did I understand you to say, did a Sindarin arrive here and do I pledge for his good conduct? Well, a Sindarin did indeed show up here." Stepping aside so that Bareobron, whose eyes should have adapted to the lower light levels inside, can see Isiel standing there. "Isiel of Laelin, may I introduce Bareobron of Falesh, distinguished member of the town gaurd? Bareobron, Isiel."

"Well greetings, Bareobron," Isiel says and inclines his head slightly.

After their opening pleasantries to each other, Berina says: "Isiel is cousin to a dear friend, whom he's looking for, but as I have met him for the first time today, and really know nothing about him, I don't know if I'm ready to stand pledge for him or not." Turning to Isiel, Berina asks: "Tell me about yourself, that I may decide. Pledging is a serious thing, and I could be ruined if I stand for you, and you misbehave."

Isiel's look of puzzlement deepens. "Misbehave? Mistress Berina, am not being mishave. Being *Sindarin*..."

When Isiel says 'Being Sindarin.', an image of Divlena pops into Berina's head and she snorts such that she has to cover her mouth to keep from bursting out laughing. Recovering, she says: "Sorry. Your cousin...go on."

Isiel continues, "Being *heledhgwalth*." He shakes his head, and his voice has the edge of frustration when he says, "Is called making glass for open like flower, yes? Bloom. With blowing. Here am to journey, this fire makes shop to burn. Am searching cousin, being Divlena."

Considering what Isiel has said, Berina says: "If I understand you correctly, you said you're a glass blower. You had a shop somewhere else and it burned down. Since you are also searching for your cousin, you thought you'd resume your work here while looking for her. Is that correct?"

After a brief hesitation, in which Isiel seems to be thinking, he nods slightly. "I am thinking this thing. Mayhap. Or to looking for Divlena, now have more clear where she be. You say Silver Way?"

Turning to Bareobron, Berina says: "I'm told that the Sindarin are the best glassworkers on Harn. If Isiel is half as good as even

an average Sindarin glassworker, every glassworking merchant in town will want to hire him." Pausing for a moment, she continues: "I understand that Bae of Rysten is the Guildmaster for glassworkers for all of Kaldor...I had an old friend who worked for her for a brief time recently..., so I suppose Isiel should go see her. If Bae will verify Isiel's skill at glassworking...and maybe give him a job...would that do for surety of his good behavior?"

Bareobron says, "If she employs him, then she would be responsible for his actions, yes."

Still speaking to Bareobron, Berina asks: "Her shop is in the Mangai Square district, on the southwest corner of Heru Road and Torastra Way. Could you please take Isiel there? I'd do it myself, but I have too much to do here to spare the time just now."

"Certainly," He answers, "I will need to get her decision any ways."

Berina says, "Thanks."

Just before they are ready to leave, Isiel holds out his hands, palm up to Berina and says, "You are having *fliw*? Sickness, yes?" He points to one of his own eyes, then sweeps it around in a circle before offering his hands again. "Tired, mm, *rind*. And *thuiolong*, heavy breathes. Mayhap I be helping. I am being sometime for Healing."

Isiel used his healing ability to first diagnose the problem and found she has a common cold which will run its course sometime within the next tenday and is almost never fatal. After this he is very tired. [OOO: +13 fatigue, +1 healing - do you want to do healing again to try and cure her?]

"You are having a cold," Isiel says. He peers into Berina's eyes. "I can helping it go faster, shall you like? For thanks for you be helper of me."

Berina looks at him a little dubiously, then says: "If you can do this, I'll bet that it's tiring. I don't think that's a good idea just now. Mistress Bae is bound to have you make something to test your skill, so you'll need to be at your best for that. Afterwards, if you're up to it, I'd be happy to see if you can help me out. Thank you."

"I will be come back, so. And am checking to your sickness," Isiel says, with a deferential nod. "After Mistress Bae." With that, he lets Bareoborn lead him away.

* * *

Turning to Isiel, Berina says: "Winter is coming on. If you start out on the Silver Way, on foot, your corpse will disappear into the bellies of wild things and Divlena will never even know you were looking for her. I'm told that Sindarin have little use for money, but if you are going to spend any time at all in this kingdom, you'll need it, so I strongly suggest that you go see Mistress Bae and see about acquiring gainful employment. Good luck."

Eyebrows squinched tight as he listens to Berina talk, apparently deciphering her quick speaking on the go, Isiel merely nods once, when she is done, and looks to Bareobron for his reaction.

* * *

As Rikoro departs and Berina answers the knock at the door, Isiel is left standing with the beaverskin coat. He tries to concentrate on the history of the item but, after a dozen minutes, gets nothing from it. [+1 psychometry]

A heavy sigh escapes Isiel's lips after a dozen minutes have passed. He draws a deep breath, and there are furrows in his brow as he hands the coat back to Berina [when she returns]. "Much sorrows. Am not being able to find her."

* * *

Davas and Josrel travel to the inn and proceed to Lillia's room. Instead of the ostler, one of his men, from the night encounter at the stables, stands guard. When Davas and Josrel approach the room, the guard merely nods but, when Davas turns to leave, the guard blocks his way, "I was given very specific instructions not to allow anyone in the room without your presence. If he is to stay, you stay too." Looking in Josrel's direction, he continues, "and do not for a moment assume that I remember not this young hothead – he is the one who would rather die in an attempt to see the lady than he would act in a civilized manner and get permission to see her."

Davas is about to protest when the man indicates Josrel and calls him hothead. He closes his open mouth and takes a deep breath. Nodding, he says "of course ... but could you tell Halime that I will be late to my work?" Straightening, quickly, he grins. "... no ... he told you I was to stay didn't he?"

Grinning, he shakes his head. "Of course he did. Thank you. I will stay ... of course".

So saying he turns to look at Lillia and Josrel regarding each other, shrugs and seats himself quietly in the corner.

Josrel calmly looks from Davas to the guard: "I'm the hothead." Josrel says pointing to his ribs. "You hit me."

Josrel still talking calmly: "Your right I was wrong. I am sorry that I tried to get past you to see my beloved Lillia, that you were guarding. I didn't realize that by keeping her in a room above some stables had elevated her position in life to someone that I needed to get permission to see. When just the other day I was able to see and speak with her without anyone's permission. But I thank you good Sir for showing me the errors of my ways. Can I have your name and where I may find you so that you can give me more of your pearls of wisdom?"

The guard answers, "Ah, so you figure that if you cannot beat me in a fair fight, you will sneak around to where I live and thrash me in my bed. There are some that find humor in such posturing, like some fighting rooster, but I can assure you that I am not one of them. If I find you threatening me or mine, I will deal with you proper. From what I have seen so far, that will take little effort from me. Now inside with the both of you."

Turning to Davas, Josrel says: "If you don't mind would you bring me into the room?"

Laughing at the guard Josrel speaks to Davas; "Imagine, he feels threatened by me. Come Davas lets to my future wife." Then heads into the room.

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Standing quickly, Davas moves between Josrel and the guard. "Josrel !" he says firmly. "You are proving him right. Remember why you are here".

He nods at Lillia, watching them quietly. "Come ... you have better things to do .. in a better way".

Once he has Josrel aside, he whispers quickly "you should say you are sorry to that man when you go. Think on it ... and think on Lillia and what she will think".

He holds his arm a moment, then releases him towards Lillia, going to sit again in the corner.

"Josrel!" she exclaims as she rushes to embrace him, "I have been longing to see you and here you are. What brings you here?" she asks as if she did not already know.

"Lillia!" Josrel returns as he rushes open armed to Lillia. Meeting her in the middle he engulfs her in his arms. Still holding her tight Josrel pulls back "I feared the worst when I was told you were taken. You are well? " Not waiting for an answer. "They are treating you respectfully? I hope."

Now just holding both her hands Josrel gets down to one knee staring up into her eyes. "I know not what has brought us to this point in time or these circumstances. Your abrupt absence from my life has crushed my life. I can't bare another moment without you."

Josrel takes a deep breathe. "Lillia will you be me wife and join my in Love and Marriage? And whatever troubles you are facing we can face them together." Josrel waits forgetting to breathe still on his knee.

Laughing, she answers, "Of course I will...as soon as you have the permission of my mother and the Ibarti. In the future, let us remember these troubles and not hide our emotions from each other."

Raising from his knee Josrel embraces Lillia and kisses her on the cheek "Wonderful!!" Josrel exclaims "This is the happiest moment in my life! We should go to your mother and the Ibarti now and get their permission. Shall we go then?"

His attention obviously caught by Josrel saying "go", Davas turns quickly. "Ah ... remember ... Halime suggested that Lillia should stay here until wed. To avoid more trouble". Looking from one to the other, and finally to Lillia, he adds "I think it would be best if you did. Josrel could go ... ask for you in marriage ... while you stay here, safe". He raises his eyebrows and nods in the direction of the guard. "Remember the guard" he says quietly.

"No, you should gird your loins and ask them yourself," she answers, "first it sets a bad example to them if I have to be there to support your decisions...they will believe that I am going to be the breadwinner and decision maker of the household. They will surely deny that sort of marriage. Show them you have some courage. Second, the last days have shown that it is not safe for me to be on the streets and you do not have the force of arms to protect me. It will do no good for us to decide to marry and for me to be killed before we can get permission." Kissing him on the cheek, she continues, "Now be a love and do your duty."

Taking a step back from Lillia, Josrel says: "I was not shirking any duties, I only wanted to show your Mother and the Ibarti that we are united in our decision to get married. I will go get their permission and come back here and get you and take you from this place." Looking confused at Lillia, Josrel says: "Lillia why is your life in danger? Who is that has put your life in danger? Were you taken against your will and are you being held here against your will as well?"

As tears come to her eyes, she says, "You do not believe me? Are you just interested in my inheritance as well? I thought better of you but if all you are concerned with is getting my property without risking your own safety, you can just go your way and leave me to my fate."

Taking Lillia by the shoulders and looking her in the eye Josrel asks calmly." Lillia what are you talking about? Were you kidnapped because of your inheritance? Lillia you should know me by now that I could care less about your inheritance. Whatever it is."

Wiping the tears from her eyes : " Lillia I need to know what I'm up against. Who these people are that have you here? And more importantly why would they try to murder you? If you care at all for me I need to know everything because now my life is in danger as well as my friends who helped me find you. Please Lillia tell me what is going on?"

With an angry look on her face, Lillia says, "Your friend here tells me that he and your other friends were not responsible for the murder of the pawnbroker's wife but killed she was by somebody. The ostler tells me I may be in danger. The innkeeper here tells me I might be in danger. You are the only one that does not think I am in danger. I have not heard of you or your friends being in danger at all. I will not have you saying anything bad about the Falesh's since they are the ones who brought me to safety and brought you to me."

Josrel stares blankly at Lillia then turns to Davas with a look of bafflement then turns back to Lillia. Pinchs the bridge of his nose while squinting takes a moment then says to Lillia : " I'm sorry Lillia I meant no disrespect to the Falesh's. Don't you worry about me or anyone or anything else I will take care of things. I am going to get permission from your mother and the Ibarti to marry you. You stay right here and don't move. I will be back for you."

Turning to Davas : " I am finished here Davas." Josrel motions to Davas to Leave.

When outside the room and away from the door Josrel turns to Davas again: "Thank you for finding her Davas. I am sorry I kept you from your duties. I will be off now to go to Lillia's mother now. I will see you later this evening." With that Josrel strides to Lillia's mother house on the corner of Medrik and Kalabi.

Smiling at Lillia as they go, Davas gives her a quick wave and a nod. Once outside the room, Davas turns to Josrel and says quietly "well ... that could have gone better". He flashes Josrel a huge grin, slaps him on the back and adds a bit more seriously "best of luck with her mother ... and be careful !"

Davas walks down the stairs with him and waves him through the door, before grinning quietly to himself, shaking his head and going to find out what needs doing.

15- ÁGRAZHÂR -720 TASHAL, KALDOR

4TH WATCH [HOT, CLEAR, CALM, FOGGY]¹²

Berina spends the day, between sneezes, studying the books she found in the cellar of the signal tower of Ovendel Fief. They tell of the “spittle of Yaelmor” – apparently meteors from the moon – and of their mutative powers. She learns that the mad Shek P’var, who taught Tesiel, tracked the occurrences and learned that one fell near what is now called Morgath’s bowl – which got the name from the meteor crater. In his journal, he planned a trip there to harness the power of the meteor but the journal ends before he could leave on his journey.

* * *

Thrrid nods, "Spurs ya say...good, sure..." He offers a polite incline of the head to the peasant and then turns off to make his way South along the road pointed to. When he reaches the Inn, he enters and asks the barkeep for one night's lodging, a warm meal, and the strongest ale they have...

"I am Halime of Falesh, the owner of this inn," the innkeeper says, "it is a bit early for the evening meal but I can always get you some beef and vegetable pottage with ale and bread." The pottage and bread make for a good solid meal but are unremarkable. The dark-copper-colored ale has a fruity aroma and a very soft texture. It has a light hoppy taste which lingers in the aftertaste.

After the meal, Halime shows Thrrid to a room next to one that is being guarded. The room is as ordinary as the meal, with a bed, chest, and bed-side table. "I hope you realize that we allow not candles or other fires in the rooms. If you want to move around in the night or if you have other needs, there will be a journeyman sleeping in the corridor who can assist you. The room and the meal are 2d and I will collect in the morning along with any other charges for services or meals you require. If that is too dear for you, you can share a room for 2f less."

Thrrid nods to the Innkeeper and follows him up to the room. In his best Harnic he can manage he mutters out, "Ya...room is good, though if'n I cin 'ave a few flagons of that'n ale in me room, I be paying a bits more." He gives the guards in the neighboring room a "once over", his bushy brows furrowing together. When he gets in the room with the Innkeeper he asks, "What'n the gaurdin for?"

With a smirk, Halime says, "Star crossed lovers, disagreements between clans, tales for minstrels, you know how it is."

Unless it's some drastic answer he seems to take the explanation in stride, and finishes off the hopefully soon to arrive flagons of ale before drifting off to sleep. Though, he keeps his weapons within arms reach.

Thrrid aha's, those he doesn't seem to completely understand everything the Innkeeper says. He offers his best smile and nod and then waits for his ale and heads to sleep.

* * *

Bareobron leads Isiel through the market square and around to the glassworker. While Isiel looks around the room and examines Mistress Bae of Rysten’s masterpiece, Bareobron describes the situation and asks her assistance. The masterpiece is a simple pyramid of multi-colored glass spheres but the clarity of the glass and the purity of the colors would be considered praiseworthy even among the Sindarin.

Isiel studies the work, not touching it or making any sudden movements. A slow smile spreads across his face, and his eyes are bright with excitement as Mistress Bae begins to speak.

"It just so happens that I recently had to let my journeyman go when he got in trouble with the watch," says Mistress Bae, "If Isiel is willing to spend the day preparing a sample of his work, I will consider employing him. The guild has rules about hiring non-guild members but, as I am the guild master of Tashal, if his work is any good I can document an honorary journeyman status for a Sindarin. You can return at the end of the fifth watch to see how it goes."

Isiel waits while Bareobron and Mistress Bae work out the details, then gets to work preparing a piece for her. After selecting several rods of glass in different colors from her supply, he makes sure the tools he needs are close at hand and settles down at the work bench. He will work on producing a sample, however long it takes, of trillium done in glass, with rose colored petals, green leaves, nestled in a crystal cup. His bearing is one of intense concentration, and his fingers move delicately, yet surely, with the materials.

What he produces is barely adequate by human standards (and well below his own Sindarin standards)...perhaps it is due to his fatigue and eagerness. [+1 glassworking]

When Bareobron returns in the evening, Mistress Bae tells him, "He is not what I expected of a Sindarin but he does have some skills and I need the help. I will employ him for the time being at 15d per tenday plus room and board."

Looking far more tired than he had at the beginning of the day, Isiel turns to Bareobron. "Mistress Bae is for me being pledge, yes?"

"Yes," answers Bareobron, "as long as you are working for her."

With a nod, Isiel agrees to her terms and awaits instruction on where he is to take his meals and rest at the end of days.

When Bareobron leaves, Mistress Bae tells Isiel, "You will be sleeping on a pallet in the work room near the hearth for warmth and to look after the fire during the night. You will take your meals with us during the fifth watch and a brief cold-meal to break your fast at the start of the second watch. We work from the third hour of the second watch until the last hour of the fourth watch each day and you are free to do as you will during the fifth watch. You have to be back promptly by the end of the fifth watch as we lock the doors at night until dawn. You will be working 24 days a month and one of your days off is the 15th as that is an ill-omened day. You can have whichever other days off you want for the rest but you must give me at least a days' notice."

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When she finishes outlining the details, Isiel gives her a slow nod. "These are being good." He looks back at the workbench. "There is more time being work today, yes?"

* * *

Wandering the country roads, Rikoro finds 10 agrimony, 3 betony, 5 bugloss, 4 comfrey, 3 doshenkana, 5 fanosel, 2 fennel, 5 horsetail, 4 madder, 1 mint, 4 pennyroyal, 6 sanicle, and 2 wylorafina.

Returning to the shop of Lorin of Lorinsen, the apothecary, he is told, "I need not more agrimony or horsetail at this time. I can give you 1d per dose of betony, 1f per dose of bugloss, 3f per dose of comfrey, 1d per dose of doshenkana, 2f per dose of fennel, 1d 1f per dose of madder, 2f per dose of mint, 1f per dose of pennyroyal, 1d 3f per dose of sanicle and 1d 1f per dose of wylorafina. As I told you before, I deal not in narcotics so if you bring any more fanosel into this shop, I will have to turn you in to the watch."

Pursing his lips at the mention of drugs and the watch, Rikoro nods confidently to Lorin and offers in response, "I should know better myself being the son of a Litigant. I have been away from Kaldor for over a decade in Gelimo. Would you mind terribly letting me know which herbs to stay away from our destroy should I spot them? As I do not wish to upset you or the city watch."

"I am somewhat new to Tashal myself," answers Master Lorin, "so fanosel is the only one I know of at this time. They made a big deal of searching for fanosel when I first arrived here."

Rikoro listens carefully to Lorin speak then starts into the sale of the herbs, "As to the prices you mentioned they are more then fair and I will gladly sell you all that you wish to take from what I carry. Minus of course those you did not want"

"Let's see now," he says, "3 doses of betony at 1d per dose, 5 doses of bugloss at 1f per dose, 7 of comfrey at 3f, 3 of doshenkana at 1d, 3 of fennel at 2f, 11 of madder at 1d 1f, 7 of mint at 2f, 5 of pennyroyal at 1f, 9 of sanicle at 1d 3f and 3 of wylorafina at 1d 1f. That will be 3d plus 1d 1f plus 5d 1f plus 3d plus 1d 2f plus 13d 3f plus 3d 2f plus 1d 1f plus 15d 3f plus 3d 3f. Coming to a total of 52d" and he counts out the money.

After the transaction is complete Rikoro inquires with Lorin, "Are there any herbs you are in of particular need of this season Master Lorinsen? I can make an extended effort to look for them whilst I am out gathering if so."

Master Lorinson answers, "I have found that if one looks for a specific herb, he misses so many others around him. No, just continue as you have been doing. We are getting to the end of the summer and the autumn herbs will be appearing soon so what you bring will change as time goes on."

Rikoro dips his head slowly at Master Lorinson's words, "True. True. You have my thanks for the coin and your time."

After exchanging a few more words with the shopkeep, Rikoro makes his way out of the store and heads over to Master Holik's with the intention of selling the remainder of his legal herbs.

Rikoro finds Master Holik's shop busy and the apothecary is hard at work. Glancing up at Rikoro, he says, "If you are selling

more herbs, I am afraid I have not the time or the coin for you just now. You will have to come back in a tenday or two."

Rikoro offers a smile and understanding nod to Holik, then turns to the door and leaves. Once on the street he looks to the sky trying to judge if he has enough time to head to the nearest clothiers shop.

15- ÁGRAZHÂR -720 TASHAL, KALDOR (CONCLUSION)

5TH WATCH [HOT, CLEAR, CALM, FOGGY]¹²

Josrel was greeted pleasantly by Lillia's mother and, as soon as she spoke, he knew she was the mystery woman at the start of the story. She tells him that, of course, she gives him permission to marry. When Josrel explains where Lillia is currently lodging, she suggests she should probably remain there until the marriage and possibly even have the marriage at The Spurs attended by only close friends and family. They agree to a marriage on the 29th.

Josrel then goes to the Ibarti, who congratulates Josrel on having his facts straight this time. He also agrees to the place and time for the marriage. As to Josrel returning to the temple, the Ibarti says that he can return until the marriage but, after they are married, they will probably require a place of their own. He knows that Lillia will inherit the lease to a townhouse when she marries but there is only a bare minimum of furniture. The Ibarti will see if he can find suitable employment for one or both of them after they are married.

Josrel agrees to move into Lillia's townhouse after the marriage, as for furniture, lets move in first and get settled and take it from there.

Josrel thanks the Ibarti for all that he has done for him. Also thanks him for his efforts in finding employment for them. Josrel is concerned about his future as a Haliki if he can continue his service to the temple.

Josrel returns to Berina and Davas' townhouse to give them the news.

Josrel tells the group of his meetings with Lillia her mother and the Ibarti.

* * *

Davas returns to the townhouse after finishing his work.

Berina says, "Davas, my love, we need to ask my father for permission to marry, and I imagine you'll need to do the same with Lord Dasarayne as well. When do you think we should do that?"

Giving Berina a stupid grin and her hand a quick squeeze, Davas nods agreement. "We do ... but weren't we going to wait to ask your father ... so he isn't paupered by marrying off all his girls at once?"

Continuing to grin, he says "as to when to te ... ask Lord Dasarayne ... wellll don't you think it would be better to wait until you are well?"

Giving her a quick kiss through a broadening grin, he adds "after all, who would want to marry a sickly girl?"

"Sickly?! I'll show you sickly!" and she begins to get into a lover's wrestle, tickling him and ending up all tangled in an embrace, gently nibbling on one of his earlobes.

Whispering in that ear, she says: "I'd kiss you like you've never been kissed before, but I don't want to chance giving you my cold."

Relaxing the embrace enough to look Davas in the eyes, she says: "I said we could tell him of our intentions, but that we didn't have to get married right away. Besides, I don't know if I'm considered Lord Odasart's vassel or not. If so, there may be merchet to be paid as well. I'll have to check with Lord Odasart...and in any case, I should ask him just out of courtesy. He's been very good to us."

Obviously expecting her to try something, Davas is ready for her first onslaught and fends her off, laughing and tickling back. Eventually he gives in to her and finally surrenders.

Still chuckling, he nods. "Of course. you did say ... and yes we could tell ... ask him soon ... but ask if it's OK. Yes ? yes".

Letting go of the embrace altogether, she continues: "We do need to go to Ovendel, not just for you to ask Lord Dasarayne's permission to marry, but the decisions about planting and livestock will have to be made soon, and your family now has a say in those matters. You may not be the head of your clan, but since their new status is due entirely to your efforts, I would think that they should at least ask your opinion on these topics. Besides," and she smiles broadly "I'd like to meet more of my new family-members-to-be."

Still smiling, Davas nods again, then says in a more serious manner "yes, I would like to go for that too. It would be good to know they are doing well". Swinging her around, he adds "would you come with me? ... I know families are wonderful ... but you can expect ... well ... let's just say no one expects the inquisition". With a sudden grin, he gives her a quick tickle, then flees to the kitchen and the dishes.

* * *

The Khuzan sleeps through the day in the Inn and then heads down for something to eat and to pay the Innkeeper. After eating and paying, Thrid heads to the house that Obras pointed to earlier in the day and knocks on the door.

Muttering to herself "A lot of visitors today.", Berina goes to answer the door. Looking down at the Kuzdul, she says: "May I help you?"

Looks up at the taller woman..."I'ma lookin' fer Bereena of Kyfa, ya?"

Berina says, "Yes, I'm Berina of Kyfa."

Thrid offers a short, quick bow. "Pleasure'n is mine." He pauses and looks up, his tangled beard hiding most of his broken Harnic speech. "I am Thrid of da Tynan clan. I am being here at request of mine Great Uncle Rymakel." His eyes narrow and the tone of his voice sound as if he's not particularly "into" what he's saying.

"I am sent to yous to be repaying ya for your efforts in Ovendel anding at da mines in Ambarin." He offers a nod of the head, "I'ma now offering me services to ya's to use as ya needin, ya?"

He stands quietly in the doorway.

Lowering her head a little, Berina closes her eyes, pinches the bridge of her nose between a thumb and forefinger, and says quietly: "Gods, what next?"

Raising her head and reopening her eyes, Berina says: "Come in, come in." Directing him to a bench to sit, she sits on another and asks: "Offering me your services, hm? Well...what do you know how to do?"

Grimmaces under his beard, not actually sitting, but moving in front of the bench she motions too. "What cannae do? I'ma Man at Arms, whichin means I be 'ere ta do whattan ya need. Ya needin me ta be guardin folk, I be guardin folk, ya needin me ta be deliverin da heavy packages, I be deleverin da heavy packages. Jus' don' be askin' me to be doin' anything stupid."

Berina says, "Things are pretty quiet just now. For myself, I could use some help with my shield-work, and I'd like to learn to speak some Khuzan. I'm a bit under the weather right now, but once I'm well again, we could start to work on those things."

Thrid's mouth screws up at the mention of learning Khuzan, "If ya be needin' tutorin' in words, ya be be needin' ta find yerself da word teachin' type." He crosses his bulky arms across his chest, "An I ain' lookin' like the word teachin' type, ya?"

Berina continues, "I have a friend, a Haliki of Save-Knor, who's about as helpless as it's possible to get in a fight. My husband-to-be, Davas of Fainovirs, is working with him to improve his knife-fighting skills, and if you could teach him the basics of stave-work so he isn't more of a hazard to himself than to an opponent, that would be a good start."

Thrid nods occasionally, seeming like he's having trouble keeping up with the woman's speech. Finally he says, "I ain' be no teachin' type of da staves either...what be da use of trying ta fightin' with an overbig stick?"

He smirks as if the thought is funny to him. "If'n ya want some trainin' in some more realin like weapons like axes or maces, I might be able ta help."

Berina says, "Winter's coming on, so I don't anticipate any commissions in the near future. I can't afford to support you, so you're going to have to find employment. Heh, I half expect Bareobron of Felesh to knock on my door any minute, asking me if I'll stand surety for you. If he does, ask him for a job in the city guard." and here Berina chuckles. "You might see if you can find work as a bodyguard, or some similar work. Once Lord Odasart sends me on another 'job', I'll need a good fighter. That'll do for now. Please stop by and let me know how you're doing."

"I ain 'ere to be askin' fer no charity, I'm 'ere to do what needin be done." He shakes his head, "I find me own job if'n I get bored, but if ya needin me 'elp with anythin', I be at the place called da Spurrssen." He shifts his weight as he finally looks about the room he is in. "If'n I don' hear from ya every few days, I be comin' and checkin' in with ye, ya?" He doesn't seem

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to wait for an answer before he turns and with a grumble heads back out.

With that, Berina politely shows him out.

As he finishes and is just about to depart, Thrrid notices Isiel, and his eyes grow a tad larger. He stares for a few moments before his eyes narrow and a scowl forms on his face. He moves out the door, muttering and grumbling in Khuzan as he goes.

Arriving only minutes after Thrrid, Isiel waits patiently, and watches closely, as Thrrid explains his quest. When he is sure Berina is done, he ventures to inform her about his employment with the glassworker, and thanks Berina for her help.

Berina says, "You're welcome. I'm glad I was able to help. Come back and visit when you can. A relative of Divlena's is welcome in my home."

* * *

Rikoro returns to the townhouse after purchasing a couple of coin purses.

* * *