

**PREVIOUSLY TASHAL, KALDOR**

After ten hours writing and studying cellar of the townhouse, Rikoro emerges.

Upon seeing Rikoro emerge from the cellar, Berina asks: "What were you up to down there?"

Rolling out his shoulders Rikoro's eyes squint and open trying to adjust to the change of light as he regards Berina, "Trying to find some solitude and place to study. I may look at inquiring within the Sage's temple or find a location outdoors as below was not conducive to much more than feeling cramped."

"To bad it didn't work out for you down there." Berina says. "It would have been both convenient and private. When I'm researching some spell or other...or even practicing the more powerful spells I already know...I have to run off into the wilderness so I don't risk burning down whole sections of town." and she rolls her eyes toward the ceiling. "The lesser spells I can work on at the forge."

Thinking intently for a moment, Berina suggests: "Your spells are not so spectacularly dangerous as mine are. Have you considered going into Orgael Wood to practice? Orgael is the woods just north of town...you know, the place where they have all the gibbets. Most people are superstitious enough to think the woods are haunted because of the gibbets, and stay away, so you should have privacy for your work. Just an idea."

Pondering Berina's words, "I confess I did consider it, but I thought it might draw the eye and suspicion of others if I did begin to spend too much time amongst the dead."

Berina bursts out laughing, and says: "And it's more lively around here?!"

**08-AZÚRA -720 TASHAL, KALDOR**

1<sup>ST</sup> WATCH [WARM, PARTLY CLOUDY, SOUTH WIND, THUNDERSTORM]<sup>5</sup>

A crash of thunder woke Josrel from a sound sleep. At first, he did not realize what had disturbed him. A flash of lightning, and more rumbling of thunder, enlightened him as it lit the room.

He was still not accustomed to the change from the quiet solitude of the temple to now being on one of the busiest streets in Tashal. Adding to the noise was the nobility returning with their soldiers to winter in the city. The sound of marching feet passing the building, followed by yet another flash of lightning and peel of thunder, highlighted Josrel's thoughts.

Still asleep lying next to him, Lillia reached out to pull him next to her and share their body heat.

Josrel lets Lillia pull him down, as he lay staring at the ceiling he says: "How is it you can sleep with all this noise." He turns over to Lillia and pulls her into him in an embrace and closes his eyes.

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Berina was just about back to sleep after a particularly loud clap of thunder had woken her, when the tramp of feet and the sounds made by armor on moving bodies brought her to complete wakefulness.

Rising from beneath the bedclothes, and trying to not wake Davas, she went to the window and opened the shutter just enough to see what was going on outside. The light of two torches revealed four soldiers of the city guard, two of whom were holding the torches.

The banging on the door woke the entire neighborhood of Querina road.

"Obras of Kyfa! Open in the name of the law!"

Though the thunderstorm did little to stir Rikoro from slumber, the banging and yelling from across the street woke him. He lay in a daze listening as the words were exchanged. With an exasperated sigh, Rikoro turns on his side away from the noise and says in a grumbling whisper, "Do these people know no peace. Come Nolomar fire will surely reign from the sky... if not Berina." Whether he meant that figuratively or literally is something only time will reveal.

"Oh bat-droppings!" Running across the room, Berina shouts: "Davas! Wake up!" and takes about a second and a half to throw on her linen dress, snatch her robe, and run down the stairs...her hand on the railing to guide her in the dark and to keep from falling. A flickering bit of light coming in through small cracks around the door, guided her across the room.

Throwing open the door, she is in time to hear...

"... wha ... ? " Davas' eyes slowly open, in time to see Berina's back hurrying through the door. He leans on one elbow, then flops back onto the bed, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. "What ... ?" he adds as he slowly sits up, then realizes there is a commotion below and he grabs his pants and slowly crosses to the window. He is just in time to see Berina protesting to four armed and armored men while dressed in her night clothes and robe. He winces a little, which turns into a grin, before sobering and moving quickly downstairs.

Listening carefully, one can hear the voice of the weaponsmith saying, "I am coming. I am coming. You need not wake the whole neighborhood. Who are you and what do you want?"

"I am ordered to take you into custody to answer charges of the attempted murder of the metalsmith, Uvlenela of Dyselsen."

"WHAT?!!" Berina shouts at the same time as her father says...

"I have done no such thing," exclaimed the smith as he opened the door.

Throwing on her robe as she crosses the street to where her father and the guards are standing, Berina hears the commander say...

"Your guilt or innocence is not my concern." The commander, ignoring Berina, says: "You are to come with us now to stay in the goal until the day of your trial." Speaking now to Berina, the commander says: "You are in violation of curfew. Get off of the street, or I'll run you in with the old man." He turns and leads his men and their charge away into the dark.

Appearing at the door just as Berina is entering the shop, Davas, still half asleep, watches as Obras is led away.

## STORY 2 PAGE 2

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"That's ridiculous! My father would never do such a thing!" One of the guards moves to place himself between Berina and Obras, his weapon ready. Berina stops short at this, and growls: "Somebody's going pay for this, and pay dearly."

Those quick enough to peer through their windows, see four soldiers escorting an old man, still in his night shirt, and led by their commander.

As the guards move off with her father, Berina shouts: "I'll see to the shop, and I'll prove your innocence...I promise!"

Trembling in anger, and fighting to control it, Berina enters her father's shop. Inside the shop, she finds Obras' two apprentices, awakened by the ruckus like everybody else in the neighborhood. "My father has been arrested on some trumped-up charge. Go back to sleep, if you can. I'll be back in the morning to give you direction. I'm going back across the street. Lock up after me."

Going back to the townhouse, Berina folds herself into Davas' arms and says: "Hold me." After a short while, she pulls out of his arms and says: "Let me clean the mud off of my feet. We might as well go back to bed." Later, surprisingly, Berina is able to drift off to sleep.

Davas holds her until she releases him, then says simply, "let me. While I do, you can tell me what happened ... and what we might do tomorrow that would help. Come". So saying he leads her inside.

As Davas cleans her feet, Berina says: "Father has been accused of attempting to murder Uvienela of Dyselsen. She's the metalsmith who has the shop just around the corner on Malishi Way. The very idea! With the skill my father has using the weapons he makes, if he wanted to kill her, she'd be dead." Shifting gears a bit, she continues: "When I go to work tomorrow, I'll ask Lord Odasart what I can do, who I can see, to get to the bottom of this mess."

Berina relaxes enough to almost fall asleep, when she realizes the intense, pungent aroma of the mud and garbage from the street. Her stomach heaves and last night's dinner spews all over the bedroom floor. She continues to heave long after her stomach is empty and it is three hours later before the dry heaves stop.

Sighing quietly, Davas rises, kisses Berina gently and dodges nimbly aside as she vomits again. He makes sure she is not getting worse, then goes and gets a bucket, water and a cloth and returns to clean up. As he does so, he tries to think if he has any herbs that might settle an upset stomach (and will get and prepare them for Berina if he does).

He realizes that anything he could give her could possibly make things worse until he understands the cause of her illness.

Should Qisse be woken by all this, he tells her to go back to bed.

Davas hears Berina out, looking surprised at the mention of the accusation of murder, then thoughtful. As he wipes her feet dry, he looks up "Perhaps ... is it possible ...". He speaks slowly and quietly. "Mayhap a clan that we may have ... annoyed ... mayhap, they seek to do us harm?"

He stands, and tidies up. "I think you need to find out where this lie comes from ... and why". He turns back to her. "... but for tonight, to bed. Come." He stands her up and helps her to bed.

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The thunderstorm did not disturb Isiel's meditation. Storms in Eval are no different than those in Kaldor. The march of soldiers past the building was a different matter. It seemed that every night there were more of them.

The Jarin, where he grew up, had sometimes commented that Sindarin never slept. It was true. They merely meditated. Hearing the sound of the soldiers returning whence they had come made Isiel wonder if humans ever slept as much as they claimed to.

This night, Isiel stoked the fire a bit, and soaked in its heat and light. He was not cold, not like the Humans reckoned cold at any rate, but he enjoyed the warmth and glow of fire as much as anyone. Eventually, the tramp of soldiers in the streets faded enough into the background that he could return to his meditation, but he decided to ask Mistress Bae about it in the morning, to ask if the number of soldiers coming into the city was usual.

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Even from his pallet in the cellar of the inn, Thridd could hear the lad at the door yelling, "Master Halime! Master Halime!"

Master Halime yelled back from his bedroom window, "What is the ruckus, lad?"

"They have arrested the smith, Obras of Kyfa. They say he murdered someone."

"Wait there. I will be right down," said Master Halime. "There will surely be trouble over this."

Thridd curses as he hears the name "Kyfa". "*What in the blasted hell's did that man do? Great Uncle...why have you asked me to watch over these foolish folk?*"<sup>1</sup> He shakes his head and hefts himself up from his pallet.

Thridd quickly gathers up his clothes and his club and runs up the stairs to join Halime in going to see what is happening.

Thridd reaches the top of the stairs just as Master Halime arrives from the floor above.

"I am sorry you were disturbed master khuzdul," says Master Halime as he opens the door to let the lad enter. "It is just a local disturbance in the neighborhood. No need to concern yourself."

Thridd furrows his bushy brows in thought as he puzzles through Halime's words. "Wellen...is I hear'n bout Master Kyfa? I knowsa him, ja? I cannae go check onna him fer ye, ja?"

Turning his attention to the lad, Master Halime says, "stir up the hearth fire and warm yourself then I will have you deliver a message to the Archer."

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<sup>1</sup> Text within quotes shown in **bold** and *italic* are in the Khuzan language.

Thrrid says to Halime after he mentions Archer, "I be uppinnows, I can be delivering whats ya needin, ja?"

Appearing surprised that Thrrid is still there, Master Halime says, "Master Kyfa is a respected member of this community. I have told those that I associate with that he is not to be troubled. When I hear from my...umm...informants that trouble has come to his house it can only be serious trouble.

The khuzdul nods, his thick, matted beard wobbling back and forth.

"After first light, you could serve me by visiting his house and that of his daughter. See if there is anything they need and ask who will care for his apprentices. In asking, do not mention my name as his daughter does not know of our association. She has taken a high moral stance about issues she knows nothing about. Going out in the darkness of this storm will only make things worse – for them and for you."

Seems to have trouble following the conversation completely, but nods regardless. "I'ma there ta help the Berina lady after the morning, ja?" With that he wanders over to the fire to warm himself till the morning light.

"As to Archer...I believe he may be fighting the same cause as the Kyfa's. He may thus have information useful to them. This lad has delivered messages for me before so will be able to go places you cannot, although, I thank you for your offer."

#### 08-AZÚRA -720 TASHAL, KALDOR

2<sup>ND</sup> WATCH [COOL, OVERCAST, NORTHWEST BREEZE, HEAVY RAIN]<sup>7</sup>

Josrel wakes a little early having not been able to fall back to sleep as soundly as he is used to. Quietly gets out of bed, performs his morning ablution and readies himself for another day at the courts. Kisses Lillia lightly on the forehead to wake her and tells her: "I am leaving now for the courts dear. I will see you later after sessions are over." Kisses her again and makes his way out the door.

Upon opening the door realizing its raining Josrel looks up at the sky pulls his hood over his head rubs his hands together as he blows into them. Folds his hands into his sleeves and trudges to the courts.

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The Khuzdual man spends the remainder of the early morning hours in a light sleep, waking up every so often. He rolls over around sunrise with a huge yawn and heaves his bulky frame up off the pallet. "*Sereniel guide me today. These beardless humes are nothing like the Jarin I'm used to.*"

He gathers up his meager belongings and heads up to the main floor of the Spurs. Most likely empty at this early hour, he moves over to warm his hands by the dying fire before heading out the front door.

He makes his way up towards Mangai square, one of the few folk outside as the sun creeps over the horizon. Eventually he makes his way to the house of Berina and Davas he was once at before. He reaches up and heavily bangs on the door.

Roused from a deep sleep by yet more banging from the street, Davas swears quietly to himself and rolls quickly out of bed. He looks out the window to see where it is this time, then with a glance at Berina, he smiles, grabs his clothes and dresses as he goes to answer the door.

Opening the door while putting his arm into his shirt, he looks around the muddy street, before glancing down. "Yes?" With a look of realization, he adds quickly "oh ... it's ... sorry, I have forgotten your name master khuzdul" he says with a shake of his head. Suddenly noticing the water dripping from the man's beard, he steps quickly aside. "My apologies. Please ... come in".

Davas ushers him inside and indicates a chair. "Please sit" he says as he takes another chair. "What can I do for you ... would you like tea?"

If Thrrid says he would like something, Davas does his best to provide it, listening to what he says as he does so.

The short man grumbles something unintelligible as he shuffles in through the door, shaking the rain out from his shirt and beard. "***Blasted rain...snow I can deal with, but rain...pah!***"

Trying to understand Davas' words he nods, "Not a master, ja? Plain just Thrrid be finelike." He shivers once as the door is closed behind him. "I be needing no tea, unlessin you gots some warm mead, that I be taking happy like, ja?"

After Davas' brings whatever, Mead or not, the short fella continues...

"Me assuming that hearing about Master Kyfa you have, ja? I be here to helpin' in any way you be needing."

A quick search through cupboards yeilding no mead, Davas returns and sits. "Jar ... I mean, yes we heard" he says distractedly. He looks embarrassed a moment.

"He lives across the street ... and your knocking was not the first we heard this night'. Davas wipes his face and smiles grimly. "Four soldiers to take one man in his nightshirt ... and on such a night!". Davas leans back and stretches. Turning to Thrrid, he says "... helpin .. g yes, that would be useful, though I know not what to do. Perhaps when Berina comes down? ... perhaps we can decide then. But first, breakfast".

Davas stands and goes to the door to the kitchen, turning back as he is just about to disappear. "Anything you don't like? ... I'm not sure what we have". He gets a slightly puzzled look on his face "... and how did you come to hear of it so early?"

A grin suddenly becomes visible even through the tangled mass of his beard at the mention of breakfast, "Ja...eating be good abouts now. Whatever'n you got be fine by me." He looks about for somewhere to sit before finally settling down on a chair. "I been staying over'n at tha Spurs, and one a' the boys the Master has workin' fer him came a'running in and told us. When I heard, I figured I best be coming here to see if'n I can help, ja?"

Berina says to him: "Thrrid, I know that you don't care to do anything that doesn't involve cutting someone down to size with your axe," a touch of sarcasm tinges her voice, "but I think you might have a bit more interest in doing what I'm going to suggest now than you have shown so far in the things I've asked of you."

## STORY 2 PAGE 4

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The dwarven man follows along with Berina, offering little more than a half shrug, half nod at the mention of chopping folks down with his axe. He then leans forward, listening to Berina as the subject gets more interesting.

Pausing a moment to marshal her thoughts, Berina starts in: "My father, Obras of Kyfa...a weaponcrafter who deals in Khuzan weapons from time to time..., has been arrested on a charge that he attempted to murder a metalcrafter whose shop is around the corner from his own. It's the motive for the crime that should interest you. The metalcrafter...a woman named Uvienela of Dyselsen...apparently got hold of some special kind of Khuzan bellows, and my father supposedly found out about it and nearly killed her trying to get it away from her."

Thrid's brows furrow together in a thick unabrow as he hears this. "If'n she has some Khuzan bellows, I be sure'n they be stolen. I best be gettin there liken now ta take them back, ja?"

Berina continues, "Putting aside the question of where Uvienela acquired this Khuzan bellows, what interests me is, the person who said that it was my father who attacked her. The man's name is Armenton of Soral. He's a pawnbroker and the son of one of the city aldermen, Melin of Soral. While I can't prove it...he'd be swinging from a rope if I could...I'm convinced that Armenton had his own wife murdered so that he could force another woman, with an inheritance, to marry him. That woman was Lillia, whom Halime took under his protection until Josrel could marry her himself. Armenton had her kidnapped, and myself, Davas, and Rikoro tried to get her back before he could force her to marry him. In trying to help Lillia, we made him an enemy, and I think that, aside from wanting the bellows for himself to sell to the highest bidder, he's also looking to get back at me for my part in foiling his plans regarding Lillia."

Thrid seems to have some trouble following some of the conversation, "I not bein in the know 'bout you human marriages and relationsheeps." He pauses, thinking a bit, "Ain' matter ta me who be thinkin' they be ownin' some Khuzan weapon making things, I be takin' them, since I bein' sure they don' be ownin' them unless'n I see some sorta proof like they gots them proper-like."

Berina says, "I don't think Armenton did the actual killing of his wife or attacked Uvienela...he's too much of a coward to do something like that himself..., but he has a hired man-at-arms that he uses to guard his shop. I think the man-at-arms did the two crimes at Armenton's direction. What I want you to do, is to nose around and find out what you can about that man-at-arms. I don't know his name, but the Spurs should be the perfect place to casually ask around about this guy. Will you do this?"

Thrid nods, "I be'in happy ta ask 'round bout the Spurs, but me thinkin' that be faster ta just check these bellows, Ja?" He stands, brushing down his front before saying, "Don' ye be worryin' bout nothin', I be taking care of both this Uvienela and this Armenton."

Berina lowers her head a little, pinches the bridge of her nose between a thumb and forefinger, and sighs.

Raising her head back up and opening her eyes, Berina says: "Uvienela is in the infirmary at the temple of Peoni. She is unconscious, and it remains to be seen whether she'll live or not.

Lord Odasart led me to believe that the authorities have the bellows...keeping it as evidence for the time being I suppose...and that the Khuzan ambassador has demanded it back. If it goes anywhere, it'll go to him."

The Khuzan stands up and offers a polite nod to the woman before heading out into the rain. After a few moments he comes back in with a smirk, "Uhm, where bein' this weaponcraffin' shop?"

In spite of her troubles, Berina chuckles and says: "It's a metalsmith shop, not a weaponcrafters. Go out the door here and go right a few doors to the square. Turn left right away and go down a few doors. It'll be on your left. You can't miss it. I suppose you could talk to Uvienela's workers, but I'm sure everybody will be nervous and on edge. If you learn anything, let me know."

\* \* \*

While breaking their fast in the morning, Mistress Bae tells Isiel, "You can have the day off today as I will have to be in court all day. I was first finder for an attempted murder. And before you ask, you do not have permission to work in here unsupervised."

Isiel nods gravely at her instructions, and takes a few of his belongings with him as he heads out for the day. He pulls the cloak tighter around his shoulders to try and keep dry, and decides to seek out Berina at her home, since he had promised to stop by from time to time, but she has not been home of late.

He finds nobody at the townhouse and decides they will probably return in the evening for dinner.

With a glance at the dark sky, Isiel heads to the inn where Berina told him his cousin had once worked. There, he nurses a drink [OOC: hopefully some kind of beverage he is familiar with, or possibly homesick for] in a dry, warm place, and watches the humans, listening to their voices, their stories and news.

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"Everyone please rise," announces the bailiff. "The civil court is now in session. Judge Shotro of Quinbor presiding. Speaker for the prosecution is Alderman Geldane of Dysel. Speaker for the defense is Alderman Melin of Soril. Bailiff is Sir Gorvan Nevan. Court recorder is Haliki Josrel of Aswain."

"Be seated," says the Judge as he sits down, "Bailiff, what is our first case?"

"Master Weaponcrafter Obras of Kyfa has been accused of the attempted murder of Master Metalsmith Uvlenela of Dyselsen. The first case is an informal inquiry to determine if there is sufficient evidence for Master Kyfa to be bound over for trial before Chief Justice Pesera of Hendel."

"Proceed," says the judge.

"Our purpose is twofold," says Alderman Geldane, "show that a crime has been committed and show that Master Kyfa has motive and opportunity to commit the crime. I call the first finder, Alderman Bae of Rysten."

"Alderman Bae of Rysten, please come forward," announces the bailiff."

When Mistress Rysten stands up, the Prosecutor says, "Please tell us, in your own words, what transpired last evening."

"I was going to visit Mistress Dyselsen to commission her to make several tools for me," Mistress Rysten says. "When I arrived at her shop, a cloaked and hooded figure pushed me aside as he was leaving. I entered and found Mistress Rysten struck down. Quickly checking that she was still alive, I heard her say, 'The Khuzan Bellows' before she fell unconscious."

"Rushing to the door to raise the hue-and-cry, I found pawnbroker Armenton of Soril in the street. He told me that the man who bumped into me was the weaponcrafter Obras of Kyfa and that he had dropped a large wooden mechanism in his haste to leave. Armenton then fetched the watch and arranged for Master Kyfa being taken into custody."

Berina is standing at the back of the hall near the entrance. At the mention of Armenton's involvement, she grips one of the doorposts to hold herself in check.

"Can you tell us what the wooden mechanism is?" asks the Prosecutor.

"In my work I use a bellows to keep the fire hot. This mechanism could be a bellows but, if it is, it would keep the fire very hot. A normal bellows heats the fire then allows it to cool as it is prepared for the next stroke. The 'bellows' in question has handles on each end and would heat the fire both on the stroke and on the backstroke. Possibly even hot enough to melt iron."

In spite of her agitation over her father's difficulties, as Mistress Bae describes the bellows, Berina's eyes go wide, and she mutters quietly to herself: "Incredible!"

The Prosecutor says, "The Adzamere ambassador has already stated that this mechanism has been stolen from the Khuzdul and is not to be examined. As it is known that Master Obras of Kyfa sometimes sells Khuzdul weapons, we believe his motive was to retrieve this bellows. Master Uvlenela of Dyselsen has been taken to the Temple of Peoni to be cared for but has not recovered consciousness."

The Prosecutor sits down and the judge asks, "Alderman Soril do you have any questions or statements at this time."

"No your honor. Master Kyfa has, of course, pleaded not guilty but we have no defense prepared in such a sort time."

"Since all cases of this seriousness are handled by the Royal Court," says Judge Quinbor, "I declare that Master Obras of Kyfa be kept in the goal until he can appear before that court when it next meets on the 20<sup>th</sup> of Azúra. Master Soril, notify his kin so they may provide for his food and other necessities."

Berina walks up in front of Judge Quinbor and says: "Your Honor, I am Berina of Kyfa. Obras is my father. If Your Honor will grant me the privilege, I will see to my father's food and other needs."

"Granted," he says. "That is as it should be."

"Thank you, Your Honor. At what times may I visit my father to see to his needs?"

The Judge answers, "That is up to the goaler but I believe the usual time for such things is the start of the fifth watch."

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While everyone in the townhouse is breaking their fast, Qisse tells Rikoro, "Ee mentioned yesterday dey ee were lakin' vor work. I wuz talking to a neighbor and she 'eard dey de Mercantylers' Guild wud be very interested een a translator vor khuzan. Dey sed dey 'ave niver avore 'eard uv a 'uman who naw'd de language."

In Qisse's direction Rikoro offers a content smile and nods his head appreciatively, "You have my sincere thanks Qisse. I shall look into the matter as I do need steady employ."

After wiping his mouth free of crumbs, Rikoro turns to Berina and Davas stating, "I imagine the both of you will be looking into the matter that occurred with your father last evening. I doubt you need me, but I am at your disposal. Should you need anything what so ever I will be over at the Mercantylers' Guild following up on Qisse's welcome information."

Rikoro rises from the table, leaning unnecessarily on his staff and makes his way for the door heading first to the Save-k'nor temple for morning ablution and following that to the guild hall.

Davas nods and waves his thanks, his mouth still full. A little later, he turns to Berina. "Yes ... what should we do? Have you any ideas?" he asks.

Berina says, "Well, I'm going to ask our Khuzan 'friend' Thridd to nose around and see what he can find out about Armenton's hired man-at-arms. Did I tell you that it was Armenton who accused my father of this crime? If anything bad happens to my father over this, I swear that Armenton will face a reckoning, the likes of which will have the bards singing about it for centuries." and the look in Berina's eyes is enough to send shivers down Davas' spine.

Davas' features fix in a grim look. "No" he says quietly "you did not say who accused him ... and now we are sure, if we were not before, that this is revenge. Or an attempt at it". He smiles, though it lightens his look only slightly. "Fear not. The innocent will be set free and the guilty ... the guilty will be exposed. Yes, now it is personal ... and Armenton will find out ...". Turning quickly to Berina, he says quizzically "so, what are the rules for feuding in the city?"

"Well, it happens, but I think you'll have to ask Rikoro about the specifics. I think it would constitute a breach of the King's Peace, so unless it gets even worse, I suggest that you do nothing for the time being."

Davas grins. "So ... rather like the country then ... don't get caught?"

He shakes his head. "OK, let's do nothing ... for now. But this had better end well".

Berina says, "The court has appointed Armenton's father to speak as my father's defense! Needless to say, I'm going to see if Rikoro's father will take the case. I've got to see to it that my father is fed and his other needs are taken care of while he's in gaol. I've also got to provide direction for father's apprentices

## STORY 2 PAGE 6

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and try to keep his business going during all of this. I'll need to find time to look into this to try to prove my father's innocence. And on top of all that, I still need to go to work every day...I can't take anymore time off." She slumps a little.

Obviously outraged, Davas splutters a moment. "What?" he almost yells. "Surely someone so close to the accuser cannot be expected not to be biased ... can they? Who does the appointing?"

Subsiding a little, Davas leans back. "So ... it falls to me to find what I may then? Very well. Perhaps a word to Halime might discover what might be done? ... after all, he helped us more than we did ourselves during the Lillia thing."

Berina says, "I would like you to go see Josrel and Lillia. Since Armenton is involved, they need to be warned to be on their guard. Also, the temple of Save K'nor comes by a lot of information about a lot of things. If they can, I'd like Josrel and Lillia to see if they can find out anything about this mess."

Davas says, "Of course. We must do so at once".

Berina says, "My darling, I need you more than ever right now. Hold me for a little while."

With a warm smile, Davas opens his arms and does so.

### **08-AZÚRA -720 TASHAL, KALDOR**

3<sup>RD</sup> WATCH [COOL, OVERCAST, NORTHWEST BREEZE, HEAVY RAIN]<sup>7</sup>

When Rikoro is granted a meeting with the Mercantylers Guildmaster, he is told, "We can indeed offer you a job as a khuzan interpreter. You will be paid 13d per tenday and you will live at the guildhall in the cellar. The workday is ten hours, during the last two hours of the second watch and all of the third and fourth watches. You will have the fifteenth of each month off plus five other days off which you must specify in advance." When he describes the living conditions, Rikoro realizes that they are much better than what he is used to.

After listening quietly to the Mercantylers Guildmaster, Rikoro inquires, "The offer sounds quite good. My only question is would there be any change in pay should I choose to reside elsewhere or is it necessary to stay within the guildhall?"

"Most extraordinary," he answers, "No, I am afraid that will not do. We cannot be chasing you around town whenever we need an interpreter. You can be away during the time we have meals, which is the first couple of hours of the second watch and all of the fifth watch, but the rest of the time you will have to be available. If you are away during those times, you will have to make your own arrangements for meals as we all eat at the same times."

Without hesitation Rikoro says, "I understand. Well then consider the position filled. When would I begin?"

\* \* \*

After the hearing, Berina goes to her father's shop and lets Obras' apprentices know that he will be unavailable for a while. She tells them to deal with as much of Obras' workload as they are able to do, and that she will return at closing time to try to deal with as much of her father's business as they are unable to.

"Oh, no mam," one of them tells her, "we are never allowed to touch his tools."

Pinching the bridge of her nose in exasperation, Berina says: "You do have your own tools, do you not?" She hurries on before they can answer: "Work on what you can, using your own tools, and I will do what I can, including making excuses to those customers who will have to wait a bit longer than they had expected to."

One of the lads begins to cry and the other says, "We have not our own tools and we cannot do weaponcrafting. We are only apprentices." He looks like he expects Berina to hit him.

Berina's look of exasperation turns to one of astonishment. "You mean to tell me that my father hasn't started to teach you to make the tools you'll need for this craft?" She gently hugs the crying apprentice, and says as she dries his tears with a sleeve of her shirt: "Hush now, I'm not going to punish you. You've done nothing to be punished for." Looking from one to the other, she asks: "How long have each of you been apprenticed to my father?"

"Just a year, mum," one of them tells her.

Berina says, "Well then, here's what we'll do. First, I want the two of you to make sure that the shop and the living quarters are clean and neat. By this time, I'm assuming that you know where my father prefers to store his tools, fuel, and raw materials. Go ahead and put any of those things away if you find them somewhere else...yes, even my father's tools." and she smiles at them. "The tools of this trade are durable things...you're not going to harm them just putting them away. If you don't know where something goes, just lay it neatly on the workbench."

"After you're done cleaning, wait for the forge to cool down and clean it out. Once it's all cleaned out, lay in a fresh charge of fuel but don't light it."

"Later, I'll start teaching the two of you to make a basic forging hammer. I'm not a highly skilled toolmaker like Mistress Uvienela," here Berina winces slightly "but together we should be able to make a couple of serviceable hammers to get you started. As time goes by, you both will gain in skill and be able to make better at a later date."

"When I take father his meals, I'll ask him what he wants you to be doing, or how he wants me to direct your activities."

"Finally, you're to take your meals at my townhouse across the street. Qissie, the housekeeper, will no doubt grumble about all the extra mouths to feed," here Berina smiles broadly "but she's a big softy inside. If there is any food in the living quarters here, take it all to the townhouse with you. If you offer to help Qissie out with some of the chores around the house, she'll warm to you quick enough."

"If we all keep our wits about us, we'll come out of this mess just fine. Ok, get started on the work I've given you to do, and I'll see you at dinner."

Berina then goes to the townhouse and finds Qissie. "Qissie, I need you to feed my father's two apprentices for the duration of this current trouble. I've told them that they're to take their meals here. How much extra money will you need to buy food for

them? And while I'm at it, I need to know how much extra will be needed so that I can take meals to my father."

"I assume dey weel be eating what us do," Quisse answers, "right now bait costs be averaging 51d per month per person. 'ow far ahead do ee want to budget vor?"

Berina says, "I hope to have proved my father's innocence soon, but in case I don't, the trial is in twelve days, so let's plan for three more people for the twelve days."

Qisse appears to do some calculations in her head and says, "Dey weel come to 62d."

Berina gets the 62d and gives it to her.

Once Qisse has named a sum, Berina will get it and give it to her.

She then goes to work, and when she get's an opportunity to do so, tells Lord Odasart everything that has transpired. At some point in the conversation, Berina repeats what Mistress Bae had to say about the bellows, and say: "Milord, if Mistress Bae is correct about the bellows, such a device could revolutionize metalworking and armor crafting! I could easily see why someone would be willing to kill for such a thing. Nevertheless, I know my father would never stoop that low."

"That may sound like a wondrous mechanism," he says, "but if it is the secret of Khuzdul weapons and armor, trying to examine or take it could easily start a war. I would advise you to leave it be."

"I understand, Milord. We've trouble enough without a war as well." She gets a child-caught-misbehaving look, and says: "Mistress Bae's description has given me an idea about how to duplicate the effect, but that's for another day. Right now, proving my father's innocence is the first priority."

"You will do no such thing," Lord Odasart says frowning. "While I let you play around at metalwork, you are no guild metalsmith. You start trying to improve on metalwork or even selling your work, and you will be brought up on charges of breach of guild privilege. Even a master smith, such as your father, would have to get approval from the guild before he attempted any such thing and that is highly unlikely – our guilds honor their clan privileges as they do ours."

Berina say, "Yes, Milord."

With a thoughtful expression, Berina says: "If the bellows can do as Mistress Bae says...and I trust that she knows what she's talking about...then anyone who makes their living working metal in one manner or other, would have motive for the attack on Mistress Uvienela...including a Khuzdul trying to get it back. Then there's the matter of how Mistress Uvienela came by the thing in the first place."

"First the murder and kidnapping, now this...and in both cases, Armenton of Soral is involved. I swear, one day I hope to see him swinging at the end of a rope!" Berina pauses for a moment, then says: "Pardon me Milord, that last comment was uncalled for."

Getting a weary look on her face, she continues: "After I do my daily tasks here, make sure my father's needs are met while he's in goal, oversee his apprentices, and try to prove his innocence, I don't know when I'll have time to sleep." and she gives him a tired, sheepish grin.

"I am sorry about that," Lord Odasart says, "but if you are asking for more time off, I am afraid I cannot allow it. You have had too many days off already."

Berina says, "Oh, I understand, Milord. I wasn't asking for more time off...I can't afford it. You've already been more than generous to me, and I thank you for that."

Berina asks: "Milord, a thought has occurred to me. Tashal is filling up with many of the nobility and their retainers. Feeding them all has got to be a big job. My husband-to-be Davas is a good hunter. Is there any way he could be legally warranted to hunt for the table of yourself or others of the nobility over the winter?"

"Not on his own. Not without on some lord's demesne or another," he says. "I could probably arrange for him to go out with others for the same amount I am paying you. That is 157d per month if I remember right."

Berina's eyes widen for a moment, then she says: "That sounds very good. Thank you Milord. I'll tell him about it, and I think you can expect him to come see you about this offer...or should he just see your steward about it?"

"I will have my chamberlain make the arrangements as soon as Davas contacts him," he replies.

\* \* \*

Thrid heads to the metalsmith's. Ducking into the shop, he peers around, "casing" the joint as it were. When someone notices him or asks him what he wants he simply states, "I be here'n to take back tha bellows that'n yer master gained improperly."

A young man points out an ordinary bellows and says, "That is my master's bellows and she is no thief."

Thrid begins to look through metalsmith's shop regardless of their complaints to see if he can find the "bellows" or any other items that appear to be of Khuzan make.

The man protests, "You cannot just come in here and take what you please! I will have the watch on you!" but Thrid finds nothing that looks of Khuzan make."

When done, Thrid tells them if they have an issue, they can check with him at the Spurs. After that, he returns to the townhouse and reports what he found.

Thrid ignores the protests and continues to look about. Finding nothing of interest, he gives the man his best "Stink Eye" before stalking out of the building.

Thrid returns to the townhouse to inform Berina and the others of not finding anything.

# STORY 2 PAGE 8

## 08-AZÚRA -720 TASHAL, KALDOR

5<sup>TH</sup> WATCH [COLD, OVERCAST, NORTHWEST GALE, HEAVY RAIN]<sup>9</sup>

When Davas comes home from his job at the Spurs, Berina says to him: "Davas, my love, good news! Lord Odasart says he can arrange for you to hunt with others for 157d per month. I recommend that you take him up on that. It's a lot more than Halime is paying you, and I'll wager that you'll like it a lot better than mucking out stables."

Kissing her quickly, he says quietly "it is, and I will. You are a marvel are you not?" he quips, kissing her again and just gazing at her for a while.

Looking up in surprise, Davas says quickly "really? That sounds ... great. Is there a catch? ... and I don't want to leave Halime lacking help, particularly after what he has done for us".

More slowly, he adds "although ... that is a great deal of money ..."

Given her worries about her father, Berina is mostly interested in cuddling for the time being [OOC: Of course, Berina's definition of cuddling, tends to be a bit different than everyone else's idea of what cuddling ought to be<g>].

Being well aware that Berina may need some 'distraction', Davas will do what he can.

Gathering up a meal's-worth of dinner, Berina says: "Save me some to eat later...I have to get a meal to my father at the gaol. I'll be back shortly." As she goes to open the door, there's a knock. She opens the door and says: "Come on in, boys." and her father's two apprentices come in [OOC: See next post.]. "Everybody, introduce yourselves." and she goes out.

As he puts some food on a platter and takes it to the kitchen to try to keep it warm for her, he calls over his shoulder "... I am Davas. Are you wanting food?"

Assuming they are, he finds what he can for them with a single sigh and shake of his head, grinning the while.

\* \* \*

Berina goes across the street to her father's shop and up to his bedroom. She gets a clean change of clothes and any toiletries her father might need. Leaving the shop, she heads off to the gaol.

After getting checked through security and ushered in to where Obras is being kept, she says to him: "Father! I've brought you dinner and a clean change of clothes. I don't know how long they'll let me talk to you, so I'll get right to it. I intend to get Litigant Drelin to take your case...I don't trust the Sorals to properly defend you. I'm seeing that your apprentices get fed. Is there anything specific you want them doing?"

"Nothing particular," he tells her. "During the first year, an apprentice does odd jobs, such as cleaning, and they watch me work. I am probably kinder than some masters and harsher than others but what is most important now is that they be cared for and not frightened more than necessary. If they tell their clans about wild rumors about me, their apprenticeship would be ended and I would have difficulty getting others."

Berina says, "OK, I've already got them cleaning up the shop and living quarters. I'm going to teach them to make their first simple tools, starting with a basic forging hammer. This will keep them busy and out of mischief until you can resume their instruction. I've already arraigned for them to take their meals at the townhouse."

With a sigh, Obras says, "That will not do at all. I never was able to impress upon you the importance and power of the guild. The importance is that they regulate the quality and prices so that a smith's income is directly related to the quality of their workmanship and we need not spend all our time making inferior products and charging outrageous prices for them. As to the power of the guilds...assume for the moment that they caught you teaching, you who have had no formal training and are not part of the guild. You would be in trouble for breach of guild privilege, I would be in trouble because they would assume I taught you, and they would withdraw their support for my current problems. If they discovered any of the nobility that knew of you doing smith work and allowed it, they would immediately stop the crafting of any weapons in Tashal until you were sufficiently punished. Now imagine all of the nobles coming into Tashal for the winter and finding they could get no weapons all because of you. If that does not give you nightmares, it should. Have the lads do the cleaning and housework they are already doing, and leave the rest be."

Berina says, "OK father, I'll refrain from teaching them anything to do with work governed by the guild. Since I'll be paying to feed them, can I have them do chores for my housekeeper?"

"Certainly," says Obras. "Keep them busy, by all means."

After he's answered, she asks: "Should I be talking to someone in the guild on your behalf?"

"Murder is a felony," he says, "and they would have no judgment in the matter. However, they do finance the legal defense of their members – the only problem is that, me being in the same guild as the victim, any monies would have to be matched for the prosecution. In either case, you should find out from them if any funds are available to match what the other side has requested."

Berina says, "It's too late to look into that today, so I'll do it tomorrow on my way to work. The Drelins won't come cheap, so I'll need all the help I can get. If you need anything...like changes of clothes...just let me know when I bring your meals, and I'll bring it with the next meal. I'll also keep you informed about how things are progressing." Kissing him on the cheek, she says: "I love you father. I'm going to get things set right. I'll see you tomorrow."

He says, "I love you to and I know you will do what is right. I will stay with only the one set of clothes as I want not the stench of the goal on all my clothes. As it is, I will probably have to burn these when I get out and get new ones. Fair thee well, my daughter."

Berina takes Obras' nightgown with her when she leaves. When she gets back to the townhouse, if the apprentices are still there, she says: "When you go back to your room at the shop, take this with you. Tomorrow, see that it gets washed."

"Yes, mum," they reply.

Finally settling in next to Davas...and eating whatever has been saved for her...she says: "By the Gods! This is almost as bad as having to fight with the undead." and she snuggles up to him.

Starting visibly, Davas simply says "no ... no it isn't ... though it is much harder to work out who your enemies are ... before you deal to them".

He grins. "And next time you invite someone for food, you really should tell Qisse. She really is starting to use that look a lot ... you know ... that 'when will they ever learn' one? I will have a talk to her tomorrow and try to make sure she is ... happy".

\* \* \*

During the nights meal Rikoro informs the group about his position, "I have been hired on by the Mercantylers Guild as a translator. They have had me begin right away. It feels good to have steady employ, but unfortunately it means I can no longer reside here. I inquired, but they prefer to keep me close. As such tonight will be my last meal here. I have paid up rent until the fifteenth so I imagine if you require another tenant that will be enough time to find another. I'll be sure to keep in contact though as our time together has been...eventful to say the least."

Clapping him on the shoulder, Davas says "excellent news. And yes, do stay in touch".

Berina speaks to Rikoro: "What sort of hours does your father keep? The Court has appointed Melin of Soril as my father's defense. His son Armenton is the accuser!" Berina's anger is almost physically discernable. "I need to get someone who will actually defend my father."

Rikoro's face twists in confusion as he listens to Berina then offers, "The accuser and defense are of the same clan? That seems highly suspicious and clearly there are conflicting interests here. I'm surprised the Court even allowed it. We can certainly try with my father or uncle. But we should head there now more so because they would need time to prepare if they accept then anything else."

Berina says, "Well then, let's get to it. And congratulations on the job. You and Thridd should have some interesting conversations!" and she smiles.

Once finished Rikoro thanks Qisse deeply for her aid in finding the job.

Josrel, upon entering the townhouse, greets all in the house. He turns to Berina, offers a comforting hug, and says: "I was completely taken by today's proceedings at court today. I see that we must have really gotten to Armenton now that he is going after you and your family. Is there anything I can do to help you in this?"

Berina says, "Josrel, I saw that you were taking the notes at court this morning. You know that Armenton is involved in this somehow. You and Lillia need to be on your guard. If you are able...without betraying confidences..., I would appreciate it if you and Lillia could keep an ear open for anything regarding this trumped up charge against my father that happens to pass into the temple."

Josrel says, "Of course Berina we will help you in any way we can." Pausing and cringing a bit. "Of course you know that as a member of the court there are some things I may not be able to discuss with you. But, if you are not in court during any of the proceedings I will of course tell you of the happenings."

Berina says, "I understand. When I said not 'betraying confidences', I meant it to apply to any confidence, not just those from the temple."

Josrel smiles and nods as Berina acknowledges Josrel meaning.

Changing topics a little, Berina says: "Last I heard, Uviena was still alive, but unconscious. She was taken to the infirmary at the temple of Peoni. I'm going to have to stop by on my way to work and see how she's doing. If she regains consciousness, she could tell us who really did this." Looking at Josrel, she adds: "I'd appreciate it if you and Lillia could stop by and see her yourselves. I hope she is under guard, because whoever really did it might try to finish the job...and don't tell me that nobody would dare to commit a murder in the temple itself. Anyone who would stoop as low as they already have, would have no compunction about killing her wherever she was. After all, if she wakes up, she would be able to point the finger at the real assailant."

"Of course Berina..." narrowing his eyes as he says: "Who knows what might pop into my head as I check in with her. Hopefully the Good Priest of Peoni have not disposed of her clothing that she came in with."

Josrel excuses himself from their evening meal, heads back to his townhouse and has dinner with Lillia. During dinner Josrel says to Lillia: "Dear it seems our friend Berina is in some trouble. Well not Berina herself but her father has been arrested for murder." Josrel pauses: "And it seems that Armenton of Soril is involved." Josrel growls Armenton's name as he says it. "Do you think when you are at the Temple that you could have an open ear to any information that may be floating around there about this matter? I don't think much will be heard but any help will be grateful." Chewing on some food. "I think I will stop at the Temple on the way home tomorrow so I may be a little late in coming home."

"Yes, I can do that," she answers, "but, like you, I doubt if it will be discussed. They are more interested in the dealings between countries than they are with the dealings between people."

Josrel spends the rest of the evening with Lillia discussing the days events until they retire to bed and cuddle in each others arms. [OOC: wink wink]

### **09-AZÚRA -720 TASHAL, KALDOR**

2<sup>ND</sup> WATCH [COLD, OVERCAST, NORTH STORM WINDS]<sup>11</sup>

#### **Rikoro**

After breaking his fast with hot, buttered cheat (whole wheat bread), sausage, eggs, gruel, small ale and an apple, Rikoro is asked to attend a meeting with the Master of the Mercantylers Hall (Korein of Cuke), a representative of the Metalsmith's guild (Vaber of Kateris) and the Khuzdul Ambassador (Inmatan of Dhuzak).

# STORY 2 PAGE 10

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Rikoro greets everyone as they are introduced with a humble expression and a bow of his head.

Ambassador Inmatan asks Rikoro (in Khuzan), *“I understand that you speak my language. I was not aware that there had been any humans taught the noble tongue. How did you come about learning it?”*<sup>1</sup>

At first Rikoro seems to struggle listening to the Ambassador, nodding his head slightly a few times, then he pauses as if formulating a response in his best albeit limited Khuzan, "It is a long ..." Rikoro stops to search for the right word "Tale. I learnt in Gelime. From two Khuzdul. Not willing. At first I heard words and pieced together .." Rikoro again breaks to think "Meaning. After time I introduced. They were interes.." Faltering and changing his word, "Impressed a human could learn. They made me an oath not to teach other humans. I took it. And they showed me more."

Switching back to Harnic Rikoro continues on, "Apologies Ambassador I'm better at listening then speaking as that's how I learned. Needless to say it's been a rarity to exercise it since returning so I should be able to ease back in with time. If I wasn't clear enough I can try again in Harnic."

Master Korein addresses the group, "My informants have told me of the attempted murder of a metalsmith and of the weaponsmith who has been arrested. They also tell me that Rikoro knows one of the weaponcrafter's kin and that they have recently been visited by a Khuzdul. With everyone's approval, I would like to suggest that Rikoro be the one to question the Khuzdul community in Tashal and follow the path of the Khuzdul bellows since it arrived in Tashal."

"That is acceptable to me," says Master Vaber. "He can start with the Khuzdul Smith who brought it here, a Master Khmaain of Pakath. Master Khmaain has recently petitioned our guild to be allowed to set up another weaponsmithy."

"It is acceptable to me as well," says the Ambassador (in Harnic). "If the Khuzdul that has visited is a friend of the family, I would suggest he be asked to accompany Rikoro since most of the Khuzdul community will not trust a human. Especially one who speaks Khuzan...they will think him a spy."

After everyone has spoken the newly appointed translator speaks up, "For the record the Khuzdul's name is Thriid of Tynath. I shall seek him out at his place of employ and see if I can commission his aid. My only question is where might I find Master Khmaain?"

Master Vaber says, "The last I heard, he is staying at the Tower Inn, next to the Heru Gate."

Rikoro nods once and then informs the group of his departure to the Spurs Inn in order to begin the investigation.

Arriving at the tavern, Rikoro steps inside and looks around for someone who is employed there or for Thriid himself.

## Isiel

After he has broke his fast with horse bread (mixed grain bread), gruel and small ale, Mistress Bae tells Isiel, "I am concerned about this business with Master Obras. I have known him to be a good man and I believe not his being involved. However, as

first finder and alderman, I cannot be seen to be involved in the investigation? Perhaps, you can help his kin and keep me informed. I will give you leave to be away and I will continue to pay you. What say you?"

With a slightly bemused expression, Isiel nods. "I am good for to help Mistress Berina, but are not thinking for paying me, if there is no work," he says slowly. "Is like day off?"

"Yes, I suppose it is," she answers, "thank you for your help."

With another nod, Isiel smiles. "Many welcome." Once more he collects a few personal belongings for the day and heads over to the townhouse.

## Thriid

After Thriid breaks his fast with maslin (wheat and rye bread), porridge and small ale, Master Halime tells him, "I heard about your visit to the metalsmith yesterday. That sort of thing simply will not do. Think not that you are above the law and, you being arrested for theft will help not their cause. If you want something acquired, let me know and I can make it available without a lot of fuss."

The dwarf scowls into his beard, but merely finishes his food.

"Now, if I can still trust you," continues Master Halime, "I would like you to deliver a message to Mistress Kyfa. Tell her I would like her to come as soon as possible. I have someone she should meet who has information that should prove useful to her investigation. However, this person is in considerable danger and cannot reveal his identity in daylight."

Thriid nods, "A'ight, I be takin' message for you." He pushes away from the table and offers a polite nod before heading out into the streets.

Immediately buffered by the storm winds he grumbles, "**These north winds are a foul omen that the northlands are not happy with this city. Sereniel watch over me till I can return to Habe...**"

He makes his way to Berina and Davas' townhouse and bangs on the door.

## Josrel

Josrel breaks his fast with Lillia and she serves him havercakes (barley bread), porridge and small ale.

Afterwards, when he arrives at the court to start his day, Judge Shotro pulls him aside and says, "It is possible that the Kyfa's will want to retain their own counsel. If they do and you verify his identity with the Kyfa's then I want you to communicate with the litigant about what happens here and keep me informed of what the litigant says and asks. But you are not to divulge the proceedings of the court with anyone else. Do you understand?"

Looking a bit surprised at the Judge. "I understand that what is said in court stays in court. But I don't see why I would have any reason to communicate with the Kyfa's Litigant without you or another Judge present. But, in the event that such an occurrence happens you will have all rights and access to the recordings I have taken." Josrel adds "I am a servant of the courts recording the events of the trials."

"You would have reason to because I just asked you to," says the Judge, "I have not the time to bring some litigant up to speed on a case he has taken on in the middle."

Bowing his head to the Judge, Josrel says, "As you wish your Eminence. All information given to the new Litigant will be recorded in the court journals and relayed to you as well as the Plaintiff's Litigant."

### **Berina, Davas**

As soon as Berina smells the morning meal, she again vacates her stomach of last night's meal. This time she is able to regain her composure after only an hour. [+1 Condition]

As Berina rushes from the room, Davas follows, obviously concerned. He holds her as she heaves and comforts her as she recovers. After a while, he says quietly "love, this is not good. We must get you to physician ... as soon as you are able".

As the heaving subsides, Berina smiles up at Davas weakly and says: "It's not as bad as it was yesterday, so I want to give it a few more days to see how it goes. It may be that the smell of the mud of the street merely triggered the first bout of this, and had nothing else to do with it."

Davas nods, undecided but prepared to do what she wants.

She pauses, then says: "It may be morning sickness, my love. It's possible that I'm pregnant with our first child. A trip to a physician will probably tell for sure, but if I'm only sick in the morning... and not at any other time during the day...and if I miss my next period...then we'll know." She hugs him and says: "Let me rinse the bile out of my mouth, and I'll give you a proper kiss, then we can eat."

His mouth hangs open a moment, then shuts and he grins, then frowns and shakes his head. "So soon ... I think not ... but ..." he grins again. "if it is so, then ... well ... even more reason to look after you".

For them to break their fast, Qisse serves horse bread (mixed grain bread), gruel and small ale.

Looking the worse for the morning's exertions, Berina says: "Thank you, Qisse."

"Pardon me vor axing, miss," says Qisse, "bit better way I be lukin vor a midwife to examine ee?"

Berina says, "If you know of a good one, then by all means have her come see me and check me out. Thank you, Qisse."

\* \* \*

Hearing the pounding on the door, Berina goes over and opens it. Seeing Thridd standing there, she says "Well...good morning." and starts to laugh at the thoroughly soaked Khuzdul. "Please, come in and dry yourself by the fire." and she stands aside to let him enter.

Berina gets Thridd an ale and says: "What brings you to my door at this hour? Good news, I hope."

The Khuzan man steps into the townhouse as the winds almost push him in the door. After he's in and steps to the fire for a moment of warmth he turns to Berina and says, "The man I be

workin' for, down at Inn of Spurs be wantin' to speak with you, ja?" He claps his hands together, rubbing them vigorously to warm them. "Halime be saying there be someone you be meeting to be helping you with your..." He seems to pause as if searching for the proper word. "'vestigatin, ja, that be it, your 'vestigatin. Somepin about this people not be wanting to come out in light of day." He shrugs. "I be takin' you back there when you be readylike, ja?"

Berina answers, "If we leave right now, I can do this and still get to work in a timely manner." Turning to Davas, she says: "Love, are you up to going in to your job a little early? I'd like both of you with me on this. Let me get my robe." She runs and gets her robe and returns. "Let's go." and proceeds out the door.

The man watches idly as Berina gets a robe, "Twis a bit windy like out, ya might be wantin' something more substantial than that." Whatever Berina decides, Thridd leads her (and possibly Davas) out to the Spurs.

Nodding, Davas scans the room, tidies what he can while waiting for Berina, then follows them out.

\* \* \*

When you arrive at the Spurs, Master Halime greets you, "Welcome. I am glad that you have come. The person I want you to meet is below, but I am afraid I will have to ask you to wear hoods while I take you to him."

The dwarf is about to protest, but decides to not and goes along.

Berina arches one eyebrow and says: "Very well."

A surprised look is replaced by one of grim determination. Then Davas nods once.

If you do not object, he leads you to the cellar, has all of you put on dark hoods that you cannot see through. He has each person put their hand on the shoulder of the one before them. He then leads the first person in line around the room a few times and then halts. You hear the thud of what you assume is a trap door hitting a wall. Halime tells you he will carefully lead each of you to a ladder going down. When you have all navigated the ladder, you hear the trap door being closed and a lantern being lit. Halime tells you that you can remove your hoods.

The dwarf attempts to remember the approximate direction and steps they take to the "trap door" just in case.

You find yourself in an underground tunnel with a packed earth floor and stone walls. At a table in the middle of the room sits a man of average build, with black hair, hazel eyes and dressed in rawhide.

"If you will permit, I will quickly tell my tale and you can determine if it is of help to you or not. I am Alegur of Thatain and I came to Tashal several months ago with companions, some of whom I believe you have met. There was Mobon of Falen, Jak of Odasart and Jethrul of Krarisen."

Berina nods at the names.

Alegur continues, "On our journey here, we came across a dead body that was the spitting image of Jethrul. From that time on we had several people who claimed they knew Jethrul. Some of

## STORY 2 PAGE 12

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those people, I was later to learn, were of the Yellow Hand, cult followers of Ilvir."

At the mention of Ilvir, Berina's attention becomes more focused.

Davas looks up noting Berina's interest and his face becomes grim on hearing of the 'extra' Jethrul.

Alegur says, "A couple of weeks after we arrived here, I met and later married, a woman named Yuilina of Coralartak, the daughter of an innkeeper. The rest of my companions continued on to Kiban to finish their mission and I stayed behind."

The reference to Kiban causes an intake of breath by Berina.

Alegur says, "The Yellow Hand lost track of Jethrul and, in their rage, captured and tortured me to have me tell them what I knew."

Here he pauses a moment to compose himself and continues, "I knew nothing so they killed my wife as a warning for me to stay out of their business. It had the opposite effect as now I was determined to cause their downfall.

"Since that time, I have been in hiding and I have been aided in my quest by Master Halime. I will admit that Master Halime has many dealings that are outside the law and that he can be a bit ruthless, but he is not a killer and he remembers his friends.

"The same cannot be said of Master Melin of Soral, who has no compunctions about killing and would stab his own kin in the back if it suited his needs. I know his son Armenton is terrified of him. However, I am not asking you like Armenton as he is just as evil.

"I have come to learn that Master Soral is trying to create a criminal organization in competition with the Lia Kavair and he is using the Yellow Hand to do his dirty work.

"One of the Yellow Hand's best assassin's is named Eveuf of Gandevidor. I believe it was he who killed Armenton's wife and assaulted the metalsmith. The problem is that I have no proof of Master Soril's involvement and I cannot go against Eveuf of Gandevidor on my own. I believe Master Soril is beyond our reach, as he is very influential, but with you help, we can deal with Eveuf and thwart Master Soril's current plans."

As Alegur relates the details of the plot, Berina's eyes grow wider and wider. When he finishes, Berina looks at Davas and whispers: "Holdan?"

Still grim, Davas nods once at Berina, then listens to her speak.

Berina returns her attention to Alegur and Halime, and says: "I think you have stumbled onto something bigger than you realize. Recently, we were involved in an 'incident' at Holdan manor. I don't believe I'm at liberty to divulge details, but almost certainly Ilvirians were involved, and it resulted in...among other things...the death of the original lord of the manor and that of a good knight of Larani. Also, from hints that Mobon made, the business in Kiban involved Ilvirians as well."

"Master Soril may think he's using the Ilvirians, but I submit that the reverse is true, and that the whole kingdom is at risk. You may think that I'm indulging in wild flights of fancy, but I've experienced too much to write it off as co-incidence."

Focusing on Halime, Berina says: "I believe that there are forces at work that are trying to bring down the kingdom. It's one thing to take the nobility out by getting them to fighting amongst themselves, but as long as the Lia Kavair exists, the Ilvirians' plans are at risk."

"Master Halime, I think that you need to alert your counterparts throughout the kingdom to this threat, if you haven't done so already. Have them keep on the lookout and be ready to act at the slightest sign of what I've been talking about."

Wincing at the first mention of Lia Kavair, Davas shakes his head. When Berina talks of Halime's "counterparts", Davas raises a hand as if to attract her attention, then drops it as she rushes on. He watches Alegur as Berina speaks.

"You know, I have opposed the whole idea of what the Lia Kavair stands for on the general idea that stealing is just wrong. But the more I think about it, stealing will always be with us, and I'm coming to understand that the guild works to keep things from getting completely out of hand."

Berina walks over to stand in front of Halime and says: "I have to admit that I have not been ill-treated by the guild. There's what you did for my friend Josrel," a wry smile crosses her face as she continues "and you can ask your counterpart in Olokand about an incident involving me there." Sticking out her hand, she says: "Peace between us?"

Sighing gently, Davas pinches the bridge of his nose and shakes his head. He suddenly looks at his hand as he moves it away from his face, grins quietly to himself and turns his attention to Halime, expectantly, obviously concerned that Berina has overstepped some line that he is unaware of.

Halime readily takes her hand and says, "I am happy for us to not be at odds as I have a high respect for your father. Unfortunately, there is not much in the means of communication between Lia Kavair chapters and very little in trust. If you get with me at some later time to relate what you can, I will send a message to those that I know as I see no harm in trying. For now, Davas has to get to his work in the kitchen and Thriid to his post in the common room. Again I must apologize but you will need to be hooded when you leave. If you know not the ways into our lairs, the information cannot be tortured out of you."

The Khuzdul shakes his head, "I dunnae know how you be getting always bein in these troubles." He pauses, "I ain' from 'round here. If'n you need someone taken care of, be pointin me in the right direction and they jus' be found with their head cave in, ja?" He scratches his beard, "None's of you needs ta get yer hands dirty."

Turning slowly to look at Thriid, Davas eyes widen slightly. He stares a moment, then, without taking his eyes off him, he says to Berina " ... perhaps ... you should tell Thriid about the feuding rules too. Soon I think". He gives the Khuzdul a hesitant grin, then looks away, embarrassed.

"Fuedin' rules ya say...ja?" His eyebrows furrow together as Thriid turns to Berina, "What rules be these?"

Berina says, "I know feuding happens from time to time, but I'm sure that it's in violation of the King's Peace. I suggest you forget about feuding for now."

The Khuzdul shakes his head, "King's peace, ja? There be only one King I be followin', an' it ain' being no human king." He looks between all the Humans, "Where be I from, someone do ya wrong by killing and such, then ye be in yer rights ta do tha same. A'course never get to that generally it does not, ja?"

He holds his hands up, then crosses his thick arms across his chest, "You be handlin' things whatever ways ya be needin ta do, but lettin' these Yellow hand men like this 'ere Master Soral keep breathin' be coming back ta haunt ya in the future, ja?" He just shakes his head.

Master Halime says, "Feuding is a matter between clans, even here. It is only a breach of the King's Peace when it results in open conflict in the streets or effects those not of the clans involved. Thriid, I would remind you that, you are not where you come from and, if you murder someone, you had better be prepared to confront their whole clan. If you break the law of the land...this land...you will be called to account without the aid of any of your kin. While you are working for me, I am also accountable for your actions but, if you go too far without my knowledge, I will be forced to declare you outlaw. If you know not what being declared outlaw means, it means you can be set upon by anyone in the kingdom without recourse to law or kin."

The Khuzdul seems to think on this for a bit, "Well, at leas' some of tha clan rules seemin to be the same, ja?" He pauses, "All I be sayin' is that it best be dealin' with troublesome type folks sooner rather than later, ja? But I follow what you all be thinkin' be best." A glint shines in his eyes, "But if ya be needin' someone to be takin' care of, ya jus' point me in tha right direction."

"I bes' be getting myself back ta work, ja?" Looking to Berina, "I bein still be here at tha Spurs if'n ya need me fer anything, jus' lemme knows." He looks around and when he's led out he heads to work for the day.

\* \* \*

After once more hooding you and leading you out, Master Halime shows Berina to the door. She had barely disappeared down Querina road when Rikoro approaches the Inn from the north.

Berina is just passing her father's shop when she sees Isiel approaching.

Berina says, "Well met, Isiel. I'm afraid I don't have time to stop and chat, but if you can join me on some errands, I'd be happy for the company."

With a nod, Isiel joins her, going into her father's shop.

Berina turns back to her father's shop and goes in. Looking up the apprentices, she tells them: "My father said I can't teach you about toolmaking...breach of guild privilege apparently...so I want you to go to the townhouse and help Qisse with the chores."

Leaving the shop, she heads for Lord Odasart's to go to work. She chats with Isiel on the way.

One of the things he brings up--if her understanding of his speech is correct--is that Mistress Bae has given him time away from the glassworking shop to aid Berina (and her father) however she needs.

Berina says, "I appreciate the offer, but given your unfamiliarity with this city, I'm not sure what you can do. Hmm, let me think."

Berina turns to him suddenly and says: "The metalsmith who was attacked was taken to the temple of Peoni. The clothes she was wearing at the time of the attack should still be there at the temple. As you did with my robe when you 'read' it to try to see Divlena, could you 'read' the metalsmith's clothes to try to see her attacker? I should think that such a violent action would leave a strong impression, and it was recent too." Rushing on before he can answer, she says: "If you go to the temple of Peoni to try this, you'll need to know the woman's name to ask about her clothes. Her name is Uvienela of Dyselsen. I don't know how you'll be received by the people at the temple, but you could try."

Once she gets to work, she asks Lord Odasart about funds from the guild for Obras' defense and how to get them: "Milord, my father said that the guild has some funds available for member's legal defense...in this case, matching that requested by the plaintiff. The court has appointed Melin of Soril as Obras' defense council...in spite of the fact that it's his son, Armenton, who has accused my father of the assault. I'm considering hiring the Drelins...unless, of course, you recommend a different litigant...and I'll need money to pay whoever I hire. How do I go about requesting funds from the guild for my father's defense?"

The chamberlain tells her, "Milord Odasart is not available right now and will not be for several days while he handles matters at court."

Berina says, "Do you know where the guildhall for the weaponcrafters is? I will need to stop by there after work."

"I do not believe they have a guildhall of their own," he answers, "they, and the metalworkers, have their guild meetings at the hall of the Mangai. Obviously they are not there at all times and you father is the guildmaster of the weaponcrafters. The guildmaster of the metalcrafters is Master Vaber of Kateris. His shop is three doors down Querina road from Mangai Square on the left hand side."

Having not been at the manor previously, Isiel looks around with curiosity, but stays by Berina's side.

"And what may I do for you, master?" asks the chamberlain.

Before Isiel can reply to the chamberlain, Berina turns to Isiel and says: "No, no. This is where I work. Unless you have business with Lord Odasart, you'll need to go." Turning to the chamberlain for a brief moment, she says: "My pardon, he's new in town. I'll show him out." Once Isiel and Berina are out in front of Lord Odasart's mansion, Berina points to a large building across the square and say: "That's the temple of Peoni." Once she's sure Isiel has soaked up all that she's said to him, she'll leave him and go back inside and get to work.

"Was thinking you are having more errands, Mistress," Isiel says. "But is being good, going to temple. Can be trying, yes, for the metalcraft's clothes, to see who did be attacking." After thanking her for the directions, Isiel heads over to the temple of Peoni.

\* \* \*

After a quick glance around tavern, Rikoro spots Davas and then Thriid. He approaches the Khuzdul saying, "Greetings Thriid. I'm not sure if you remember, but we met at Berina's townhouse when you arrived there to speak with her. I'm Rikoro of Drelin."

Rikoro reaches out to clasp Thriid arm once he finishes speaking.

The Khuzan looks over at Rikoro as he stands about the tavern. His eyebrows furrow together as he looks the man over. His gaze sweeps about to see if any others are approaching before he offers a nod, but does not extend his head. "Ja, I believein I remembir ya."

Rikoro noticing Thriid not returning the reach, lowers his own arm to his side slowly without seeming to mind.

Smoothing over his green leather vest Rikoro starts again, "I've come to find you and ask for your services. You likely do not know, but I work for the Mercantylers Guild as a translator. One of the languages I know is Khuzan."

Thriid seems surprised by this and says, "Ja?" He then switches to Khuzan, "*If you truly be knowing the Khuzan tongue, then who be the King of the mighty kingdom of Azadmere?*" He grins as he awaits a response.

After milling over either the words or the question, Rikoro responds in broken Khuzan, "*King of Azadmere? ... Not know. Learn words, not history.*"

The Khuzan nods and then continues to listen.

Rikoro steps in closer to Thriid, lowering his voice to say, "They've tasked me with aiding in a matter surrounding a bellows of Khuzdul make. What I need from you is legitimacy in the form of being by my side while I speak with others of your race. Would you be willing to aid me? I'm not sure if you've found employ yet, but if not I'm sure the Guild would compensate you for your time, if not gain esteem with Ambassador Inmatan of Dhuzak for your participation."

"I dinnae where ya learned ta speak the language." He shakes his head, but then continues, "But if'n you truly be workin' for the Abassador I might be able to be helpin, ja?" He looks about the tavern, "I be workin' already fer Halime, but I be able to be helpin when I not be working." A slight look of suspicion crosses his face, "Expecting to talk to the ambassador first I be though or I not be helping, ja?"

With a nod of his head, Rikoro says, "Understandable. This matter does require some urgency, would you mind if we spoke to Halime now about freeing you for the day to pursue the investigation and speak with the Ambassador?"

Thriid nods again and then says, "We cin ask, ja? Worstest he be saying be no."

The Khuzan motions Rikoro to follow him and approaches Halime, "Boss man...this man be sayin' he be doing worklike for Ambassador to find bellows. Be asking if I be able to help ja?." He pauses, "He be sayin' it urgent. You need me about today, if'n not I go help them."

"Certainly," says Halime. "You get six days off each month and this can be one of them."

The Khuzan nods, "Thanks ja boss." He then turns to Rikoro, "I be at yer service fer the day, lead ons, ja?"

Rikoro thanks Halime, and then turns to leave the inn saying as he walks to Thriid, "Let us head to the Mercantylers Guild first to confirm my claim on your behalf and then we shall find this Khuzdul smith, Khmaain of Pakath."

Thriid nods, and follows along, not saying much.

## 09-AZÚRA -720 TASHAL, KALDOR

3<sup>RD</sup> WATCH [COLD, OVERCAST, NORTHWEST WIND]<sup>10</sup>

At the door of the temple, Isiel can see a man in tattered clothes talking to one of the priestesses, "...iny ding I can do to 'elp een return vor a meal. I want nat charity. I can work vor what I receive."

"Go along through there to the kitchens," she tells him, "and they will find something for you."

Turning to Isiel, she says, "Peace be with you. How can I serve thee this morning?"

Isiel nods in greeting. "I am being Isiel of Laelin. Am hoping you can be help. Am wishing see clothes. Of Uvienela of Dyselsen. For to be reading, yes?"

"You want to what?!?" squeaked the priestess, "Read her clothes? You take your disgusting notions and be on your way before I call the guards." She turns and storms into the temple, muttering, "I have never heard of such a thing in all my years."

Isiel looks at her in some surprise, and calls to her retreating back, "Can see attacker from clothes. Is *Gúl*<sup>ii</sup>. Magic, you see? Mistress Bae is wanting me to help."

"You will not be doing any of your witchcraft in this temple," she says over her retreating shoulder, "and I will have to have a word with Mistress Bae about harboring a witch."

\* \* \*

Rikoro and Thriid travel to the Mercantylers guild where they are told the Ambassador can be found at the Mangai Hall. Proceeding to the Mangai Hall, they arrive just as the Ambassador is leaving.

"You are that translator fellow, are you not?" he says to them. "If you are looking for me, we will have to talk as you follow along. I have business at court and I am on my way there now. What is it that I can help you with?"

Thriid gives the ambassador the once over to see what he looks like. He then speaks in Khuzan, "*It is an honor to meet you Ambassador. I am Thriid of the Tynath clan of Habe.*" He pauses before continuing, "I have been sent by my clanhead to assist the Kyfa clan to repay some old..." He seems hold before he finally says, "...debts."

Continuing to keep pace he then says, *"This fellow here has requested my assistance and we are here to that end. I know not the exacts, but he can ask you the specifics."* He then offers a polite incline of the head in deference to the Ambassador, or at least as much can be done while walking, and then turns to Rikoro.

Rikoro shakes his head after Thrid finishes then addresses Inmatan respectfully, "I've nothing further to inquire of you Ambassador. Thrid just wished confirmation that I was indeed tasked with looking into the matter. As you said a human speaking Khuzan is subject to suspicion and Thrid was no different."

In Khuzan, the Ambassador says, *"He need not go into specifics since he and I were there when it was suggested that you accompany him. I just need you to be with him to show he has the support of the Khuzdul community."*

With that Rikoro offers a sheepish wink in the Khuzan Man-At-Arms direction and asks him, "If you are satisfied we can now head to the Khuzdul weaponscrafter and begin the investigation."

Holding his words a moment Rikoro then inquires, "Unless you wished to discuss compensation for your day away from employ?"

The man shakes his head and switches back to speaking in Harnic, "No, I do not be needing any compensation. As long as we be working to help Kyfa's, ja?" He seem to wait to make sure the Ambassador does not dispute Rikoro's claim.

With a surprised look, the Ambassador says, "The idea that one of the people needs to be paid to look after the integrity of his clan is preposterous. If Thrid indeed needs compensation, I will see what I can do about it...and remember it when I next have dealings with his clan. While you know the language, you appear to know very little of our people and culture. And now I must bid you adieu. Good day gentlemen."

After a short formal good day to the Ambassador, Rikoro leads Thrid to the Tower Inn.

Assuming the Ambassador does not dispute any claims from above, Thrid turns to the Ambassador and speaks in Khuzan, **"If you need anything at all from me sir, I will be at your disposal and available at the Spurrs Inn."**

After a final good day to the Ambassador, Thrid follows Rikoro to the Tower Inn.

#### **09-AZÚRA -720 TASHAL, KALDOR**

4<sup>TH</sup> WATCH [COLD, OVERCAST, NORTHWEST GALE, HEAVY RAIN]<sup>9</sup>

You reach the Tower Inn just in time for the midday meal and just in time to get inside before it begins raining heavily. The common room is crowded but you see no Khuzdul. A tavern maid approaches you and says, "Wud ee like me to find ee a place to sit and bring ee a meal?"

After glancing around Rikoro settles his eyes on the server and responds in turn, "My thanks, but we arrived hoping to find someone staying here. Perhaps you may know where they are?"

The person I speak of is a Khuzdul named Khmaain of Pakath. Master Weaponscrafter by trade."

A man approaches and says to the server, "Go on about your duties, lass. I will take care of this."

Turning to Rikoro, he continues, "Yes, he is staying here but I have seen him not this morning. We are a bit busy now but, if you want to find your own way, it is up the stairs and third door on your right."

Thrid looks about the Inn before turning to listen to the man. After he finishes, Thrid looks around the room again before following Rikoro. He does not notice anyone paying particular attention...although the room is fairly crowded.

"Much appreciated, we shall", with those words spoke, Rikoro makes his way through the tavern and up the stairs.

Thrid follows Rikoro up the stairs and to the door, as Rikoro wraps on the door, Thrid says, "You be wantin me to be doin' talkin? I still be not fully aware of what we be needing to be asking, ja?"

Once at the top, Rikoro walks past each of the rooms counting the doors in his head. Reaching the third door on the right, Rikoro taps on it gently with his staff and waits.

Shifting his focus from the door to Thrid, Rikoro replies, "My thanks Thrid, but I should speak as the representative of the Mercantylers' Guild. What I shall need from you is confirmation I am who I say I am. Though things may change depending on the situation and his responsiveness to me."

Even though his tap was gentle, the door swings open a couple of inches. There is no response from inside.

After speaking to Thrid, Rikoro glances at the crack in the door and sighs to himself. "Either Khmaain does not believe in security or we're about to find something displeasing", as Rikoro speaks he nudges the door open fully with his staff. From where he stands at the entryway he peers about the room trying to make out the scene before him.

Thrid nods and then turns to the door as it swings open.

They can see a rather ordinary inn room...ordinary, that is, with the exception of the Khuzdul hanging by his neck from a rope tied to the rafters. He is two and a half feet above a two-foot stool that has been knocked over. There is a note on the bedside table next to the window.

Thrid rushes past Rikoro, shouting in Khuzan, **"Sereniel's Blood!"** He runs up to the hanging Khuzan and hefts him up just in case there is still life in him. If not he curses and turns to Rikoro, "Shut tha door quicklike ja?"

Rikoro takes a step back at first, as Thrid rushes in. On the Khuzdul's order, Rikoro makes his way inside the room and closes the door.

Concern growing on his face, Rikoro inquires as he moves to the body, "Is he alive? If not we need to report this immediately, lest we be charged ourselves."

## STORY 2 PAGE 16

Thriid can tell by the lack of breathing from the man that he's already dead. "*What the blasted forges did I get myself into.*" Thriid let's go of the hanging man and turns towards Rikoro. "Ah...ja, we needin' the city vatch coming in ta check dis out." He says, "Run downstairs qvick and tellin da Innkeeper we be needin' da watch. Askin him when the last time this fella been seen alive too's."

He moves over to look at the note, "Hmms, we might want to lets the Ambassador knows about dis rights away too."

He turns his attention to the note.

[http://duttond.topcities.com/Harn/Kaldor/Handout\\_s2\\_s1\\_E.gif](http://duttond.topcities.com/Harn/Kaldor/Handout_s2_s1_E.gif)

Rikoro moves closer to the body of Khmaain examining it while speaking to Thriid, "I suppose that is a note explaining his note and confessing to something? What tongue and script is it in and can you read it? That will lend truth to the contents in my eyes"

Thriid relays the contents of the note to Rikoro verbatim.

Making his way around the corpse, Rikoro notes, "From this height he would have suffocated rather than had his neck broken. I'm a limited physician at best, but before I report this to the Innkeep and the guard I would like to see if there is more to it then suicide"

Examining the body, Rikoro cannot tell the cause of death.

Thriid moves away from the note and looks up at the corpse, "Somethin' jus' don' feel rights, ja?" He steps towards Rikoro, "I can sees Khuzan mitting suicide by runnin' into gargun cave with jus' a dagger or somethin', but hangin jus' don' seem right."

After finishing his terse exam, Rikoro nods grimly to Thriid, "Mill about the room for anything of import, but leave things as you found them. I shall go and bring the others."

The dwarf nods and then begins to look about the room for any signs of foul play or signs of something out of the ordinary.

He finds nothing out of the ordinary. In fact everything appears neat and clean. Even the bed does not appear to have been slept in. In a chest at the foot of the bed, Thriid finds what appear to be the personal belongings of the victim: an excellent quality sleeved wool shirt, a leather vest, wool hose and leather shoes (all size 5); 36d in coin, four small scrolls [#88, #89, #90, #91]<sup>2</sup> and a glass vial of milky white liquid [#92].

The Khuzan takes a quick look at the four scrolls and to see what they say. Otherwise, he leaves things alone. He makes a quick look through the room again just to make sure no one is in the room and then steps into the hallway, shutting the door behind him. He stands guard in front of the door and does not let anyone in until Rikoro returns.

Just as Thriid is leaving the room, a man approaches from the common room below.

"Is there anyone else in there?" he asks as he takes up a guard position on the opposite side of the doorway.

The Khuzdul man shakes his head, "No, ain' noone's else in there, unless you be counting the dead fella, ja?" He stands opposite the other man and waits.

\* \* \*

With that Rikoro leaves the room, heading down the hall. When he reaches the staircase he carefully makes his way to the bottom and searches for the man who pointed him to the dwarf's room earlier.

Noticing Rikoro approaching, the innkeeper says, "Did you find the one you were looking for?"

With somber sounding voice, but quietly so as not cause a stir Rikoro informs the innkeeper, "I did find him, but not in the manner I expected. I suggest finding the Watch or Guardsman as he is dead."

After speaking the words and waiting for the innkeep's reaction, Rikoro glances around the tavern trying to find anyone acting out of the ordinary.

Rikoro doesn't notice anyone paying any attention to him as the Innkeeper fetches a young lad from the kitchen. The Innkeeper says quietly, "You lad. Go to the castle and fetch the coroner, if he is there, and a guardsman, if he is not. Tell them we have business with them."

Speaking to a man seated at the door of the common room, the Innkeeper says, "Go upstairs to the third room on the right. Make sure that anyone in the room leaves and nobody disturbs anything."

Rikoro interjects as the Innkeeper speaks to the man, "I should let you know you'll find a second Khuzdul in the room, he is with me and seems a bit flat footed by the ordeal. I can only imagine what sort of emotions it may stir to see one of his kin like that."

Rikoro then rubs the back of his neck, exhaling with a bit of a tired sigh as his eyes scan over the crowd looking for someone who stands out of place or that he may recognize.

As the lad runs out the door and the man goes up the stairs, the Innkeeper turns to Rikoro and says, "You being first finder, do not go anywhere until they arrive. Would you like anything to eat or drink while you wait?"

With more then a few moments consideration, Rikoro says, "Hrm yes, I have yet to have a midday meal and I imagine we are going to be here well past supper. I will cover the expense of my companion Thriid as well since I've brought him into this. Though I believe he will likely wish a strong ale with his meal."

After finding you a place to sit, the serving girl brings you arbolettys (a spiced cheese dish) for starters, followed by a bread bowl of rota (barley fruit soup), wastel (first quality bread), and a pint of ale.

The ale has a dark copper color, a fruity, slightly vinous aroma, a firm texture and a hoppy, citric, slightly musty flavor with a bitterness that grows pronounced in the finish.

She tells you for your main entrée you have a choice of custard lumbarde (marrow and fruit tart), roseye (fried loache with roses and almonds), or nekkesan (swan-neck pudding).

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<sup>2</sup> Numbers in brackets are indexes into treasure log and should be used whenever inquiring about the item.

In response to the options, Rikoro says, "I shall have the roseye please, it sounds quite nice"

When the meal is brought he picks at his food, tasting each item individually and waiting between each, clearly in an attempt to discern something about what he's eating.

When she returns with your roseye, she also serves a sallat (medieval salad) to accompany your entrée and faun tempere (gilli flower pudding) for desert. When you finish, the innkeeper asks 3d for the meal.

Rikoro reaches into his pouch, fishing out three dram and a farthing and hands it to the serving girl with a kind smile.

[OOO: Since a dram is a measure of weight (1/16<sup>th</sup> of an ounce) and denarius (pl. denarii) is a small silver coin, I'll assume you mean the latter.]

"Dank ee, maister. Be dere iny other services dey ee require?" she says.

With a shake of his head, Rikoro says "I am quite fine for now my thanks though."

\* \* \*

At the last hour of the fourth watch, a nobleman arrives and says, "Master Ashel, what is this business you would have of me?"

Nodding towards Rikoro, Master Ashel says, "This man here has said he found one of my guests dead."

The Coroner asks, "And when was the last time your guest was seen alive?"

The Innkeeper answers, "Last night after dinner when he went to his bed."

Turning to Rikoro, the Coroner says, "Lead me to the body and, on the way, tell me what business you had here when you discovered it."

"Of course, it is just up the stairwell here, third room on the right." Rikoro leads the way while continuing to speak, "I arrived here with another Khuzdul named Thriid of Tynath to find Khmaain of Pakath hung." As Rikoro winds his way to the top flight of steps, he pauses for a breath, "The reason for the visit is that I was tasked in helping uncover a missing Khuzdul bellows. I am a translator for the Mercantyle Guildhall and one of the tongues I speak is Khuzan. Master Korein of Cuke and Ambassador Inmatan of Dhuzak wished me to speak with Master Khmaain as it is believed he was the owner of bellows in question. If you're aware of the current situation with Master Obras, it seems a rather nefarious plot is unfolding as this matter ties into his own plight."

"And what would be your name?" the Coroner asks.

"My apologies in this madness I misplaced my manners, it is Rikoro of Drelin. And yours?" Rikoro replies.

"You may call me Coroner or Sir Imadoen..." his voice trails off. When you reach the room with the two guards, he says with a surprised look, "I know that name. Were you not the first finder for the pawn broker's dead wife? You seem to be the first

finder for more than your share of deaths recently. Is there anything you want to tell me before I discover it from others?"

At first Rikoro is dismayed, but it washes over him and he offers in retort to the Coroner, "If you mean to ask if I have had a hand in either death. Then the answer is a resounding - no I have not. If you wish to ask about my suspicions on both matters, I'll share it, but I doubt you wish to hear base assumptions without proof."

"That is quite correct," says the Coroner. "Since all I know of you is your ability to find bodies before any others, I am interested not in your opinions."

Addressing the group, he continues, "all of you wait here while I look around" and he enters the room.

About a half turn of the glass later, he comes back out of the room with the note in his hand. Looking at Rikoro, he says, "I believe you said you are a translator. Can you interpret this?"

Rikoro reaches out to take hold of the parchment and then scans over it a few times, mouthing some words to himself, "The sum of it reads as a reason for why he ended his life. Let me translate the full of it though."

He then stops to clear his throat before looking intently at the note again, "... I have brought disgrace to myself and my clan. I can not live any longer with shame. Master weaponsmith Kuvell of Charlin says to me he will be soon the new guildmaster and that I must pay him two Khuzan crowns to get my franchise. Not having that amount, I pawned the only thing I had of value, my bellows to Armenton of Soril. I now find the that my bellows has been used in an attempted murder and accusations against a clean.."

Breaking from the reading and Rikoro shakes his head for a moment, "no no sorry.. -innocent- man, Master Obras of Kyfa. I can only say that my clan had nothing to do with any of this."

Rikoro looks up from the note to the Coroner, handing the paper carefully back to him, "He then signs his name.. Khamaain of Pakath." Adding as an afterthought, "If there were other parchments in the room we can compare the writing on this to ensure it is authentic. Otherwise perhaps someone can verify this was done by Khamaain's hand."

"Yes, I am sure 'we' can," says the Coroner. "Well that settles it...the note confirms the evidence that it was suicide." Motioning vaguely towards Rikoro and Thriid, he says, "you two may be on your way now. There is nothing more for you here."

Rubbing at the back of his neck slowly, Rikoro says slowly "If you find you have need of me further because I was first finder - I reside at the Mercantyle Guildhall. I will be continuing my investigation on their behalf."

"Yes, so you indicated earlier," says the Coroner. "Just see that you do not interfere with the official investigation."

Turning to the inn's guard, he says, "Tell the innkeeper that the victim's belongings will be divided between the inn, so you can arrange for the internment of the body, and the crown, as compensation for the disturbance of the King's peace."

Rikoro listens to the conversation as he makes for the stairs. Once at the bottom the Satia-Mavari looks for the innkeeper and approaches stating, "Master Ashel, the Coroner has released all of Khmaain's belongings to you in exchange for taking care of the body. I would like to ask if I could further inspect the room. I came here on behalf of the Mercantylers' Guild about some bellows and would like to complete what I was tasked with. In the process I can take inventory for you to save you the trouble. It will not take me very long and I am certain you will have the guilds appreciation." With his request spoken Rikoro looks inquiringly to Ashel.

The innkeeper's guard followed Rikoro down the stairs and, after listening to Rikoro's request, says, "Master, the Coroner has only granted the inn half of the Khuzdul's belongings. The other half goes to the crown."

The innkeeper says to Rikoro, "Whether you can examine the room or not during the Coroner's investigation is up to him but I doubt he will allow it. Afterwards, the room will be cleaned as quickly as possible and the belongings will be sold so I am afraid I cannot grant your request. I cannot afford to leave the room idle long enough for rumors damage my business."

Exhaling with a bit of a sign, Rikoro nods at the innkeepers words and says, "I understand. I would not wish to stir any further trouble for you, so I shall bid you a good day Master Ashel."

Rikoro offers a dip of his head and then turns Thriid, "It appears we are done for the day. You have my thanks for your assistance in the matter."

\* \* \*

After his rebuff at the temple of Peoni, Isiel decides to go to the nearest pub for refreshment while he thinks of what to do next. Across Kald Square he spots the Red Fox Inn and heads in that direction. Entering the common room, he notices that the patrons are mostly speaking in quiet tones. The one exception is a loud argument at the bar...

"Armenton, you have botched this affair to the point that I cannot pull your fat out of the fire this time," says the man dressed as an innkeeper.

"Yes, father, but what am I to do now?" Armenton asks.

"You will have to leave town until this all dies down and I will have to declare you outlaw to keep it from splashing back on me. I will try once more to push forward this accusation against the metalsmith but with the death of the Khuzdul, I have no hope for making that story be believed. For now, gather a few of your belongings and be away with all haste. Go to Minarsis and I will try to contact you by the time of the wool faire."

"Yes, father," Armenton says as he hurries out the door.

Isiel remembers the name of Armenton being mentioned in Berina's conversation with Lord Odasart's chamberlain and thinks she may be interested in this development.

Instead of settling down for a drink, Isiel ventures once more into the rain, and seeks out Berina at her home.

At the townhouse, the housekeeper, Qisse, tells Isiel that Berina has just gone to the litigant Drelin and gives directions to their destination. "If you hurry, you can just catch them," she adds.

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5<sup>TH</sup> WATCH [COLD, OVERCAST, NORTHWEST GALE]<sup>10</sup>

As the two leave the inn, Rikoro asks Thriid if he found anything significant in the room while alone. Then after hearing from the Khuzdul what he discovered, the two part ways for their respective abodes.

Thriid tells Rikoro what he found but he did not take any of it away with him and the scrolls were in a script that he was unfamiliar with.

Upon reaching the Mercantylers Guildhall Rikoro inquires if Master Korein is available to speak. The chamberlain tells Rikoro that Master Korein is sitting down to dinner with the rest of the lodgers and he is welcome to join them.

As he withdraws from the chamberlain to the dining hall, Rikoro offers his thanks. Once arriving at the table he offers a quiet nod of greeting to the others as he takes his seat.

During the meal he waits before others have begun before partaking himself. Once everyone has had their fill Rikoro turns to Korein and asks, "Would you care to hear of my preliminary findings thus far Master Cuke?"

"Very well," he replies.

With a nod Rikoro continues, "It appears that Master Khmaain of Pakath took his life by hanging. He left a note claiming he felt responsible for what has occurred as he pawned his bellows to Armenton of Soril in order to pay the Master Weaponsmith Kuvel of Charlin two Khuzan crowns for a franchise.

"Apparently he felt he brought disgrace to himself and his clan for what has befallen Master Obras of Kyfa. Apparently Master Khmaain feels that he is innocent, though did not elaborate any further. The Corner Sir Imadoen has taken over the investigation, but I fear in his mind it is a closed matter. I had hoped to compare the note found to another of Master Khmaain's to confirm authenticity; alas the notion was turned down."

Rikoro pauses to let the words he has just said sink in before continuing, "Would you like me to resume the investigation in the morning to see what I can find from Master's Kuvel and Uviendela about the bellows?"

Unfortunately Master Armenton despises me from a previous engagement and will not be forthcoming with any inquiries I make."

"You appear to be confused as to what you want to accomplish or your methods are confusing me," Master Korein says, "In example, what does the authenticity of a suicide note have to do with the path taken by the Khuzdul's bellows. He says he pawned the bellows so I think we can assume that is so. Whether the Khuzdul owed Master Kuvel money and whether he paid the amount owed, again has nothing to do with the bellows. The fact that the pawnbroker had the bellows shortly before he made his accusation, and the bellows was returned here, is highly suspicious in itself. Have you discussed your findings with Master Obras' family to see if the pawnbroker has some grievance against the weaponsmith or his family – enough to

cause him to make a false accusation? Now that you know the pawnbroker had the opportunity, finding he had a motive can go a long way to freeing Master Obras – as any decent litigant can tell you.”

With a soft smile Rikoro bobs his head then replies, "Apologies my methodology for solving any problem is usually less than coherent not to mention dizzying to witnesses. I prefer to circle something from all angles, spiraling in closer to the answer. In this case the history of the bellows traveled as you pointed out."

Tilting his head back and forth as if weighing something Rikoro continues, "Though the direct approach is usually better with some assumptions made. I question the notes authenticity and the death is all. This could have been a ruse to throw the light of suspicion elsewhere. And I had hoped to shore up such a possibility"

Tapping on his bearded chin Rikoro hms, "However, with Master Armenton involved perhaps that is enough to believe the truth behind it."

Rikoro sits upright in his chair and offers, "The statement I made about the pawnbroker disliking me also likely reaches to Master Obras' daughter Berina too as we were both involved in the same matter. But I find it only a tangential cause and relationship. Nonetheless I will speak with the Obras clan to see what I can about the bellows."

"I think that would be best and a certain amount of haste is advised," says Master Korein. "I believe that as you get more experience in investigation of such cases, you will find that circling around and questioning assumptions will tend to get innocents killed as others act without such hesitations."

With a sheepish grin and a nod to Korein, Rikoro responds, "Haste has never been a trait of myself nor the followers of the Sage, but your point is well made Master Cuke. I'll endeavor to do so in the future."

The translator then excuses himself from the table and makes his way to the cellar. Before bed he scribes in his journal the days events and afterwards drifts restfully to sleep.

\* \* \*

Shortly after Berina has returned from visiting her father and just as she and Davas are sitting down to dinner, somebody is banging on the door.

Answering the door, she finds the guardsman, Bareobron of Falesh. Out of breath from his haste, he manages to gasp out, "Mistress Berina, you should gather what help you may. Shortly after you left, a messenger arrived and said your father's trial date has been moved up to tomorrow. Something appears to have gotten them worried and they are trying to press through before events can catch up to them."

"Damn!" She blurts out. "Thank you, Bareobron."

Turning to Davas, Berina says: "We've got to move on this now. I'm going to gather up father's apprentices...who should be able to testify as to his whereabouts when the crime was committed. I'll take them to Litigant Drelin's place...it's just around the corner off of Mangai Square on Malishi Way, next to Uvienela's

smithy. In the meantime, I'd like you to go to the Mangai guildhall and fetch Rikoro. Get him to his uncle's place. I know the two of them are not on the best of terms, but I'll grasp at any straw now."

With a worried look and a quick nod, Davas says simply "of course".

He turns to go, then stops and slowly turns back to Berina. "Ah ... where is the guildhall?"

"Where is...?" Berina says, then goes over to Davas, wrapping him in an embrace, and says: "Whatever am I going to do with you?" She looks up at the roof beams for a moment, then back at his face, saying: "Oh...yeah." and kisses him passionately.

"It's actually Mercantylers' Hall, and it's in the southwest portion of Mangai Square. You find the well, and it's the big two-story building directly south of the well."

Once Berina has told him the way, he gives her a quick smile and is gone to do as she suggested.

Addressing Bareobron again, Berina says: "Could I prevail upon you to go to Lord Odasart's mansion and tell him of this development, please?"

"Yes, mam," he answers, "I can do that on my way back to the Heru gate. If you need anything from me later, that is where I will be."

If the apprentices are in the townhouse having their meal, she'll gather them there, otherwise she will go across the street to the shop and get them there. Berina and the apprentices will troop over to Charance of Drelin's shop.

She gathers the apprentices (who quickly gobble down as much dinner as they can) and goes to the Drelin residence. A window is opened on the upper floor, in answer to her banging on the door, and a voice calls out, "Who is it and what is your business at this late hour?"

Berina answers, "I'm Berina of Kyfa, and I need your help to save the life of my father, Obras of Kyfa...wrongly accused of attempted murder."

"Very well," the voice answers. "I suppose you had best come inside and explain yourself. However, you did not need to bring your children with you."

Berina looks at the boys, then chuckles and says: "They're my father's apprentices, not my children...still, my mother died many years ago and father has not taken another wife, so in the absence of their real mothers...wherever they may be...I guess I'm the closest they have while they're under my father's tutelage."

A moment later, a woman opens the door and motions for you to enter. "Warm yourself by the fire and I will fetch some tea. The master will be down in a moment."

Berina says, "Thank you."

Just as the woman returns with the tea, a man enters the room and sits in the seat by the hearth. "Well now. What are the facts of the situation?"

## STORY 2 PAGE 20

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Berina says, "At about this time day before last, your neighbor, Uvienela of Dyselsen, was assaulted and seriously injured...apparently over some sort of Khuzan bellows."

"Mistress Bae of Rysten was coming to see Uvienela about some commission and was practically run over by the assailant, who was cloaked and hooded. As first finder, she raised the hue-and-cry, but the attacker escaped."

"Armenton of Soril...who just happened to be there [OOC: This last said with heavy sarcasm.]...claimed that he saw that it was my father who had committed the crime." and the man can practically see fire in Berina's eyes.

"During first watch yesterday, the city guard roused my father out of bed and arrested him for attempted murder. I should mention that Uvienela was taken to the infirmary at the temple of Peoni, and was still alive when last I heard. By the second watch yesterday, my father was charged and thrown into gaol...his trial to occur in twelve days."

"Alderman Melin of Soril was appointed as my father's defense council. Armenton is Melin's son! Isn't it highly irregular for the father of the accuser to be appointed as council for the accused?"

"No," Master Charance says. "It is highly unusual for an Alderman being related to an accuser but they are trusted to be professional about their jobs. If they were not trusted, they would not become aldermen."

Berina continues, "Now this evening I find out that my father's trial has been moved up to tomorrow...no doubt to try to prevent me from arranging for proper council for my father. I gathered up my father's apprentices and came straight here. I thought you could question them as to their knowledge of my father's whereabouts at the time the assault took place. I don't know what...if anything...they know, but I'm hoping they can tell you."

"Now see here," Master Charance says, "do not be making accusations for which you have no proof. It will damage any credibility that you have and could land you in the goal yourself. No, questioning your father's apprentices will do no good. If they like their master, they would lie to help him and, if they like him not, they would lie to harm him."

Berina continues: "It is my belief that Armenton himself arranged for the assault for the purpose of falsely accusing my father of the crime to revenge himself on me."

"My friends and myself were recently involved in foiling a particularly nasty plan Armenton was up to his neck in. A Haliki of Save K'nor, Lillia of Alkar, was kidnapped for the purpose of being forced into a marriage she didn't want, because she has an inheritance."

"I became involved because one of my friends...another Haliki named Josrel of Aswain...was in love with her, and she him, and he was desperate to rescue her. We discovered that Armenton was connected to Lillia's abduction, and after we had confronted him in his shop, his wife was knifed on the street, right in front of us, by a cloaked and hooded assailant, and as she died, she tried to tell us about Lillia's whereabouts. Armenton accused Rikoro of that crime, but he was with me the whole time, so I know he didn't do it."

"I raised the hue-and-cry, but the attacker escaped in the crowds in Kald Square."

"Armenton has a man who he employs as a guard at his shop that I personally think is the actual assailant in both crimes...acting on Armenton's orders. I feel that it was Armenton who was going to forcibly marry Lillia, and his current wife had to go so he could re-marry. I know that these are just my opinions, but I voice them to suggest a motive for the crimes."

"In the end, Halime of Falesh intervened on our behalf and Lillia was freed. She and Josrel have married, so her inheritance is beyond Armenton's reach."

"This accusation against my father I believe to be the beginning of Armenton's revenge against me and my friends for our interfering with his scheme. Can you help me?"

"Perhaps, but you simply have to stop making these unfounded accusations about respected members of the community and their family," says Master Charance. "And the only known member of the community to help you being Halime of Falesh, a man of notorious reputation, helps not your case either. Do not think that you can hire a litigant to escape punishment if you have done anything wrong. Speaking of which, have you considered how your family is going to pay for my services?"

\* \* \*

Following Berina's directions, Davas arrives at the guildhall and knocks on the door. A small panel in the door is opened and a voice says, "What is it? What do you want?"

Slightly out of breath, Davas says quickly "I seek Rikoro ... Rikoro of Drelin. It's important - and urgent".

Davas waits impatiently for a reply, then he looks a little surprised. "Um ... is he here?" he says hesitantly. He waits then for an answer.

"Yes, he is here. I believe he has retired for the day. Wait here and I will fetch him." And the panel closes.

The guild chamberlain arrives at Rikoro's bedside just after Rikoro had lain down. "Sir, there is a man at the door saying he has important business with you. He appears to be of the lower classes and I can have him go away if that is what you wish."

Waking from his slumber Rikoro glances around seeming disoriented, "Eh, apologies, what was that? Oh.. oh I see. No. No. I shall see who it is. I fear my attire doesn't speak much about me either." After slipping on his hose, shirt, vest and shoes Rikoro saunters up the stairs to the entryway where he meets Davas.

If Rikoro is here, Davas waits impatiently for him, then says to him "There is news ... Berina has gone to litigant Drelin and says you should go to your uncle". Again a quick look of surprise. "Oh ... of course". With a rueful smile, Davas shakes his head and adds, "will you come?"

Without hesitation Rikoro responds, "Of course, of course. Let us be on our way."

As the two men walk through the night soaked streets Rikoro mentions, "I have been doing some investigation on behalf of the Mercantylers' Guild and uncovered some information myself. I

thought it could wait until tomorrow morning, but clearly wind was caught of the events and now everything is moving forward much faster. I shall speak more of it once we reach my uncle's abode."

\* \* \*

Just as Berina answers, there is a knock at the door and the housekeeper shows in Rikoro, Davas and Isiel, who have arrived at the same moment.

Rikoro looks inquiringly to Isiel and offers in formal, but accented Sindarin, "*Twilights Greeting Isiel.*"

Switching back to Harnic and regarding those gathered Rikoro takes in a breath, "Good evening uncle. Apologies for all of this. I believe Berina has explained the circumstances as to the urgency, just as Davas informed me on the way here."

Rikoro motions to Davas indicating who it is he speaks of while continuing on, "I myself have some additional information to include in the matter. Something that ties Armenton of Soril deeper into the affair. You see I now have steady employ as a translator with the Mercantylers Guildhall. Berina no doubt explained to you the circumstances surrounding her father's charges. The Mercantylers guild was interested in tracking the movement of the Khuzan bellows. Apparently it was originally owned by a Khuzdul Master Metalsmith named Khmaain of Pakath. I was tasked with investigating the matter and so went to the inn he was residing at. Unfortunately my arrival found him dead. He had taken his own life by hanging. Though he left a note detailing what had occurred to lead him to such. Apparently he needed coin for a franchise license and so he sold his bellows. And this is where Armenton fits in, as Khmaain pawned it to him."

Berina actually whistles at this point.

Rikoro goes on, "Khamaain felt he had shamed his clan and caused suffering and undo charges to an innocent man – Obras of Kyfa"

"I knew Armenton was at the bottom of this!" Berina says.

Turning his attention to Berina, Rikoro asks, "The question that now remains concerns Armenton's motive for the false accusation. While I would think our own actions against his intentions with Lillia would be enough, are there any bad relations between the Kyfa and Soril clans? In particular with your father?"

Berina says, "Not that I'm aware of, but that's not a question I've put to my father. I thought that foiling Lillia's forced marriage was enough, but I never stopped to consider that my father might have had a run-in with the Soril clan completely unrelated to our little adventure." Berina asks two questions of her own: "May I assume that after you found Master Khmaain's body, the coroner was summoned? And may I further assume that this note you found is now in the coroner's possession?"

Rikoro nods once at each of Berina's questions, "Correct on both counts. Though if it was somehow lost you have several witnesses that can attest to the reading."

After the exchange between Berina and Rikoro, Berina addresses Isiel: "I confess that I'm surprised to see you here Isiel. Do you have some news?"

The small line appears in Isiel's forehead as he works out what those around him have said. Then he says, "I do. I am having a drink after the temple you are showing me, at the Red Fox Inn. You ken this place?"

"Ken?" Berina asks, pauses a moment, then says: "Oh, you mean do I know of this place." A frown crosses her face as she continues: "Yes, I know of the Red Fox inn."

Isiel says, "In this inn, do I see a man called Armenton. This same man you are naming here, I am thinking. He is being scolded by his father, for . . . the man says, 'botching this affair.' His father does send him to Minarsis."

"Thank you for this news, Isiel." Turning to the others, Berina says: "It looks like their evil little scheme is unraveling. Melin is sending Armenton into hiding."

Addressing Rikoro's uncle, Berina says: "Master Charance, can the charges against my father be continued if the accuser is nowhere to be found?"

Master Charance answers, "When a person is asked to appear before the court, they are allowed three essoins. These are excuses, if you will, for not appearing. Each essoin is until the next session of the court, which meets once a month. So, you see, it will be three months before this Armenton is in default of the court's warrant. At that time, it is up to the First Finder whether she wants to pursue the matter in the king's court – which she probably will not. If Master Uvienela survives her injuries, she can say who attacked her. Whether she survives or not, it is up to her clan whether they want to pursue the matter under vendetta law."

"OK, two questions." Berina says. "Assuming nothing changes...like Uvienela dying...does that mean that my father has to spend three months in gaol, or could he be let out on his own word or with someone to stand surety for him?"

"I can arrange to have him set free on the oath of his frankpledge," Master Charance answers. "In case you know not already, his frankpledge are ten citizens in his neighborhood who guarantee his appearance before the court. If he does not appear, they are held accountable."

Berina asks, "Also, could I pursue this matter under vendetta Law?"

"It depends on your meaning of 'pursue' but, no, only the clan head can start such actions," he answers.

Berina says, "You say that in order to become an Alderman, a person has to be trusted to be professional about their job. Well, I can't answer for anyone else, but for what it's worth, I do not trust Melin of Soril." Getting an even more serious expression on her face, Berina continues: "Twice you have accused me of making 'unfounded accusations' against 'respected' members of the community...Armenton was not the First Finder, yet this whole preposterous case against my father rests on Armenton's word alone, with no other proof than that. What about that?! My

## STORY 2 PAGE 22

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father is Guildmaster of the Weaponcrafter's Guild. Doesn't that make HIM a respected member of the community?!!"

Rikoro visibly sighs and rubs the back of his neck while Berina's temperament grows more fiery.

Master Charance answers, "I have heard nothing that indicates any decisions have even been considered, much less decided. Your father's status will be taken into consideration but your suspicions rest on Armenton. The only thing that has been said regarding Meril of Soril comes from this foreigner, whose statement would not be accepted by the court. Again, I tell you, making these accusations and shouting at me will get you no where – even less as I refuse to be treated in such manner."

Rikoro hangs his head, and puts his hands behind his back to clasp them as if being scolded himself while he listens.

"Armenton's baseless accusation has certainly gotten somewhere!" Calming down further, Berina says: "Look, I'm sorry for yelling, but I hope you can understand why I'm so upset."

"Yes, I can understand but, I say again, such emotional outbursts will not be in your benefit," he says. "That is why people hire litigants – to handle such situations with expertise and dissipation."

By the time she's done, Berina is just short of shouting, and on her feet glaring at Master Charance. Re-gaining a measure of self control, Berina says: "I came to you out of the respect I have for your nephew. Do you have any interest in seeing that my father receives a proper defense?"

As Berina begins to get agitated, Davas reaches tentatively towards her. Once she gets to Armenton he realizes there is no stopping her, smiles quietly and withdraws his hand. He watches Charance' reaction to what she says and, as she fumes (relatively) quietly asking the questions towards the end, he winces, looking away, then back to him. He looks at Berina, opens his mouth as if to speak, then thinks better of it, shuts it and looks to Charance, awaiting his response.

Master Charance says, "You look to me as if I was some sort of Larani Saint who goes around defending the helpless out of a self-defined goodness of my heart. I am not, and I doubt if you will find anyone of that description. I am a businessman and I have yet to hear how you intend to pay for my services. Research and court appearances do not come free, or even cheap."

Berina says, "I haven't said how I'm going to pay for your services, because you haven't said how much those services will cost and what those services will be."

"My services require 45d per day, or partial day, and include legal advice, such as I have just been giving you, and appearances before the court on my client's behalf," says Master Charance.

Berina says, "I have enough money to pay you for tonight and two more days besides. They've moved up his trial date to tomorrow. Hopefully, my father can pay you for anything more. He did say that the guild has some funds for just this sort of thing. Knowing my financial limitations, will you defend my father?"

"Yes, that will be quite sufficient to get started," says Master Charance, "and, from what I have heard so far, I doubt it will take much more than that to free your father. Even with me not being able to use much of the information in court, I can use the information out of court to scare them into making a mistake. Now, tell me where you live and who is the most prominent citizen you know of in the neighborhood. Then go home to get some rest and I will be in court on the marrow. However, if you cannot keep your humors in balance so as to control your temper, you had best stay away from the court so you do not make the case more difficult."

Davas has been sitting quietly listening to the conversation ... until Charance suggests that Berina should 'keep her humors in balance'. At this, he splutters, trying to control his laughter. Looking up a little embarrassed, he says simply "sorry ... sorry ... frog in my throat". He gestures vaguely to his throat, grins, and subsides again. "Sorry ...".

Berina says, "Davas" and she indicates him "and I have the lease on the townhouse across from my father's shop. The townhouse is the sixth building on the north side of Querina Road going east from Mangai Square. As for the most prominent citizen in the neighborhood...that would have to be Aldin of Charion, the tentmaker. He's the Alderman for Eastside, and his shop is two doors east of my father's shop, on the south side of Querina Road."

"As for my temper...I'll go to my job for Lord Odasart tomorrow, and stay away from court entirely. I'll stop in here in the morning, on my way to work, to pay you for tonight and tomorrow. I'll stop in again in the evening to find out how things went. How's that?"

Sitting behind Berina, Davas nods furiously, a look of relief and a huge grin on his face. As Berina turns, he tries to turn the nod into a neck stretch. Gesturing vaguely at his throat again, he says vaguely "... throat ... ?" and gives her a half hearted grin.

"That will be fine," Master Charance answers, "but there will be no need for a morning visit. I will arrange to break my fast with Alderman Charion so that I may speak with him before he is off to the court. I will look forward to meeting you in the evening then...say at the middle of the fourth watch."

Berina gives Davas a look out of one corner of an eye, then says to Master Charance: "Excuse me for a moment." She turns quickly to Davas and tickles him for a few moments, then embraces him, and turning back to Master Charance, says: "We're to be married soon, but we've gotten to know each other so well, you'd think we've been married for many years. Would you like to come to the wedding?" She then gives Davas a quick kiss.

"We can discuss that at some later date," Master Charance answers. "For now, I must bid you adieu so that we can get some sleep before the events of the marrow."

"Certainly, Master Charance. Everybody, back to our various residences." and Berina leaves with Davas and the apprentices in tow.

Rikoro offers a very subdued thanks to his uncle, then makes his way out with the group. Seeming a little bit frazzled, likely from having woken up, he offers a quick good night to the group out

on the street and makes his way back to the Mercantylers Guildhall for some much needed sleep.

### 10-AZÚRA -720 TASHAL, KALDOR

2<sup>ND</sup> WATCH [COOL, OVERCAST, NORTHEAST GALE, LIGHT RAIN]<sup>12</sup>

After arriving back at the guildhall late in the night, awakening a very unhappy chamberlain to let him in and sleeping late into the second watch, Rikoro awakens and prepares for his day at work. The chamberlain, still upset, says he is too late to break his fast.

In response to the chamberlain's mood, Rikoro says, "I seem to apologize quite often as of late, but nonetheless you have it for disturbing your sleep last eve. I was so disoriented myself that my senses escaped me and I failed to offer it then. If you could find it in you to at least provide me with some bread to snack on for the remainder of the day I would great appreciate it."

Rikoro then sets to work on his assigned tasks within the guildhall.

\* \* \*

After arriving back at the glassworker's late in the night, awakening his mistress to let him in and sleeping late into the second watch, Isiel awakens and prepares for his day at work. While Mistress Bae quickly breaks her fast, she tells Isiel, "We will not be able to get any work done again today as I have to be at a special session of the court."

Isiel nods. "This I am hearing. I find Mistress Berina last eve, and tell her of things I do hear at this inn . . ." and he fills her in on the information he gathered at the Red Fox Inn and the developments at the household of Rikoro's uncle.

\* \* \*

After arriving back at the townhouse late in the night, awakening Qisse to let them in and sleeping late into the second watch, Berina and Davas awaken and prepare for their day at work. Berina is again throwing up last night's dinner for an hour after smelling the morning air coming in off the street. Qisse says she has not had a chance to find a midwife yet but she should be able to today.

\* \* \*

Blissfully unaware of the events of the previous evening, Thriid sleeps the night through (with no more than his usual hangover) and awakes to take is post at the door of the Spurs.

The khuzan takes his normal watch of the spurs and spends the day there as usual.

\* \* \*

After a good night's sleep, Josrel breaks his fast with his wife and goes off to work.

Arriving at the court and arranging his paper, quills and ink, he notices a heated conversation on the other side of the room between Alderman Melin of Soril, Alderman Aldin of Charion and Master Litigant Charance of Drelin.

"Everyone please rise," announces the bailiff. "This special session of the civil court is now in session. Judge Shotro of

Quinbor presiding. Speaker for the prosecution is Alderman Geldane of Dysel. Speaker for the defense is Master Litigant Charance of Drelin. Bailiff is Sir Gorvan Nevan. Court recorder is Haliki Josrel of Aswain."

"Be seated," says the Judge as he sits down, "Alderman Soril, I believe it was you who requested this session. Please proceed to explain yourself."

Master Soril says, "At the last regular session, Master Weaponcrafter Obras of Kyfa was accused of the attempted murder of Master Metalsmith Uvlenela of Dyselsen. The first finder was Alderman Bae of Rysten and the chief witness was my son Armenton of Soril.

"Recently, I have learned that the accusation was false and the attack was arranged by Armenton. He has since fled the city and his whereabouts are currently unknown.

"Since this action was done without my knowledge and I cannot condone such acts of violence against my fellow citizens, I must hereby declare my son to be outlaw and I ask that Master Obras be released at once."

"Are there any objections?" asks the Judge, waiting a moment.

Finding no objections, the Judge says, "Very well, let the record show that Master Obras of Kyfa is innocent of all charges and is released to return to his home. Let it also show that Armenton of Soril is hereby declared outlaw and cannot expect any of his clan to come to his aid for any reason. Court is now adjourned. Haliki Aswain would you please accompany Master Kyfa to his home to see that he arrives there safely?"

Josrel exits the court house with Master Kyfa, turns to look behind him then pulls his hood over his head and wraps his cloak tighter about him looks to Master Kyfa and says: "I am happy this matter is over for you, Master Kyfa. I know I am an agent of the court and should be impartial to the matter, but I do have a remote personal connection to you and this matter in a way. You see, I am a friend of Berina, Josrel of Aswain." Josrel extends his hand.

"Pleased to meet you," says Master Kyfa

As they walk to his workshop Josrel scans the people if any passing by (OOO: Looking for anyone who might pose a threat.): "And I too have had a bad experience with this Armenton of Soril."

Strolling some more Josrel goes on: "I know your daughter Berina will be pleased as well with today's results. I could only imagine what kind of hornets nest she has stirred up in trying to clear your name."

Pausing a moment Josrel turns to Master Kyfa and continues. "I wish to Honor you Master Kyfa, Berina is a very special person. I have known her for a short time, but in that time she has shown a complete stranger in me, such kindness and loyalty that I have not been given in a very long time. I could only hope to be blessed with a daughter of her character."

"I thank you, lad," says Master Kyfa.

# STORY 2 PAGE 24

When they arrive at the smithy, Master Kyfa says, "I must speak with Berina's housekeeper about arranging a dinner for all of my benefactors. If you would be so kind, perhaps you can deliver invitations to Berina, Davas, Rikoro, Isiel, Thriid and yourself at their respective places of employment, to meet at Berina's house for dinner at the first of the fifth watch?"

After seeing Master Kyfa safely to his workshop : "I will deliver the message Master Kyfa as you wish. I will see you then."

Josrel delivers the messages to Berina, Davas, Rikoro, Iseil and Thryiid of Master Kyfa's dinner invitation for the First of the Fifth Watch. Then if time allows return to the court house to finish his shift there.

\* \* \*

Berina stops by Master Charance's shop after work to pay him the 90d. When Master Charance informs her of the day's outcome, it's all she can do to keep from giving him a happy bear-hug.

She leaves Master Charance's shop, and literally runs to her father's shop. Finding him, she gives HIM the bear-hug and says happily: "Oh father, I'm so glad you're free and your name cleared! I suppose I should be vowing to hunt Armenton to the far corners of Kelestia, but I'm in too good a mood right now!"

[--insert notification of dinner here--]

Berina says, "Why, thank you father. Master Charance was worth every penny of the 90d I paid him to defend you. Did you invite him too?"

Berina says, "Before I forget it, I want to put in a good word for your apprentices. They're good boys, and did all I asked of them...well and quickly. Will you be inviting them as well?"

Berina says, "I have a strong desire to mother those two, so maybe I AM ready to be getting married and start a family."

## 10-AZÚRA -720 TASHAL, KALDOR

5<sup>TH</sup> WATCH [COOL, OVERCAST, NORTHEAST GALE, LIGHT RAIN]<sup>12</sup>

Once everyone arrives and has a seat (at table or on floor as necessary), Qisse serves a dinner consisting of puree of lettuce leaves with onions for an appetizer, a choice of entrée of beef and vegetable pottage; oysters; or boiled partridge; accompanied by St. John's Rice (currant rice with carob cream), wastel (first quality bread) and beer (amber color, sharp, fruity aroma, smooth texture, nutty flavor leading to a bitter-coffee finish).

Reclining amongst cushions near the table, Isiel eats delicately but with obvious enjoyment. He savors each bite and each sip of beer--and later, the coffee--in a completely unhurried manner, often closing his eyes as if he can better taste things that way. For entree, he chooses the oysters, and slurps them down with little happy sounds and an utter lack of self-consciousness.

More relaxed than he has been for a couple of days, Davas thoroughly enjoys the food, grinning broadly and nodding at Qisse when the next course is brought forth. "Wonderful" he says often ... usually through a mouthful of food and often accompanied by wide eyes and a nod at Qisse. He drinks rather more than usual ... and enjoys it rather more too, his eyes sparkling and a grin on his face.

At the start of the serving Rikoro waits as others begin. However, during the meal he eats more than usual choosing the beef and vegetable pottage, then begins to relax as he drinks his beer.

At some point during dinner, Berina stands and says: "I thank all of you for your help in this matter, but I'd like to specially thank Rikoro and Thriid for their discovery of the suicide note. I have no doubt that it was crucial to setting my father free." and she raises her drinking vessel in their direction.

The Fyvrian Mavari offers a polite nod to Berina as he raises his cup, "It was nothing less than what you would do for any of us." Then Rikoro takes a content sip looking over the company of people present.

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<sup>i</sup> Quotes in *bold face italics* are in the Khuzan language.

<sup>ii</sup> Quotes in *regular italics* are in the Sindarin language.