



Children of Redwater

Letters By: Vé



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Setting

The story takes place in the lands of House Lloar, more specifically in or around two locations: Redwater and Westflood.

Redwater

Redwater is the town in which the siblings were born and raised by their loving parents, Arden and Orpheia. It is also the town where their parents became embroiled in a political struggle that would quickly end their lives in heartbreaking fashion and change the lives of their children forever.

Redwater earned its name in the time of Krullus. A terrible battle was fought near the site of the town, and the river ran red for many days after.

Redwater is situated on the banks of the Valley River at the mouth of the great Berian Valley. It has always been the winter home to the Berian Woodsmen and their families. More recently, thanks to the efforts of both Lord Eldram and Arden, it has become their permanent home. It is currently under the rule of Henerick, son of Eldram, Lord of Redwater. Henerick's mother, Thylera, the Lady of Redwater is still very active in the daily affairs of the town and the surrounding lands.

The town is of vital economic value due the major export of raw timber from the Berian Wood. Great rafts of the massive trees are assembled in the Valley River just south of Redwater and floated down to the mills in Westflood when the river is high enough.

The town is surrounded by a wooden palisade of huge Berian trees. Nearly all the structures are wooden with a few exceptions. The remains of an Asos era structure has been repurposed into an inn known as The Whetstone. Its reputation for food, drink, and song reach well beyond the local area. There is also modest temple to the Triad made of salvaged Asos stone and large river rock.

The largest stone structure in the area is the keep of the Lord of Redwater. Positioned atop a hill several miles to the southwest, the keep has an excellent vantage over the town as well as the river and approaches from the south. The keep is of more modern construction and was built by skilled and highly paid labor. It has never been attacked by significant

forces and in fact still appears newly completed. Prior to the construction of the town's palisade wall, the keep provided shelter to many of the residents of the area in times of trouble.

Westflood

Westflood is the city on the western shore of the Lake of Swords, where the five siblings have spent the last three years of their life in the mandatory service of Klain Whiteshield, Lord of Westflood, Regent of the Lake.

It is built on the foundations of many of the ruined manors of the nobles of House Asos. Much of the stone for the walls and major structures was salvaged from the monuments, temples, and libraries of the once proud city of Orenthyr and the smaller surrounding ruined towns.

The city is major trade hub for grain, lumber, fish, and finished goods. There are many working mills in and around Westflood, reducing the giant rafts of Berian trees into finished lumber.

Westflood has a non-typically religious population for a city of Lloar due in large part to the attitudes and personal beliefs of the Regent, Klain Whiteshield. There is a very large abbey to the Triad, The Abbey of the Lake, including a massive temple, library, and structures for housing and educating many of the faithful.

The large number of merchants, traders, artisan, and pilgrims make the population highly mixed.

The City Guard are regarded as protectors of the people and commerce of the region and they have a reputation of little tolerance for infractions against local laws and citizens. They are one of the largest armed forces between Silarum and Caladria.

The Lands Between

The lands north of the Lake of Swords are known as the Salt Plain. The area was the largest irrigated crop-producing region in the known history of Athia prior to the coming of the Thyrs. When the armies of Krullus invaded the lands of King Asos, not only did they flood his great city, they destroyed the ancient aqueducts, canals, and cisterns of the

irrigation system. They even salted the fields, ensuring the land would never again feed the nations of men.

The land is only now beginning to show signs of recovery. Wild grasses, brush, and even occasional groves of trees can be found in the hill country north of the Lake of Swords. Many of the lowlands and valleys are still stained with salt and unable to support much life, but higher ground is again home to herdsman and even an occasional farmer.

Herds of caribou, elk and larger animals are no longer uncommon.

There are two major trade routes between Redwater and Westflood: The Salt Road and the Valley River. The Salt Road is made up of stretches of old Asos road and newly constructed segments joining them together. It is the fastest route north from Westflood to Redwater. The Valley River has long been the trade highway for the region. When travelling south from Redwater to Westflood, no route is faster. Barges do still travel up river from the Lake of Swords against the strong current using the ancient Pull Road. A construction endeavor unimaginable in the current age, the Pull Road is a series of stone roadways, bridges, and levees, coupled with the favorable terrain on which beast of burden pull barges up the great river. Pulling a barge up river is a slow and arduous process, but huge loads of goods can be moved using minimal manpower. Barge travel is regulated closely in the high flow season to not interfere with the downstream timber rafts from Redwater.

Both routes are dotted with small villages, homesteads, and occasional roadhouses.

Occasionally to the far west, the Dragon Spine Mountains are barely visible.

Family History

Arn, Eckart, Vili, Vé and Loralei are the five children of Arden and Orphea of Redwater.

Arden came to Redwater when he was in his early twenties, as part of the expedition from Westflood, led by Eldram, future Lord of the region. The purpose of the expedition was to reign in the Berian Woodsman under the Lloar banner, more specifically under the rule of the Regent of the Lake. This endeavor would ultimately be successful, and would be credited to Eldram, but all knew, including Eldram himself, that the real breakthroughs were because of the efforts of Eldram's young lieutenant Arden.

The agreements made by Eldram (and Arden) with the Berian Woodsmen would forever change Redwater. The construction of the palisade and creation of a secure town in which the Woodsmen could live with their families in safety, would ultimately allow for stability in the region. This stability would allow for the re-establishment of the timber trade so essential to the communities down river.

Eldram was rewarded for this success with a newly sanctioned title of Lord of Redwater as well as the accompanying wealth resulting from the opening trade route. He would eventually bring his wife Thylera and young son to live in the keep overlooking the town.

Arden was credited with opening several new paths into the Berian Wood, finding several lost settlements, and helping to manage wise harvesting of the trees around Redwater. Arden would also ultimately become good friends with his mentor Lord Eldram. The two would often take expeditions in the woods alone together, much to the displeasure of Lady Thylera.

Arden would meet Orphea at a wedding during the time of construction of the palisade wall. A local Woodsmen of some fortune had a daughter marrying one of the palisade builders close to Arden, and so he was invited to attend (along with most of the town). During the typically large feast, Arden became captivated by a woman singing traditional celebratory songs. She was very gifted and very beautiful. He would later learn she was also quite smart and very strong willed. Her name was Orphea.

Orphea's family had lived there in Berian Valley for many generations. Her father a Woodsmen, her mother a midwife. She was an only child to older parents. She too had noticed Arden, the strong, respected man at the right hand of the new Lord.

At one point in the celebration, after much encouragement, Orphea began to sing a familiar wedding feast song. "The Legend of Ilval and Annon" is an ancient verse telling of two forbidden lovers that eventually find happiness only to end in tragedy. All at the feast were surprised, but none more than Orphea, when Arden began to sing along, trading stanzas, as though rehearsed. The two were lauded as the highlight of the feast. Arden and Orphea would be forever tied to the song and local wedding traditions.

They were married that same summer. The following year, Arn was born.

Eventually, Orphea took on the role of midwife, thanks to the teachings of her mother, serving Redwater and the surrounding countryside. Arden continued to explore the Berian Valley, searching for new trails, riding areas of beast and other fowl denizens. Both had the respect of the population of Redwater and of many of the Woodsmen as well.

The family quickly grew to include 3 more sons. First Eckart, then followed by the twins, Vili and Vé. Arden knew that Orphea wanted a daughter and eventually the Triad blessed them with Loralei. Arden loved their children very much and raised them to be strong willed like their mother. He would teach all of them to hunt and track and survive in the wood. Always saying to Orphea, "I cannot always be here to look over them. They need to know how to look after each other." Orphea too, would teach much to the children, about the herbs of the forest, about caring for sick animals, and people. Above all, she encouraged them to be honest, patient, and diplomatic like their father.

Orphea learned to love the winter in Redwater. It was a time when her husband was home. The springs would come, and Arden's duties would take him away from home. Once even taking him with Eldram on a journey to Westflood for some political meeting. They would be gone for two cycles (60 days). Arn has memory of his mother crying often during this time.

In the coming summers, Arden would agree to stay closer to home. Eventually suggesting that Eldram take his son Henerick on his outings in his place, but there would always be at least one or two he could not refuse.

Orphea was pleased. The young family had years of stability, contentment, and happiness.

Lord Eldram's Dilemma

In these years, Henerick would come of age. A handsome, strong, and smart young man, Henerick was given every opportunity to learn from his father and his retainers. Fencing, fighting, hunting, riding, all were taught and learned.

The trait Eldram tried most to impart to Henerick, wisdom, was the piece he refused.

He became an entitled, cruel, angry young man. Bullying the locals, stealing, using his father's title to get him out of any scrape.

Eldram would eventually press Henerick's mother to send him to her brother in Westflood to get formal education at the Abbey. She agreed and used it as an excuse to leave Redwater for a time.

When Thylera and Henerick returned, he was no better. What he seemed to have learned was ambition. And not surprisingly, lust. He now had a male attendant/bodyguard named Fuhlgar. A large man of similar ambition and morality, always with him to muscle his way out of trouble.

Thylera almost immediately began to press Eldram about arranging for Henerick to succeed him as Lord. Eldram was, at first, excited by the idea and even went so far as to inquire with the Regent about such a possibility.

It would be Arden, and Orphea that would change his mind.

Orphea would eventually learn of Henerick's treatment of the local population of young, unmarried ladies when attending several of them in pregnancy. Orphea became so affected by the accounts given by the young women, she immediately told Arden and demanded something be done, adding that she had noticed Henerick speaking with Lorelei just days before.

Arden wasn't really concerned about young Lorelei, but Eldram deserved to know what was happening with his son. The Lord was less than happy to learn of it and became enraged at Arden for overstepping their friendship. Arden made a quick apology and took his leave.

It is unclear what happened over the next few days, but in the end, Lady Thylera left the keep and Eldram came to Redwater to visit with Arden and Orphea.

The Trip

It had been a long time since Eldram had visited their home. It was large by Redwater standards, but nothing compared to the keep. Eldram looked around the family home with a hint of envy. He first apologized to Arden and then to Orphea, offering her his own purse filled with septems. He asked that she use them to see to the girls she was caring for. He then asked Arden if they could take one of their trips in to the wood. He had been thinking of a possible solution to the issues with his son and wanted to discuss it at length. To their

surprise, he invited the entire family. Arden eventually agreed and allowed the Arn, Eckart, Vé and Lorelei to come along. Orphea elected to stay to care on a pregnancy that was nearing time. Vili stayed to assist.

Eldram refused to let any of his retainers accompany them on the hunt, only one cook, and one groom for the horses. They modestly outfitted themselves, hoping to live off the land as usual.

The first couple of days were spent travelling on trails all of them, even Lorelei knew well. Arden and Eldram debated how to correct the misdeeds of Henerick. Once they reached the deeper wood, progress was slow. They were forced to slay an ursi. Eldram was knocked from his horse. Once it was over, he laughed loudly. Thanking Arden for saving him once again.

They stumbled upon a waterfall in the stream, almost fifty feet high. It was a perfect place to stop. After making camp, Eldram asked the children for some time alone with their father. Not long after, they could be heard arguing. Eventually Eldram came storming into camp asking the siblings strange questions, almost yelling.

“Wouldn’t you like to live in the keep? To travel to Westflood and beyond? To learn from the best teachers?”

Finally, Arden had to physically restrain him. It would all end with the two of them laughing and the children confusedly joining in. Once they gathered their breath, Eldram continued,

“Is it so bad Arden, what I propose? Is it such a tragedy for you and your family?”

“No, I suppose not.” Arden responded.

“Then ask me or I shall not believe you!” Eldram pressed.

Arden then smiled, drew his sword, and yelled, “I demand Lord, that you name me successor!”

“Good. So it will be.”

The attack that followed caught them all by surprise. Many arrows from all directions. Both Eldram and Arden were struck. Eldram called to his friend to get his family to safety.

"This time I shall save you!" he cried.

Arden leapt from the falls screaming for the sibling to run. Arn and Eckart fired arrows blindly into the trees, trying desperately to hit their assailants.

"Come on you cowards!" Eldram shouted to them.

Several more arrows pierced him as he fell to the bottom of the waterfall. It would become quickly apparent that the arrow which struck Arden was poisoned. He would need help to escape. The siblings would spend the next five days, helping each other, dragging their seriously injured father home.

When they finally arrived, they would learn that Orphea was killed in an attempt on Henerick's life. Vili was missing and was being hunted by the whole of the town guard. All of the children were accused of conspiracy against a Lord of House Lloar. And, Arden was accused of the murder of Eldram, Lord of Redwater.

The Inquiry

For eight days, the siblings were imprisoned within the dungeon of the keep. They received no word of their father and struggled to support each other through the ordeal. Vili was unconscious when they brought him in on the third day. He had taken refuge in the barn of the woman he had been caring for. He knew nothing of what was happening other than Orphea was dead.

They eventually received a visit the Curate of Redwater, Linden, an Acolyte they all knew well. He was very serious and measured in his account of what was happening. Their father was alive and would stand accused before Klain Whiteshield, Regent of the Lake himself, when he arrived some time before the end of the cycle.

Lord Eldram's body was brought in to Redwater the day before they had arrived in town with Arden.

Orphea was killed in their own house for attempting to kill Henerick. Henerick was badly injured. He may be blind in one eye.

Linden refused to hear any of the sibling's accounts of events, stating he was to be involved in the inquiry.

The day before the trial the siblings were taken to a different part of the keep and briefly questioned by an Acolyte calling himself Lathan. He was a very serious, tall, thin, pale man. His questions were very specific, and he demanded they each answer with yes or no only.

Day One

The day began with introductions of the participants in the Inquiry:

The Regent, Lathan, Linden, Henerick, Lady Thylera, the siblings, Arden, a few other witnesses, finally ending with Lady Thylera's brother Toreas, Henerick's uncle, who would be speaking for the Lord's family. And, Rilen, one of Arden's trusted guides, who would be speaking for Arden's family.

Arden was placed in chains at the front of the room. The siblings caught his glance a number of times, but they were not allowed to speak with him at all.

Many boring accounts of Lord Eldram and Arden's friendship and working relationship were given in the morning, followed by character witness including the Regent himself on behalf of Arden.

After a midday break, Lady Thylera gave an account of Arden visiting Eldram to speak of Henerick shortcomings and unworthiness to be Lord and the argument that followed. She also testified that both she and Eldram wished greatly that Henerick be Lord one day.

Arn was asked to give an account of the night they were visited by Eldram.

Eckart and Vé were asked details of their trip.

Vili was asked about where he last saw Orphea.

Loralei was asked only two yes/no questions:

"Did your father and Eldram argue on the trip?" and,

"Did your father draw his sword and demand to be made successor?"

She tried to answer both with "no", but Curate Linden shook his head both times at the Regent. The Regent instructed her to answer truthfully or face the consequences. She eventually did.

Arden would give his account of the trip and the death of Eldram. Many details of which were fuzzy due to the poison still in his system. Many objections and questions were voiced from Toreas.

Another break was taken.

The room was cleared of all audience not directly involved in the inquiry. Lathan then began to pray in front of a small altar that had been hastily set up at the end of the room. Linden and one other Acolyte began praying soon after.

Lathan called a visage of Eldram into being in front of the room. The image of the dead Lord was terrible to behold. He looked like a statue of himself, looking around at the those in the room as if confused.

Both Toreas and Rilen were asked to pass a single written question to Linden. Linden then asked the visage of Eldram each question aloud:

“Did you wish your son to succeed you as Lord of Redwater?”

“Yes” he responded.

“Did Arden or his children cause your death?”

“No” he responded.

Clearly shaken, Linden wiped his brow and nodded to the Regent.

The image of Lord Eldram then faded away.

The Regent then spoke,

“So then on the matter of murder, Arden, you are declared not guilty. In the matter of conspiracy and treason, perhaps tomorrow will show the truth. This inquiry is now excused for the night.”

Curate Linden would later inform the siblings that the second day would be largely concerning their mother and the conspiracy. He added that the will of the Triad will be also present at the inquiry as the day before.

Day Two

A few minutes before the beginning of the second day, the children were briefly reunited with their father. Arden looked very sick but smiled as soon as he saw them. He was in chains. There were many questions, and promises, and tears but, in the end, he demanded they be strong and that they remember their mother as they knew her, not by what would be said there today.

Again, much of the first half of the day was made up of introductions and statements of the conspiracy case to deny Henerick succession to Lord of Redwater. Later were many accounts of the quality and character of Orphea.

Eventually, there would be an account of the evening in question from a local man, Artil, a respected merchant that knew the family. He told the story of how Orphea was at the Whetstone singing when Henerick and Fuhlgar arrived. Eventually, as was common on the rare occasion when Orphea was at the Whetstone, she was asked to sing the "Legend of Ilval and Annon". She eventually agreed and was unexpectedly joined by Henerick. The crowd cheered loudly. Not long after, Orphea left. And soon after, Henerick would also leave. The story caused Arden to protest to the point of being further restrained and gagged.

Henerick would then tell a surprising tale of how he saw Orphea walking home alone and offered to escort her. She would accept and upon arrival at the house, ask him if he needed on more cup of wine before heading to the keep. Henerick accepted. She then threw herself upon him and they made love in Arden's bed at her request. After sleeping for a few hours, he arose before dawn to make his usual escape before waking the woman of that particular night. He would find his father's purse on the table. He woke Orphea, demanding an explanation. She told him of his father's wishes to take care of the girls he had been with. Henerick denied his involvement and she became enraged and attacked him with a kitchen knife. He called for help and Fuhlgar kicked in the door and ran Orphea through. He immediately sent for help and then cut off Orphea's head that she would not rise to trouble them further.

At the end of the telling, Linden, with tears in his eyes turned to the regent and nodded.

A break was called.

Afterwards, when the siblings were again called to the inquiry, there was an argument happening between Henerick's uncle, Toreas, and the tall Acolyte Lathan. Toreas was demanding that he be allowed to ask the questions. Eventually the Regent denied him.

What was to happen next would haunt the dreams of the children forever.

The room was again cleared of all audience not directly involved in the inquiry. Lathan then began to pray in front of the small altar as he had the day before. Linden and the other Acolyte began praying soon after.

Lathan called a visage of Orphea into being in front of the room. Colorless, silent, but undeniably Orphea. Her hair waved about her as though she was floating in water. She looked thin, almost ill. The injury at her neck was not bleeding, but obvious. Her eyes went immediately to Arden who was crying. She smiled.

Linden took the page he was given and asked the following question aloud,

“Did you act in defense of yourself when you attacked Henerick?”

“No” she replied, with look of anger and pride.

Linden then asked the second question,

“Did you willingly invite Henerick into your own bed?”

The visage of Orphea immediately looked to Arden, she began to shake and eventually pulled at her hair and looked as though screaming, her mouth wide, eyes closed tight, silently screaming.

Toreas demanded, “Make her answer!”

And so, she did. With streams of tears running down her colorless face.

“Yes.” she said.

And she was gone. Arden had to be removed from the room, Arn too was restrained. Never have the children been as confused or saddened.

The Regent then closed the inquiry for the day.

Day Three

The morning of the third day began with a visit from Linden. His hair had turned white overnight. He was, like everyone, affected by the events of the previous day. He informed the siblings that their father had requested a direct audience with the Regent to discuss confessing to the accusations.

Soon, they were taken to see Arden in his cell. The Regent was leaving as they arrived.

"You have one hour." he stated as he exited.

This would be the last time the children would see their father. They spent the time talking about how things would change, how to stay strong, and how to look after each other. There were many tears and embraces. Embraces that would have to last.

At the end of the hour, the Regent returned and gave Arden his word that the siblings would be safe. Arrangements had been made to take them to Westflood. They would not see Redwater or their father again.

The time between

Three years. The Regent promised Arden he would keep his children in Westflood under his protection for three years.

It was in Westflood that Vé would begin his studies at the Abbey of the Lake. The experiences of his father's trial affected him deeply. Eventually, he would hear the voice of Erebos, forever changing his outlook on what happened, and what was to come.

Arn would first be made a tracker for the City Guard. He would rise quickly through the ranks and would eventually be considered for promotion to the White Guard- the Regent's personal bodyguards. He would decline the assignment to return home with his siblings.

Loralei would be a ward of the Regent, she would only cross paths with Arn and Eckart a time or two, but she saw Vé often at the Abbey. Her youth kept her from direct service, but she was trained and educated among the Regent's own family. She would eventually be allowed to roam the city alone but never for more than a few hours at a time.

Eckart was assigned to a local merchant, a wealthy one, by the name of Liutulf. He would come to lead his personal guards. He even accompanied him once when he travelled

south to Sillarum over a year ago. Although his reputation was unquestionable in service to Master Liintulf, when the Regent found out about the trip, Eckart was forbidden from leaving the City. Master Liintulf then released him from service. Eckart has been on his own since then.

Vili's whereabouts have been unknown the rest of the children. He contacted Vé just days before they were to leave Westflood.

At the end of the three years promised to the Regent, the siblings ended their service. But it worked out that he was able to keep them a bit longer. The Regent refused to allow them to leave until winter's end. When Auctus finally came and the snows ended, Orphea and Arden's children would no longer stay.

On the 16th Day of the First Cycle of Auctus, in the 6th Year of the Triad, they would start their journey home.

Auctus 16.1c

Dear Brother Anselm:

I have no idea when I'll be able to post this letter, but it gives me some small measure of comfort to at least write it. I already miss the quiet of the abbey, and our talks. Just now, shivering under a foul-smelling blanket, I cannot express just how much I miss what has been my home for the last three years. But you were right. I have to go back to my first home. There is too much unfinished business.

Oh! You'll never believe who showed up at the gates: Vili. It turns out he's been in Sillarum all this time. I have no idea what he's been up to, but he seems to have prospered. His clothing is fine (even bordering on dandy-ish, if truth be told) and he's become more confident and garrulous. It was great to see him, but something feels off. I worry that he's not being entirely genuine with us.

He brought with him a friend named Rishja: a tavern worker it seems. She's older than all of us, and seems worldly and self-assured. Ekhart knows her in passing as well. Speaking of Ekhart, how he has changed. Taller, as are all of us, but he looks thin and a bit sickly. I feel badly that I didn't make more concerted efforts to see him over the last three years, but I cannot bear that guilt alone. I was not hard to find.

I think Lorelei is less ready to forgive our errant brothers for not keeping in touch. We shall see. She and Arn are much as they were when you met them, though Lorelei looks more and more like Mother every time I see her. Arn's manner reminds me of father, as well.

Which brings me back inevitably to thoughts of Justice. On the first leg of our journey we spoke at length about what each of us expects and desires when we reach Redwater. I think we all crave some manner of justice or revenge, though the precise manner of seeking it varies widely among us. The scars of what happened to our parents are apparent on us all, and the years have served only to stoke the fires of our anger.

All of mine were temporarily quenched in the icy brine of embarrassment and ... well, literal icy brine. When we reached the ford across the Salt Run I steered our cart off the road and upended it. No real harm was done, and we soon repacked all our belongings. Rishja, who has more skill at tending animals than I, has taken over the driving. Much to

my short-lived relief. When we took the cart across the river, a jolt from the waves tumbled me in. I wish I had taken your advice and spent more time practicing my swimming. I could blame the cold ... and Erebos' Mercy it was cold ... but the truth is I floundered. Ekhart had to grab a rope and come in after me. I do not doubt that I owe him my life. Rishja got a fire going, and while Ekhart and I were just getting out of our wet clothes, Arn was thrown from his horse while crossing. He was never in as much danger as I, but from the cold. Now we three brothers shiver in our tent, and I feel as if I'll never be warm again.

An inauspicious start to our journey. I pray that the morrow goes more smoothly.

Auctus 17.1c

Dear Brother Anselm:

I hope you will forgive my poor penmanship, but I'm writing you this letter from the back of a dead man's horse. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

After our misadventures crossing the river, we sat down around the fire to discuss our plans. Though only after Vili and Rishja went for a private talk, and Lorelei disappeared around the same time. I fear there are already secrets in our midst, which saddens me. Forgive me, my thoughts are jumbled. It comes from fearing for my life.

How to describe our talk? There was too much ale drunk, and very little agreement. Ekhart believes that Henerick has Redwater on "lockdown" and subjugated to his evil will. Lorelei is worried the Lady Thylera will have turned the people against us, but even so she wants to present herself at the Keep, trusting to the protection of the Regent. Arn wants to make contact with local families first, to get the lay of the land. Rishja offered to enter the town before us. Vili worries that Henerick will just kill us all outright, and Ekhart agrees with him. I think we'll be welcomed warmly, for our parents' sake.

Hurmph. If it feels like this letter is a mish-mash of conflicting opinions, then I'm accurately reflecting our conversation. The only conclusion we came to was that we need more information before we can make concrete plans. There is danger ahead of us. I think we all agree on that much.

Speaking of danger, we were ambushed in the night by guards from the Eclan Traders. Fortunately, Ekhart spotted our attackers and woke us all before it was too late. We made a good accounting of ourselves, killing six armed men with only minor wounds among us. I myself took two arrows, but trust I will mend well. It's difficult to describe the skirmish. I've never been in a fight for my life before. There was that unpleasantness with those thugs, but they did not intend to kill me.

Things happened so fast. There was fire and shouting and running hither and yon. Lorelei turns out to be deadly with her crossbow. Vili stood stock still in the face of incoming arrows, aiming Mother's bow with icy calm. Ekhart was a whirling blur of action, ending

with his spear stuck deep into a man's guts. And Arn. Arn was terrifying. He cleft a man in twain! Collarbone to hip. Right in half.

My own contribution was slight. I called upon Erebos and blinded our attackers, which I flatter myself helped somewhat. Though Vili does not believe I did even that. Infuriating! The only time I swung my axe was decapitating the corpses.

Forgive me, I fear I made a muddle of that recounting. We are all well and back on the road towards home. I'm sleepy, and my wounds ache, and the world seems more dangerous and antagonistic this morning than has since the trial, but we are all well.

As dawn broke, I sat on the lip of the canyon, and prayed; bidding the night and another piece of my childhood goodbye. I yearn for the solace of the temple, but deliberately, defiantly turn my face towards the rising sun. Whatever dangers the new day brings, we will face them as a family. And Erebos willing, we will master them.

Auctus 18.1c

Dear Brother Anselm:

We're currently camped in a deserted farmhouse, our tent groaning under a thick layer of snow. I'm awake before the others, roused by the odor in here. However much I may have complained about the cold in my cell back at the temple, it was certainly better than waking up to the smell of goat shit inside a tent. What on Athia does that animal eat?

So, yes, we have added a goat to our not-so-merry little band. Lorelei and Rishja traded the last of our ale for it from a friendly goatherd yesterday. Mostly, it seems, to deprive a slumbering (and no doubt hungover) Vili of his drink. The goat is named Bernard, and the stated purpose of eating her (yes her, don't ask) has quickly vanished under a flood of affection from Rishja. I suspect she will be with us all the way to Redwater.

Beyond Bernard eating part of Vili's trousers, there is little to report except what we talked about. Oh, how we talk. I grow frustrated with our incessant rehashing of past events. I yearn to learn something new; to have some form of action. But while we're on the road, there's little else that we can do, so we talk.

We discussed the Regent, who most seem to agree is a good and moral man, if not necessarily the smartest. He may have been outsmarted by Thylera and Henerick. There was some discussion of who we most want to see dead. While Ekhart and I are mostly motivated by a desire for the truth of what happened, Vili seems intent on Henerick's death, laws and consequences be damned. Lorelei wishes for Thylera's death. Arn wants to kill Fuhlgar. And I find myself lamenting the events that caused my carefree family to become so bloodthirsty.

It is to the mystery of those events that we return time and again. Why would the lord force father to draw his sword and demand to be made heir? Why would Mother invite Henerick into her bed? If not so that when put to a very narrow and specific question, they would be forced to answer truthfully but in the most damning way possible. Vili says it's unlikely that the lord could have been controlled by an Air Mage. Was there blackmail? Threats against us children? Who was behind this confounding series of events? Who stood to gain? Henerick perhaps, but he was already heir.

My head spins and my teeth clench and I must force myself to calm down. Again I gnaw on this bone. The gristle is long since gone, and I cannot get to the marrow of the issue. There is no profit in it, but I cannot stop myself.

One last thing. Ekhart asked me about contacting Mother's shade. I tried to be non-committal, but I suspect I was more revealing than I intended to be. You are my only confidant who knows how I've struggled with that issue. I want to speak with her, as much because I miss her, as to learn about her death. But every time I've tried Erebos has blocked my way. Either the time is not right, or it is simply not to be. I must trust in my God that there is a reason for my failures. It's all I can do.

The others waken. I will leave off here. I hope you are well. Erebos protect you.

Auctus 19.1c

Dear Brother Anselm:

I'm awake before the others again. The rhythms of the temple are difficult to put behind me. I relish these quiet moments. Erebos grant that the rest of the morning stays as calm and peaceful. I'd rather not have a repeat of yesterday.

After an uneventful night at the farm house, we were roused by the sound of our ox, Nalgene, bellowing because he'd fallen partway into the well. Both Lorelei and Rishja were slightly injured by his thrashing as they tried to help. I called upon Erebos to paralyze the beast and we were finally able to drag him out with the aid of the horses. An inauspicious start to the day, but fortunately, not a portent of further difficulties.

Except for the snow. Ugh. However eager we were to get home, I'm beginning to think we should have delayed longer. The entire morning was a slow-going slog through a foot and a half of snow. Only a bit of singing kept our spirits up. Lorelei's voice is every bit as beautiful as Mother's was.

At lunch Lorelei asked all of us brothers whether or not we had dated anyone. Vili and Ekhart were reticent and did not reveal much. But then, neither did I say anything about my brief and ultimately star-crossed dalliance with Solveig, nor the unpleasantness that followed. Arn still seems to be pining for his sweetheart from back home, Kari, I think her name is. But he hasn't corresponded with her, so who knows what will happen there.

The snow started again as we ate, and not long after we got moving again, we met up with a Cerick Sentinel named Olin. He urged us to find a place to camp and wait out the storm, and joined us for the evening. He shared wine and interesting news.

It seems that Henerick is getting married soon to a rich foreigner (from Luria, he thought). Many people will be headed to Redwater for the wedding. He also told us that there has been trouble with the men working the rafts. Extra wages have been sent in by Henerick's uncle, but even then there have been defections. A would-be deserter was run down by armed men last year, and there are rumors of other extra-judicial killings.

It didn't take long before Olin recognized that we were all related, and from there it was a short and logical path to uncovering our identities. He had dealings with Father, and respected him, and expressed sympathy for our cause. But he also warned us to be careful. Once we pass Mudrim, we are beyond his purview and it is best to assume the Sentinels there will be under Henerick's thumb.

Olin urged us to follow him to the pull road, as the salt road will likely be unpassable in places thanks to this Gods-cursed snow. On the morrow we will follow him to the East, with vague plans after that, perhaps to include hiring a boat. Beyond that I cannot say. It will be as Erebus wills, I suppose.

[Not in this note, but we ended with the sound of a mammoth trumpeting.]

Auctus 20.1c

Dear Brother Anselm:

Erebos preserve us. Our ill luck persists. Shortly after completing my last letter to you we were attacked by a mammoth. Olin had gone ahead to scout, and we heard the warning blast of his horn and the angry trumpeting of the mammoth at the same time. It was probably foolhardy, but we all rushed forward. By the time we were in sight, Olin had been thrown from his horse, and his leg was bending at a painfully unnatural angle. We readied our weapons, and Olin's horse, Axim, was crushed by the mammoth, and killed instantly.

Arn dismounted and ran right up to the mammoth, dealing severe damage, and only avoiding the same through deft use of his shield. Vili and Lorelei fired at the mammoth from a distance, while it took all the efforts of Rishja and Ekhart to keep Nalgene calm. I myself rushed to Olin's side to provide aid, pausing only to call upon Erebos' might to smite the great beast. It was the largest spell I've yet cast, and I must admit the feeling was exhilarating. (Though once again, Vili refuses to acknowledge my contribution.) Vili rushed in close to aid Arn and was struck heavily for his trouble. Then Arn smote the beast a mighty blow, disemboweling it, and just like that, it was over.

I provided what aid I could, but fortunately no one was seriously hurt. It turns out that Olin's painfully askew leg was wooden, and he'd already lost it years ago. We spent a few hours harvesting meat, fur and the tusks from the mammoth, before pushing on again. Vili harangued Arn for being too foolhardy and risking his life, and tempers were once again soothed by Lorelei's singing.

We made camp within sight of the river, with the promise of reaching Gold Bend on the morrow. We ate mammoth meat, which was tough and gamey, and not to my taste. Over the fire we talked more about our childhood, and lamented that none of us ever had the opportunity to travel with Father when he went out of town. I remember that once Father went to Westflood for two whole months and Mother was very angry at him for it.

Vili continues to be ... well, Vili. He spent some minutes complaining of being cold and entreating others to build up the fire. When Rishja and Lorelei questioned his ability to do so himself, he grudgingly marched off and returned with exactly one stick. For once I was able to look past my annoyance and find some humor in his behavior. Would that that were more frequent.

It's morning now and Lorelei is giving Rishja an archery lesson, and I'm jotting down these lines to you. I'm looking forward to a warm bed in an inn tonight, though it will mean we'll be parting ways with Olin, and I've grown fond of the old curmudgeon.

Post Script: Just on the outskirts of town we ran into a quartet of scrawny young men. They hid on either side of the road and threw rocks at us. Before we could see how hungry and desperate they must be we readied ourselves for violence. What an intimidating and warlike crew we must seem, even for ones so young, for the men ran off quickly. We left them some of the mammoth meat, and went our way. I have the leisure to write more to you now because we've managed to throw the left wheel of the cart. I hope that this setback doesn't keep me from the luxury of a hotel bed tonight. I'd make that a prayer, but I dare not bother Erebos with such trifles.

I hope you are well brother. I'll try to post my backlog of letters once I get into town. Whenever that is.

Auctus 21.1c

Gold Bend is a sad little town, made up mostly of ramshackle huts on stilts that are in such poor repair as to often seem abandoned. The one building of any significance is an Inn called the Book Box. So called, it seems, because it contains two books. Which in these parts is apparently a substantial library. The bunk room is filthy and smells worse than Brother Archibald's feet. And the fish stew that Olin talked up with such fervor is a lumpy, pasty, foul-tasting concoction that is only marginally better than Brother Marcus's Secret Ingredient Stew. (I was always convinced that the secret ingredient was Brother Archibald's socks.)

All of this I have gleaned from a quick trip through Gold Bend just as the sun was setting, and from the testimony of my siblings. Ekhart and I stayed with the wagon all day while everyone else ventured into town in search of a replacement axle. I must say that I had a lovely day of reading, and sparse conversation, and well ... just quiet. It made me pine for the Abbey.

From what I heard there are two groups of bargemen here who find themselves without horses to pull their barges. One group overworked their animals, who died. The other had their horses commandeered by the Eclan Traders. Rishja sold our spare horses and a large amount of our mammoth meat to one of these groups. Which seems a judicious arrangement. We'll have more need of money than spare horses, I think. In the morning, we're hoping to board a barge for the trip up-river to Redwater, or at least as far as Mud Rim.

What else? Rishja apparently has a friend here (or at least a friend of a friend) because she seems to know someone wherever we go. And in case she was running short of friends, she befriended a young girl with a younger goat. Olin found us a new axle. He convinced two of the young men who threw rocks at us to provide one as recompense for their actions. Given the unsanitary condition of the "Inn", we're camping on a spit of land just outside of town.

Oh, one more thing. I haven't had occasion to call upon them yet, but I sense that Erebos has granted me new interventions of Divination. I am humbled by this sign of approval. However much I am plagued by doubts, surely this indicates that at least some of my

actions are pleasing to my god. I haven't yet mentioned this to anyone else. I want to be sure of my abilities before I trumpet them to the world. Erebus knows I don't want to give Villi any further reason to doubt my abilities. I'll reveal this new boon when the time is right.

I pray that you are well, and that Brother Marcus is not on kitchen rotation any time soon.

Auctus 22.1c

I am well pleased to leave the town -- though even that word feels too charitable -- of Gold Bend behind us. We are now making our way, slowly and laboriously, upriver. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Since I last wrote, we had to negotiate passage on one of the barges. The only one left after we sold our horses is called *The Keg*, and is captained by a man named Rynar. After some negotiation we came to the agreement that we and our cargo could ride on the barge, while Nalgene pulls the barge and the empty cart upriver. It might seem to amount to much the same thing as us proceeding up the pull road ourselves, but we have access to the knowledge and experience of Captain Rynar.

On the first day of travelling thus, Arn and Lorelei chose to ride their horses on the road. While I was engaged in prayer, Ekhart, Vili and Rishja took it into their minds to throw rocks and other debris at Arn and Lorelei. I don't know who initiated the idea, though I suspect Vili, but I was very disappointed in all three of them. Regardless, Arn and Lorelei understandably thought they were under attack. In the ensuing chaos, Ekhart, Vili and our goat, Bernard, all ended up in the water. Rishja jumped in to save Bernard. We had quite a time fishing everyone out and soothing lost tempers.

When I say there was chaos, I mean that in more ways than one. It turns out that Lorelei can cast arcane spells. It's a talent she'd been keeping hidden from all of us. When she was hit, she turned without thinking and cast a spell that caused Ekhart, Vili and Rishja to lash out at one another indiscriminately. While I'm inclined to feel that this will be a great asset to our cause, I think some others in the family are worried. I know that users of arcane magic are misunderstood and feared in some areas, but I myself believe that we are all children of the Triad. Regardless, I hope we keep this information amongst ourselves and no one blurts it out at an inopportune time.

Last night I prayed for an omen from Erebus, and lay awake scanning the stars for a sign. What came to me was that we would approach a large bend in the river, and thereafter would come Death. I have rarely sought omens and this one chilled me to the bone. This morning I shared the omen, slightly watered down so as not to overly excite my companions. After much discussion, and several alternate plans evaluated and discarded, I again asked

for Erebus' guidance, and determined it would be best if we all approached the bend as one group.

We're now about an hour away from that bend, and I pray that I have misinterpreted this omen. That somehow we will avoid the death of one in our company. Or, failing that, that it will be my death that approaches. I must sign off now. I hope to be able to resume my letter soon. Whatever fate may befall us at the bend, I remain, now and forever

(When we arrive at the bend Olin is hanging from a tree, still alive, but barely so. Stopped there.)

Auctus 26.1c

Dear Brother Anselm:

It is with a heavy heart that I write these lines. By the grace of Erebus, none of my family was killed, but we did indeed meet with Death at the bend in the river. There we found our friend Olin hanging by a noose from a tree. We thought at first his furtive movements meant we had arrived in time to save his life, and Lorelei and Arn sprang into action to cut him down. Atlas, he had already passed and his movement were the awakenings of the Sickness. While we fought to end that horrendous parody of life, more Sick waded out of the river. These were the crew of the other barge we met in Gold Bend. The bargemen all had large, unusual arrows sticking out of them. Some kind of ambush had clearly taken place.

Our own ambush was hard fought, and several of us were wounded. Once the battle was over, I called upon Erebus to magically heal my friends and family. It felt nice to be of some use, since I once again felt somewhat ineffectual during the battle itself.

We spent some time investigating, trying to understand what had happened. We found evidence that our erstwhile horses had been present, though no trace to where they had gone, nor any clue as to where the barge was. It's possible, though not entirely likely that it sunk in a deep part of the channel, and it certainly did not float downstream by us. The most likely thing is that whomever killed all these men took the horses and barge further upriver. We'll have to be on our guard.

We advanced further upstream before camping for the night. I apologize that this letter is short. My sorrow is great enough that I feel almost as if I haven't been fully present all day. I leave you now to go offer a prayer of thanksgiving to Erebus that my family is safe, and another for the safe passage of the souls of those who are not.

Auctus 27.1c

Dear Brother Anselm:

I need to keep better track of the date. These days on the barge are interminable, and I am rather amazed that this is only the ninth day of our journey. It feels as if it's taken much longer than that.

We awoke to the news that Ekhart had spotted Olin's wooden leg floating by in the night. This is confusing, and may be evidence that the other barge is indeed upriver of us, but we could reach no consensus on why the leg would just now be floating past us. We also spotted some sections of the pull road where the stones had been disturbed, and some other signs of wild boars in the region.

Then began our long interminable day of river travel. To pass the time, Vili and I constructed a rudimentary chess set out of paper and other bits of flotsam. Bernard ate a bishop before Rishja tied her up, so we both played a bishop down.

The river is set in a broad valley, with a mile to the canyon wall. In the afternoon, I spotted a group of Ferox and their haalu mounts on the Western rim of the canyon. They were too far away for any meaningful conversation, but Lorelei waved and they waved back. At this point we were attacked by a group of five wild boars.

I appreciate that Arn and Lorelei wish to ride on the pull road, but it has the effect of splitting us up when things go wrong. We find ourselves quite a distance apart and unable to immediately provide aid. Ekhart spent a good part of the encounter trying to close the distance in between firing his bow, while Vili and I were limited to missile weapons from the barge. Speaking of, I should have spent more time practicing with my sling. I managed to hit a boar a couple of times, but it felt as if I wasn't doing much damage. Though Vili did acknowledge one hit, and I'm almost ashamed at how good it felt to get some approval from him.

But enough of me. As I said, others bore the brunt of the fighting. Lorelei cast a few spells that somehow made the boars attack each other, and Arn as usual waded in with deadly effect. Lorelei's horse was killed, and somehow Vili managed to get butted in the rear by Bernard while loosing an arrow. Peth, our not so intrepid teamster, abandoned Nalgene

and dove into the back of the cart, hiding his head under his arms and shaking like a leaf until it was all over.

In the end it could have been much worse. None of us were seriously injured, and it seems we provided entertaining sport for the Ferox. We butchered the pigs and took what meat we could. This in addition to the mammoth meat, which is starting to go bad, should bolster our rations somewhat.

Again, we moved upriver further until we found a good spot to camp. We had a quiet night around the campfire, and as soon as I finish this letter, I'm going to pray to Erebus to grant me better vision while I mount my watch.

I pray you are well.

Auctus 28.1c

Dear Brother Anselm:

Well, today's events more than make up for the boredom of the last three days. Mud Rim is a large town with an earthen palisade and a huge suspension bridge that crosses the canyon. There's a lively tavern called Trumbo's, an inn called the Stone Hearth where baths are available (a great relief to both Vili and Lorelei), a disused shrine to the Triad and a giant ramshackle trading store / pawnshop called Hobb's.

A berthing fee for the barge had been pre-arranged, but Arn and I had to see to (and pay for) stabling the animals. Vili and Lorelei ran off to the inn to secure rooms and bathe. Ekhart went looking for a wheelwright to fix the cart, and Rishja went to Trumbo's.

The town was abuzz with wedding fever. Not only is Hennerick's bride to be expected to come through any day now on a presumably sumptuous wedding barge, but there's a local wedding planned for tomorrow. The local horsetrader is coming into town with a new batch of horses to trade, and his son is marrying the daughter of one of the richest men in town. It promises to be quite a spectacle.

I'm looking forward to a bath tonight.

I hope you are well.

Auctus 29.1c

Dear Brother Anselm:

Our eventful day continued on the same course. Soon after Arn and I had settled our horses at the livery, a great herd of horses came thundering into town. The horse trader and his men (who seem to eschew shirts for some unknown reason) brought hundreds of horses across the bridge. We went down into town and met up with the rest of the family (and Rishja) at Trumbo's.

Ekhart was quite concerned with our being discovered by the Eclan Traders, who have an office in Mudrim. He wants us to trade away any saddle and tack that might be traceable to the horses we inherited from those ruffians who attacked us. This soon led us into a wider discussion, and a new plan. We're going to sell off a lot of our most cumbersome equipment and make sure we have enough horses for all of us. That way we can split off from the pull road a few days before reaching Redwater and enter town in smaller groups so as to decrease the chances of being identified immediately. We put together a list of things to do, things to sell and things to buy to prepare ourselves for this new plan.

While Ekhart and I went to Hob's to start trading, apparently Rishja and Lorelei befriended some of the horse trader's men. I wasn't there to witness it, but it seems Lorelei brought some unwanted attention to herself (at least the rest of us didn't want the attention) by engaging in a duet with the groom-to-be's brother. And she and Rishja were invited to attend the wedding. Oh, and Arn met the mayor of Mudrim. For a group ostensibly trying to keep a low profile, we're making a lot of new friends.

Eventually we all met up again in Hob's. Ekhart and I had traded in the mammoth tusks and acquired all of what we'll need for the rest of the journey. Rishja found a dress to wear to the wedding. So, a successful shopping trip, it seems.

We're all bedding down in the hotel for the night, except Rishja, who is off running one more errand of some sort, it seems. Tomorrow is the wedding, and hopefully we'll be able to finish our business and depart for Redwater. I rather long for a boring day on the river.

I hope you're well.

Auctus 30.1c

Dear Brother Anselm:

After my last letter, unable to sleep, I went to visit the shrine to the Triad in town. There I met a travelling acolyte by the name of Brother Tash. He had, as have so many others, recognized us for who we are. He brought a message from Redwater that we still have friends there, though we are already being watched by those who wish us ill. He advised that we should not enter Redwater by road or river, but should first go to the Spire of the Spring where we will find either friends or a message. Some of my siblings were suspicious of Tash's motives, but I'm inclined to trust him.

But later that night we got a reminder that we are indeed in danger. Lorelei was attacked in bed by two would-be assassins. Fortunately, she awoke before they could strike and her spells and screams brought us all running. Except Vili. The ensuing melee was short, and sadly left us with no living attacker to interrogate. The resulting brouhaha brought the mayor, and she scolded us for not being more careful, while apologizing that this had happened in her town.

What else? We did more preparing for the rest of the trip. We sold the cart, and cashed in the note we got for selling the horses. We went to inquire about buying new horses, and while we have arranged with some friendly horse traders to take care of that tomorrow, we weren't able to complete the transaction. The father of the bride gets first pick as part of the dowry, it seems. I also called on Erebos' grace to beautify the groom and most of our party. That had an outsize impact on most people's opinion of my abilities. Vili even drunkenly apologized for every doubting me. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Oh, and Rishja found Peth and recovered Lorelei's horse. It seems that Peth had been hired by Eclan Traders to spy on us, but gave a false report because he felt bad about stealing our horse. She had him arrested by House Cerrak.

We attended the wedding, which was a lovely affair. There was much drinking and dancing afterwards, and I even took part in some of both. I enjoyed myself more than I thought I would. Ekhart spoke to the mayor again, and arranged some kind of signal to send back down the river after we arrive in Redwater. Just before retiring for the evening we caught sight of the Lurian princess's barge. It was pulled by a dozen horses and seemed

plenty opulent. And I think I saw Lorelei kissing one of the horse traders. I'm keeping that bit of information from Arn, just in case he feels too protective. I expect nothing will come of it. Tomorrow we're going to buy horses and be back on our way. At least I hope so. This town has already brought enough excitement for me. It all makes me miss the quiet of the abbey.

I hope you're well.

Auctus 1.2c

Dear Brother Anselm:

Ah, family. I often wonder if Vili and I somehow split personality traits in the womb, because we approach situations from such different perspectives. Last night Vili wanted money to go bribe guards so that he could free Peth, or at least talk to him. I think Vili may have intended to kill Peth, though that was never stated outright. I of course refused to give him any money. Vili and Arn went off with the apparent intention of sneaking into the jail. I never got the full story, but they did not succeed. Instead they spent some time talking to guards, and then went off to go drinking. Crisis averted from my perspective.

Somewhere in all this, Arn and Ekhart expressed concern that Lorelei might not know enough about sex to avoid getting pregnant if she continues to spend time with that horseman. E'Gill, I think his name is. I'm not entirely sure I understood my brothers' concerns exactly. The whole topic made Arn at least profoundly uncomfortable. After letting him twist in the wind for a bit, I volunteered to have "the talk" with Lorelei. Which, when the time came was decidedly anticlimactic. Lorelei is well-informed and quite worldly for her age. In fact, I think she was mostly annoyed with Arn and Ekhart that they would think so little of her. In the end it felt like a bonding moment for Lorelei and I, so I'm glad, in a back-handed sort of way, that it happened.

Ah, family.

The day ended with Lorelei asking me to lead the family in a prayer of Thanksgiving to Erebus. I was quite nervous, but believe I acquitted myself well enough. And I'm very glad that someone is expressing some interest in my faith. I must play the situation with a deft hand. I of course believe that faith and piety would improve their lives, but I must avoid being boorish or overbearing. We shall see.

The next morning tragedy struck the town. The Lurian princess, one Dionysia, took a great liking to the Moremere horse that T'Var gave to May as a wedding gift. Dionysia's father, Charon, attempted to buy the horse. Even watching from atop the mesa, we could see how arrogant and rude he was as he dropped bag after bag of silver at the bride's father's feet. Each side had a small group of armed retainers, and tempers ran high. Then some shoving,

then suddenly T'Var was run through by a sword. E'Gill, and his elven friend, Ezben, leapt off the top of the mesa onto the roofs of the buildings below. Ekhart and I followed. Yes, I know this was a foolhardy act, and I'm beyond lucky that I escaped with only a few scrapes and bruises. All I can say was that in the moment, I wanted to reach T'Var's side as quickly as possible, in the hopes that I could save his life. Alas, I was too late.

Ekhart punched E'Gill in an effort to prevent him from rushing to his own death. The skirmish between the horsemen and the Lurian guards was short and resulted in two more deaths amongst the horsemen. But soon enough calmer heads prevailed and both sides backed off. When the mayor and town guard arrived, all parties played down the conflict and I don't believe that anyone will be arrested, much less charged.

The sale of the horse went through, with likely over a thousand silver changing hands. And there was a strange look between May and one of her father's guards. What the import of it might be, I cannot say.

All told the event has left me feeling sad and deflated. Such senseless loss of life because of the strident whims of a spoiled princess. Pride and arrogance created a situation where violence was all but inevitable. It makes me want to despair. In such times, I must put my trust in Erebos and the basic goodness of human nature. I pray that they will prevail in our own tribulations to come.

I pray also that you are well,

Auctus 2.2c

Dear Brother Anselm:

After the needless death of T'Var, the horsemen seemed to be interested in nothing but leaving town as soon as possible. Lorelei spent some time attempting to comfort E'Gill, and I like to believe her kindness brought him some succor. But their goodbyes were hurried, for his father would brook no delays. It was a mark of E'Gill's concern for Lorelei that in the midst of all the preparations he honored his promise to sell us the horses we need. Though somehow, he forgot to wait for me to arrive with the money. If we ever see them again, I'll have to make that right.

With the dust of the horse herd still hanging in the air, we decided to make our own departure as quickly as possible. The mayor had ordered the gates shut and that no one would be allowed to leave. Apparently the Lurians had run their horses to near death getting their monstrous barge up the river, and since the horsemen left behind only the bride's dowry, they demanded that no one be allowed to leave. Fortunately for us, Arn was able to speak with the mayor and convince her that we be allowed to leave. (During this conversation, he overheard that a prisoner, possibly Peth, escaped from the Cerrek Counting House.) There was a nervous moment as we went through the gates when Charon realized that some horses were leaving, but fortunately he was too late. We pressed on with all haste.

We camped for the night, and I rather missed the big yurt. Our bedrolls were adequate, but only just barely, and there's still sharp chill in the air.

Vili has taken to espousing his new-found faith in Erebos. I know I should be pleased, but he is so ostentatious about it, and I cannot help but doubt his sincerity. I cannot work out his motive for faking conversion, but something feels off. Ugh. How is it that we're twins and yet so different?

Today while going upriver we started to see logs coming down. They were stripped of branches, so they'd obviously been deliberately felled. But they were sent down one by one, unlike the great barges that were created in our father's day. And the trees themselves were small. Then, after a few hours there came a raft. Again the logs were small, and again unlike in Father's day, the raft had passengers. There were several woodsmen who

seemed to be prisoners of six armed guards. All of us were concerned about being recognized, and tried to look unobtrusive.

All except for Vili. He somehow got it into his head that if we attacked the guards the woodsmen would rise up and help us. So without saying a word, he started firing arrows. Despite our shock and anger, we all sprang into action. Arn and Vili fired arrows, Lorelei and I used our magics to blind and paralyze the guards, and Ekhart was almost hit by a spear and fell into the river. We killed four of the guards without any injuries to ourselves, but by then the raft had been carried downriver beyond our reach.

So now, when those guards reach Mudrim, the jig will well and truly be up. We cannot outrun a messenger on a fast horse. Henerick already knows that we're coming, but with this act, we've declared open warfare. Any chance of a peaceful entry into Redwater is now gone, in my opinion.

I must admit that in my rage, I punched Vili. It's not something I'm proud of, but I also cannot say that I wouldn't do it again.

I pray that Erebus protects you, but more selfishly and more fervently, I pray that he protects my family.

Be well.,

Auctus 3.2c

Dear Brother Anselm:

Two days have passed since I last wrote. Few events have occurred, but my mind has been heavy.

I attempted to use clairvoyance to look in on Father. I saw nothing. I do not think that spell failed, but I do not know if this means that Father is alive or dead.

We, as a family, finally sat down and had it out. It turns out we were not all on the same page about how much danger we're walking into. I, for one was more on the end of the continuum where I thought we might be able to come into Redwater and not be immediately murdered. I had clung to the idea that there would be sufficient repercussions for Henerick that he would feel somehow constrained.

Vili and Ekhart, on the other hand, had already considered us to be in a state of war. Vili in particular seems to consider anyone who wears Henerick's uniform to be an enemy. This is a point of some contention with Arn, who, understandably to my mind, feels some guards may not completely agree with the actions of their employer.

The discussion continued on for some hours, but in the end, I think we all settled that we should consider ourselves at war. No one representing Henerick's authority is to be trusted. We did extract a promise from all parties that we should not make unprovoked attacks on guards without at least two of us agreeing to do so. There is also a short list of people who can be attacked without provocation. Or, more accurately, who have already provoked us beyond our ability to stand.

I shifted my stance considerably after this conversation -- and apologized to Vili for striking him -- but I must say I'm still not completely comfortable with our bellicose footing. I worry that innocents may be harmed by our actions.

To wit, since we had the skirmish with the guards on the raft, I've felt an absence of Erebos' presence. I paralyzed a man who then fell into the river and drowned. Since then when I have prayed to Erebos I do not feel his favor in the same way I have in the past. Have I sinned? Have I strayed from the correct path? Am I walking into a situation where it will become ever harder for me to live my faith as Erebos demands of me? I fear that the answer to all these questions are yes, but I do not actually know.

We are now within sight of the Berian Woods. Whatever form it may take, a reckoning is coming. I pray to Erebos that we may find justice without losing our souls in the process.

I hope that you are well,

PS Vili cut his hair. Is that really how I look?

Auctus 4.2

Dear Brother Anselm:

There is evil in the Sickness, and evil done by those afflicted by it. But I fear that the evil that men do to each other will always exceed it. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

We travelled for most of the day with nothing notable happening. We did find a dead horse, slain by arrows. It had no saddle, but I cannot say for certain whether it had a rider, or if so, what happened to the rider.

We also spent some time discussing what we would do once we reached Otz Flat, where the last bridge across the river is. The plan is to have Rishya stay with Rynar so that she can tend to Nalgene the rest of the way into Redwater. The rest of us will meet up with her in town at some point, or at least find a way to get a message to her.

Of course, all this was before we came to Otz Flat, and found the evidence of the evil that men do. The entire town was razed, burned to the ground, and half the bridge was collapsed. In the center of town was a large bonfire, still smoldering, that held several human remains, some of them children.

As we tried to absorb what we were seeing, and understand what had caused it, we were set upon by the Sick. There were four Sick, three of them children, and two Possessed, being Mr. Otz and his wife. Though I'd never seen Possessed before, the descriptions I read of them in Porfirio's Book of Fantastical Beasts made them unmistakable. Mr. Otz had part of his skull missing, yet a glowing eye somehow floated in the space left behind, while Mrs. Otz, missing both her legs, floated bodily above the ground.

The battle that followed was taxing. I feel I gave a good accounting of myself, as Wither caused the creatures no end of difficulty and even caused some damage. But as usual Arn dealt massive wounds. Lorelei threw fire and set our weapons alight, and Ekhart's spear was a blurred whirlwind of threat. Vili was pursued away from the town by one of the Sick, which he dispatched with his bow. But the fighting was hard, and few of us escaped damage. Especially when Mrs. Otz used magic to wound us all. I called upon Erebus' healing in combat for the first time ever, and was gratified with the results.

In the end we were victorious, and Arn has added Mr. Otz's magical axe, Yellowtooth to his arsenal. We are all weary, though I was able to heal everyone's wounds. All of this has left me with little favor left, and I continue to feel an absence of approbation from our god. It has left me feeling lost and heartsick.

Contributing to that feeling is the realization that this whole massacre was likely precipitated by the upcoming wedding. The enormous barge that the Lurians are dragging upriver is too tall to have fit below the bridge at Otz Flat. The inevitable conclusion I must come to is that Henerick knocked down the bridge so that his wife-to-be could ride all the way into Redwater in comfort. And the villagers either rebelled at the idea, or were slaughtered in cold blood for reasons that will forever elude me.

We are encamped in the one remaining structure that still stands, on the east bank of the river. Tomorrow we must figure out how to get the horses across the river before we make our way to the Spire of the Spring. I pray that we can go a single day without encountering further evidence of evil, but I am not feeling hopeful.

I pray that you are well,

Auctus 5.2

Dear Brother Anselm:

I know it's only been a day, but for some reason it feels as if it's been quite some time since I last wrote to you. In truth, not much has occurred, though just my impulse to say that worries me. I do not wish to become so inured to violence that it becomes a matter of little note. But again, I am getting ahead of myself.

After passing the night in the ruins of Otz Flat, we parted ways with our intrepid barge captain, Rynar. The helper he picked up in Mudrim will help him the rest of the way in to Redwater. The fellow seems amiable enough, but for some reason his name refuses to stick in my mind. He's an unremarkable man, most notable for the striking red shirt he insists on wearing. Sadly, we were also forced to part with our horses, and our trusty ox Nalgene.

After a hearty breakfast we struck out to the east. The morning was uneventful if wearying. My feet have been pampered by days of being carried by a barge, a cart or a horse. We stopped at midday and built a fire and ate lunch.

Shortly after, as we continued to the east, we heard voices ahead of us. There was an argument, and the phrase "He said they were going to be right here." was distinctly audible. Out of an abundance of caution, we readied ourselves for violence. We sent Arn and Ekhart ahead, with the plan for them to draw any attackers back into an ambush. Our prudence was well-considered, for as soon as the strangers caught sight of my brothers they yelled out "There they are! Get them!" and attacked.

Our attackers were five men in Redwater livery, the leader of whom was known to us from our childhoods. I won't bore you with the details of every cut and thrust, but suffice to say that our plan worked well, and we quickly incapacitated two and killed three. The only thing worth noting is that Lorelei and I should probably coordinate our tactics some. We managed to both blind the same man simultaneously. I will admit to feeling some gratification that I was at least able to blind two others at the same time. I will try to remember to speak to her about it tonight.

On searching the guards, we found a note on the sergeant with a rudimentary map pointing to our current location with the legend "you will find them here". By this point,

many people must know of our intention to return to Redwater. But moreover, at least one who wishes us ill knows that we are going to the Spire of the Spring. I pray that Brother Tash has not betrayed us. If his mysterious meeting at the Spire turns out to be a trap, we may be in serious trouble.

I believe that our prisoners will wake soon, and we have many questions for them. I will write more later.

May Erebos protect you.

Auctus 6.2c

Dear Brother Anselm:

I never thought to find myself interrogating prisoners, but that's what we did for most of this afternoon. After our fight with the guards from Redwater, we had custody of two of them. Once they woke, we learned that their names were Vilmar and Sgt Jonas. I had maintained my spell of blindness on them, and Lorelei cast a spell that made them feel chilled to the bone. I hope that our actions were not immoral. I can say that no lasting harm came to either of them while they were in our control. I know the same would not be true if the situations were reversed.

Sgt. Jonas was stubborn and refused to help us in any way, but Vilmar was much more forthcoming. In particular after Vili told the tale of our parents' betrayal from our perspective. It seems clear that the residents of Redwater, and the guards in particular, have been fed lies about what happened to our family. From what Vilmar said some, if not most, believe that we are in the wrong, and are returning intending to overthrow Henerick's rule. On the latter point at least, they may be correct.

The troop of guards that we bested in combat were sent by Fuhlgar. He said he was told by "the old man" where we would be. This "old man" could not be Brother Tash, as there is no way he could have travelled to Redwater ahead of us. It might be Brother Linden. I remain uncertain as to his allegiances. He seemed a good man while we were growing up, but he did participate in Father's trial, and the questioning of Mother's shade. I cannot say if he was a willing participant or no. But at this point speculation is likely bootless.

We also learned that there are at least sixty guards in Redwater, that the resumption of payments to the townsfolk is contingent on the dowry of the Lurian princess and it seems that the townsfolk are firmly under the boot of Henerick. Whether or not this has created a reservoir of unrest in the populace remains to be seen.

In the end, we freed our prisoners and spent what little remained of the afternoon getting away from the scene of the ambush before making camp. I do not doubt that Henerick will send more men with orders to murder us. The prospect of those encounters makes me heart-sick and weary. Must the path towards Justice always be paved with blood? Is there not a better way? I fervently pray that we may find it. Be well, Brother

Auctus 7.2c

Dear Brother Anselm:

Well, now I've seen a giant. We'd heard a weird, low "oooh" sound in the night, and it grew stronger as we travelled through the day. It eventually was accompanied by the smell of smoke, as of wet leaves. By this point, we could also hear cries of "No, no, no. He will not come." We were cautious about approaching, so I asked Erebos for an omen, and he told me that proceeding would result in a good outcome. Thus emboldened, we proceeded.

In a clearing we found a female giant, and a badly injured man. Vili approached with a white flag, and Lorelei sang a lullaby in an attempt to calm the clearly distraught giantess. Our efforts were in vain, for she immediately attacked Lorelei with a huge club. Praise Erebos that she survived, but her entire left side looks like one huge bruise. Battle being joined, I called upon the power of Erebos to drain away half the giant's life, and Arn and Ekhart laid on such savage blows that she was quickly dispatched. Unsure if giants are affected by the Sickness, we decapitated the body to be safe. According to Rishja, the giantess was likely attempting to attract a mate.

The wounded man turned out to be a woodsman named Sten. His two children, Lars and Edvin (about four and five years old) were starving and approached the smell of smoke in hopes of finding some food or someone willing to share food. They had been living with a band of outcasts in the forests. He referred to them only as "Steen and her people". Apparently, they are a group of people from Redwater, Otz Flat, or those that have lived in the forest for years. They have a hidden stronghold with an entrance through a hollow tree. There they live what may be a mean existence, preferring it to living under Henerick's boot.

We fed Sten and his children and took them with us as we travelled for the rest of the day. We are now camped between two trees, to get as much shelter as we can from a pouring rain. It was a day of new experiences. I wonder what tomorrow will bring.

I pray that you are well, Brother.

(Not in this letter, but I pray to see auras, and around midnight, see three human figures coming from the west.)