

## Episode 22 1/2 Back in Guardraw

### Saturday, April 22<sup>nd</sup>: breeze

1. The party planned to linger in Guardraw this day, then travel to Sundown on Sunday, April 23<sup>rd</sup>. So, Saturday would be a day of rest. Maybe some shopping, and also some training. There was also expectation of there being a party that evening. Slippa was the only member of the party who seemed to be excited about that. In the interest of taking advantage of the good weather for archery training, several party members were over at the Arena where practice weapons and armor and targets could be rented at a small charge.

A few, including Groa, Corvyn and Melodious, paid a visit to the magic shop to see if Merchant Actinium might have something both affordable and of interest. He was away, but his assistant Mellione mentioned having a Wand of Magic Detection available for sale. The cost was 1500 gp. She acknowledged that it was expensive. "But that's true for most magic items," she says. "One use items, like healing potions, are less expensive, of course. Those sell for just 50 Sovereigns."

2. When the party gathered for the noon meal, Oliver, Groa, Melodious, and Corvyn happened to come in and see Elsapheth in a somewhat heated conversation with Doil. Veylann was trying to calm things down. "Why can't you accept him for what he is?" Veylann is asking Doil. Brother Sheth is just sitting there, trying to mind his own business.

Doil scowls. "Well, sure, but why can't he tell the whole story? And, why can't you, Elsapheth? Just where have you come from? Before showing up at the Hold?"

Then, you happen to notice Belfor is over at the bar, making a point of keeping his back to the table where Doil, Elsapheth, and Veylann are talking. Slippa is there at the bar also, talking to him, and occasionally looking back toward the table. Probably trying to do damage control, you figure.

Doil says to Elsapheth, "You have secrets yourself. Want me to tell some of them? Why you were kicked out of the Hold? So, why are you asking Belfor to say more? Sure, he didn't say who they were, but why should you care? Maybe there is something more we ought to know about Belfor? But how about you?"

As you come up to join in the conversation, Veylann says, "We shouldn't be talking about this here. We need a room. Maybe bigger than normal, where we can all talk about this."

Right about then, Slippa comes back from over at the bar. She must have heard that. "Yes. We need to get this mess solved." She turns to Oliver. "How about getting us one of the bigger rooms. With a table and enough room. We will probably want a room later anyway. No. I'll do it. I'll get us a good room." She goes over to the bar to talk to Liquidity.

Meanwhile you (Oliver, Groa, Corvyn maybe) ask what all this is about.

Doil says. "After all that Fargo forced Belfor to say last night, Elsapheth here thinks he hasn't said enough. As if she hasn't been tight as a clam when it comes to telling us her background, too."

“I just asked him what the cleric group was, or Order, he was raised by,” Elsapheth explained. “I didn’t insist that he had to tell me.”

“He obviously has some good reason to keep some things secret,” Veylann said. “I know what it’s like to have someone wanting to do you in. That’s why I’m not still in Selleze myself, after all.”

Slippa returned to the table. Belfor was trailing her, looking uncomfortable, and looking down. “We’ve got room One,” she said. “A nice big room. Let’s all go up and talk this out. They aren’t going to run out of food while we’re gone.”

When the party got into the room, all nine of them, Slippa shut and latched the door.

Veylann suggested that Elsapheth talk first, and explain what the problem seems to be.

“I’m not trying to cause trouble,” she said. “Others are forthright. Doil, too. I am with you because of him, but he’s honest with me. He doesn’t think I’m pure enough of a dwarf to be, well, more than a just a friend. Mostly, I’ve felt at home in this party. Nobody has given me a hard time, like always before. Yes, I know there are some things I have to hide. And I do. But not a complete wall of silence like Belfor. Quite honestly, he scares me. He’s not of the Way of the Cross, but seemingly knows about it, and he calls on bear spirits or something like that. But, he won’t explain anything. Nothing at all until Fargo pressed him, and even then nothing much. Not even the Sisterhood or whatever it was that raised him. I don’t think I’m the only one he scares.”

(Oddly enough, Belfor’s origin, as described to Fargo, was not far away from Elsapheth’s origin, also in the Gildegulch area. Maybe that has some connection to the tension. But, something has to be done, or the party seems likely to lose Elsapheth or Belfor or both.)

“If you want to know more about me, you owe it to everybody here to explain yourself first,” Belfor responds.

“That’s fair,” Elsapheth answered. Turning to the rest of you, she says, “I’m a dwarf. But, I’m not entirely a dwarf, as I believe you maybe already knew that. Not hard to tell. My mother was a half orc. Half orc, and I think half human. ‘Willow’ was her name. I never knew my father. I knew his name, Axel Forgebillow. Nobody told me much of anything about him. My mother was sent away from the coven when I was young, eight years old. She had been given another “assignment.” So, I was raised by the Sisters of the Mysteries of Life, there in their secret hold, in expectation that I would become a cleric of their order. They said they had high hopes for me. But, I came to find out certain things, as I grew older, that made me not want to follow in their way. So, I was discharged. I was blindfolded, taken to the area of Gildegulch, and released. I found my way into the town and was allowed to serve at the Church there for a while. I eventually found out where my father Axel Forgebillow was from. There were dwarves in Gildegulch and later in Selleze who would talk. I tried to join my father’s Hold, of the Rockproud clan, but was rejected because of the impure blood; I wasn’t entirely a dwarf, and they would not allow me to stay. I eventually found my way to Guardraw. And, joined you here. So, to tell the truth, I am regarded as an unclean embarrassment by dwarves, and a half breed half orc by humans, as well as an apostate by my former Order.”

Belfor then speaks. “I will apologize first for having been so secretive. but if anything, I bear some burdens that are more troublesome than Elsapheth’s. I too was

raised in a secret hold of the Sisters of the Mysteries of Life. It was a hold for raising young boys to adulthood, with an expectation that they would later serve the Order, though the Order itself remained exclusively women, of course. I never knew my mother or my father. Boys are taken from their mothers at age of about four and raised by what were called 'Aunts,' who saw to their keeping and training. It was an orphanage, and not a particularly kindly one, either. From what little I heard said, my father was thought to be a half-elf, but the Sisters were disappointed to find no trace of such ancestry in me. As we boys matured into young men, we did labor like cutting trees, sawing lumber, and other work needed for our hold as well as to supply others. Always supervised by Aunts and Sisters, lest we should escape. I managed to escape despite their precautions. I was found by a kindly woodsman, though I suppose it would be more accurate to call him a 'Druid.' He was sympathetic, and gave me a home with him, living out in the woods. He taught me most of what I know, and also had some perspective and thoughts on the Sisters of the Mysteries of Life, who he regarded as enemies. The sisters are somewhat druid-like too. They live and have their secret holds in the deep woods. They found his camp and we both had to move out. We parted ways. Better that just one of us be found, if someone was to be found, than both. I'm not going to mention his name, in case there's a chance he succeeded in escaping. I managed to get away and eventually made my way west to Topaltown and then to Guardraw, where I met Fargo and the rest of you.

"So, the Sisters of the Mysteries of Life are Evil?" Slippa asks. "That's what you seem you imply. In all my years, I've never heard that."

"I wouldn't say evil," Elsapheth said. "They do have some irregular beliefs, and don't seem to acknowledge the authority of the Archbishop or anybody else."

Belfor waited until Elsapheth had said that, then adds. "I don't like what they are doing. Or, let me put it this way. I don't like what I think they are doing. I don't know whether to say they are evil or not. I'm sure many of them are not, personally, evil. But they are following in the doctrines of their order. As a whole, I have doubts, but I don't know enough to say more."

Slippa whistled. "Occasionally one or another of them have come through Sundown. They never did talk about what they were up to. Always seemed pleasant enough. Secretive."

"Well, yes," Elsapheth said. "There are secrets, and not many of those secrets are shared with those who are not fully accepted into the Order."

"Or with those who merely serve the Order. Or prisoners of the Order," adds Belfor.

"They, the Sisters of the Mysteries of Life, have friends in high places," Elsapheth said. "They told us that. It was a warning not to divulge anything. So, I've tried not to talk about it. I wanted to leave that all behind. A new life. With you. That's harder to do than I supposed."

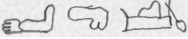
"We welcome you, as you are, and consider you a sister to all of us in the Way," Veylann says in a kindly voice. "I will not trouble you about this past."

"Nor will I," Slippa says. "But now that I'm hearing all of this, I'm getting curious. Just what are they up to? I always supposed they were perfecting the arts of healing, and other things to sustain life. But that's not what I seem to be hearing from either of you."

"Exactly," Belfor says. "What are they doing? And why? It doesn't seem good."

There was some back and forth and odd questions, but clearly the business was done.

3. The party returned to the Common Room and got lunch. In the early afternoon, Mister Fargo came by and found the party just finishing the meal.

“So, you really want to go to Sundown?” he asked. “Don’t expect cooperation. I heard what Lady Aliathah and Mistress Kaykenyon wrought there. Wasn’t pretty. The reason I heard more than just rumors is that I told Mister Urtles you were planning to go there, and he had a lot to say about it. He was still giving all the reasons it’s best to stay away and let things calm down, when who do you suppose comes into the room. It’s Mistress Kaykenyon herself. She says, she does, ‘You have people going to Sundown? I want them to look for something. It will look like a box. At least two or three feet by maybe one or two high and deep.’ She gave me this piece of parchment with symbols written on it.  “That’s what’s supposed to be written on it.”

Fargo continued, saying, “She said, ‘I don’t know what the writing means. Likely not still magical after all these years, but maybe it can be restored.’ Mistress Kaykenyon seems to think this might be the most valuable thing the ancient Sunnarians had, likely carefully hidden somewhere down below. Or, possibly somewhere in the Temple of the Sun. It’s written of in the early tablets. Something to do with porting between here and the Kingdom of the Sun. Opens portals maybe? That would fit. I don’t know. But this thing may just still be down there. Meanwhile, Lady Kaykenyon is trying to translate more of these tablets. Ancient version of the language, apparently. Hard even for her.”

Fargo continued, saying, “I was going to send you out to the west to check on those red vaporous apparitions that have been showing up around Torquis. But, maybe this is more important. So, if you find something like what Lady Kaykenyon is looking for, grab it and bring it back.”

4. The party was in the common room as dinner was being served, before the music got started. A woman walked up to your table, and said, “Someone named Melodious here? Liquidity said you’d be here.”

Melodious rises and says she had indeed found him.

“I’m Transverse,” she said, “Messenger. I’ve got something for you.” She pulls out a pouch of what must be coins and hands it to Melodious. “With thanks from Guildmaster Kryptorum of Selleze. He said you’d know what it’s for.” She then seemed to remember something else. “Can you tell me where to find someone called ‘The Demon?’ I assume that’s somebody’s nickname, but nobody seems to know anything about who that actually is. I’m supposed to find him, or her if that’s it, and make a delivery. Any help you can give me on that?”

(Someone, Melodious presumably, needs to give her an answer.)

Melodious later finds in the pouch 30 Empros.

5. The party happens. The entertainment is good but far short of spectacular. Call it a “+3 party.” Doil and Elsapheth are content to just stay at the table and drink. Slippa is trying to entice Oliver to dance with her and maybe more. (She did rent that big room, after all.) Veylann noticed that the messenger Transverse was still there, and decided to see if she’d like to dance and maybe spend some time with him.

Belfor was approached by a young pretty commoner girl who said, “Someone told me you do a really cute bear imitation.” So, he ended up talking to her a bit.

Corvyn was approached by Mellione, the nice girl from the magic shop. She said, “You must be new in town. Where are you from?” She seems to want to get to know him better.

A young commoner boy approaches Groa and stammers out an invitation to dance. (Reactions to any of this? If not, I’ll assume graceful disengagement. Anyone looking for something or someone in particular? Default is “nothing happens.”)

Melodious did ask Liquidity about the messenger when he got the chance. He answers, “No, I did not take a fee, since I did not need to handle any money or objects on your behalf. I merely pointed out to the young lady where she might find you. She did ask me about someone called ‘The Demon.’ I had to reply that I really couldn’t say.”

**Saturday, April 22<sup>nd</sup>: breeze, partly cloudy**

6. The party sets off from Guardraw for Sundown. By hustling, you can get there in one day. (So, what do you do when you get to Sundown? That’s I suppose where we start the next Adventure.)