

The

Isles

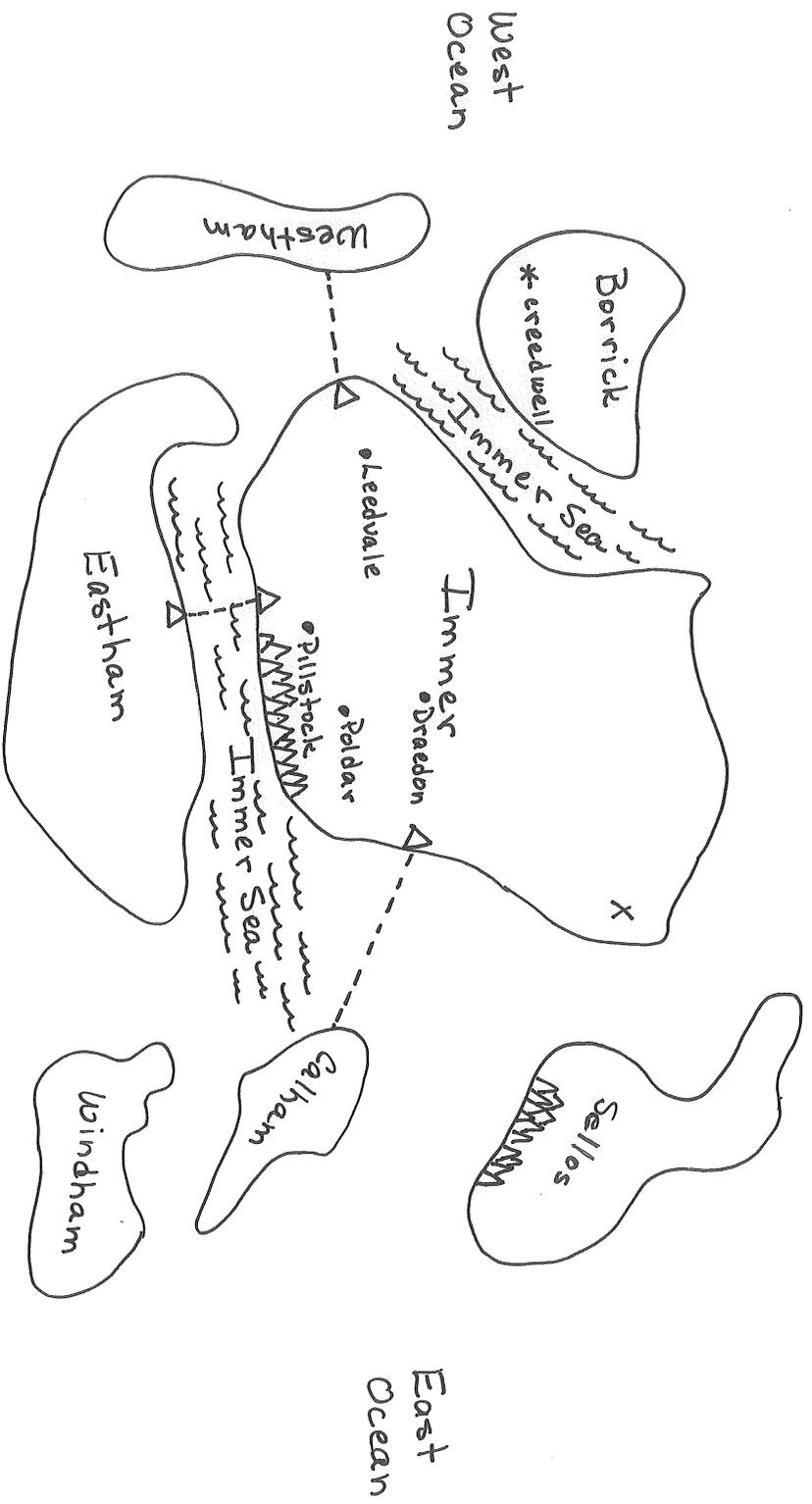
of

Bernham

Tom Sparks

BERNHAM

1N



Isles of Bernham

X - New Port City
Δ - Capt. Makes docks

Cast of Characters

Arless, Fanlith - elven leader - Windham

Arless, Ealen – wife of Fanlith - Windham

Ashwind, Raith - shipbuilder - Immer

Besthle, Jarek - dwarf chief - Westham

Bassley, Ian - trader - Immer

Boles, Titus - community leader, Council advisor - Immer

Boles, Sheela - wife of Titus Boles - Immer

Boles, Kayl - daughter of Titus and Sheela - Immer

Boles, Mac - son of Titus and Sheela - Immer

Boles, Mathus - uncle of Kayl and Mac, community leader - Immer

Calder, Justin - Council secretary - Immer

Creedwell - mage - Borrick

Dortha, Vantha - elf - guide - Windham

Gant, Caleb - farmer - Eastham

Gant, May - farmer - Eastham

Giles - hermit - Immer

Greybeard, Calvin - Inn/tavern owner - Immer

Greybeard, Abigal - Inn/tavern owner - Immer

Greybeard, Milla - daughter of Calvin and Abigal - Immer

Greybeard, Kerns - son of Calvin and Abigal - Immer

Hale, Captain - ship Captain - Eastham/Immer

Korel - Angry Dwarf Leader - Westham

Krafte, Tolan - smith - Immer

Krafte, Gemma - wife of Tolan - Immer

Raines, Kennel - trader - Immer

Stovars, Haln - head Councilman - Immer

Uchek, Goran - dwarf leader - Calham

Mistress Vela - bakeshop owner/healer - Immer

One

An Adventure

After several days of preparations, they were ready. They agreed to travel very light so they wouldn't attract attention. Kayl and Milla had their short swords, but stored them in a knapsack, out of sight. Mac had his shakes and Kerns had his favorite knife. Shakes were throwing disks with three sharp sided edges. His uncle Mathus taught him the art. They were quite effective at close range. They had plenty of food and water, a flint and axe just in case they needed to cook, and a forged notefor the Captian from Kayl and Mac's parents. Kayl didn't like the idea of the note and said they should use it only if necessary.

Kayl learned from casual discussions with her parents what day the ship was heading out again. And, the fact that it was not going to Eastham, but to Westham instead. Pa must have been talking to one of the Councilmen. Westham was where the Dwarves lived. The group was so excited they could hardly contain themselves. Apparently, there were a few dwarves that the Council agreed to talk to and the Captain was to pick them up and escort them to the the Council chambers. On the rare occasion that dwarves came to their island of Immer, none of the group had seen any of them. Now they were going to their island!

It was still dark the morning they met at the cutoff to the Immer dock. As they headed from their homes in Poldar and Pilstock, they were sure they could get on-board ship before anyone awoke. They headed up the ramp, directly to the first hatch they came to that led below decks. Mac had been on board the ship once with his Pa as a guest of the Captain, so he led the way. The only door in the long dark hallway that was open led to a small storeroom. Perfect.

Within minutes, they started hearing noises. The crew was getting things ready to castoff. Hopefully, there was nothing in this storeroom they needed for the trip. After some time, they realized the trip to Westham was much longer than to Eastham. They would be in this cramped little storeroom for over an hour, at least.

It turned out to be almost two hours because of the winds. After they docked and things were quiet again, Mac led them topside. They found the ramp, but it was still stowed. There was no dock here. It was a wet landing and the boarding party had climbed down the rope ladder to a smaller shore boat. They were stuck! And it looked too far to swim to shore. What now?

Mac turned around and came face to face with one of the crew. They were

caught.

"Well, well, well. What have we here? Follow me!" ordered the crewman.

"Where is the Captain?" asked Kayl.

"Went ashore. But, he'll be back shortly. You can wait in the Galley," he answered.

"Well, we won't be seeing Westham today," said Kerns.

"Yes, but they are bringing back some dwarves to take to the Council. We can at least see them," replied Mac.

"Unless they lock you up in stowage. Then you can keep the rats company," said the crewman, showing no sympathy.

"We will talk to the Captain. He will treat us fairly," assured Mac.

While they waited in the galley, the cook fixed them some breakfast, since they were all hungry. The Captain and the shore party returned before they were finished. The same crewman took them directly to the Captain's cabin.

"We have some stowaways here, sir. Care to talk to them, or should I take them directly to stowage?" asked the crewman, grinning.

"Kayl. Mac. What in the world are you doing here?" asked the Captain "And is that you Milla? And you must be Kerns. Oh, I see now. An adventure."

"Yes, sir," they all replied.

"Your parents would be very interested in your little excursion, I'm sure," said the Captain

"Oh, please don't tell him, Captain!" exclaimed Mac.

"Well, since you didn't make it to the island, and you were never in danger, maybe I won't say anything," replied the Captain.

"Where are the dwarves? Can we see them?" asked Kerns, excitedly.

"How do you know we have dwarves here?" asked the Captain.

"Well, we heard from Pa you were bringing some back to see the Council," answered Mac.

The Captain covered a smile as he led the group aft where the three dwarves were huddled. It was obvious they did not like the idea of being on a ship or the water.

"We were ordered by Goran on this mission," said one of the dwarves. "We are to see the Council about trade possibilities."

"Speak no more of that," ordered the Captain. "Not till you are in the Council chambers."

Kayl and Mac Boles are brother and sister, just two years apart. Being almost eighteen she was the leader of the group. Their parents are Titus and Sheela and live on the outskirts of Poldur.

Milla and Kerns Greybeard were also brother and sister and both two years younger than Kayl and Mac. Their parents are Titus and Abigal and own the Greybeard Inn in Pillstock.

This adventure had been planned for weeks, but didn't turn out anything like the plans.

The crew cast off and started for home. Even though they didn't make it ashore, the group all got to meet and talk for over an hour to the dwarves. The risk of stowing away was definitely worth it. And their parents may never know anything about it.

As they came into view of the Immer dock, they saw a small group of people standing there.

"Uh-oh," said Kayl. That looks like Pa."

"And our Pa too!" added Milla.

"How in the world did they find out?" asked Mac.

After a moment of contemplation, Kayl said,

"Mathus. He must have overheard us planning and said something to Pa."

The ride in Calvin's carriage was very quiet. The group knew what was coming when they got home. As soon as the Boles were dropped off, Calvin headed home with Milla and Kerns. He didn't say too much on the drive and when they all got to the Tavern, they were joined by Abigal, who had to stay and mind the customers.

They were led to their rooms and the questions began.

"Whose idea was this?" asked Abigal.

"All of us decided together," answered Milla.

"Kayl is old enough to have realized the dangers of going to Westham!" said Calvin, raising his voice.

"Easy, Cal," warned Abigal.

"But we thought we were going to Eastham," said Kerns.

"It doesn't matter. None of you should have boarded that ship. You were stowaways. That's a punishable offense," said Calvin.

"If the Captain wanted to he could bring charges," finished Abigal.

"From now on, if you want to travel to other islands, make sure you have good reason and it is sanctioned by the Captain," said Calvin.

"Yes, sir," they both answered in unison.

Titus Boles didn't say anything further of the incident, but Kayla and Mac could tell he was not pleased. They were sure he would tell their Ma, but she would probably not mention it. They decided to have another talk with the Captain to see if it would be possible to go along with him on his next trip out.

Afterwards, in the tavern, Calvin and Abigal discussed the possibility of apprenticing Milla with Mistress Vela. They were just so busy with the Inn and tavern, they didn't have the time to pay attention to either one.

Milla was old enough now and Vela is always commenting how there are not enough hours in the day. Abigal would ask her the next time she goes in for spices.

Haln Stovas was explaining the benefits of trade to the dwarves, when he was interrupted by Justin Calder, Council secretary

"We have a problem," he said. "Someone just broke into the treasury room and stole some cash."

"What? Did you catch them?" asked Haln.

"Apparently, it was a dwarf," replied Justin.

"That can't be. They are here with me," answered Haln.

The secretary looked at the one of the dwarves and asked, "How many are in your party?"

"Three," he answered.

"Where is the third one?" asked Haln.

"He wasn't feeling well. Probably the food here. We left him in the room," sneered the dwarf.

"Bring me the third dwarf!" commanded Haln.

After the dwarf was brought in and questioned, he admitted to the theft. He said he really needed it to buy supplies to take back home. Their village is very short of food and they are hungry.

"All you had to do was ask," said Haln.

"It's not our way," replied the dwarf. "It is not honorable to beg."

"You'd rather starve, or steal!" exclaimed Justin.

"Easy, Justin. Every culture is different. While we understand why, we cannot tolerate theft. It's time for your party to return home," said Haln.

"We are ready," said the dwarf.

"The secretary will contact Captain Hale to escort you to the ship," explained Haln. "But first, he will take you to the market and get your supplies."

"Yes, sir," replied Justin.

"This is a very good example of why your island needs the trade agreement. To keep your villages fed, so you don't have to steal money for food or dishonor yourselves by begging. Can you please explain this to Jarek?" asked Haln.

"Yes, we will," replied the dwarf.

Haln Stovas called for a Council meeting as soon as the Captain left with the dwarves. They all felt this incident would help convince the other islands of the benefits of a trade agreement.

One thing that was needed was a way to find out what the conditions were with each individual tribe. Maybe Mathus Boles could help. He was brother to Titus and traveled the islands more than anyone else. Another possibility was that maybe Mage Creedwell already knew about the situation and had a solution. They often knew more than anyone thought but they were usually

reluctant to offer any information. It was decided by the Council to contact Creedwell first. If no solution was found there, then they would talk to Mathus.

A few days later, Creedwell was in his study when he was interrupted by Captain Hale.

"I've been sent by Haln Stovas of the Immer Council," stated Hale.

"They must need something of me. It's the only time anyone from Immer pays me any notice," replied Creedwell.

"Well, you are not the easiest person to contact. And you never travel to Immer or any other island for that matter," offered Hale.

"True. What is it they want?" asked the mage.

"They are trying to establish trade agreements between the islands and would like your help," stated Hale.

"Impossible! What they fail to realize is that trade agreements between islands is only possible when the inhabitants are cooperative. Elves, dwarves and humans have been feuding for centuries!" shouted Creedwell.

"All the more reason why we should start trying. Can you help?" asked Hale.

"You can tell the Council I have better things to do than deal with stubborn dwarves and the secrets of elves," answered Creedwell.

And this was the message Captain Hale brought back to the Council. They quickly decided to speak to Mathus, only to learn he was gone and would not return for many weeks.

"Unacceptable!" said Haln.

"Well, I think there may be another alternative," said Hale.

"At this point, we need to consider them all. What is it?" asked Haln.

"What about Kayl and Mac?" asked the Captain.

"The children of Titus and Sheela?" asked Haln.

"Yes, they would make excellent ambassadors for this cause," Hale answered.

"Hmmm... we will have to think on that. How old are they now?" asked Haln.

"Nearly of age. And by the time you put this together, they could be all trained up on what you need," stated Hale.

This seemed like a good solution to the Captain. He was fond of Kayl and Mac and he would be the one taking them to the islands. Besides, the young have very good powers of persuasion.

The overcast skies had been threatening rain all day. Tolan Krafte looked up from his forge and saw someone coming through the gate to the smithy. He put his huge hammer down and cut the bellows to the fire. He had been tending to his wife's illness so much in the last week that work orders were backed up. And, if this was someone with another order, he may have to tell them it will not be finished this month. He did not like doing that because he needed all the work he could get.

As the figure got closer, he recognized Abigal Greybeard and was relieved to see her. She was carrying a large basket that he was sure contained soup for his wife.

"Good afternoon Tolan," Abigal said. "How is Gemma this afternoon?"

"About the same," he replied, smiling. "But, with that soup, she is sure to improve."

"Ok if I head on in?" she asked.

"Yes, and thanks Abigal," he replied as he picked up the hammer again.

Abigal went straight to Gemma's room and saw that she was asleep. Well, she probably hasn't eaten anything today, so I better wake her. As she neared the bed, she thought Gemma looked even more pale than yesterday at this time.

"Wake up Gemma," she said soothingly. "I've brought hot soup again.,"

When Gemma didn't stir, Abigal took her hand and she froze. Immediately she knew there was no life in those cold fingers. She checked for a pulse. None. She was so sure yesterday Gemma was improving. She repeated a silent verse she had used before, hoping it would give Gemma some peace, and headed for the forge. She steeled herself for the task in front of her. When she approached Tolan, he took one look at her face and knew. She said she would take care of notifications and he slowly made his way to Gemma's room.

The courtyard was full several days later as almost everyone in Poldar paid their final respects to Gemma. Tolan was holding up very well, everyone commented. After the service, he was standing near the gate thanking everyone for coming, when Calvin Greybeard asked to speak to him privately. After Mistress Vela hugged him goodbye, he went to the bench where Calvin and Abigal awaited.

"Tolan, the word going round is that you are way behind on orders. That true?" asked Calvin.

"Well, I've been spending so much time tending Gemma, it kinda got away from me," he replied. "I'm sure I can catch up though."

"I also know that the Council will be sending a large order your way soon and we believe you need some help," stated Calvin

"I'll have to take delayed orders, since I can't afford to pay for any help," replied Calvin.

"Not to worry, my friend. Abigal and I think we have a solution. We would

like to apprentice our son Kerns with you. No payment necessary and he's a very good worker and quick learner," answered Calvin.

"Well, I think that's a great idea, Calvin," he replied looking at Abigail. "Are you sure you can spare him from the tavern?"

"Certainly," replied Abigail. "He really needs to learn a trade and he would be very good at this kind of work, I'm sure."

"Can he start soon?" asked Tolan.

"Tomorrow morning soon enough?" Calvin answered, smiling.

"I'll look forward to it. And thanks," Tolan said, relieved.

Later that afternoon, Mistress Vela was just finishing the last of the herb grinding in her bakeshop, when she heard Sheela calling for her.

"Hello Vela. Terrible about Gemma," Sheela said quietly.

"Yes, it was. It must have been a shock for you," replied Vela. "I heard that Kerns will be apprenticing with Tolan."

"Starts tomorrow. I think it will be good for the both of them."

"You're right there," said Vela.

"How about you?" Sheela asked. "Could you use some help around here?"

"What did you have in mind?" replied Vela, grinning. "Are you going to pull yourself away from the Inn?"

"Well, not exactly. Calvin and I have been seriously considering getting Milla apprenticed," answered Sheela.

"That would leave just the two of you in the tavern and Inn," stated Vela.

"Yes, it would. But, things are fairly slow these days and we think it's very important to get Milla started on a craft."

"And what would that be, Sheela?" asked Vela.

"She wants to be a healer."

"Oh, my," said Vela, quietly.

When Sheela returned home, she found Titus in the kitchen. She told him about her discussion with Vela.

He was pleased that she agreed. He asked her when she would tell Milla. "As soon as she gets home," said Sheela.

They also discussed Kerns working with Tolan. Titus said he was glad Tolan would be getting help in the smithy. He also said that Tolan would need help around the house, now that Gemma was gone. Sheela said that was a good idea, and she would ask Kayl to go over a couple times a week.

"And Vela can also help out, can't she?" asked Titus.

"No, she is very busy these days and would not have time," answered Sheela. "It was all she could do to take herbs to Gemma all those times."

Just then, Mac came in and asked if they had seen their youngest, Jolsey lately.

"I promised him I'd take him when I went to check the traps," he said.

"I haven't seen him all morning. I thought he was gone with you already," Sheela said.

"I hope he hasn't gone off by himself," stated Titus. "He knows you're supposed to be with him."

"I'll head down to the trap line right away," Mac replied, looking concerned.

Mac checked all the traps inside the next hour and there was no sign of Jolsey. He was about to go back and get Kayl to help him look, when he saw her coming down the path.

"Ma said you're looking for Jolsey. No luck, huh?" she said.

"No, and I've checked all the traps," he replied. "Maybe he fell asleep on the path somewhere."

"Let's head back and start looking again," answered Kayl.

They walked the path all the way back to the first trap, calling and checking for a sleeping Jolsey. No luck. They headed back to the house to get more help.

Titus met them and suggested they check everywhere around the house before they told their Ma. They agreed and started searching all the places where Jolsey liked to play. Kayl was really starting to worry about an hour later, when she heard Mac shout, "Got him!"

Both Kayl and Titus headed to the side yard where the path to the traps began. They found Mac, looking down at Jolsey asleep under a bayberry bush.

"He must have sat down here to wait for me and fell asleep," Mac said.

Titus was relieved as he picked up the sleeping boy.

"I'll carry him to your Ma," he said.

This was not the first time Jolsey had done this. Once, after an argument with Mac, he went off and hid. It was hours before they found him and everyone was worried sick, especially Ma. That's why Pa made sure they checked everywhere this time.

Mac assured Kayl that he would try to be more careful about what he promised Jolsey. It was obvious that he took everything he was told very seriously. Kayl told Mac she would do the same.

"I remember the last time he disappeared. We all thought he was surely hurt somewhere," Mac said.

"Yes, that also happened with you once," Kayl remembered fondly. "When you were very young, you had found some money and went to town to buy tarts. It was Mistress Vela that brought you home."

"Really?" replied Mac, surprised. "I don't remember that!"

"I'm not surprised. You were very young. And we couldn't believe you actually found your way to the bakeshop," said Kayl, smiling.

"I guess tarts were as important to me then as they are for Jolsey now," Mac surmised.

As the months went by, the group's stowaway adventure was forgotten and they started meeting at the cliffs again. Since Kerns now working with Tolan, Mac and Milla sometimes went alone. They were spending a lot of time together now days. Kerns really liked Milla, but he wasn't sure how she felt about him. So, as they were sitting in their spot one afternoon, he just came right out and asked her.

"Milla, you know I'm very fond of you, right?" he asked.

"Yes, and I'm fond of you too," she replied.

"I can't remember a time when I wasn't trying to impress you. Remember all the game I would bring to your Ma? That was for your benefit, too" he admitted.

"Oh, really?"

"Yes, and I sometimes think about us being a couple," he said. "And I really need to know how you feel about me."

"Well, I'm not sure, Mac. You mean a great deal to me. But, I really haven't thought about us as a couple."

"Can you start thinking about it?" he asked.

"Yes, of course, if It means that much to you."

"It does. And I haven't told anyone else, but I think Kayl already knows," he said.

"I've been so busy with Mistress Vela, I haven't had time to really think about anything else."

"Why do you think I've been pestering you about doing things together, Milla?" he asked.

"I thought maybe you were just bored."

"Bored? Thats not..."

"Just kidding, Mac," she interrupted. "I do enjoy our time together, you know."

"Thats nice to hear."

She leaned over and kissed him.

"I promise to think about us as a couple."

"Ok. Guess we better be getting back." he said. It was the last thing he really wanted to do.

Two

Bad News and Hard Work

It was early morning when Mathus crested the east hills overlooking Poldar. He wasn't supposed to be back for several days yet, but the news he had for the Council couldn't wait.

He was barely at the edge of Poldar, when he was met by a shopkeeper. He told him there was a standing order for him to report to Councilman Haln. Mathus thanked him and headed for the chambers. I wonder if they already know about my news, he thought. Maybe Captain Hale said something to them. I'm sure he knows.

Mathus was greeted by secretary Justin Calder and was escorted directly to the Council room and announced.

"Morning Mathus. Tell us about the conditions between the islands" asked Haln.

"Have you been talking to Hale?" he asked in reply.

"Well, all we know is there is some sort of trouble, but nobody knows exactly what," answered Haln.

"I learned from the elves that there is stealing by the dwarves from some of the other islands. Then, on my visit to Westham, Jarek said that someone was stealing supplies from them. And they are afraid they will steal some silver from the mines next. He is very angry," reported Mathus.

"After the incident here with the Westham dwarves, I know they are the culprits," stated Haln.

"And, It's far more serious than you've heard, I'm afraid," Mathus replied.

Haln started pacing, deep in thought. "We simply have to implement peaceful trade agreements. And we have to do it soon!"

Justin finally spoke, "Why don't we send out a delegation to all the islands? Inform everyone about the stealing and impress upon them the urgency here."

"Good idea, Justin, but we have to first decide who would be part of this delegation. Lets get that on the agenda for the next Council meeting," Haln said.

"Do you need more from me, Haln?" asked Mathus.

"No, I think we have a good idea what we are up against. Thanks Mathus," replied Haln.

Milla couldn't believe it when her Ma told her about apprenticing with Vela. She didn't even remember telling her parents about wanting to be a healer. She

assured Vela she would remember all the ingredients in this poultice. They had been working on herbs and healing draughts for several days now and Vela was very pleased at the progress she was making.

"Soon, you'll be ready to learn how to administer tonics, Milla," said Vela.

"I think I'll need to learn a lot more before I do that, Vela," she replied.

"Well, maybe, but I'm happy with your progress so far.

"How did you become a healer, Vela? And how old were you when you knew?"

"I guess when I watched my Pa die from the fever and there was nothing anyone could do. I thought there had to be some way to fight it," Vela answered quietly.

"I was only about ten when that happened. My Ma said I didn't even cry. I just got this determined look on my face and told her I was going to learn healing."

"It was different with me," answered Milla. "I've know for a long time I wanted to help the sick. I think it's what I was born to do."

"Well, either way, we always need good healers. What would really be interesting is to learn how the elven healers work. And the dwarves!" exclaimed Vela.

"Kayl and Mac's uncle say the day will come when we will be going to their islands on a regular basis. We can find out then," Milla said.

"That would be really great. I've heard the same thing from Giles, you know. So, maybe there is some truth to it," replied Vela.

Kerns stopped to wipe the sweat from his brow and asked, "Is it always this hot in here?"

"Yes, we have to have the fire very hot to form these rods," answered Tolan. "The Council wants all these bars and rods for the chamber windows done by the end of the month."

"Well, it's a good way for me to learn the bellows and how to form things when they are red hot, right?" Kerns observed.

"That will definitely help you when we have to work with large items, like wagon wheels and carriage frames," said Tolan.

He liked learning smith work and he really enjoyed working with Tolan. His Pa was right, he needed the help and it felt good to be needed. But, deep down, he knew this was not a trade he would stay with. What would be more interesting would be learning what could be done with fire besides just heating iron. What would it be like to command fire magically, like Creedwell could. Kerns was sure Creedwell would show him if he could just get apprenticed with him.

It was odd to Kerns that he and Milla were apprenticed at the exact same time. Milla was doing what she loved and he was happy for her. Would he ever tell anyone about his interest in magic? Maybe Mac. It just wasn't something that was very practical. Look at Creedwell. He had no friends and lived on an island with his small family. But, for Kerns, the draw to magic had been there for as long as he could remember. He never told anyone, but when his work with Tolan was over, he decided he would tell his Ma and Pa.

Mathus had just left the Council chambers when he saw Ian Bassley, who offered to buy him an ale. Mathus said he just got to town and hadn't even been home yet. He would be happy to meet him tomorrow at the Greybeard for lunch. Bassley agreed.

Mathus wondered what was it Bassley wanted that was worth him springing for an ale. Traders almost never offered to buy, usually it was the other way around. He figured it had something to do with trading between the islands, though.

He headed home to greet everyone and let them know he was back. Kayl and Mac weren't around. He did, however, see Titus, who asked him to join him and Sheela for lunch. Business was very slow today so they had plenty of time to hear about his latest travels.

He gave them the details of everything he told Haln. Sheela was surprised to learn of the trouble, but Titus was not. He said he had been hearing grumbling from some of the locals about problems in the islands. The talk of trade agreements was on everyone's lips these days. It seems the Council had better come up with a plan soon, or trouble might find the people of Immer.

Mathus assured Titus and Sheela he would do what he could to help the Council. Then, he told them of his meeting the following day with Bassley. Titus felt that not much would come of it. Mathus hoped his brother was wrong.

The streets of Poldar were full of activity in the morning. People were whispering that something important was happening at the Council chambers, but nobody knew what. In addition to the normal visitor, Captain Hale, several others had been seen entering the main Council chambers, like Mathus Boles. And there was a standing order for him to attend. That was peculiar.

In addition, Merchant Bassley had been seen on the streets a lot more than usual. Even in Draedon, trader Raines was seen purchasing a lot more supplies than was customary. Yes, something was definitely happening on

Immer and everyone was speculating.

Sitting in the Greybeard just before noon, Bassley was also hearing the whispers. He knew the Council was considering several options to establish trading between the islands. If he was going to capitalize on the situation, he had to get Mathus on board. The man knew the islands and what was possible with the dwarves and elves as far as trade was concerned.

Calvin met Mathus just inside the front door.

"Bassley is at the corner table. Should I bring two ales and today's special, meat pies?" asked Calvin.

"Yes, thanks, Calvin. Then please see we are not disturbed, ok?" replied Mathus.

"Sure," answered Calvin.

"Oh, and the tab goes to Bassley," said Mathus grinning.

Calvin nodded and went off to fill the order. Mathus joined Bassley and told him he had ordered.

"Great," replied Bassley.

"So what's on your mind, Bassley?" asked Mathus.

"Well, I've heard you met with the Council yesterday. Would it have anything to do with trade agreements?" he asked.

"I'm really not at liberty to say, but the word on the street is the Council is discussing it," Mathus replied carefully.

"Listen, Mathus, it's no secret that you travel extensively between the islands. And that you have a feel for how the agreements would be accepted. Is that why the Council summoned you?"

"Again...I really cannot discuss it," replied Mathus.

"Ok, I'll come straight to the point. I would like to get a jump on the Council actions and start my own trade routes. You know I have good connections on most of the islands,"

"I'm aware, yes," Mathus said.

Calvin brought their ale and pies and placed the tab beside Bassley. He smiled at Mathus, "Will that be all?"

"Yes, thanks Calvin," replied Bassley.

They both took a long pull on their ale and Bassley leaned in closer to Mathus.

"So, how would you like to come to work for me and help establish some routes? I think you would find it beneficial to Immer as well as yourself."

"I'll tell you Bassley. I believe this is not something that should be done outside of the Council. They are the ones responsible and I'm sure they will come up with a solution soon," Mathus stated.

"I thought you might feel that way, Mathus. But I just wanted to give you first chance. Guess I'll just have to find someone else to help," answered Bassley.

"Well then, good luck to you," said Mathus sincerely.

"Of all the people on Immer, who is the most knowledgeable on old Lore?" Mathus asked Kayl and Mac later that afternoon.

"Giles the hermit, I guess," answered Mac.

"Correct," answered Mathus.

"Kayl, have you ever talked to Giles about the islands and the old days?" Mathus asked.

"Not specifically the islands, just about things in general," she answered.

"Well, I've discussed the islands with him and have never been able to get him to talk about how the people interacted with each other back then," stated Mathus. "How would you two like to see if you can get more information from him?"

"Specifically, if the people traded goods and if so, how they did it?" Kayl asked smiling.

"Good girl, Kayl," replied Mathus. "Maybe if we learn how they traded in the past, we could apply some of it to today," said Mathus.

"Why doesn't the Council just summon him and ask, like they did you?" asked Mac.

"Because Haln Stovas knows Giles would never agree to talk to them. He is not overly fond of authority," answered Mathus.

"And you think we could get him to open up?" asked Kayl.

"Yes, I do. With your natural curiosity and a few chovies from Vela, I think he would love to talk to you," answered Mathus grinning widely.

Kayl and Mac started their planning for the trip over to Leedvale. They would leave first thing in the morning and felt sure Giles would talk to them, but were not completely convinced he would talk about trade. Giles was a mystery to most people on Immer. In fact, many had never even seen him. He rarely came to Poldar and what things he needed he got from some of the old timers that lived in Leedvale. These old timers and Mathus were about the only people he spoke to, except for Mistress Vela. She and Giles had a special relationship.

Not many remember when Giles was not around. He was considered the oldest living human, on Immer at least. Creedwell maintains he is a youngster, but that may be just mage pride. If one could talk to the elves, they may be the only ones that know for sure, but they aren't talking.

He agreed to speak to Kayl and Mac when they knocked on his door this morning only because Mathus was their uncle. They entered the dark cabin and as soon as Giles smelled the aroma of the chovies, he asked "Is Vela with you?"

"No, but she sends her regards and these chovies," answered Kayl.

"Hmmm...that means you must want something from me, right?" he asked skeptically.

"As a matter of fact, we do," answered Mac.

They exchanged a look and Kayl started into their preplanned script.

"Mac and I are studying the history of the islands. We have talked to everyone we know, but can't get any information as to whether the people of the old times ever talked to each other. If you don't know, I guess our last option would be Creedwell or the elves," Kayl explained.

"Of course we would have to have Mathus help us with Creedwell and we think we can convince Fanlith on Windham, maybe," said Mac.

Giles popped a chovie into his mouth and said, "Well, I might be able to save you some time. Creedwell wouldn't know anything about the people back then, because he has never really talked to anyone. And Fanlith might know a bit about communication with the dwarves, but very little with humans," stated Giles.

"You are the only one that knows what we need, then," said Kayl, smiling sweetly.

"I suppose I am, yes," Giles replied. "You want to know about trade between the islands, right?" he asked.

"Yes...who did the trading and how did they get the goods between the islands," Mac replied.

Giles got up and started fixing tea. He knew exactly what they wanted and why, but he wasn't going to let on.

"You have to remember, back before all the islands were completely settled like they are today, communication between the different races was difficult. They did do trading between islands, however. There were a few ships owned by the dwarves and they carried silver from their mines to any that would buy or trade it."

"The problem they had were the storms. They had to be sure one didn't come up on the journey to another island. The elves were especially fond of the silver, so they helped the dwarves with a remedy."

He poured them all tea, grumbled about being out of chovies, and continued.

"The elves made a device, a magical device, that could detect a storm well before it hit. With this device, the dwarves could plan their trips to the other islands safely."

"What happened to these ships?" asked Mac.

"Gone. Eventually, the need for silver dried up and the dwarves decided they didn't want to travel anymore and destroyed the ships," answered Giles.

"How terrible!" gasped Kayl.

"I think they didn't want the people on Immer getting them. They really disliked humans and didn't want to be bothered by them," replied Giles.

"Are any of the devices still around?" asked Mac.

"No, I'm sure they were destroyed with the ships. But I'm sure the dwarves

still have the knowledge," Giles answered.

"We will just have to go to Calham and Windham and ask them," Mac said bluntly.

"Good luck there, lad," Giles said.

"Well, at least we know about the devices now and there may be a chance to get the knowledge. Maybe Creedwell can help us make some if the exact knowledge can be learned," Kayl said.

"There you go again, relying on Creedwell. But, I suppose you're right. If you can get the details of the device from Fanlith or Goran, the mage should be able to help with the magical part."

Mac stood and shook hands with Giles and thanked him. Kayl also thanked him with a big hug. The slightly embarrassed hermit bid them goodbye and good luck.

As they walked back to Poldar, they discussed all the information they had learned. Several things they were sure that nobody else knew.

The elves made magical devices that warned of storms. The elves used them on ships to travel to other islands. And apparently, they didn't sell or trade any silver with humans on Immer. There were probably no humans on Eastham back then, they surmised.

The only piece of the puzzle now left was how to duplicate these devices for Captain Hale to use on his ships. Mac was sure that Mathus could get Creedwell to help with that. All in all, it was a very productive trip.

As soon as they arrived home, they found Mathus and Titus in the parlor. They came in and sat down, both with huge grins on their faces.

"Looks like things went well," their Pa said expectantly.

"Don't tell me the chovies worked," said Mathus.

"That and our persuasive powers," replied Mac grinning.

Just then, Sheela came in and said, "Well, how did our travelers fare?"

"You're just in time. They were about to tell their story," replied Mathus.

So, for the next hour Mac and Kayl gave the three of them all the details of their talk with hermit Giles. They were sure some of this information would be new to them. And it was.

They discussed what to do with the information of the devices. Should they take it directly to the Council or wait until Mathus talked to Creedwell? Mathus was sure the elves would not divulge the details of the device and the dwarves probably didn't know anything about the magical part.

Titus wondered if there was a way to find out from the dwarves what happened to the ships.

Sheela was intrigued with the information that the dwarves did not trade with humans.

The important thing now was to decide exactly what to do with this new

found knowledge. Mathus favored taking it directly to the Council. Mac wants to go to Creedwell first. Each one of them explained how they thought it should be done, but in the end it was decided by Mathus and Kayl.

"I trust Haln Stovas to do the right thing with this information," said Mathus. "And since it was Kayl and Mac that got it, they should accompany me to the Council."

"Agreed," said Titus and Sheela in unison.

"How much should we tell them?" asked Mac.

"Everything," replied Mathus. "We then strongly recommend that we should go directly to Creedwell."

"And if possible, Captain Hale should go too. He needs to know about the device, since it's his ship we want to put it on," stated Kayl.

"You're right, Kayl," said Mathus. "I'm sure he will agree, since he has to take us to Borricks. And it should be Mac and I and the Captain. No more. We don't want to overwhelm Creedwell," as he grinned at Mac.

"It's settled then. First thing in the morning. Right now we should think about supper," said Sheela.

"I also will tell the Council about Bassley. That may get them to act more quickly with their decision," Mathus said.

Mac couldn't believe his luck lately. A trip to see Creedwell was exactly what he wanted. And, he was sure he and Kayl would be included in even more adventures, maybe even to the other islands.

Three

Decisions and Preparations

The three Boles family members were at the Council chambers early the next morning. Haln greeted them, "So, what brings you here before breakfast?"

"We have good news for a change!" replied Mathus.

"Justin, have everyone meet in the chambers," said Haln, smiling "And have coffee brought in."

As the Councilmen gathered, Mathus asked Kayl and Mac to report all the details of their visit to Giles. Kayl started by telling them of their discussion with Giles and all that they learned. Mac then explained what their idea was about the devices and how they could be made.

When they finished, the Council was stunned. Haln admitted that storms were not even considered an issue. But, he said that with this device it really would be possible to set up trade routes between all the islands.

Mathus then reported his conversation with Bassley.

"If he is prepared to start trade routes all on his own, then I think he would be a valuable resource to the Council in their endeavors," Mathus stated.

"Agreed. We will talk to him. Convincing the dwarves and elves to the trade routes should be sanctioned by the Council, but we will welcome any contribution he wishes to make," Haln said.

As the discussions continued, Mathus explained that he and Mac should go to Creedwell for help building the device and not rely on the elves.

"Very true. However, a delegation must visit the islands first. The device will not be needed if the nobody agrees to the trade routes!" Haln exclaimed.

"So, I guess it's time to discuss who the delegates will be and a time frame for setting out," Mathus said.

Haln looked at the other Councilmen, nodded and said, "No further discussion is needed. Based on this new information, the Council has made their decision.:

"Really? That's great," said Mathus and Kayl together.

"We want the delegation to leave immediately. We also want the delegation to be made up of only three people. Mathus, Kayl and Mac Boles," Haln stated.

Mathus and Kayl looked at each other. Mac whooped! Composed himself and said, "Sorry."

"Then you all agree?" asked Haln.

"Absolutely...yes," they replied.

"Excellent. I can't think of anyone more qualified for this mission," Haln said, smiling. "While you prepare we will call in Titus and Sheela and inform them of our decision. They will agree with us, I'm sure."

More decisions were made. Bassley would be contacted for help. Mathus

then expressed his concerns about being sanctioned by the Council.

"The Council will prepare an official decree on trade routes and have it ready by tomorrow afternoon," assured Haln.

"I will contact Captain Hale. He will be pleased," Mathus said.

When everything was covered that they could think of, Mathus, Kayl and Mac departed. There was a lot of preparation to be done.

"Let's work on buying supplies first. We want time for Haln to talk to Ma and Pa," said Kayl.

"Ok, while we walk to town, let's talk about what we need," Mathus responded.

"I need more shakes," said Mac.

"So do I. We'll get Tolan to make up some. And first thing in the morning you and I need to brush up on throwing technique," Mathus replied.

"First stop should be Vela's. I want her to prepare an emergency pack of herbs and a healing draught for me. I wish Milla were going. She knows more about this than I do," Kayl said.

"Do you really think we need that?" asked Mac.

"You can never be sure of anything with the dwarves. And we will be going to Westham. Jarek and his tribe may be a problem, but hopefully not," Mathus replied.

"I wish we could talk to Creedwell before we go. He could give us an idea of what we will be up against," said Mac.

"Well, Captain Hale should be able to help there. We'll get him to tell us all he knows while we sail," Mathus reasoned.

Before Kayl headed to Vela's and the boys went to Tolan's, she said "I think I can confide in Vela, but be careful how much you tell Tolan, ok?"

"Right, see you back home," replied Mac.

Vela was just sitting down when Kayl walked into the bakeshop.

"Kayl, you're just in time for tea," said Vela.

"Oh, that would be nice. I need a big favor Vela. And I know how busy you are, but it's important," Kayl said seriously.

"I'm not that busy these days. Milla is doing much better than I had hoped," Vela said.

"I'm so pleased to hear that."

"Now, what's so important, dear?" asked Vela.

Kayl lowered her voice and said, "Not a word of this to anyone, ok?"

"Absolutely," said Vela. "But I have a feeling I already know what it's about."

"It wouldn't surprise me. I need you to make me up an emergency herb packet. And a healing draught."

"You're going with the delegation?" asked Vela, surprised.

"Yes, we leave in 2 days. And since we are going to Westham, I want to be

prepared," grinned Kayl.

"Oh dear. Milla is gone for the day...tell me everything, ok? Vela asked.

So, for the next hour, while Vela assembled the packet, Kayl told her everything that was said in the Council this morning. She also told her about her visit to Giles. Evidently, Vela had also spoke to Giles a little about the history of the islands, but did not know about the device.

When Vela was finished, she explained everything she put in the packet and exactly how to use it. She hugged Kayl and told her to be very careful. Kayl said that between Mathus, Mac and Captain Hale, she would be fine. Vela smiled at her and agreed, but she wasn't quite so confident.

Tolan and Kerns were hard at work when Mathus and Mac arrived. Mac greeted Kerns warmly and asked him how things were going.

"Great," replied Kerns. "I'm getting better each day. Course I have an excellent teacher."

"I glad you're happy here Kerns, but Kayl and I miss our time together with you and Milla. She is also doing well with Vela, I understand," said Mac.

"Yes, she is learning herb lore faster than I am learning smith work," replied Kerns, proudly.

"Let's plan another outing soon, ok? asked Mac, knowing it would be quite a while.

"Sure thing," replied Kerns.

"We are both just about out of shakes, Tolan. Can you make us up some more?" asked Mathus.

"Not a problem, Mathus," replied Tolan. "Another thing for Kerns to learn."

"Can we pick them up in the morning, then?" asked Mathus.

"Make it late morning, ok?" replied Tolan.

They agreed and headed for home.

Kayl was in the parlor with Titus and Abigal when Mathus and Mac arrived.

"We were just telling Kayl about being summoned to the Council," said Titus.

"They explained everything to us about your trip."

"It sounds exciting and a bit dangerous," Abigal added.

"Dangerous how?" asked Mathus.

"Going to Westham. That's Jarek's island and he doesn't like intruders," replied Abigal.

"Well, we are very well prepared. We have a decree from the Council stating we are on official business," Mac stated.

"I will still worry. And how will you contact us if you need to?" asked Abigal.

"Captain Hale has deckhands for that purpose," answered Mathus.

"I know you two can take care of yourselves. Kayl has her sword and Mac and Mathus their shakes. Just be on your guard when dwarves are around.

They are an unpredictable lot," Titus said.

"We will be very careful, Pa," Kayl assured. "And I have a healing packet and instructions from Vela."

Mac and Kayl headed off to make their last minute equipment check. Mathus continued talking to Titus and Abigal for a short time, then headed off to see Hale about last minute details and departure time.

"Swords, shakes, healing kit, water, maps, letter from Council," Kayl ran through the list. "What about food?" she asked.

"I think Captain Hale is providing that," answered Mac. "Eastham has lots of food stalls. And, on the other islands we'll carry food from the ship."

"Also, extra clothing and good hiking boots. We should also have sleeping gear in case we have to spend the night somewhere," Kayl said.

"Good idea," answered Mac.

"I wonder if Captain Hale will accompany us to each island?" asked Kayl.

"Probably so. Maybe we should have asked for Bassley to come. He has been to the islands and knows both dwarves and the elves," wondered Mac.

"So does Mathus and the Captain. At least as well as Bassley," replied Kayl.

"Yea, you're probably right. I'm just worried about meeting dwarves that are against outsiders. I only want to see those that will be friendly," Mac said.

"I'm afraid that's not possible, Mac. We will just have to be courteous to everyone we meet. If things get difficult, the Captain will get us out of there, I'm sure," she assured.

"Let's hope so," Mac said with a forced smile.

The next afternoon, Mathus found the Captain stocking the galley when he arrived at the ship. He asked if everything was about ready and Hale said it will be in time to leave.

"What time should we be here?" asked Mathus.

"After a good breakfast will be fine. And remember, we will be leaving from the north dock," reminded Hale.

"Ok, if I know Kayl, we will be there shortly after sunup," Mathus said, grinning.

"Are they worried about anything?" asked Hale.

"Not really. They seem wary of the dwarves, but then, so am I," said Mathus.

"The only unknown is Jarek. Goran and his group should be friendly enough. We will just have to make a backup plan on the sail to Westham," stated Hale.

"Sounds good. See you in the morning. North dock," Mathus said.

After finishing checking everything they could think of, Kayl and Mac were discussing the trip when Titus came in. He asked Kayl to join her Ma in the

parlor. He then sat next to Mac and looked closely at him.

"I know we've covered this before, but I really want you to be careful out there," said Titus seriously.

"I will, Pa," replied Mac.

"In the event of any trouble, let Mathus have the lead and watch his back. Also, keep a close eye on your sister," Titus said.

"Yes, sir," Mac answered. "It's what I planned to do."

"I know, son. I have every confidence in you...and Kayl. But, I will still worry," said Titus, lowering his head.

Mac reached over and hugged his Pa and said,

"I love you, Pa."

"And I love you too, son," Titus replied.

Kayl knew when she entered the parlor that her Ma was upset. She sat beside her, hugged her and said,

"Try not to worry, Ma. I'll be very careful and keep a close eye on Mac."

"I know, dear. I just hope you and Mac come home safely," Abigail replied.

"Captain Hale said a fortnight, at most. And if we are going to be longer, he will send a courier," explained Kayl.

"Do you really think the risk is worth it?" asked Abigail.

"Absolutely. Open trading between islands will benefit everybody. And who knows, the elves and dwarves may have things we don't even know about," answered Kayl.

"That's exactly what I wanted to hear. I love you, dear," Abigail said while giving her daughter another hug.

"I love you too, Ma," responded Kayl.

Although it was early, Kayl and Mac went to their beds. It took them a while before sleep took them. Later, Titus and Abigail sat together, talking quietly.

"Are we doing the right thing, letting them go?" asked Abigail.

"If I say yes and something happens to one of them, I'll never forgive myself. But, it's too late to say no now," replied Titus.

"We will have to tell Milla and Kerns, before they hear from someone else," said Abigail.

"I know. I can do that tomorrow. The Council didn't say we couldn't tell anyone," responded Titus.

"Yes, and I'm sure word will spread once you tell them," Abigail said, grinning.

So, the stage was set. The delegation was selected and approved by the Council. Plans were made and everything checked and double checked. All that was left to do now was hope they were successful.

Four

Discoveries Abound

After an easy walk on the path to the north dock, the trio hailed the ship, just minutes after sunrise, as predicted. The Captain smiled knowingly and waved them aboard.

"I'll wager you had no breakfast before you set out," said Hale.

"We ate on the way," replied Mac.

"Well, go below and ask the cook for a proper meal."

"Aye, sir!" they all responded promptly.

I hope all my orders are received so well, thought Hale as he prepared to get under way.

The Immer Sea was calm and the sun was warm and bright. They cast off and started the easy sail to Sellos. Kayl and Mac stood at the starboard rail, watching everything with silent awe. Mathus joined them and they discussed the plans for the day. They would be doing a wet landing at Sellos, as there was no dock on the island.

"The island is deserted, right?" asked Mac.

"As far as I know," replied Mathus.

"Our main task there from the Council is to make sure of that, as well as check out the landscape," said Kayl.

"Its been quite a while since I've been there," Mathus added. "and the ground is very rocky with lots of scrub pines."

"How much rain do you think they get?" asked Kayl.

"About as much as Immer, but less than Eastham. I didn't go very far inland, so I think we will want to do that. The captain is putting us at the narrowest part of the island and we should be able to see the East Ocean in a short walk," Mathus said.

"Are there any wild animals?" asked Mac.

"None that I saw, but lets keep an eye out."

"Will you keep the log book, Kayl?" asked Mathus.

"Yes. I will log everything we see and do on every island, so we can report to the Council."

"That will be great. I'm not much of a writer," Mathus replied.

"We'll be there just the one day, right?" asked Mac.

"Depends on what we find," answered Mathus.

Sellos was now in sight and the Captain brought them to within about a hundred yards of the beach and dropped anchor. He would join the group on the island, as he was also curious about the conditions. They found a fairly sandy spot and steered the launch to the shore.

The first thing they noticed was none of the trees were very tall. Probably stunted by the wind, they guessed. The Captain gave a deckhand instructions and they all set off inland.

The ground was covered with rocks and not easy walking, but they still made the far shore in good time. The wind coming off the East Ocean was much stronger and the cliffs here were higher than the ones on Immer. So far, they had seen no living things but birds.

The Captain suggested they head south and farther inland away from the cliffs. As they walked, the ground became less rocky and easier to navigate. They came to a short rise and when they topped it, they viewed a valley several miles across. It had pools of water and grassland.

"Wow. This is amazing," said Kayl. "The soil looks darker than any we've seen so far."

They spent the next few hours exploring the valley and found it to be several miles wide and a bit longer. The south side sloped gently down to the Immer Sea and you could see Calham off in the distance. They searched the beach area all the way to the place they landed. They all agreed a dock could be built anywhere along here and a road could be built directly to the valley.

"This part of the island is a lot wider than it looks from the water," observed the Captain. "I would have never guessed such a beautiful valley lay here. "

"It is perfect for a small town on the beach and roads into the valley. And if the rainfall amounts are adequate, the farming would be good," stated Mathus.

"I'd like for Caleb and May to see all this," said the Captain." They could tell us what would grow best here."

The group decided to head back to the ship for some dinner and discussions.

During dinner, they agreed to spend another day here and explore the north side of the island. They just might find another small valley.

Kayl and Mac sat talking quietly that evening as she made notes about everything they had seen this day. They were both excited and hoped the rest of the trip would be as productive. Mac said he could see himself doing some farming here, if conditions were right. It would be interesting to be involved in settling a new island and establishing a farming community. Kayl agreed, but she said she wasn't that interested in farming. Maybe she would start a small business, though.

The next morning, they were all off again early. The Captain suggested they split into two groups, one around the west side and the other the east. They would meet at the northern most point at noon. He felt that things were safe here, as there were no signs of life except small animals and birds.

Mac and Mathus headed off, while Kayl and the Captain started over to the east side. They followed the same trail they had taken yesterday until they came to the cliffs. Here they headed north, following the rise until it finally

flattened out. The farther north they walked the taller the trees became.

"It looks like it may go all the way to the north point," observed Mac.

"Yes, and it's far enough from the beach that it would be hard to see from the water," replied Mathus.

Kayl and the Captain were also amazed when they saw the trees getting bigger and thicker. Finally, they came upon the forest. The Captain guessed that it was at least a mile across.

"And how far are we from the north point?" asked Kayl.

"At least another two miles. This is a very nice size forest. Lots of pine for building a dock and some buildings," he answered.

"I wonder if the dwarves over on Calham know this is here?"

"I've never heard them mention this island at all. And we've not seen any signs that anyone has been here," answered the Captain.

"I just can't believe this forest and the valley have been here all this time and nobody knew about it," stated Kayl.

They continued north and eventually came to the northern most point of the island. There sitting on a rock were Mac and Mathus. The two groups reported on what they had seen, all being impressed by the size of the forest.

"Lets have some lunch and head back," said Mac.

"And this time we all go together, right through the middle of the forest, ok?" asked Mathus.

They all agreed and set about to eat a cold lunch. Starting a fire here would not be a good idea, just in case someone was out on the water.

"Does anyone from one of the islands have a boat?" asked Mac.

"I'm sure the dwarves have a few. And maybe even the elves. Of course, neither group really likes the water very much, but it's better if we not take the chance," answered the Captain.

The group started heading south just after noon. Kayl asked them to help her identify all the different types of trees they see for her log book. She also said she would need to know the size of this forest.

Several times Mathus put up his hand asking for quiet. They all stopped and listened, but could not hear anything unusual.

"What do you think it is?" asked Kayl.

"I'm not certain, but it sounded like the growl of an animal," he said.

"And if there were any animals on this island, this would be the perfect spot for them to live," reasoned Mac.

"Right. Lets keep a sharp eye out and have your weapons at hand," the Captain said.

They continued on, slower and more cautious than before. Both Mac and Mathus were watching closely for any sign of an animal, whether it be spoor or tracks. Kayl kept her eyes in the trees, just in case it was a nocturnal bird, such as an owl. She saw nothing.

They came to the southern end of the forest without hearing the noise again. They all agreed it might just have been the wind and no further mention of it would be made.

They continued on until they met the trail from the ship. They stopped here while Kayl sketched a crude map of the island, getting input from the others. It seemed like a fine place for someone to live. She knew they still needed more information and some experts to come and look things over, but she felt really good about what they had seen so far.

Just as they were heading down to the ship, the skies opened up and it started raining. It wasn't a downpour, just a slow steady rain that lasted all the way to the ship.

"I was wondering if we would see this," Mathus said.

"Several of the islands get afternoon rains regularly," added the Captain.

"It would explain the water we saw in the valley," Kayl reasoned.

"Good soil, fresh water and lots of trees. Kind of reminds me of Eastham."

"This will make the Council happy," said Mac.

The group had made excellent progress the last two days and decided tomorrow morning they would head to Calham. To Goran and his dwarves.

Milla was just finishing up the last of the tonic for Vela, when her brother came rushing in the bakeshop. He said one of the women in the Greybeard had become ill and he was sent to fetch Vela.

"She is out on her rounds," said Milla quickly, "Tell me her symptoms."

"I'm not too sure, I only saw her for a minute or so," answered Kerns. "But, I know she fainted and was all white looking."

"OK, I'll grab some things and follow you back."

"Hurry," said Kerns looking very worried.

They arrived at the Greybeard a short time later and were met by Abigal and Titus. Neither one hesitated when they saw Milla instead of Vela. They quickly took her upstairs to the guest room of the sick woman, where Milla promptly asked everyone except her Ma to clear the room. She immediately asked her Ma to open the large window for some fresh air.

She administered to the woman, checking her over thoroughly and gave her a small healing draught.

"I'm sure she will be ok," said Milla. "She just had a bit of nausea, probably because she is pregnant."

"Really! I thought so, but wasn't sure," said Abigal.

"I will have Vela come see her this evening, just to make sure I didn't miss anything."

"Thank you, dear, for getting here so fast. She just turned white and fainted.

Scared us half to death."

"I'm sure she will be fine. Do you want me to talk to her family?" asked Milla.

"No, I can do that. You must be getting back to the bakeshop."

Milla hugged her mother and headed back to town. She was surprisingly calm for her first sick call. She felt as though she checked everything with the woman and made the correct diagnosis. Vela would hopefully confirm her findings this evening.

Kerns caught up with her and the two walked together. He was glad for the quiet time with Milla and he asked her all about her work. She seemed to be happy and learning all that Vela taught.

"Have you learned any island lore?" asked Kerns.

"Some," she replied. "Mostly just what Vela learned from Giles."

"I sure miss Kayl and Mac. I wonder when they will be back?"

"Probably not for another week or so. They will have some wonderful stories for us, though," Milla answered.

Kerns was not sure if he should talk about his work with Tolan, but finally decided he should.

"I like working with Tolan and am learning so much..."

"But...you're not happy, right?" finished Milla.

"How did you know?" asked Kerns, shocked.

"Well I wouldn't be much of a healer, or a sister, if I couldn't read that in you, Kerns."

"It's true. I feel like what I really want to be doing is something I can never do," replied Kerns.

"And what is that?"

"I want to be studying magic. With Creedwell. Is that crazy?" Kerns asked.

"Not at all. Why do you think you'd be happy learning that instead of the smithy?" asked Milla.

"Well, I've always been interested in magical things and the more I wonder about things, the more questions I have. And there is nobody to talk to about this, you know."

"I can well imagine. The only one that you could ask about this is Mathus, or Kayl," she stated.

"Right, and when they get back, they will be so busy with the Council and all..."

"Maybe you should ask Pa if you could take a trip to Borricks. Talk to Creedwell," said Milla.

"He would probably let me go, but I doubt Creedwell would agree to even see me."

"You never know till you try. Ask Mathus when he returns. Maybe he will even go with you," Milla said smiling.

"Excellent idea. I'll do that. In the meantime I'll talk to Pa. He has to agree first," Kerns said.

For a while now, Kerns had been reading about the magic of the old Lore. He even talked to Giles about it once and he said there was no reason he couldn't learn the old lore like anyone else. But, Kerns wanted to learn more than just the old Lore, he wanted to be able to do magic. Not the transformational magic that only Creedwell knew, just small stuff. If he could just get Creedwell to apprentice him to learn the basics, he would learn the harder stuff from books.

He was sure that the elves knew the old magic. Maybe he would go talk to Fanlith and see if it would be possible for him to learn elven magic. Maybe only elves could learn what they knew. Maybe Mathus knew. He had so many questions. As far as he knew, he was the only one interested in the magical part of the old Lore. Vela and Giles didn't know any magic, he was sure.

So, he decided to talk to his Pa this evening about going to Borricks to see Creedwell. If that failed, he would go see Giles again and see if he had any books on the basics. He would try to learn it that way. One way or another, he would become an elemental magician, he felt sure.

Five

First Encounter

On the sail to Calham the group decided that one of the things they would ask Goran was whether any dwarves had ever been to Sellos. And if so, what they found there. They did not want to let him know they what they found. The Council had to be told first.

They dropped anchor at a spot the Captain had been to before and prepared the launch. The Captain decided to stay on board this time, since he was uncomfortable leaving the ship before they knew if the dwarves accepted the delegation. And if the group wasn't back by a predetermined time, he could go for help.

Of course he and Mathus did not discuss this with Kayl or Mac for fear of making them nervous. Goran would sense that and it might adversely impact the mission. He was sure that Mathus could handle things and return safely.

The group had just left the launch and started inland when suddenly there were several dwarves blocking the path. They were all armed and did not look happy at all.

"Who are you and why are you on our island?" asked the apparent leader.

"We come in peace and are here to see Goran. Can you please escort us to him?" replied Mathus.

"I've seen you before," the leader said to Mathus. "But these two I do not know."

"We travel together as a delegation from the Council of Immer with business for Goran," replied Mathus, firmly.

The leader did not look impressed, but gave a command to the rest and motioned for the group to follow. Mathus told Kayl and Mac to stay close and do exactly as he does. They walked with the dwarves, making sure they took note of signs so they could retreat in haste, if necessary.

They saw many other dwarves as they walked, watching them closely. They did not look friendly at all. Mac whispered to Mathus, "Shouldn't we have our shakes ready, just in case?"

"No, don't even look like you are reaching for a weapon," Mathus replied to both Mac and Kayl. "There are just as many dwarves you can't see as the ones you can."

After quite a long walk, the group still did not see any dwellings and no animals. They were beginning to wonder if there was any village at all, when the leader stopped.

"From this point on, we must cover your eyes, so you cannot see and remember the path."

Mathus nodded and accepted the leather covering. Kayl and Mac did the

same. They were each lead by a dwarf, so as not to stumble, and very soon they were going down hill and the air got a lot cooler. A cave, thought Mathus.

Both Kayl and Mac smelled water and Mathus smelled wood smoke. They must live below ground, thought Mathus. Then they heard a loud horn; ta-rah..ta-rah. Many dwarves started talking at once, excitedly. Mathus stopped and told Kayl and Mac to stop.

"Are we there yet?" he ask the into the air, hoping the leader was still there.

"Just a bit longer and we will meet Goran," he replied.

After a few more minutes the dwarves bade them to stop, removed the leather covers from their eyes and said to sit on the rocks near a small fire. The group did as they were told. Sure enough, they were in a cave.

Kayl was adjusting her eyes to the firelight, "Did you know these dwarves lived in caves?" she asked Mathus.

"No, I had no idea and the Captain never mentioned it," Mathus said. "I'll bet Trader Raines knew, but he never let on."

"Maybe he thought we all knew," Mac said.

Just then, a commotion sounded behind them and a rather large dwarf came into view. He was a lot older than the leader and his group, but with the same reddish-brown beard. He walked up to Mathus, who stood and shook his hand.

"Well met, Chief Goran!" Mathus said politely. Turning to Kayl and Mac he said,

"This is my niece Kayl Boles and my nephew Mac Boles."

"Welcome to you all. I take it you are here on some kind of business?" the chief answered.

"Yes, we are an official delegation of the Council of Immer. We are here to speak to you on an urgent matter. Can you find a private place in which to discuss it with us?" Mathus asked.

"Right here is private enough. Any that hear us will not repeat it; that is our law," Goran assured them.

"I don't trust that they represent the Council. I want proof!" spoke one of the dwarfs.

"Yes, they could just be spies from Calham or Westham for all we know," added another dwarf.

Kayl looked shocked and started to reply and Mathus stilled her with a look. Mac instantly put his hand in his carry pack where he kept his shakes.

"Hold!" yelled Mathus. "We carry official documents from the Council. Will the chief examine them?"

Goran nodded, but said nothing to the dwarves who made the accusations, that hung heavy in the air.

Mathus handed the decree to Goran, who read it aloud to the assembled dwarves, which had grown considerably. I didn't even see them come in, thought Kayl. She glanced at Mac and he had a very worried look, but managed a smile.

"This could be forged. We have had false paperwork shown to us before, by that trader Raines," shouted someone.

"Yes, and look what it led to, smuggling of our silver," another dwarf said.

"Even if they are official, that doesn't mean much. What has this Council ever done for us?" said another.

"We were told that Raines was sent by the Council too."

"Enough!" the chief said loudly. "We will discuss that matter later. We must first determine if this group truly represents the Council and if we can trust them. We will meet in clan chambers to discuss it. You three will await our decision," he said, looking at the group.

"May we have something a little more comfortable than rocks to sit on while we wait, or is the hospitality of dwarves not really what I've heard?" demanded Kayl.

Goran's eyes softened and said, "Of course you may, Kayl Boles. And you will find our hospitality quite to your liking as soon as we have come to trust you."

The group was led to another small chamber with comfortable chairs covered in pelts. They all sat and Kayl asked for some tea. Mac couldn't believe she was so calm, he was starting to get very nervous.

Mathus grinned at her and said, "Just like Abigail. Headstrong, but polite."

"Not that it will do any good," she replied. "I hope you remember the way out of here."

"Not me, I was blindfolded too, you know. Besides, it won't come to that," replied Mathus.

"Sounds to me like trader Raines has them spooked. What was that they said about smuggling?" Mac asked.

"Smuggling silver I think he said," answered Kayl.

"We definitely need to hear more about that before we leave this place. The Council should know of it too," Mathus said.

After what seemed like hours, the group was asked to join the chief and the others in the clan chambers. This is a good sign, thought Mathus. They were led to an enormous cavern with a stone table in the center big enough for twenty dwarves to sit at comfortably. Places were made for all three and more tea was brought to them.

Goran started by saying that a decision was made to trust the group for now, but they could not agree on any treaty. Official trading with the other islands was another matter, however. They have always traded for the things they need, but Fanlith and Jarek stopped all trading some time ago. If the Council could persuade Fanlith to get them started again, then they would be happy to join.

More discussions took place about trading, while Kayl took careful notes. Finally, just before the meeting ended, Mathus asked Goran to explain what this

issue is with Raines. He looked at several other dwarves and some silent communications took place, Kayl was sure. Finally, several of the assembled dwarves left the chambers and there were only Goran, their earlier leader and two other dwarves left.

"This is a very delicate matter," explained Goran.

"I don't know how much is true as I have not been able to get a complete story from those involved. It has to do with honor among dwarves."

"Well we need to relay this to the Council as soon as we return, so they can talk to Raines. Can you at least tell us what you think he has done?" Kayl asked.

"About a month ago, several of the workers in the mines noticed a shortage in our silver stores. We thought maybe it was someone from Jarek's clan, so we sent a runner to Jarek and he assured us they have enough silver of their own. We believed him because we have done no trading for quite a while," the chief summarized.

"We finally decided it was not a dwarf and the only one that had been here was Raines," added the leader. "He has been here several times and had plenty of opportunity, but when we confronted him, he denied it."

"But, we are sure it was him," added Goran.

Mathus assured Goran and the others present they would report this to the Council immediately upon their arrival on Immer. Which should be within the week. The chief seemed content and said they were welcome to spend the night as it is nearly dark outside.

"I can't believe it is so late. It's hard to tell down here how much time passes," Mac said.

"Oh my, we had better let the Captain know we are ok. We had a set time...er well, I mean..." Kayl stumbled.

"It's quite alright, I understand," Goran said, smiling for the first time since they arrived. "It's always good to be cautious. We dwarves have to live that way all the time."

"I would be honored if you joined us for dinner. We can send a runner to your ship with a message from you," the leader said.

"We would be glad to accept," replied Mathus.

"Yes, maybe we can see more of your caves!" Mac said with a grin.

"He means more of your home," said Kayl, a little embarrassed.

The chief nodded and they all left the chambers.

The group felt safe enough, but were still a little nervous going through some of the dark rooms and chambers. It was hard for them to get used to the darkness all the time. The dwarves have accustomed their eyesight over the years and can see very well.

They saw many storage rooms, meeting rooms, a dining room and some sleeping quarters. They were, however not permitted to the mines. Just as well, thought Kayl. It's bad enough that Raines has the knowledge, we are better off

without it.

Dinner in one of the great dining hall was very good. There were at least fifty dwarves in the hall. Mac had seconds and thirds and the dwarves were honored that he liked the food so much.

There were toasts to the group and well wishes, too. Many of the dwarves expresses hope that trading would really happen and Kayl assured them it would.

Mathus and Mac were assigned sleeping quarters with their leader and his group. Kayl had semi-private quarters with several other dwarven women. She enjoyed their sense of humor and made friends easily.

The next morning, after a wonderful breakfast of eggs, meat and brown bread, the group was escorted back to the ship. It was a pleasant walk down the same path they arrived on, but without the blindfolds. Mac and Kayl commented that they must trust them now and had a feeling they would be back soon.

"Ahoy the ship!" yelled Mathus, once it was in sight.

"Well, there you are," replied the Captain. "Even though a runner came last night, I was still worried."

"It was touchy at first, but we ended up having a very productive meeting with Goran," Mathus said.

"You can give me all the details on the sail to Windham."

Kerns was nervously awaiting his Pa to return from an errand in the village. He was going to tell him today about his wish to learn magic and going to see Borrick. What's the worst that can happen, he thought. If I can get Mathus to go with me, he shouldn't object.

He debated talking to both his Ma and Pa together, but he felt that Calvin would be more reasonable about the dangers involved. He'd get his approval first, and then together they would confront Ma.

"You're not at Tolan's today?" asked Calvin as he came in the yard.

"Just this morning. I had an important errand to do."

"Oh? Anything I can help with?" asked Calvin.

"As a matter of fact, I need to talk with you alone."

"Sure, I'll be right back out after I give these spices to your Ma," he replied.

"The thing is, even though I appreciate Tolan and all that he is teaching me, I just don't think I want to do that long term," Kerns said nervously.

"Well...do you know what you do want?" asked Calvin.

"Yes, and you're not going to like it, I fear."

"Maybe, maybe not," Calvin said, smiling.

"I want to learn magic and study with Creedwell," Kerns said all at once.

"Is that so," answered his Pa. "I would not have guessed that. You've never mentioned anything about it before."

"Only to Milla. And I'm sure Kayl knows," he said.

"I guess parents are the last to know, huh?"

"It's not something that most will accept. That's why I thought you and Ma would not like it," answered Kerns.

"Well, Kerns. You are nearly of age and you should know your own mind. If this is what you really want, then we will support you," his Pa declared.

"Really? Even Ma?" Kerns exclaimed.

"She may not be thrilled with the idea, but she will support it just the same."

"Wow...what great parents I have," Kerns said.

"Now that's something I know your Ma would be thrilled to hear," Calvin said grinning.

"Well that's how I'll start the conversation then, when I tell her," said Kerns and he hugged his Pa.

So, the stage was set. Kerns should go see Creedwell to inquire about an apprenticeship. He knew his Ma would want Mathus to go with him and it was probably best, since he knew Creedwell.

He just had to continue working with Tolan until the group returned. It would be a good time to read up on any books he could find on elemental magic. If Creedwell sees he already knows some of it, maybe he would be more willing to apprentice him.

Kerns wondered if he should pay a quick visit to Giles to see if he has any reading material. Wait till he tells Milla. She will be so happy. All in all, it was a very good day.

Six

New Friends are Made

Windham was only a short sail from Calham and the group arrived on the west side for another wet landing. This time, the Captain joined them, as they expected no trouble from the elves. Kayl and Mac were really excited about meeting Fanlith and Ealen.

Mathus brought them quickly to the outskirts of the main village where they were met by a sentry.

"I didn't think we could get so close before we saw someone," said Mac.

"We've been watching you since you were about a quarter mile from the beach," said the guide, smiling.

"We've been expecting you," said another elf. "You are the Immer delegation, correct?"

"That's right," replied Mathus. "Can you please escort us to Fanlith?"

"Yes, I am to be your guide. Follow us."

The group noticed all the friendly smiles and waves from the elves, a stark contrast from the welcome on Calham and the dwarves. They all seemed to have very nice dwellings and lots of great gardens. None of dwarves that didn't live underground had gardens at all. Kayl wondered where they got their fresh vegetables. Could they have gardens in the caves? It was something that she neglected to ask Goran.

So, she thought, without visible gardens, why wouldn't they be more interested in trade agreements? Especially with Eastham. They must have some other source of fresh foods. She would make it a point to ask Mathus.

They then came upon an enormous tree that must have been fifty feet tall. The branches were very thick and had steps and guy wires leading to and from the trunk.

"This is the home of Fanlith, our leader, and his wife Ealen. They will meet us on the second level. Please be careful where you step," the guide said.

Even though it was steep, it was very easy to climb the path upwards, and soon they were met by a very tall elf with laugh wrinkles and gray streaks in his auburn hair. Beside him was the most beautiful, ageless woman that Kayl had ever seen. Mac stared at her, speechless.

"May I present Fanlith and Ealen," stated the guide.

"Well met!" exclaimed Mathus.

"We welcome you all to our home," responded Fanlith.

"Where is it?" asked Mac, looking all around.

"The main house is up another two levels, but we will be going the the great hall, one level up," answered Fanlith.

"We have been looking forward to meeting the Immer delegation. Please

follow us to the hall for refreshments. Would you like a rest after your journey?" Ealen asked.

"We have only come from Calham, so it was a short journey. Tea would be nice, though," Kayl said.

"How do you know about us?", Mathus asked.

"We go to Immer on a regular basis, but keep mostly out of sight," Fanlith replied. "We do listen though."

So, the group followed the elves up another level and stopped before a set of large hanging vines. Fanlith pulled aside the vines and Kayl gasped at the size of the room behind. How could this room be in a tree, she thought?

"We get the same reaction from all humans," said Ealen, smiling. "If you look closely, you will see the walls of the room are actually tree limbs that have been encouraged to grow sideways."

"Yes, now I see. The walls are actually the foliage of all the limbs, joined somehow," Kayl answered. "But how?"

"We simply asked them and they obliged," she responded, as if it were a normal thing.

"Oh, Kerns would love to see this!" exclaimed Mac.

"Absolutely. He is our friend on Immer and he wants to study magic," Kayl said, looking again at Ealen.

"Well, I wouldn't call it magic. More of an understanding with the tree," Ealen replied, smiling.

Tea was brought after everyone had taken very comfortable seats in a small room off the hall.

Fanlith and Ealen explained how happy they were that open trading may be a reality again. It had already been decided by the elder elves that they would do all they could to help in the effort. Mac and Kayl glanced at each other and Mathus explained as much as he could about the plans of the Council.

"So, tell us of your travels," said Fanlith.

Mathus and the Captain explained briefly all that happened on Calham and Sellos. Then Kayl told them about the plans for the rest of the trip. Fanlith was very interested in what they found on Sellos, but seemed concerned about the plans for Westham. There were very few people, humans or elves, going there now. It was clear that Jarek's tribe was not interested in outsiders.

"Is it necessary to have both Goran's and Jarek's tribes in the treaty?" asked Fanlith.

"The Council of Immer wants all islands to have free trade and belong to the Bernham alliance," answered Mathus.

"I understand. And it would be a very good thing, but you may find that Jarek has other ideas."

"And that's fine. But, we must at least explain things to him," Kayl stated. "And ask him to join."

"I think it would make relations worse if we ignored Jarek's tribe," Mathus

said.

"Wise thinking," said Ealen, nodding her head.

"I still worry about such a small group going unprotected to Westham... uninvited." Fanlith said, concerned. "At least take a company of elves with you."

"Oh dear, no," Kayl said cautiously. "I think that would be counter-productive. We must be able to say we come in peace and a group of armed elves would certainly not send that message."

"Well said, Kayl," Ealen smiled. "It sounds to me like the Immer Council has elected the proper group for this delegation."

"You may be right," Fanlith said, looking at Kayl. "But, we have an elf that has had dealings with Jarek and knows more than any of us about their culture. How about if I have him accompany you, just to Westham. I would feel much better."

"You are very kind, Fanlith," said Mathus. "What does the group think about just one elf?"

"It would be good if we had him during the trade negotiations," stated Mac.

"And afterward, he could report back to you of our success," added Kayl.

"Exactly my plan," Fanlith grinned.

"Elves sure are smart," stated Mac.

"We've had a fair number of centuries to learn things," responded Ealen.

And the discussions continued until another beautiful elf appeared and announced dinner was ready. Kayl felt very plain indeed among these women. She wondered if this new elf was the daughter of Ealen, since she looked very much like her. But, before she had a chance to ask, Fanlith stood and asked everyone to follow him.

They were led up another level to a room with a large table. A wonderful array of food was laid out and Mac's eyes got very big. As they were being seated, Kayl noticed a rather striking elf standing to one side, like he was waiting on something. Fanlith motioned him over and introduced him to the group as Vathar Dortha. He had agreed to be their guide to Westham. Mathus and the Captain both nodded to him in thanks.

Mathus explained that he and Vathar had done a small bit of traveling together. Mac asked if they would tell all about it after dinner and they both agreed.

"But, before that, I have one more thing to discuss with Fanlith," said the Captain.

"I would be happy to help, if I can," said Fanlith.

The food was totally different than Goran's dwarves served, but just as delicious, Kayl thought. The elves must definitely have gardens. She quietly asked Ealen about it and was told that all the vegetables were grown in the courtyard between the main trees. She said she would show her while Fanlith and the Captain talked. Kayl said that would be wonderful and she also hoped to meet some of the other beautiful elven women.

She was reminded of how her little group, Mac, Kerns and Milla, discussed the elves on the cliffs outside of Pillstock. That seemed like such a long time ago. They all thought the elves were magical. Kerns will be surprised when he learns that the elves aren't magical, just in close harmony with the earth. Maybe that was magical, she thought. A serious discussion about this with Kerns and Creedwell was in order.

When they were finished eating, Fanlith, Mathus, Mac and the Captain remained at the table. Kayl and Ealen headed to the gardens.

"There is a question among this group and the Council that we hoped you could help answer, Fanlith," the Captain said.

"Concerning what?" asked Fanlith.

"Kayl and Mac learned from the hermit Giles that there had been trading between the islands a long time ago."

"That is true. Giles is a very honest human," said Fanlith.

Mathus then told him about what was learned from Giles. He explained about the worry of bad weather and that the elves helped fashion a device for the ships to use to warn of approaching storms.

"What we would like to know is if that knowledge is still available," the Captain said.

"Ahh...that is a very good idea. It would be helpful to have one of those devices on your ship, Captain. Unfortunately, there were very few elves that had that knowledge and they have all passed over."

"Nobody still knows?" asked Mac.

"No, but there are a couple elders that still remember a little of how they worked. I'm sure if you explained that to the mage, he could make a similar device," Fanlith said confidently.

"Excellent. Could we talk to them before we leave?" asked Mathus.

"Yes, lets go find them now," Fanlith said.

Kayl was still viewing all the different kinds of plants in the main garden when they were asked to join the rest back in the dining room. She told Ealen about Vela and her knowledge of herbs and that it would be wonderful if she could see this garden someday. Ealen assured her that if Vela visited, she could spend all the time she wanted with the head gardener.

Back in the dining room, Mac and Mathus told Kayl about the discussions of the device. And that they had gone to see an elder and found out how the device worked, in theory. Now, they could take that information to Creedwell and see if he would help make a device.

"The Council hinted to me that if this delegation is successful, they would investigate building more ships. So, we are going to need Creedwell to make several devices," the Captain said.

Fanlith was sure this was knowledge that should not be discussed openly and was pleased they trusted him enough to tell him.

"Well, if thats so, it is imperative that you succeed in your mission," Fanlith

said, looking at Mathus.

"Yes, and with the help of you and Vathar, I feel certain we will," replied Mathus.

"I just hope we get a good reception on Westham," added Kayl.

They all nodded and Vathar assured them he could get Jarek to be civil. As long as there were no other problem dwarves, things should be fine.

The group spent a pleasant night among the elves and headed back to the ship in the morning, after breakfast. They now had a new member, Vathar, and everyone felt good that he agreed to come with them.

They readied the ship for the sail to Eastham. Mac was excited about finally meeting the farmers. They were expecting the delegation. Kayl made notes in her journal for the Council about all the help they received from Fanlith and Ealen. She was sure they would be invaluable in securing the trade agreements.

Vathar was also excited about visiting the farmers. He had instructions to learn all that he could that would help Ealen with her gardens.

Seven

A Discovery of Self

On the 5th day of the trip, the group entered the Immer Straights between Eastham and Immer. They could see fields of grain on the northeast side of Eastham. Kayl and Mac commented that they looked over at Eastham many times from the cliffs, and never saw them. But, those cliffs are a lot farther west and they could not see the east end.

The Captain docked the ship smartly and told a deck hand to bring word to Caleb that they had arrived. Once the group was ashore, the Captain said he would have to stay and look after some things on board. So, along with Vathar, they headed to the small settlement to meet with Caleb and May. With Mathus leading the way, they were at the edge of a settlement when Caleb appeared. Introductions were made and they all headed to the main hall, where his wife May and several other farmers awaited.

More introductions were made and Caleb asked Vathar to tell them about the elves, as most farmers had never met any. He gave everyone a short history of the Windham elves and explained Fanlith's wishes about helping the farmers in any way he could. This was warmly received by all the farmers.

Since Caleb knew they were coming, the farmers had samples of all the crops grown on the island at hand. The group recognized corn, wheat, potatoes, carrots, peas, and onions. They also saw a few plants that they did not recognize. May explained about the carob pods, cacel roots and wheer plants that they were experimenting with.

"Now I must report about a problem we have here on Eastham that I doubt the Council knows about yet," stated Caleb.

"While you do that, we will be about our tasks," said May. "We'll meet you for dinner at our house," she said to the group.

She and another worker climbed on a wagon to head back to the fields. One of the workers stood for a long minute staring at Kayl.

"Today, Raith," May said to the worker.

He smiled at Kayl and jumped on the wagon and they were off.

"If everyone will have a seat, I will begin," Caleb said.

"I hope it's nothing too serious," Kayl commented.

"It isn't yet, but may be very soon. We have always been able to meet the Immer and Eastham quotas with no problems. But, recently crop yields have been way down and with less rain than usual, we are getting dangerously low on stores," Caleb explained.

"We're not sure exactly whats causing the low yields and we don't think it's just less rainfall. We can see rain falling to the east and north, but it doesn't

seem to get here like it used to."

"Our rainfall on Windham has not changed," noted Vathar.

"That would mean Calham and Sellos are getting the usual amount," observed Mathus.

"Probably so, but like I said, I don't think it's rainfall alone causing the yield problem," said Caleb. "And until we figure it out, you must carry word to the Council that there may be a shortage."

"Have you found the crops being eaten by anything?" asked Mac

"No, not at all. And the bird population has not increased. It's like there is an invisible fog that settles down on the crops, stunting their growth."

"This is most intriguing," said Mac. "We could talk to Giles or Creedwell and see if they have ever heard of this happening before."

"Good idea," said Kayl. "We should be home in a few days and we can check with Giles right away."

"And, Mac and I will be visiting Creedwell at the same time," Mathus added.

"That will definitely help, I'm sure," Caleb nodded.

The group talked with Caleb for a while and then asked for a tour of the crop fields. Mac was especially interested in seeing the low yield crops. He must understand the problem as much as possible to explain it to Creedwell. Kayl felt the same way, so Caleb took them on a complete tour of the major fields around the village.

Just as the sun was getting low on the west end of the island, the group stopped at a rather large house near the end of the village. May came out the door and welcomed them to their home.

"This seems like a very big house for two people," Mac commented.

"It needs to be big to hold all the temporary workers from around the island," she explained. "When certain crops need harvested, some workers live too far away to go back and forth, so we put them up here for a few days."

"So, you must have different workers with you most of the harvest season."

"That's right, Mac. And it takes a lot of cooking to keep them all fed. Of course, they help by bringing food when they come," answered May.

"Seems like it would be better if you just turned this big place into a workers house and you and Caleb got a small place of your own," Mac said, smiling.

"It has crossed our minds, to be sure," Caleb replied.

Mac filed this bit of information away, along with all the other things he learned from Caleb today. This was a very interesting problem, he thought. It will be fun to help solve it.

After dinner, Mathus told Caleb and May the group had something they needed to discuss with them. He looked at May and told her they weren't the only ones with news. Mac wanted to explore some more while they gave all the details of what they found on Sellos to Caleb and May. Vathar listened with great interest.

They couldn't believe the news. They always thought nothing much of

anything was on that island. They had tons of questions for Kayl and she had to get out her logbook to answer them all. Mathus asked them if they would be willing to go to Sellos and check out things first hand.

"Absolutely! When do you think that might be?" Caleb asked.

"I'd say in a week or so," replied Mathus. "After we get back and report it to the Council."

"Wow, it would be great if we could start several fields there. We would put down just a few things at first, to see how they do. They would be the crops in the shortest supply here," Caleb said.

"That's why we want you to see the situation there first hand. You would know better as to what crops should be tried first," said Kayl.

"We will recommend this to the Council first thing. I think they will definitely agree," Mathus stated.

"And if the trip leaves you shorthanded here, I can have Fanlith send elves to help. I know several that would love to learn more about the farming here," added Vathar.

When Mac returned from his exploring, Caleb and May were showing the group to their sleeping quarters. Once again, Kayl had a choice of her own area or the second level with May. She chose May's company.

Later, Mac told Kayl and Mathus he would really like to stay here and help Caleb, but he knew he couldn't. He would come back right after reporting to the Council. Mathus said that it should be him and Kayl that takes Caleb to Sellos and it should happen right away.

Once the Council hears about the possible crop shortage, they will surely approve the Sellos trip immediately, thought Mac. He was not sure why, but these farming problems peaked his interest and he knew he had to help solve them. He never pictured himself as a farmer, but the more he learned about it, the more he wanted to learn.

He figured it was the same way with Kerns and his magic. Nobody really knew where life's interests would take them, but you had to be willing to follow the path once it was shown to you. He couldn't wait to tell Kerns and Milla about the path he was presented with here.

Back on the ship, the Captain was just finishing up his inspection when he called his first mate to him.

"I need you to take a launch over to Immer with a message for Titus Boles. Do you know where he lives?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. I do."

He handed him a sealed note and told him to deliver it to Titus personally. Wait for a response if there was one and head straight back. The mate gathered a few things, set the launch and started the quick trip to the docks at Immer.

Within the hour he tied off the launch and headed to the Boles place. As he arrived at the front gate, Sheela was coming down the porch steps.

"May I help you?" she asked.

"I have a message from Captain Hale for Titus. Is he home?"

"Not right now, but he should be back any minute. Have you been sailing with the group? Is anything wrong?" Sheela asked with a very worried look.

"Nothing wrong, Mrs. Boles, it's just that I'm supposed to deliver this note directly to Titus."

"Oh, what a relief. And please, call me Sheela. Would you care to come up and have some tea and cakes?" she asked, smiling now.

"Surely would be nice, Sheela."

He followed her to the kitchen and fixed him a cup of tea. Just as he finished his second chovie, Titus came through the door. He sat down and Sheela poured him a cup.

"I have this note from Captain Hale, sir."

"No problem is there?" Titus asked.

"No sir, none that I know of," he replied.

Titus lifted the seal and read the note. He grinned from ear to ear and handed it to Sheela. The mate asked if there was a reply. Sheela looked at Titus and they said no reply was necessary. The mate thanked Sheela for the tea and cakes, excused himself and headed back to the ship.

Titus and Sheela sat for a while discussing the news. The Captain was not long on details, but he just wanted them to know everything was fine. Only two more stops and they would be back home. Probably within three days.

He asked Titus to let the Council know when they expected to return and that a meeting would be needed right away. That's all he said and Titus wondered what that news was. Sheela assured him if it were bad news, he surely would have explained. Of course, they still had to go to Westham and see Jarek.

"We better not say anything to anyone else. Milla and Kerns are asking almost daily for news, but I think you should head over to see the Council today," Sheela said.

"Yes, you're right. I'll go now. And don't worry dear, I'm sure everything will be fine."

Sheela was not so sure. She had a feeling that something may go wrong with Jarek, or some of his dwarves. She couldn't remember any bad reports about Jarek, but you never know about dwarves. And he does not control all of them. She just had to be patient. Only a few more days now.

The next morning, warm goodbyes were said all around between the group and Caleb and May. The group headed back to the ship and arrived just as the Captain was readying to set sail for Westham.

"Good timing," shouted the Captain.

"We're getting good at this, I guess," Mathus returned.

"Did you learn anything that will help, Vathar?" asked the Captain.

“Yes. I learned much that Ealen will be pleased to know.”

The Captain grinned and cast off. The group discussed all the possibilities during the short sail. Mac spent some time getting his shakes ready. Kayl got her sword cleaned up and Mathus was busy with his gear.

None of them really expected trouble, but felt it was better to be prepared. The Captain told them he would drop anchor just off shore and launch in. He was going with them and wanted the extra protection for the ship and crew.

Eight

The First bit of Trouble

Soon, Westhan was in sight and everyone's level of alertness went up a bit. They saw no dwarves on the spot the Captain chose to bring in the launch. This was good, they all felt. The Captain and Mathus decided it would be best if Vathar stayed back on the ship until they determined if Jarek would be civil. Then they could send for him to help with the trade talks.

They secured the launch and headed inland, keeping an eye out for sentries.

"We're being watched," said Mathus, quietly to Kayl.

"I know. Should we stop and wait for an escort?" she asked.

"Probably best. Let's wait here for someone to pick us up," he announced to the group.

After a few minutes wait, several dwarves appeared in front of them, all armed. They didn't say a word, but motioned for the group to follow. They looked friendly enough, thought Kayl. Maybe they were instructed not to communicate. Jarek was the chief here and he would do the talking.

Within minutes, they came to a clearing where another dozen dwarves waited. A short, but very large, dwarf stepped forward.

"I am Jarek," he announced flatly.

"Well met, Jarek!" answered Mathus. "We are a delegation of the Council of Immer. We have come in peace to discuss matters of import with you. Will you receive us?"

"I will, but I cannot guarantee your safety. There is much strife between my people and some are demanding we ban outsiders again."

The Captain stepped forward. "You know me, Jarek. And I know dwarven hospitality does not welcome strangers, but would never harm them unless provoked. Would you honor this reputation now?"

"Yes. The dwarves you see now will not harm you. But, there are others I cannot vouch for."

"What we have to discuss is very important. We will risk it," Mathus said.

"Very well. Follow us," Jarek replied.

As with Goran on Calham, they were led to a series of cave entrances. Just next to them was a large area with many benches, tables and a fire pit. It looked to the group like an outside eating area.

Jarek stated that for their safety, all discussions would be held here and not inside. He ordered refreshments and indicated everyone take a seat. Mathus was relieved and by their looks, so was the rest of the group.

"So, what matters of the Immer Council are important to us?" asked Jarek.

"It concerns a treaty and trade between the islands."

"A treaty!" several of the dwarves yelled at once.

"There can be no treaty between dwarves and humans...or elves," said a fearsome young dwarf.

"We do not even have a treaty with Goran's dwarves," stated Jarek. "Surely, you must know this."

"Yes, we do," replied Mathus. "And we know it has been this way for a long time. But, we still believe a treaty with your people is important to all the islands."

"Why do you think that?" Jarek responded.

"A treaty would allow you to participate in the trading between islands. This will happen soon and we would not exclude your dwarves."

At that point a small group of seven dwarves joined the discussions. Jarek gave them a grave look and it was plain he was not happy. He indicated for them to sit and said, "This is Korel, leader of the hunter group."

Turning back to Mathus, he said, "We already trade with Raines."

"And he is not trustworthy!" yelled Korel.

"In what way?" asked Kayl.

"We believe he is not fair in his exchanges and also that he is stealing our silver," replied another.

"Can you prove this?" asked Mathus.

"Our word is proof enough!"

"We are aware there are problems with Trader Raines and we are taking word of that back to the Council. They will deal with it promptly," Kayl stated.

Mathus thought quickly about what Goran had said about Raines. He did not want Jarek to know about that, as it would just make their case stronger.

"In the meantime, we suggest you stop all trading with Raines," he said.

"And trade with you instead?" shouted one of the new group members.

"Why would trading with you be any better?" asked Korel.

"That's not what we are saying!" said Kayl, a little too loud.

"Women should be seen and not heard," replied Korel.

"That is not our custom," said Mathus.

"And, we should all strive to be tolerant of the customs of others," Kay said as politely as she could.

"Our trade agreement intends for you to trade with all of the islands, not just us," said Mathus.

"We think you are no better than Raines and should leave now!" stated Korel..

"Yes. Our hospitality doesn't extend to humans that come here and lie," said another.

"We do not lie. We only want to encourage you to stop trading with Raines until our Council decides. Give us a chance to prove ourselves," Mathus said.

"We intend to stop trading with Raines and will tell him so the next time he

comes. We should not trade with any humans!" a group member said.

Apparently, their dealings with Raines had them very angry, thought Mathus. They are suspicious of any humans now. We must work at turning that around.

Mathus noticed Jarek starting to get uncomfortable with where this was going, but he did not stop it. Kayl and Mac were upset about being called liars. The Captain stood and asked to be heard. Jarek nodded.

"I think it would be best if we discussed this with just you, Jarek. Things are starting to get uncomfortable," he said.

"You don't want us to hear more of your lies, so you would have us dismissed?" shouted Korel, his hand going to his axe.

"Enough Korel!" yelled Jarek. "I think the Captain is right. We should terminate this discussion now and I will meet with you in private."

"You would go behind our backs?"

"I am chief. I do what I think is best!" growled Jarek.

"Maybe it's time for that to change," said Korel, with hatred in his eyes.

"Yes," said another. "You don't speak for us all anymore."

"This is not the time for that discussion!" Jarek said, looking at the small group leader. "Korel, you and your friends are dismissed."

Mathus knew this was an insult to all the dwarves in that group, as they got up and left. He wanted to speak to the Captain alone, but was not sure how he could do that right now.

"We have been having problems with that group for some time now," explained Jarek. "They are young and full of ideas on how things should be done. They like the old ways and don't believe we need any outsiders involved in our lives."

"Strange, I would think the young would want the new ways," Kayl said.

"I believe the group just wants their independence and to live where they can make the rules. They don't agree with our rules here on Westham," replied Jarek.

"I'm just glad that only a small group feels that way and not the rest of you," said Kayl.

"Let us have some more refreshments," said Jarek. "I want to hear more about your trade agreements."

So, for several hours the group sat with Jarek and a handful of dwarves and they outlined what the Council plans were. Jarek seemed interested in trading with Eastham. Evidently, he and his dwarves were short on fresh food and he wanted to know more about developing Sellos.

Just then, Korel and his group re-appeared and informed Jarek they made the decision to leave Westham. They were going to Borricks to start their own dwarfdom. Jarek was not pleased. Mathus couldn't believe they would choose Borricks. Everyone knows this is Creedwell's island. Nobody else has ever lived there.

He debated telling this to Korel, but decided against it. Jarek said he would speak of their decision later and they left. They were all very upset.

A runner came up and spoke to Jarek quietly. Jarek got a pained look on his face and said, "Raines has just arrived on shore. He wants to see me."

"Not a good plan," Mathus replied. "Can you stall him while we head back to our ship?"

"He already knows we're here, he must have seen the ship," the Captain said.

"I think it would be best if you left now and took Raines with you," stated Jarek..

"You are right. We will explain to Raines what has transpired here and make sure we all leave."

Raines and the small group of angry dwarves were arguing just a short way down the trail to the ship. Korel was telling Raines that he was not welcome here anymore and he must leave now. Raines insisted he wanted to see Jarek. Mathus walked up to Raines and started explaining their discussions with Jarek when Korel hefted his axe.

"You will all leave now!" he shouted.

"That's exactly what we are doing, Mathus said.

There were at least five other dwarves in this group and all at once they drew steel and prepared to fight. The Captain tried to reason with Korel, while Mathus, Mac and Kayl brought their weapons to bear. Korel turned on Raines and in one quick movement, his axe opened up the trader from neck to gut. He screamed and fell, trying desperately to hold things inside his body. The Captain brought his sword up sliced the shoulder of Korel's axe arm. He dropped his axe and fell in pain.

The other dwarves moved in quickly. Mathus sent two shakes into the necks of two dwarves and they died before they hit the ground. Mac caught another dwarf in the shoulder with a shake, but did not kill him. He switched his axe to the other hand and moved very quickly toward Mac with a slice across the middle and Mac fell to the ground. Mathus quickly engaged the dwarf.

As the fifth dwarf fought with the Captain, Kayl lunged with her short sword and took him deeply in the side. He fell. The dwarf that cut Mac was still fighting with Mathus, when a new group of dwarves took him from behind. Jarek appeared and ordered Korel and all his dwarves confined.

Kayl ran to Mac and saw that he was bleeding badly. She staunched the wound as much as she could and called to Mathus. He and Jarek came over quickly.

"He needs a healer. Lets get him to my quarters," Jarek said.

"Are you sure?" asked Mathus, looking around warily.

"Yes, Korel and his group will not bother you again this day."

Kayl and Mathus picked up Mac and followed Jarek back to the caves. He shouted for a healer and led them inside the smallest entrance. They put Mac down on Jarek's bed and the healer appeared and went to work.

"Raines was killed," Mathus told Jarek. "And I killed two of their group."

"And I took one in the side, I don't know if he lives," added Kayl.

"You rest and attend to your wounds. I will check on their group and return shortly," Jarek said.

Mathus checked over the Captain and Kayl for any wounds. They both had cuts on their arms. Mathus bandaged them both and they all gathered around the healer working on Mac.

"How is he?" Kayl asked.

"He has lost much blood and will need many stitches, but should be ok," the healer replied.

After checking him closely, Kayl said he should not be moved until tomorrow. The Captain and Mathus agreed. Jarek returned and Kayl explained Mac's condition.

"He can stay right where he is," Jarek said. "And the dwarf you fought will live, Kayl."

"That's good news," she said.

To the Captain he said, "Korel will also live, but will never use that arm again."

"Such nasty business. I knew that group was upset, but..,"

"It was this business with Raines and the insult by being excused. Both are my fault," admitted Jarek.

"How could you know about Raines?" asked Kayl.

"It is the duty of the chief to know these things. And to take care of them before they get this bad."

"We all feel bad that it went so far," the Captain said.

"Yes, it is most unfortunate dwarven blood was spilled, especially on their own island," Mathus added.

"Well, it's over now. Korel and his group will be banished. I suspect they will still go to Borricks, though," Jarek said.

"I will head back to the ship now. You two will be staying with Mac?" asked the Captain.

"Yes," answered Kayl.

"We will set up sleeping palates right here for you both. How about some dinner before you go, Captain?"

"Thank you, Jarek, but no. My crew will be getting worried. I'll see you in the morning."

Kayl and Mathus went to another cave with Jarek where a large table was spread with food. They ate a hearty meal while telling Jarek about their visits to the other islands. Mathus felt he could trust Jarek and decided to tell him about Vathar being on the ship. Jarek was pleased that they did not bring him at first,

but thought he would like to see him again.

Mathus said when he returned, he would like to bring both Goran and Vathar to discuss the trading details. Jarek agreed. He said he believed it was time for the Westham dwarves to talk with Goran again and make peace. A treaty would help make that happen. Maybe making peace with Fanlith and the elves may even be possible. Mathus could see that Jarek was visibly shaken and felt bad that any of this happened.

Kayl was there when Mac awoke. He was in pain, but said he was thirsty. She gave him only a small sip of water because of the nature of his wound.

"If the treaty gets accepted, it was worth it, right?" Mac grinned.

"Well, you had me plenty worried little brother. And, I told Ma I would watch out for you. I thought for sure, with all that bleeding you were going..."

"I know, Kayl. I can imagine how I would have felt if it were you."

"How are we going to tell Ma and Pa?"

"We have some time to think on that," Mac said quietly as he drifted off to sleep.

Kayl and Mathus were sitting by the fire pit later, discussing the rest of the trip.

"I had a bad feeling all the way here from Eastham," Kayl said. "I didn't think it would be this bad, though".

"It could have been worse," Mathus stared at Kayl.

"Don't remind me. I know full well."

"You handled yourself very well, Kayl. You both did," said Mathus.

"Will that help when we have to tell Ma and Pa?"

"As long as you're both safe, that will be enough."

"He won't be able to go to Borricks with you, you know," Kayl said.

"I know, I will ask Kerns to go instead. I think it will be good if he talks to Creedwell."

"Good idea. Mac will be disappointed, but Ma would probably forbid it anyway," smiled Kayl.

"And we really have to get home. It will take some time before this group of dwarves can get to Borricks, if they go at all."

"We'll tell the Captain first thing in the morning. What do you think Vathar will do now?" she asked.

"I'm not sure, but he will probably want to report this to Fanlith."

"I hated leaving him on the ship, but now I'm glad we did."

"He understands. And when he hears what happened, he will be happy he didn't come with us," said Mathus.

They spent the night in Jarek's room watching over Mac. In the morning, Mac was hungry. The dwarves fixed him a light breakfast while Mathus and

Jarek talked. Kayl cleaned up Jarek's room as best she could and she and Mac joined Mathus.

"It was good meeting you Kayl. And you too, Mac," said Jarek.

"Mac and I have dreamed about meeting you and the other dwarves for a long time, Jarek," Kayl answered.

"I hope you will not be too harsh in your report to the Council."

"I think the Council will be very happy with the way things turned out," Mac said.

"After they get over being upset about your injuries," Kayl said, grinning.

"Look for us in a week or so, Jarek," said Mathus. "I'm not exactly sure who I will have with me, though."

"That's fine, you will all be welcome," Jarek said.

"Will you take care of Raines?" asked Mathus.

"Yes, do not worry. We will give him a decent burial, as we would any friend of the dwarves."

The dwarves had a litter ready for Mac and they set off to the ship. Mac wanted to walk, but Kayl insisted he be carried. The stitches were still new and would need a lot of time to heal.

Jarek walked with them and when they got to the ship, he was greeted by the Captain and a tall elf.

"Well met, Jarek!" said Vathar.

"And to you Vathar."

"I hope we can meet again under better circumstances."

"I've told Mathus to bring you along when he returns to talk about trade."

"Maybe we'll bring Goran with us."

"That would be good," replied Jarek.

Kayl and Mathus explained their decision to the Captain and he agreed. He turned and shook hands with Jarek.

"We will see you soon, Jarek."

"I look forward to it Captain. Maybe you can give me some pointers on how to build a dock," Jarek smiled.

"That would be wonderful!" exclaimed Kayl.

They helped Mac into the launch and out to the ship. They put him in the Captain's bunk and Kayl ordered rest all the way to Immer.

The Delegation had finished their task and were heading home. There were two things that Kayl was thinking about. Reporting to Ma and Pa, then to the Council. She knew which one would be harder.

Nine

Reports and New Plans

It was late morning when the ship pulled up to the Immer Dock. Nobody was around to welcome them, because they weren't supposed to be back until tomorrow. They had discussed the plan during the sail over; Mathus and Kayl would help Mac get home and the Captain and Vathar would head to the Council chambers. They would let the Council know that the rest of the group would be there just after lunch.

As the trio walked into the yard, they spotted Jolsey on the porch. He took one look at them and yelled their names while he leaped off the porch towards them. Kayl stepped in front of Mac, so Jolsey wouldn't jump up on him, as was his custom. He hugged her and Mathus and then looked at Mac and started crying.

"Mac! What happened? Are you OK?" he sobbed.

"Easy Jolsey...I'm fine. Mending well. Don't scare Ma and Pa, ok?" said Mac, grinning wide.

"Are they home?" asked Mathus.

They had their answer before Jolsey could respond. Sheela came running down the porch steps with Titus just behind her. She took one look at Mac and also started crying. Titus stopped short, folded his arms and said, "Looks like explanations are in order."

"Certainly. Lets all go inside and get Mac comfortable, then we'll give you the whole story," said Mathus.

Sheela sat beside Mac, holding his hand while they answered all the questions and gave their piece of the story. Titus was scowling when they were finished. Sheela had stopped crying, but she was visibly upset.

"I should have kept you home, son," Titus said to Mac.

"Oh no, it was the best experience I've ever had. I learned important things on this trip."

"Never to fight dwarves again is at the top of the list," Mathus grinned.

"It's not funny, Mathus. He could have been killed," Sheela blurted.

"But he wasn't," he replied, seriously.

"And besides Ma, when you hear the details of what I learned, you will feel better about it," Mac explained.

"Did you like the Elves?" asked Jolsey.

"Yes, very much. They were very nice to us and we will be learning a great deal from them," Kayl answered.

"You'll see when you meet Vathar," added Mac.

"You brought one home?" asked Jolsey, eyes very wide.

They continued explaining things until Mathus reminded them they would have to head to the chambers very soon.

"First, some lunch," Mac said.

"Don't you think you should you should stay down for a few days?" Sheela asked.

"Yes. I will. Right after our report to the Council."

"It is fairly important he be there, Ma," stated Kayl. "The Council needs to see him and hear his story first hand."

"But, he is not ok!" she exclaimed.

"Sure he is. Just needs to heal some more and then Vela can remove the stitches," Titus said.

"Or, Milla. She is nearly a full healer now," Jolsey added. Mac smiled at that.

"Ok, but after the report, you must stay down. You cannot go with Mathus to Borricks," Sheela said emphatically.

"Kayl and I have already discussed that. I will ask Kerns to go with me. He needs to talk to Creedwell anyway," Mathus said.

Titus wondered about that, but said nothing.

The group finished lunch and headed to the Council chambers. That wasn't too bad after all, thought Kayl. This report will take the rest of the day, though.

The Captain and Vathar met them outside the chambers.

"The Council is assembled in the chambers and are awaiting us," said the Captain.

"Glad to see you Mac," added Vathar.

Mac nodded to Vathar. He was glad to be here for this historic event. It's the first time in recent history that a delegation has made such a report to the Council. People would talk about this and the delegation members for a long time. He looked at Kayl, nodded and the group started down the hall.

Kerns and Milla greeted them just inside the chamber. Vela was also there. There were hugs all around and they entered the chamber. Milla stayed right beside Mac as they all took seats directly in front of the Council.

"Greetings to the members of the Immer Delegation!" stated Secretary Calder. "The Council is assembled and ready for your report."

Haln Stovas stood and greeted each one individually. He nodded to Milla, shook Mac's hand and returned to the dais.

"The Council is greatly relieved to see Mac Boles here today," he said. "We have only heard that you were severely injured and await the details."

With a gasp from Milla, she looked critically at Mac, not having heard this yet. He patted her hand and whispered that all was ok. He then gave Vela a reassuring look. Milla had a hundred questions, but resigned herself to wait like everyone else.

"The group should report things as they happened, island by island. Kayl and Mac will start by reporting on what they found on Sellos," Stovas announced.

"He's saving the worst for last," whispered Mac to Milla. She smiled and squeezed his hand.

Kayl checked her notes constantly as she gave the Council a very detailed account of the island conditions and what their recommendations were. Mac told about the two valleys they found and the small forest in the second one. They both said they were convinced that the conditions were excellent for farming and they should take Caleb & May there for an expert opinion.

Mathus reported on all that transpired on Calham with Goran and the dwarves. He told of what they learned from the dwarves about Raines and the smuggling of silver. The Council was pleased that Goran was interested in trade, but expressed disappointment that he would not sign a treaty.

"We are not finished trying to convince him, Haln," said Mathus. "I plan to return and ask Goran if he will accompany me to see Jarek. If I can get either one of them to sign the treaty, the other will follow, I'm sure;"

"Sound thinking, Mathus. Thank You," replied Haln.

Kayl started next, explaining about Windham and the very friendly elves. She told of Fanlith and Ealen and how gracious they were. They even signed the treaty, which brought smiles to all Council members.

She explained what they found out about the magical devices from Fanlith and the elders. It was good information to give Creedwell, they decided. Then she told about how Fanlith was worried about them going to Westham. He wanted an escort of elves, but they finally settled on just Vathar. They said they were very willing to help and she believed they had wonderful information to share. She introduced Vathar to the Council. They were pleased...again.

Mac led the report on Eastham. He told about meeting Caleb and May and how they were interested in what they found on Sellos. Then he explained why. The Council was alarmed to hear about the crop situation and possible shortages. They agreed to discuss it further, right after the report.

Mac explained his new-found interest in farming. And that he would also like to take Vathar back to spend more time with Caleb. He believed Vathar could be a wealth of information to Caleb and May.

Kayl spoke about all that she learned about crops and herbs. Much of what she saw with Caleb could be done on Sellos. She also recommended a dock be built on the spot where they landed, first thing.

Mathus and the Captain reported on Westham. They explained in great detail of the cold reception at first, but later Jarek and his dwarves became friendlier. Mathus explained about how Raines showed up in the middle of their discussions and all the events that led to his death.

The Captain gave a detailed accounting of the actual fight. Though it only

lasted minutes, it was very brutal. Mac was severely injured and Kayl and he had cuts on their arms. Some Council members blanched, as did Milla, but said nothing.

He then spoke a few words about the decision to delay the trip to Borrick so they could get Mac home. He stated that he was very impressed with the way the group handled themselves during the fight, in fact, the entire trip. He recommended the Council give the trio special recognition and said he must leave now to care for his ship. The Council thanked the Captain and bid him good luck. He spoke a few words to Mathus and he and Kerns left the chambers.

Milla and Vela were not sure what the Captain meant about a device, but they both decided to hold their questions until later. Vela remembered Giles saying something about a way the ships of old could detect storms, but never got any details from him. She suspected the group found out more from the elves.

Haln Stovas asked that everyone take a short break announcing that Justin had refreshments available. They would reconvene in half an hour and the Council would make their assignments and recommendations.

Everyone moved to the small chamber for refreshments and quiet discussions. Kayl introduced Vathar to everyone. He said he was honored to be included in the group and he was looking forward to learning more about farming from Caleb and May.

Milla and Mac had their heads together on the edge of the room. She was very concerned about his injury and wanted to examine the stitches. He explained that Kayl has been tending them constantly since the fight. But, he would let her and Vela check him out as soon as the Council was finished. She was satisfied.

Vela asked Kayl several questions about the dwarven healer and the elven crops. She said she learned a lot about herbs from the elves and the dwarf healer did a very nice job on Mac. They agreed to head to Vela's place as soon as this was over.

After everyone took their seats again, Haln called the Council to order. He seemed to be careful about making this an official Council meeting. Decisions were being made today that would affect many lives in the coming years.

"The Council has unanimously agreed on a few things we will now discuss. All actions authorized will have full support of the Council, including all expenses being paid. The rest of the items will be discussed and decided upon in the coming days," Haln announced.

"First, we authorize Kayl and Mac to escort Caleb and May back to Sellos. If their findings are good, we will start plans to setup an initial farming community right away."

"Next, we agreed with Captain Hale that he and Kerns go directly to Borrick."

"The Council will start exploring what it will take to build new ships if Creedwell agrees to help and is successful."

"The Council has agreed to give special recognition to Captain Hale for helping the delegation. We will also refund all expenses he incurs for travel between the Islands for as long as he is Captain of any ship."

"If farming indeed starts on Sellos, we will consider building a new port city on the north shore of Immer, to accommodate the ships going to and from there. A new dock will also be built on Sellos."

"And lastly, the Council has agreed to award Mathus Boles, Kayl Boles and Mac Boles a writ of official recognition for their service to Immer and all of Bernham. This comes with authorization to act on behalf of the Council and consideration for full membership on the Council. So sayeth the Council of Immer. Notification of this recognition will be posted in the village square for a fortnight. Congratulations to Mathus, Kayl and Mac. This session of the Council has ended. Thank you all for attending."

Kayl and Mac were stunned. They never dreamed this could happen to them. Mathus was pleased with the recognition. To Kayl and Mac he said it was indeed an honor for someone so young. But, Kayl didn't feel young. She was nearly twenty and wondered when she would have time to think about a family of her own.

Mac felt certain about his future. And Milla was to be the biggest part of it. He wanted to go back to Eastham and learn more from Caleb. He wanted to be part of settling Sellos. Now, all he needed to do was find out if Milla wanted the same things. But for now, he just wanted to be home for a long rest and to heal.

The next morning Kerns explained everything he learned to Calvin and Abigail. They were extremely pleased to hear that Mac would heal from his injury. He told them of his decision to ask Creedwell to apprentice him. If he agreed, he would quit Tolan and move to Borrick.

Calvin said he was proud of him and felt that he would do well with Creedwell. Abigail agreed and believed he was doing the right thing. He needed to follow his path in life and this seemed to be it.

Mathus arrived and they all had a hearty breakfast. He told them that the Captain was ready to go and they would be leaving right after breakfast. Kerns said he was packed and ready. It was only then that Abigail started to cry. Kerns hugged her and said he would only be gone a short time.

Mathus and Kerns arrived at the dock a short time later.

"Ahoy the ship!" yelled Mathus.

"Not sure if you meant this morning or tomorrow," the Captain grinned.

"Well breakfast and goodbyes were in order," answered Kerns.

"Good. I suspect we may be gone several days. Did you bring your notes on the device, Mathus?"

"Sure did. I just hope I can explain it so Creedwell can understand," answered Mathus.

"I think between the two of us, we can give him a good picture of what is needed," replied the Captain.

And with that, they cast off and set sail for Borricks. The skies were leaden and it looked like rain and the Captain said as soon as they got out of the straights, it would get worse. Kerns was not sure if he would get seasick or not because he had never sailed in bad weather. The Captain handed him a piece of ginger and told him to find a comfortable place on deck to curl up.

The winds and rain were not as strong as the Captain thought and they made good time to Borricks. Creedwell was standing on shore for the wet landing and Kerns wondered how he knew when they would arrive. He would ask later.

Mathus introduced Kerns and they all headed to Creedwell's house. It was a shorter walk than Kerns had thought and they were met by several servants, who took their wet cloaks. Kerns noticed that Creedwell was completely dry, like it was a sunny day. He filed this question for later also.

They followed Creedwell to a small room with a blazing fire going and they all sat while refreshments were served.

Mathus explained everything that happened with the elves and dwarves. He told Creedwell that the renegade group of dwarves were probably on their way by now, if they weren't already here.

"I've not seen anyone but you land on my shore in weeks," answered Creedwell. "But, I'm glad to know they may show up. I'll give them a reception that will definitely give them pause."

"I can imagine," replied Mathus.

"The leader of the group will have a special surprise, too. For what he did to your delegation."

"Most excellent," said Kerns.

Mathus then explained all that he had learned about the device and how important it was that they have one similar. He asked Creedwell if it would be possible to re-create such a device. Creedwell thought about it for a moment, then excused himself. He told them all to rest and he would be back soon.

It was over two hours before Creedwell returned. The Captain and Mathus had a short nap while Kerns explored the room they were in.

"I can reproduce it," Creedwell stated.

"Great! How long will it take?" Mathus asked.

"About a day or so."

"Can we help in any way?" asked Kerns.

"Yes, you come with me. You two remain here. If you want anything, ring the bell there," Creedwell said to Mathus as he pointed to a long rope hanging from the ceiling.

Kerns was led to what looked like a laboratory of some kind. There were all kinds of tools, ropes, bottles and what looked like sundials scattered around the room.

"Don't touch anything. Do exactly as I say."

"Yes, sir," said Kerns.

"And I'm not your father. Call me Creedwell."

"I was taught to call my elders sir, sir."

"My house, my rules."

Creedwell started reading a large tome that looked to Kerns to be ancient. He assembled several tools and a short piece of wood. As he read from the book, he started adding pieces of metal to the wood. But, he used no fasteners of any kind. The metal just stayed where he put it. Kerns asked if it might fall off some day and Creedwell ignored him. He didn't ask anything else.

Mathus pulled the rope and a two servants appeared in seconds. He asked for the outhouse and was shown to a room with everything he needed in it. The Captain asked the other for something to eat. It could be a long time before Creedwell returned and he wanted to eat before he slept again. Mathus returned and also asked for some food. The servants were very efficient and seemed to know exactly what they liked to eat. The Captain was not too surprised.

It was just after dark when Creedwell and Kerns appeared. The fire continued to burn brightly and Mathus noticed that nobody ever put anymore wood on it.

"I have crafted a device as you asked," Creedwell said.

"Excellent! And so fast," said the Captain.

"So, will you be able to make more?" asked Mathus.

"Yes, how many will you need?"

"Probably six more."

"Probably?"

"Ok, six," he replied, grinning.

Now it was time for Kerns to ask Creedwell about the apprenticeship. He

didn't know where to start. So, he just came right out with it.

"I have a question I need to ask you, sir...Creedwell," he stated.

"Go ahead."

"I'm interested in learning magic. Would it be possible for you to teach me?"

"It would be possible for me to teach you. Will it be possible for you to learn?"

"Yes, it will," Kerns said, very seriously.

"Hmmm...I'll think on it. Have an answer for you in a day or so."

Korel and the three remaining dwarves were nearly healed now and were discussing what they would do next. They all agreed to go to Borricks, but first they wanted to go to Immer and revenge their two dead kinsmen. The lying humans that came into their camp and killed dwarves must pay for it. Korel had only one good arm and wanted to kill the Captain that ruined the other.

They knew the Captain and Mathus. The other two, this Kayl and Mac would be easy to find. They spent the rest of the night working out the details.

Ten

New Ships and Love

Before they left, the Captain asked Creedwell if he would be willing to talk to the Council directly about the rest of the devices. He was hesitant, but Kerns practically begged him because he wanted him to meet his parents.

"It would make them feel better about what I want to do." said Kerns, "I just know it would."

"I shall have to think about it. I never do anything without at least some thought."

"You get word to me and I will come right over and get you," stated the Captain.

"Won't be necessary. I have my own way of getting to Immer."

"I thought as much," smiled the Captain. "But it's polite to offer."

On the sail back home, Kerns asked if they could put in at the Leedvale dock. He had never been there before and would like to see it. The Captain said they could, but it would be a fair walk to Poldar.

"Aren't there horses we can use?" he asked.

"Whose horses?" Mathus wanted to know.

"I don't know...the Council's."

"They don't own any, but I've always wanted to ask them if they would set up stables at each dock. Maybe that will happen when the new port city is built," said Mathus.

"Would supply several people with jobs, wouldn't it?" asked the Captain.

"Yes...I'll recommend it to Kayl and Mac and we can ask the Council about it," answered Mathus.

"Do you have anyone in mind, Captain?" asked Kerns.

"A few come to mind."

"I think it's a great idea," Kerns beamed.

They both laughed and Kerns with them.

The group landed at the Leedvale dock and walked straight to Poldur. It didn't take as long as the Captain thought, since he had to keep up with Kerns and Mathus. The Council happened to be just finishing a meeting.

"I'll announce you right away," said Justin.

He came back in a few minutes and told them to go in and take seats.

"Welcome Captain, Mathus, Kerns! What news have you?" said Haln.

The Captain held up the device and said, "Rather good news I would say."

"Wonderful!" shouted Haln. "I just knew you three would come through."

"Well, it was Creedwell and Kerns here that made the device, Haln," said the Captain.

"Kerns? What did you do to help? Haln said, looking at him.

"Sorry, sir, but I'm not permitted to say," smiled Kerns.

"Of course. Do you have news we should know about young Kerns?" asked Haln.

"Not yet sir, but I'm working on it."

"Good luck, son," he replied, grinning.

They gave all the details they could to the Council and Mathus could see they were extremely pleased. They ask questions about the possibility of getting more devices and Mathus told them what Creedwell said.

"I also believe we talked him into coming here to speak to the Council in person," said Mathus.

"Really?" asked Haln, astounded.

"Looks like it. Kerns wants him to meet his parents, too."

"My goodness. If he does, it will be the first time in the history of the Council."

"May I suggest a letter of invitation be sent, sir?" asked Justin.

"Capital idea, Justin!" answered a beaming Haln.

When all the questions were answered, they were heading down the hall when they saw Vathar waiting by the door.

"Success?" he asked.

"Indeed," the Captain said, holding up the device.

"I am pleased. I have a request, Captain," said Vathar.

"Yes, what is it?"

"I would like to get a message to Fanlith with an update."

"Certainly, I can have one of my mates take it. The sail to Windham only takes a few hours."

Vathar handed him a sealed pouch and thanked him.

"We are heading to the Greybeard. Care to join us?" Mathus asked Vathar.

"That would be great."

"I'll meet you there after I deliver this pouch," the Captain said.

"I guess I should check in with Calvin and Abigal, too," Kerns said.

Mathus noted the change of names. Guess Ma and Pa were for that younger Kerns, not the soon to be magician Kerns. He exchanged smiles with the Captain and they all left the chambers.

When they arrived at the Greybeard, they saw Vela, Abigal and Milla sitting on the front porch. There were hugs all around and they introduced Vathar to Abigal, who had not met him yet. Kerns told them what happened with Creedwell. The women explained that they were just in time for the ceremony. Milla was being certified as an official Healer today.

"Wonderful news!" exclaimed Kerns.

"Does this mean you will be leaving for another island, Milla?" asked Vathar.

"Not necessarily, but I certainly wouldn't turn down the opportunity," she said, looking at Kerns.

"Well, we always have need for healer on Windham. You're welcome anytime," Vathar said.

"That's very kind," Villa answered, blushing.

They all went inside and drinks were setup all around. Kerns was telling Milla and Vela about all the things he saw at Creedwell's when the Captain came in. A drink was handed to him and he was told of Milla's news. He congratulated her with a hug and a smile. Calvin came over and was introduced to Vathar. As they all shared stories, Abigal looked at Kerns and Milla and thought how fast they had grown. Soon, they would be off on their own, as adults, only to come by once in a while to say hello. It saddened her, but at the same time she was so happy they both have rewarding paths in their life.

Just then, Mac, Kayl and Jolsey appeared at the door.

"Hope we aren't late," Kayl said.

"We were just about to start," said Abigal.

"Titus and Sheela are on their way now. Can we wait a few minutes for them?" asked Mac.

"Of course. "

Calvin and Abigal were standing to one side talking quietly to each other. As they looked around the room they saw Mac, Kayl, Mathus and the Captain. The delegation. Then there was Milla, Vela, Jolsey, Sheela, Titus and friend Vathar. What a pleasant thing listening to them all talk to each other.

"It's the first time in a long time we've all been together," stated Calvin.

"Certainly is. I hope this happens often," Abigal responded.

"I think it will."

The ceremony began with Vela explaining all the training Milla had done. She said she was so proud to have her first apprentice and what a wonderful one she was. She wished her all the best, hugged her and sat down.

Kayl spoke next. She also said she was proud of Milla and glad to have another healer in the community. She then presented Milla with a gift.

"We all pitched in and had this made for you, Milla."

Milla opened it and found a leather healer's pouch, completely full of all the instruments, herbs and potions she would need to start her new career.

"Oh my, what a beautiful thing," she said as tears streamed down her face.

"And useful too!" grinned Jolsey.

"Yes, it certainly will be," as she bent down and kissed his head. "I don't have words to thank you all."

"It's not necessary, dear," said Abigal. "Use it to take good care of us all. That will be enough."

"I will."

Mac stood. He turned to Milla and said, "Let's hope you don't have to use it on me. I've had my share of healing these past days. But, the stitches are out and Vela said whatever the dwarven healer put on my wound was strong medicine. I'm almost completely healed."

"And, I intend to find out what he used," added Vela.

"This looks to me like a perfect time to ask you a non-healing question, Milla," Mac said, looking around the room.

"Ok, ask me what?"

Mac came over and knelt down in front of the sitting Milla and said, "Will you marry me?"

You could have heard a pin drop. But, when Milla smiled wide and said, "Yes!", the entire room erupted in hoorays and clapping.

Mac told Milla, and everyone, that there were farming communities planned for Sellos and he wanted to be part of it. And with all that construction work going on, surely they would need a good healer.

The room exploded again. The Greybeard Inn had never known such happiness.

A couple days later, word came to Kerns that he should report to the Council chambers. When he got there, he was greeted by Mathus, Kayl, Mac and Milla. After he sat down, he looked up and in came the Captain with Creedwell. He actually came, thought Kerns, amazed.

The Captain introduced Creedwell to the Council and everyone present that had not met him yet. Creedwell looked at Kayl and Mac and said it was an honor to meet the rest of the delegation.

"I understand you need more of those devices," Creedwell said to Haln.

"We certainly do. Six, to be exact. Do you think that would be possible, sir?" asked Haln.

"Hmmm...I finally got Kerns to call me by my name, now I must convince you too."

"It's a sign of respect, sir."

"I don't want your respect, just your cooperation," said Creedwell.

"We will cooperate in any way we can, sir...Creedwell," said Haln.

"Good. I have given the six devices to the Captain. But, in exchange, I want free transportation to any island on any ship."

Haln could see Creedwell was toying with him.

"Not a problem. How long will that be for?" asked Haln.

"Why, forever, of course."

"Naturally. I'll see to it that my Secretary enters it in the official records. Of course, this Council can't be responsible for what happens after we are...gone," Haln said, laughing.

"I'll see to it that the next Council is convinced also."

"Very well. Consider it done."

And with that, the entire Council stood and bowed and applauded Creedwell. Just out of respect, of course.

Creedwell and Kerns left together and headed to the Greybeard Inn. Everyone that saw them along the way pointed and whispered. Kerns felt ten feet tall and thought about asking Creedwell if they could walk around a bit, but thought better of it.

He introduced Creedwell to his parents. Abigail said how nice it was to finally meet him. She had been hearing stories since she was a girl about the mysterious Creedwell. He smiled, ordered a dark beer and chased it with several more. He said he'd had very good reports from Tolan and the Captain about Kerns. And he has decided to take on his very first apprentice. Kerns could hardly contain himself.

"Of course, he will have to come to Borricks to live. I hope that is not a problem," said Creedwell.

"Not really," answered Calvin. "We have gotten used to him working with Tolan and have learned to manage the Inn without him."

"Good. It will be the first time that any human, dwarf or elf has lived on Borricks. At least in the last few centuries."

"What an honor, Kerns," stated Calvin.

"How long will the apprenticeship be?" asked Abigail.

"Well, for life," answered Creedwell. "It will take him that long to learn everything."

"Yes...of course...I understand."

"Don't worry, I have a free pass on any ship in Bernham that he can use at any time," said Creedwell.

Calvin and Abigail both laughed and Kerns turned a shade red. Creedwell stayed the afternoon and had a huge home-cooked meal. Afterwards, he was so impressed, that he asked Abigail if she would be willing to come to Borricks and talk to his cook. She agreed.

The weeks passed and everybody was busy with their new roles. One day a messenger was sent to have the delegation report to the chambers. The Captain was on a trip, so just Mathus, Kayl and Mac reported.

Haln explained to them that the Council has decided to authorize the building of six new ships, to start right away. He also said that they had some trouble raising that much money and each Councilman contributed personal funds.

"This is a very important step for Immer and Bernham alike. We felt it necessary," stated Haln.

"And don't forget Bassley," added Justin.

"Oh, yes. Ian Bassley wanted to contribute also. He said he would benefit

as much as anyone by having these ships."

"I'm sure he will," said Mathus.

"Now, Mathus. Don't think ill of Bassley. He is concerned about trade as much as we are," replied Haln.

"Yes, you're right. And who am I to judge the man. He is helping us all, I guess."

"True. Can you get word to the Captain?" asked Haln.

"Yes, we will go down to the docks today."

"One last thing. The Captain has agreed to help in the design of the new ships, but we need you three to get the word out for shipbuilders. We will need quite a few," said Haln.

"Mac and I will post fliers on Immer and Eastham. Then one of us will go speak to Goran and Fanlith. Dwarves and elves make excellent workers," said Kayl.

"Good idea. I'm not yet used to including them in these kind of things, I guess," Haln winced.

"In time, sir," added Mac.

Kayl and Mac headed home to make the fliers. She was not sure they needed them though, once they told a few people, word would spread fast.

"Let's split up. I'll go to Pillstock and you go to Vela's," said Mac.

"OK, see you at the docks in an hour," she replied.

Kayl stopped by Tolan's with a flier. He was surprised that the ships were approved so fast.

"Guess you will be getting a lot of orders for the ship's hardware, right?" asked Kayl.

"Probably. I'd better get more help," replied Tolar.

Kayl then headed to Vela's. They discussed the building of the new ships over tea. Vela was convinced that trading between the islands would really help Immer's economy. She was glad that she had apprenticed Milla and thought she had better start another one right away. Kayl agreed.

"Oh, I have to get to the docks to meet Mac."

"Thanks for coming by, dear," replied Vela.

The Captain was just docking when Kayl arrived. Mac was standing on the dock. The Captain just needed to get some supplies and they could head to Eastham.

About an hour later they docked at Eastham. Mac went straight to see Caleb, while Kayl went to post a few fliers. She was just putting one on a large tree at the start of the road to the dock, when she was met by a young man. He was about her age and she assumed he worked for Caleb and May.

"Need any help, ma'am?" he asked.

"No, I can manage. I'm Kayl Boles from Immer."

"Yes, I know. I saw you the last time you were here visiting Caleb & May.

Some sort of investigation trip, I heard," he responded.

"That's right, we were a delegation from Immer, here to check out the farming situation," Kay said, remembering him as the one who stared at her.

"And did you find what you needed?" he asked.

"Unfortunately, yes. And it was not good news. Caleb explained to us about the crop problems."

"Yes ma'am, and things have not gotten much better since."

"I'm sorry, I don't know your name."

"Raith Ashwind. I've been helping May with the harvesting these past couple months."

"Pleased to meet you Raith. and call me Kayl. My Mother is ma'am," she grinned.

"Sure. Are you heading to the Gant's house?"

"Where...oh...the Gant's. Caleb and May. Yes, I am. I don't hear their last name very often," she said.

"Mind some company?" he asked, with an absolutely wonderful smile.

"That would be nice, you can help me with these fliers."

Raith took one of the fliers, read it and stopped short.

"Is this for real? he asked.

"Of course it is."

"Wow...I've always wanted to build ships. I'm a woodworker, but things are slow right now, so I help out here where I can."

"Oh, so you're not a farmer?"

He laughed. "No, I help build things they need, like sheds, ploughs, barns...you know."

"Well, we certainly need your skills on Immer, We have six sailing ships to build. All the size of the one Captain Hale owns. Interested?"

"Absolutely!" he answered, with that smile again.

"Can you come back with us today?"

"Don't see why not. Just have to let May and Caleb know. When are you leaving?"

"Probably in an hour or so. Can you be ready?"

"Sure."

Kayl and Raith talked all the way to Caleb's house, where Mac was busy looking at some figures. May greeted them and said she was happy Kayl met up with Raith. She knew he may be needed, with his woodworking skills.

"So, there's no problem with me going back with them?" asked Raith.

"No, not really. Once I heard about the need for shipbuilders, I thought of you," answered May.

Kayl walked over to where Caleb and Mac were studying some plans.

"Will you be done soon?" she asked.

Mac said he was almost finished. Kayl told Caleb and May what the Council said about the four of them going to Sellos.

"If things look good to you two, we will start building a farming community

there immediately," Kayl said.

"How soon do you want to go?" asked May.

"I need to talk to the Captain, but probably in the next week sometime."

"Great, we'll be ready."

Kayl looked at Raith, thought a moment, and said, "Maybe we should take Raith to have him check out the groves we found. See what kind of trees there are and if they would be good for building."

"Sounds good to me," he answered. "But don't you have to check with the Council first?"

"No, I'm authorized to act for them," replied Kayl without even thinking about it.

"Wow...I'm impressed," he said.

"If you two are done, I'm ready to head back," said Mac, grinning.

Raith went upstairs to gather his things. He came down with a duffel of clothes and a huge toolbox.

"Can I use a cart to take my tools down to the ship?" he asked Caleb.

"Sure, just leave it on the dock."

They said their goodbyes to Caleb and May, packed the tools on a cart and headed for the ship. As they were walking, Raith spotted his friend in a field.

"He set the cart down. I'll just be a minute, ok?" And he ran over to the friend.

When he returned, he explained that the man was a friend from his hometown and he was a good woodworker.

"I told him to ask May for permission to come over to Immer and apply for work. He would be excellent in mast building. She knows he is my friend."

"Thanks for that, Raith," smiled Kayl.

They arrived at the ship just as the Captain was finishing lunch. He asked if they had eaten and they all said no. Kayl introduced him to Raith.

"I saw you the last time we were here, Raith," the Captain said.

"Yes, I remember you too," he smiled and shook his hand.

There was that smile again, Kayl thought. The Captain told them to load Raith's gear and go eat while he readied to sail to Immer. Raith and Kayl were already heading down and Mac thought he saw a twinkle in her eyes.

"Looks like those two hit it off, eh Captain?"

"Sure does. And it's about time, too."

Over the next two days, Raith and Kayl were inseparable. He spent hours telling her all about his childhood on a farm outside of Leedvale and how he learned carpentry. His father was a carpenter and taught him everything. He tried building a small boat once, but a storm destroyed it on the rocks of the west Immer Sea. He never tried again.

Raith was not as tall as Kayl, but didn't seem bothered by this. He was very muscular and had beautiful blue eyes and a wonderful smile, or grin as Kayl

like to think. She asked him why he grinned all the time and he said his mother told him it would keep him out of trouble. She died when he was twelve from a fever. He and his father worked the farm until he decided to strike out on his own. He heard from his friend that there was work on Eastham and they both decided to try their luck there.

Things were fine for a while and they built a lot of farm implements. Then the work slowed and rather than go back home, they decided to do some farming. He believed it was good hard work and it kept him in shape. Kay couldn't wait to introduce Raith to her parents. She was sure they would like him.

It was easy to hire a human with a small boat to take Korel and his group across the Immer Sea to the dock at Leedvale. From there they would make their way to Poldar near the Boles cottage. The Captain would be on his ship at the main dock, easy to find.

The plan was simple. Korel and one dwarf would come at the cottage from the front, while the other two approached from the back. The only ones they were interested in was Kayl and Mac. The rest would not be harmed, just knocked unconscious, if needed.

Just after sunset, Korel and his group were in the forest just east of the Boles cottage. As they sat in the dark cover of the trees, they could see the lights of the cottage. What they didn't know was that Mathus, Raith and Kayl were talking together on the front porch. They had all just finished a supper and were discussing plans for their next trip.

Mac was off somewhere with Milla and would be returning late. Titus and Abigail were in the kitchen cleaning up.

Raith was explaining how to shave a ship mast when he saw movement out in the trees. He stopped talking and put a finger to his lips to quiet the other two. He whispered what he saw, grabbed his sword and leapt off the porch. Mathus motioned for Kayl to get in the house, pointing at his sword and followed Raith. Kayl ran to her room, grabbed her sword and headed out the back door, careful not to alert her Ma and Pa.

Raith crept low to a spot just near where he saw movement and climbed about six feet up a tree. Mathus saw him go up and he circled back behind the tree. Korel and a dwarf were walking slowly toward the cottage, axes drawn. As they passed under Raith, he jumped down right on top of Korel, knocking him to the ground. He was up quickly and one swing of his sword across Korel's wrist and the axe flew away. He put his sword point to his throat and said, "Don't move a muscle or you're dead." Mathus came up behind the other dwarf and

pole-axed him with the butt of his sword.

They both heard Kayl call out to Raith. He motioned for Mathus to take over and took off at a dead run toward the back of the house. When he got there, he found one dwarf down, bleeding badly and Kayl sparing with the other. He snuck up behind the dwarf and smashed the back of his head with his fist. The dwarf dropped heavily at Kayl's feet. She ran to Raith's arms.

Titus came out front with a weapon and Mathus called to him to get several lengths of cord. After they had Korel and the other bound to a tree, they ran to the back of the house. One dwarf lay bleeding and possibly dead and Raith was securing the other, still out cold.

"Korel and his friends," Mathus said to Kayl. She nodded.

"Lets get help and take them to the Council chambers. Haln can lock them up," Titus said.

Abigal was hugging Kayl and leading her to the house. Mathus told Raith to go find Mac just in case there were more than four. He checked on the downed dwarf, and indeed, he was dead from his wound.

"Can you take care of him?" Mathus asked Titus.

"Sure."

"I'm going to warn the Captain," Mathus said as he headed toward the dock.

After Korel and his live friends were in the Council lockup, Mac, Kayl, Mathus and Raith headed to the Greybeard. It was late, but Calvin was still up. They all ordered drinks and told Calvin what happened.

"How did you know there were more out back?" Raith asked Kayl.

"I didn't, but it just made sense that they might split up. I think I surprised them, which gave me the advantage."

"And did you really think you could take on two dwarves by yourself? Mac asked incredulously.

"Didn't think that far ahead. I knew if I called for Raith he would be there quickly. And, he was," Kayl said, smiling at him.

"If it weren't for Raith spotting them to begin with, it could have been a lot worse. The two in the back would have entered and put Titus and Abigal in danger," Mathus explained.

"Guess we owe you, Raith," Mac grinned.

"Yep...another dark beer please, Calvin. Mac's paying."

Eleven

New Beginnings and a Scare

Kayl felt strange sailing to an island without Mathus, but he and Vathar were off on Council business. It was a comfort to have Raith along. Mac felt like the odd man out these days, but he really wanted to see Caleb and May on Sellos. They had a lot of things to investigate and he just knew he would learn a lot from them.

As they neared the Eastham dock, they saw someone on the dock fishing. As soon as he spotted the ship, he raced inland. Probably a lookout, thought Mac. Caleb would not want to have them wait long for him and May. And sure enough, by the time they docked and tied up, down the path they came with a cart full of supplies.

"What's all that?" Mac called to Caleb,

"Everything we need to check the soil and drainage," replied Caleb.

"So, are you ready to go?" asked the Captain.

"Sure are."

"Let us help you aboard," Raith said.

"Oh, Raith, your friend will be coming over next week to apply for work. He is so excited," said May.

"That's great. He is a good worker and an excellent carpenter," said Raith.

The Captain ordered the crew to make way for Sellos. Then he, Caleb, May and Mac went below for tea. Raith and Kayl stayed topside talking quietly in an out of the way spot forward. They did a lot of that these days. Just getting to know each other, is what Kayl told Mac when he asked about it. Mac told her they should know everything about each other by now. He just loved teasing her about it and she just loved being teased.

"Those two sure seem to like each other," May observed.

"That they do," said the Captain. "Oh, to be young again, eh?"

"I remember when we were like that, May," said Caleb.

"Oh dear yes, you couldn't get us apart."

"Well, I'm so glad we are all together and going to Sellos. I want to learn everything I can," Mac said.

"I hope we find favorable conditions, Mac. Even though the crops are starting to improve on Eastham, it would be nice to have more farming on Sellos."

"That's our plan, Caleb," Mac said enthusiastically.

The ship rounded the east end of Immer and headed north. With the

favorable winds, they launched on Sellos in a couple hours. When Caleb asked how long they could stay, the Captain said he had supplies for several days. They picked up Caleb's tools and headed inland.

As they took the same route inland, Mac commented to Caleb that the rocky ground would make a good road bed for wagons. Caleb agreed. The Captain suggested they split up. He and Raith would head north to the groves and the rest go to the south valley. Kayl hugged Raith and they were off.

Caleb and May stopped short when they crested the rise and saw the valley. Caleb said this looked like most of Eastham when they first got there.

"And look at the pools," exclaimed May. "They must get more rain here than we do."

"I think they do. Eastham is somewhat protected from the northern winds and rain by Immer, but here the rain comes right off the northern East Ocean," Mac said.

As Caleb bent down and scooped up a handful of dirt, he said, "Look at this topsoil. It's as good as our soil a foot down."

They all went to work getting samples, while Kayl was making notes again. This time, most of what she wrote was told to her by Caleb and May and she didn't quite understand it all. Mac was asking Caleb tons of questions about different possibilities and May was explaining the different conditions she found.

On the other side of the island, Raith was making notes, too. There were so many different kinds of trees, he was amazed: Spruce, Oak, Pine, Elder, Cherry and Cedar.

"There are enough trees here to build many homes, stables and barns," he commented.

"I thought so myself. Some of it could be used for the ships, too."

"This is a wonderful place. I wonder why nobody has ever found it before."

"Well these groves are so far north that they just weren't seen by ships. And the valley that the others are in is hidden on the west side by cliffs. I guess everyone that looked at it saw only the rocky hillsides and scrub pine," the Captain said.

"Well, I have good notes here. Time to hook up with the others?"

"Sure, you need to see the valley, too."

They met the other group on the west side of the valley. Raith was as impressed with the valley as the Caleb and May. He reported to them on what he found in the groves and said they should have no trouble harvesting all the wood they needed.

Caleb said he would like to spend tomorrow gathering more samples, laying out sections and drawing maps.

"Captain, do you have a small barrel I can fill with water from a couple pools?" I'd like to test it," asked Caleb.

"I'm sure I do. And a couple deckhands to help carry it too."

The group headed back to the ship later that afternoon. They all gathered in the galley for a delicious supper, cooked by May and Kayl. The regular cook was enjoying himself, the Captain thought. A night off and a dinner to boot. They all sat around deck and talked until well after dark.

They spent the next day helping Caleb with the maps and more samples. Caleb commented to May that maybe they could come and help establish a new community. She said that would be fun, but she would miss her home terribly. Mac said they had plenty of time to think on that, but he was coming for sure.

"I'm sure Milla will love the place," he said.

"Yes, she will, Mac. And I will come visit you often," Kayl said and she snuggled against Raith from the cold east wind.

"Me too!" said Raith with that grin again.

After dropping off Caleb and May, they pulled into the dock at Immer and saw all the progress made in just a couple days. Things were going very well preparing for the building of the new ships. All they needed now were a few more shipbuilders.

"I'll come back right after we report to the Council," said Raith to the Captain.

"Very well. Ask them if any new shipbuilders have applied, ok?"

"Yes, sir."

The group headed to the chambers. When they arrived Justin took them right inside. The Council stopped what they were doing to take their report.

"It's just as I suspected," said Mac. "Caleb and May loved the valley. They took lots of soil and water samples and will let us know what they find. But, from what they saw, they said it should be perfect."

"Good news," said Haln. "And who is this on your arm, Kayl?"

"This is our new shipbuilder, Raith Ashwind. He is a master woodworker and accompanied us to Sellos. He has a report for you, too."

"Well, lucky for us. Go on, Raith."

"I inspected the groves and made a lot of notes. There are trees in abundance and all in good health. And not only is there enough for all the buildings on Sellos, but the Captain and I think there is enough for some of the new ships, if needed."

"Well...that will certainly help. Thank you for your time and expertise, Raith," said Haln.

"My pleasure, sir."

"Kayl, if the report from Caleb is positive, you and Mac are to head the effort to get new families recruited for starting the first community," Haln reported.

Mac looked at Kayl and said, "We believe it will be positive and we shall

start looking for families right away."

"Another thing. The Council has authorized a new city to be built on Immer. It will be up to you two, Mathus and the Captain to decide where and what name to give it. Report back to us when you have decided," Haln said.

"Wonderful news! We think a port city on Sellos will be needed too. It could be close to the valley and would have good hard ground for roads," Kayl commented.

"And we can rig loading ramps for trees and supplies, too. Then later, we can build a dock," said Raith.

Kayl smiled at Raith and then Haln. He could see that the rumors he had been hearing were true.

"Sir, the Captain wants to know if you have received any applications for shipbuilders," Raith said,

"Tell him we have a total of six applicants. I will send him the paperwork," Haln responded.

"We can take it to him now, we are meeting at the Greybeard," Kayl said.

"Very well. See Justin on your way out. Thank you for your reports." Haln dismissed them.

A late night knock at her door made Vela jump up. She tried to clear the sleep from her eyes. Must be the two glasses of the wine that Mathus brought for dinner, she thought. She put on her robe and answered the door. It was the neighbor from across the street.

"Come quick, Mistress Vela. My husband has a high fever and is talking nonsense!"

"Let me get my bag and I'll be right over. You go and put a cool cloth on his forehead."

"Ok. Please hurry," she pleaded.

Vela ran to her bedroom, threw on some clothes, grabbed her bag, which was always stocked for just this event. As she made her way across the village square, she noticed several cottages with lights on. It is a very late hour for this many people to be up, she thought.

After a quick check on the neighbor's husband, she could see it was a delirious fever. She instructed the wife to run to the Greybeard and bring Milla. She then went to the children's room to check on them. They were fine. She asked the teenage daughter to go to all the village neighbors with lights on to find out if anyone is sick.

"Report back as soon as you have checked them all," Vela instructed.

By the time she had a poultice made up and on the husband's chest, Milla came into the room, followed by the wide-eyed worried wife.

"Will he die Mistress?" asked the wife.

"I'll do everything I can, dear. I must get the fever down. Bring me more cool water and clean cloths, please."

Milla checked the patient and knew right away what it was. She commented on the lights in the cottages. Vela told her about sending the daughter and asked her to wait downstairs for the daughter to return. We need to check everyone she found that was sick.

"I'll take water and cloths and report back as soon as I can," Milla said.

A short time later, Milla told Vela there were four more people with a high fever, one delirious. Vela realized it was spreading. She wrote a quick note and handed it to the wife.

"Take this to Councilman Haln, quickly," Vela instructed.

"Should I wait for a reply?"

"No. Once you deliver this, go to my bakeshop and gather all the clean cloths you can find. Bring them here. Have your children get a fire going in the wood stove."

"Milla, Haln will be here soon with many men. Have them ring the village emergency bell and explain that we may have an fever epidemic. They need to check as many people as they can for fevers. A quarantine will be required."

"Should I get more women to help us with treatments?" Milla asked.

"As soon as we have a count of the sick. Let's hope it has not spread too far."

Throughout the morning hours everyone worked diligently, administering to the sick and checking everyone they could. There were at least a dozen more people with mild fevers. Just the beginning, Vela thought. Milla got word to her Ma and Sheela to recruit more women to help.

By mid afternoon, there were at least twenty with the fever. Vela saw that they were only treating the symptoms and not curing it. She called for Kayl to get the Captain and have him take one of sick to Fanlith on Windham. It was clear to her that they needed the Elven healers.

Kayl had written instructions for the healers when she landed on the Windham dock. She was escorted immediately to Fanlith and Ealen. She gave them the note and watched as Ealen ran to the base of their tree and sounded a gong.

Elves appeared out of nowhere, it seemed. She spoke to one elder and within minutes three more elders appeared.

"These are our most experienced healers. Let me confer with them," said

Ealen.

Fanlith spoke to another elf and he ran off. Within another ten minutes, there were several elves with bags of supplies at the tree.

"The healers believe they know what it is based on your explanation of the symptoms. Two of them will get what they need and meet you at the ship," Ealen said.

The elves picked up the supplies and started heading to the ship. Kayl hugged Ealen and Fanlith and thanked them.

"This is what neighbors do. Don't worry Kayl, our healers are the best," smiled Fanlith.

So, several helper elves, two healers and Kayl headed back to Immer.

When the group got to the dock, Kayl saw Raith waiting there.

"Vela is down," he said somberly.

"Oh dear. Is she delirious yet?"

"Not yet, but close. She is at home. I sent word to Mathus. Are these the healers?" pointing to the two elders.

"Yes, lets get them to Vela first. How is Milla?"

"Fine, for now. But they just brought in three more from Pillstock," he said.

Kayl and Raith escorted all the elves to the bakeshop. The elders immediately went to work on Vela. Then they systematically went to each of the two dozen patients treating them with the herbs they brought. Mathus sat at Vela's side the entire time and everyone could see he was extremely worried.

By the next day, those with only a low fever recovered quickly. Several, including the husband of Vela's neighbor, did not respond well. By the next day, everyone with fever was on the mend.

There were only two that could not be saved. The elders said they were just too late. Everyone considered themselves very lucky.

Vela was now well enough to be up and around. She was completely amazed at how fast people responded to the elven treatment. She and Milla spent hours talking to the elders, learning that the treatment was an herb that grew only on Windham. The elves reported that it may be growing on another island, but they had never searched. She made a note to talk to Haln about sending a party to Sellos and Calham, both on the east side of Immer, to see if it grew there.

Several days later, Haln sent out a notice asking for volunteers to go to Sellos and Calham in search of the miracle herb. Vela's neighbor and her children were the first to sign up. Mathus, Vela and Milla also volunteered. Within twenty-four hours, over forty had signed up. Immer was not going to be caught unaware again.

Haln also sent an official delegation to Fanlith and Ealen expressing the deep gratitude from all the people of Immer for the elders help. The delegation would also go to Calham and Westham to establish an exchange of herbs and remedies between the islands. And, since Milla and Mac were part of the delegation, everyone was confident they could secure a commitment from the leaders of each island.

Twelve

Marriages

During the next few months, everyone was very busy. Raith started the first ship, along with his friend from Eastham. Milla was building up her inventory to start her own practice.

After a positive report from Caleb, Kayl and Mac started signing up people for Sellos. Word was out and there seemed to be a lot of interest. They scheduled several trips to Sellos with the Captain.

One day, Mathus and Vathar appeared at the dock. They had been traveling for the last couple months. Kayl and Mac greeted them warmly.

"How did things go on Westham?" asked Mac.

"Well, we picked up Goran and went to see Jarek. After many assurances, we got him to sign the treaty," said Mathus.

"Oh my, that is great news. The Council will be very pleased," said Kayl.

"Yes, we should head there now. I see things have progressed here nicely. Already one ship started."

"When you are done, meet us at the Greybeard. We have lots of news," Kayl said.

"We will meet you there," Mathus responded.

Justin brought Vathar and Mathus to the chambers.

"Welcome, Mathus, Vathar. How was your trip to Westham?" asked Haln.

"It went very well, Haln. Goran was skeptical at first, but he didn't realize the impact the delegation had on Jarek. And I'm sure he felt rather bad about the fight and his dwarves injuring Mac. That softened him quite a bit, I believe," said Mathus.

"I'm sure. It's just too bad that Mac had to be the one to suffer," replied Haln.

"Well, he told Kayl that if it helped establish trade, it was worth it."

"Those two are a wonder," Haln stated. "We couldn't have selected better for the delegation."

"That they are," said Mathus, proudly.

"Did he agree to go to see Jarek?" asked Haln.

"He did. And between the three of us we convinced Jarek to sign the treaty," Mathus said proudly.

"That's great news!"

"And he has even agreed to send you thirty dwarves to help build ships," Vathar added.

"My, you three must have been very convincing."

"I think it's just the fact that the time has come for dwarves, elves and humans to start communicating again, Haln," Mathus said.

"With dwarves from Goran and elves from Fanlith, we should be in excellent shape," Haln stated.

"We'll make sure word gets to them, sir," Vathar replied.

With the report finished, they headed to the Greybeard. They joined Kay, Mac and Raith.

"How is my favorite delegation this day?" bellowed the Captain, coming through the door.

He ordered a dark beer and joined everyone at their table. Mathus and Vathar brought him up to date on Jarek and the treaty.

"Well, that's everyone then, right?" asked the Captain

"I believe so, sir," said Kayl.

"You should all be proud. That was quite an accomplishment."

"With your help, sir," replied Mac. "You must be tired of running between islands."

"Well, I have an excellent first mate and crew. I really don't do much."

"Oh...maybe it's time for retirement?" asked Kayl.

"Maybe, you just never know. First I have to start recruiting captains for the new ships. And the new ship building is right on schedule, thanks to young Raith, here."

"Thank you, sir," he said, grinning.

Since the delegation was all here together, Kayl explained what the Council wanted concerning a new port city on Sellos.

"They assigned us to decide where to build it and a name," she said.

"Well, a good place would be just up the path from the beach, right between the groves and the valley. What do you all think?" asked Mac.

The Captain and Raith nodded in agreement.

"But, for a name we are stumped," said Kayl.

"Well, I think it should be called Port Boles, after a very prominent family I know of on Immer," said the Captain, smiling.

"I think that is very fitting," stated Raith.

"I also believe it would be proper, from everything I've seen and heard of the family," added Vathar

Mac and Kayl both looked at Mathus.

"What do you think, Mathus?" asked Mac.

"As long as Titus and Sheela agree, it would be fine with me."

"Very well. if they agree, Mac and I will take your suggestion to the Council," said Kayl.

It was a couple weeks later when time came for Mac and Kayl to report to the Council again.. They reported on the progress of the new recruits for Sellos. Then gave the number of workers committed for building ships. Haln was pleased that sixty dwarves and twenty elves were promised.

"Now we have to build a place for them to live in," said Mac.

"Taken care of. Bassley has given us use of two of his warehouses and the conversion to dorm rooms is underway," Haln replied.

"Perfect," Kayl stated.

"Now, sir, for the name of the new city on Sellos. The consensus of the delegation, including Raith and Vathar is Port Boles," Mac said, grinning.

"Well, I never would have thought of that. Has the entire Boles family agreed?"

"Yes, sir," answered Kayl.

Haln looked at each Council member. They all agreed.

"Done!" he said.

"Very appropriate," commented Justin.

Several more weeks passed and the first new ship was almost finished.

Raith was working long hours, but still saw Kayl almost everyday. When the first dorm room was ready in Bassley's warehouse, Raith moved in there. She would meet him after work at the Greybeard or at the Captain's ship for lunch. Now that she was almost twenty-two, maybe it was time to think about settling down. Maybe she would suggest as much to Raith and see what he thinks.

They were having dinner one evening when Raith said, "You know, I have enough work on these ships to last for years, if I want."

"True, but once we are fully staffed with dwarves and elves, you won't really be needed, will you?"

"Probably not, as long as the Captain and my friend is on the job," he answered.

"So, some day we could move from Immer?" she asked.

"I suppose. What are you suggesting?"

"I think I'd like to move to Sellos. Maybe start a business or something," she said.

"And of course you would need help with that, right?"

"Of course."

"Maybe we should just get married and move there."

"Oh, what a lovely idea," She kissed him soundly.

"Maybe we could have a double wedding with Mac and Milla," he said, with that grin she couldn't resist.

"Let's ask them and see what they think."

At the same time, Kerns had used one of Creedwell's free passes and came to see Milla. They were sitting inside the bakeshop with Vela, when Kayl and Raith walked in.

"I heard you were in the village, Mac," Kayl said as she hugged him.

"Yes, just got here today. How are you Raith, shaking his hand?"

"Just about finished with the first ship."

"I know, I saw it when we docked. It's a beauty."

Sitting quietly down beside them, Kayl said, "Raith and I have a question for you two."

"Should I leave?" asked Vela.

"By no means. You need to hear the question, too," she answered.

"Raith and I want to know if you have a date set for your wedding?"

"As a matter of fact, we do."

"Good. How do you feel about a double wedding?" asked Kayl.

Vela, Mac and Milla jumped up and started hugging Kayl and Raith. They were all crying before it was over.

"Are you serious?" asked Mac.

"Of course we are, silly," Kayl answered.

"Well, it's fine with me," Mac said, looking at Milla. "How about you?"

"It's wonderful!"

"And I expect Captain Hale will do the honors, right?" asked Vela.

"Yes. How about on the maiden voyage of the new ship. There is plenty of room for a very large party," said Kayl.

"And Ma and Pa can bring all the food, paid for by the Council, of course," added Kerns.

"We can announce at the Greybeard, ok?" asked Milla.

"Sure, I'll get the word out," Kayl said, hugging Raith one more time.

"This will be wonderful. We should also ask Giles and Haln," said Vela.

And of course, Creedwell," added Kerns.

"Settled then," Raith said, with that grin.

The group that met at the Greybeard a few days later were all surprised at the news. The Captain agreed to perform the ceremony on the new ship. He said they should keep the guest list below a hundred. It could take place the first day of next month, so they only had a couple weeks to get ready. The four all agreed.

Calvin and Abigal agreed to bring the food. And Haln agreed to pay for it all. Mac and Kayl said they wanted Goran, Jarek, Vathar, Fanlith and Ealen. Raith said he wanted Caleb & May and several of his carpenter friends. Vela added Tolan and her new apprentice. They even agreed to Bassley and Justin.

This would be the biggest event ever in the Isles of Bernham, next to Trading and the Treaty, of course.

Epilogue

Life in the Islands was changed forever. The Council officially appointed Kayl and Mac to the Council of Immer. They would have full privileges, but did not have to stay on Immer. They would be the youngest Council members in history.

The wedding was a huge event, and everyone on Immer awaited the couples on their return to the dock. Celebrations went on for several days. The ovens in Vela's bakeshop were going constantly.

Tolan built metal awnings over most of the dock so people could wait for the ships out of the weather. There was even a crossing schedule posted now.

Mac and Milla moved to Sellos. Mac was put in charge of establishing the farming communities, including all buildings and roads. There were a great many farmers that moved there and the communities grew fast. Crop production was better than expected, and food was shipped to all the other islands.

Milla became the healer for the island. Their house and shop were the first structures built. She traveled to Calham and Westham to learn healing from the dwarves.

Kayl and Raith also moved to Sellos. They started a business right away and built a huge building right in the center of the new village. They called it the Newboles Inn & Tavern. Raith would oversee the building of the new docks and all of the initial houses.

So, now Bernham has Council members on two different islands. Haln is pleased with this, as he can now start thinking of his retirement.

Caleb and May stayed on Eastham, but turned their big house into living quarters for the farmers. Caleb and Raith built them a small cottage, just exactly as May wanted. They spend their time between Eastham and consulting on Sellos.

Titus, Sheela and Jolsey moved to Port Boles and started a shipping company. The amount of goods going between the islands needed to be coordinated. This way they were also able to visit Mac and Kayl on a regular basis. Sheela did not want to be too far away from her grandchildren.

Vathar returned home to Windham. He was honored and made a village elder. Eventually, Fanlith retired and he became the new leader. But, he still traveled to Sellos to see Mac and Kayl. Mathus visited him on a regular basis.

Captain Hale finished hiring six new Captains. After he was comfortable with their handling of the ships, he retired. He also traveled regularly between islands visiting all his long time friends, at no charge, of course.

Mathus decided to reduce his traveling and spent a lot more time at the Greybeard and Vela's bakeshop. He and Vela spent a lot of time together and everyone knew that someday they would marry and he would settle down. Vela's second apprentice minded the bakeshop these days.

Tolan also took on a second apprentice. It was the son of a friend in the village. He was doing well and Tolan seemed to spend a lot of time with the apprentice's mother. There were some rumors there, too, but nobody listens much to rumors.

The islands have come full circle from the time described in the elven writings. There is again peace and prosperity between the islands and their inhabitants, thanks to the dedication of just one generation.

- *The New Chronicles of Bernham* - by Giles