

Losandia

by

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Cast of Characters

Dwarves

Eres Ferryman - Caver - Healer
Giltar Dunst - Strehen Stone owner
Orgar Sandspar - Shielder leader
Paren Dunmar - Valeman Pub Owner

Humans

Bentley Mathes - Shipwright Shop owner - Port Sorrel
Carrey Danworth - Alvarstad Craft&lumber owner
Dean Underhill - head of Upland Council
Derrick Jons - Smith - Derwend
Erik Darkman -Smith - Port Sorrel
Emily Bandar - Sorrel Tavern - Derwend / Grub&Grog - Alvarstad
Horace Witherspoon - The Mercantile owner - Upland
Jonas - Smith - Sutterton
Kyle Baas - Captain of city watch and IPF - Derwend
Lady Mortan - The Mystic Owner - Granton
Marinda - Owner - Sign of the Rooster - Sutterton/Bearded Lady - Strehen
Mac Finnegan - Valeman - Granton
Mark Bonds - Pathway Inn owner - Alvarstad
Mistress Kallie - Tavern/Inn owner - Port Sorrel
Olt Grond - Sorrel Bridgemaster
Sloan Millard - Beggar's Lot owner - Derwend
Tolar Brent - Woodworker - Sutterton
Von Terrel - Plainsman

Goblins

Kulggor - Chief - Shell Steppes
Bentore - Leader - Central Plains

Drakken

Culgat - Leader - Sutter mountains

Barrows

Dunkel Ratherby - Barrowdale Supply owner
Mallor Dunharrow - Cutpurse Inn owner - Barrowdale
Picker Ratherby - Dunkel's son - Barrowdale

Mage

Gandrath - Head Mage - Cygnal Keep

Witch

Seylyn - witch – Hidesway

Ed Note:

It will help if you study the map and this list before you start reading. I make reference to towns, people and businesses without much explanation of each.

The mage and dwarves want free trade everywhere on Losandia and new bridges would help ensure this. Gandrath, is helping organize an effort to stand against the Upland Council. He has the Shielder dwarf leader, Orgar Sandspar and the goblinchief, Kulggor, talking to each other. And, Kulggor is friendly with the drakken and warks.

The Upland Council controls the city watch in Alvarstad and Derwend and say they will use this force to stop the building of any new bridge. Gandrath has dwarves, goblins and warks that could destroy the Uplander forces in an afternoon, but he is reluctant to use them. So, for now, it's a standoff.

There was a meeting recently between Gandrath and Giltar Dunst, the owner of the Strehen Stone company.

"Those filthy rich Uplanders have direct control of all the lumber coming out of the Great Black Forest and own most of the businesses in Upland and Alvarstad," spat Giltar.

"And they have that control because they own the only bridge across the Sorrel and won't allow another to be built," responded the Mage.

"How is it they can keep other bridges from being built?" asked Giltar.

"They control the city watch in Alvarstad and Derwend. Along with their plainsmen friends, they can stop anyone from even starting to build. They pay the watch very well, too."

"So, it comes down to money again," grunted Giltar.

"Doesn't it always?"

Orgar is the chief of the Shield dwarves. They are all warriors and much taller than regular dwarves. They are experts with double-bladed axes and live in the Shell Steppes in northern Losandia. Orgar is on speaking terms with Gandrath and also believes the new bridges should be built. He does not normally speak to Kulggor, the goblin chief, but Gandrath has convinced him to do so on this issue.

Most goblins have flat faces, broad noses and pointed ears, but there are a few exceptions. Bentore and a handful of others look more human than their clansmen. And, they speak the Losandia common tongue much better.

"You do know that Kulggor is very friendly with the drakkens and warks?" asked Gilar.

"Precisely. We could bring thousands of warriors to bear against the city watch and their cohorts."

"So, lets get them all together, ok?"

The drakkens live in the Sutter mountains and are large war-like creatures that use clubs to fight. They are generally friendly unless provoked.

The warks live in the Eastern Fens, mostly, however some can be found in the South Fens. They are small creatures that use poison darts and are excellent fighters. Their numbers are very small, however.

"Very well, I think it's probably time. I'll meet with Orgar again and advise you of our plan when we have one," Gandrath said, ending the meeting.

The Bandar family was one of the wealthiest on Losandia. Kevin Bandar owned property in several towns, including the Sorrel in Derwend and the Grub&Grog in Alvarstad, but kept no friends in Upland. He considered them uppity and difficult to deal with. He also owned the lumber mill in Granton, where he spent most of his time.

Kevin Bandar was a well respected leader of the community. He lost his wife to fever when their daughter was young. His daughter Emily inherited everything when he died. His best friend was Bentley Mathes, owner of the Shipwright Shop in Port Sorrel. Before Kevin died he asked Bentley if he would watch over Emily and help her when ever he could. Bentley promised he would.

She took over running the taverns and the mill. She knew her father loved the place, so she kept it. She still has several friends that work there and they frequent her taverns when they are in town. Emily met Mac Finnegan at a social gathering in Derwend a few years ago, and they became close friends.

They both feel the same way on the new bridge issue and believe it would help all the businesses on the Sorrel as well as those in the north. In fact, they both feel the same about a lot of other issues as well. Mac is not a business owner, but practically runs the Granton Mill single-handedly. They both know why the Upland Council is against the new bridges and are determined to do something about it.

Emily and Mac were sitting in her office at the Sorrel Tavern when she asked. "Will you accompany me to Upland? I've requested an appearance with the Council."

"Certainly. When is it?"

"Tomorrow afternoon. It's not the full Council, just Underhill and his secretary. I'm sure he knows what I want to discuss and doesn't want to waste the other's time."

"Yea, even though I think you're wasting your time."

"I know, I know. But, I have to at least try. With the talk of fighting between the city watch and Gandrath's group, the consequences are dire."

Mac studied the determined look on her face and smiled at her.

"That's the Emily I know and love," he whispered.

"Oh, really. Love is it now?"

"Well, that's just an expression. Although, it's not far from the truth!"

"I wish I had time to discuss this subject more, but I have to get things finished here and finish my notes for the meeting tomorrow."

Mac stood, kissed the top of her head and said he would see her for lunch tomorrow. Even though he works at Granton mill, he has lunch with Emily as often as he can. He meets frequently with Carrey Danworth at Alvarstad Craft&Lumber about new orders. Both meetings take him to or through Derwend. Then, there is the weekly meeting with Emily on Mill business. One of these days he will take her on a boat ride on the lake and discuss their relationship in detail. One day very soon...

Dean Underhill had been the head Councilman for many years now. He is in his middle years, balding and pear-shaped. He does not get enough exercise and he knows it. Too busy, he says. He is relentless in his efforts to better the town of Upland and their business interests and is well liked by them. All the other business owners in the river towns along the Sorrell do not like him or paying Upland imposed taxes and getting nothing in return. There is talk of telling him they will not pay any more taxes. But, the owners are afraid of being shut down by the Council, so they continue paying.

Emily and Mac arrived at the Upland Council chambers the next afternoon. Underhill glanced at Mac, but didn't say anything. He thought the meeting was with Emily alone.

Emily proceeded to tell Underhill that the Mages and dwarves want two more bridges built...one across the Sorrel at Sutterton and another across the Kline near Strehen. She then warns him they are getting impatient and may just go ahead and build. Underhill says he will order the city watch to stop them.

"Not with several thousand dwarves, goblins and warks you won't!" Emily shouts.

"I really doubt they could bring that kind of force to bear, Emily," replied Underhill.

"You cannot know that, Dean."

Underhill hated it when she addressed him so informally, but he ignored it.

"Tell me just what makes you think this thing would go that far?" Underhill asked.

She explains what the Mages and dwarves want the other bridges for and who they could involve to make it happen. Underhill thinks for a moment and says,

"I will discuss this with the full Council and see what we come up with. I will also talk to some of our people in Alvarstad. I will let you know what I learn."

"You better not tarry, Dean. Once Gandrath starts the action, it will be too late."

She looked at Mac, nodded and they left. Underhill wanted to ask Mac why he was here, since he didn't say a word, but he suspected that it was just to be a witness. Now, the Council couldn't say they weren't warned.

Emily headed back to the Tavern and Mac said he was off to see Kyle Baas, the Derwend city watch Captain. He has always liked Kyle and they are the same age. He remembers when they were boys together swimming in the Sorrel. Mac wanted to work with lumber and Kyle was interested in the watch. They went their separate ways but have remained friends.

He entered the Derwend city building and knocked on the Captain's door.

"Enter!"

"Afternoon, Kyle," Mac said.

"To you too, Mac. Long time since we've talked. What can I do for you?"

"Emily and I have just come from a meeting with Dean Underhill. We tried explaining the situation with the Mages and the new bridges, but he is pretty much in denial."

"No surprise there."

"Listen Kyle, we go way back. Tell me straight, would you follow instructions from Upland Council and go up against Gandrath?" asked Mac.

"The Council pays my salary, Mac. What choice do I have?"

"Even if they have thousands against you?"

"Thousands! Where in the world did you hear that?"

"I know for a fact that Gandrath has talked to Orgar Sandspar and Kulggor. It would be an easy thing for Kulggor to unite with the drakken and warks. You'd be very hard pressed, my friend."

"Hmmm. I had no idea we'd be up against that kind of force. Maybe I'd better talk to the Council again."

"Good luck. We've talked to them twice. Got the same answer both times. How about if I ask Gandrath to talk to Underhill?"

"Not a good idea. Mages can be very insistent at times and Underhill would feel threatened."

"And?"

"I know Underhill, Mac. He would dig in his heels and there'd be war for sure. He may even say some things he shouldn't and really upset Gandrath. That'd be bad, eh?"

"For sure. He may end up looking for the nearest pond," Mac said, grinning.

"I'll talk to him. I know why the Council is so against any new bridges, but surely there must be a way to compromise. It just doesn't seem fair that Upland should get all the bridge crossing revenue, when the goods that come across are sold to all places south of the Sorrel, now does it?"

"You should be on the Council, not in the watch, Kyle," Mac replied.

"I'll let you or Emily know what I learn, ok?"

"Thanks, Kyle. We both want the same thing here. No deaths."

"Yes, especially mine."

Olt Grond decided he didn't trust Dean Underhill and his city watch. He came up with his own plan that he thought would stop the construction and send a clear message to those planning these new bridges.

The three men met underneath the Sorrel bridge just after midnight. Bridge master Olt Grond was explaining the operation to Sloan Millard and Mark Bonds.

"Everything is in place. The explosives were easy to get from a friend that works at the lumber yard. As soon as they pour the foundations on each bridge, your men will set the charges."

"Is there anyway this can be traced back to us?" asked Mark.

"Absolutely not. Even if the men get caught or hurt, they know not to say a word. They could do jail time for this, but if they mention us, it will be a lot worse," answered Sloan.

"Good. I hate dealing with Mages," Olt said.

"Don't worry. I heard they were pouring the first foundations next week. The very next night there will be an accident and the message will be clear," Mark assured.

"They may just try again, this time under the watchful eye of some stout Shield dwarves," said Mark.

"I don't think so. They can't take the chance that the next explosion will be during work hours. They won't want to risk any lives," answered Olt.

"Hope you're right," Mark said.

"I am. You just make sure your men do their job," Olt said to Sloan.

Two

Mistress Kallie, owner of the Ridgemont tavern in Upland was expecting Horace Witherspoon at any moment. She had the cook fix his favorite lunch, kale salad and tuna. If she could just get him to agree with her and help her with the new place, she wouldn't have to worry about her finances ever again.

She was having no luck convincing Underhill that a tavern was needed in Port Sorrel. He thought that the class of people that lived there, all hardworking humans and dwarves, would not want to frequent a fine establishment. And, it would be beneath him to have anything to do with a tavern for common folk.

So, she decided to turn her attentions to Horace Witherspoon, whom she had known for years. His Mercantile was doing very well and she just needed to convince him there was money in taverns also. From the outside, it looked as though her Ridgemont was doing very well and only she knew the debt that had piled up against it. If she could get Horace to help her build a new place in Port Sorrel, she could use some of the money she made there to get caught up here.

Horace came through the door and headed straight for Kallie's table.

"This is a great idea, Kallie. I really need a break from the store today. Things are hectic this time of year. And, we have inventory going too."

"Well, just sit down here. Your favorite lunch will be here in a moment," she said.

"To what do I owe this showering of pleasures, Kallie?"

"I want to talk a little business and I always like to have good food to do that over," she responded.

"Ahh. That. Are you still considering a tavern in Port Sorrel?"

"I think it would be a goldmine. There are no good places to eat in town. The closest place is the Mystic in Granton and I think the food there leaves a lot to be desired, don't you?"

"Well, it suits the Valemens just fine," he answered.

"But, if there were a fine dining place in Port Sorrel, it would bring them and the dwarves a little culture. What can that hurt?"

"You'd have to transport all the supplies from here every week. That could be expensive," observed Horace.

"Just include those costs in the price of the meals. I have things all worked out if you like to see the figures."

"Well...not today. I really have to get back to my inventory. Maybe when it's over."

He finished his lunch, thanked Kallie and headed back to Upland. Well, that didn't go well at all, she thought. I simply must come up with a reason for him to like the idea.

When Mac and Emily rode their horses up a small hill, the sun just coming over The Vale. They were on their way to see Von Terrel in the plains south of Derwend. Von lived in a large below ground house on the northeast side of the plains, almost directly below Derwend and Sutterton. When they arrived, a large dog greeted them with barks and growls. Their horses shied and they called out for Von. He emerged from below and called the dog to heel.

"Lucky you caught me," he said.

"We saw Paren Dunmar in town this morning and he said you were home today."

"Oh, and what can I do for you?"

"We would like to talk to you about recruiting your help," said Emily.

"Sure, let's go in," he said and started back to the house.

Mac and Emily followed and they took seats at the table where Von set two steaming mugs of coffee in front of them.

"We were wondering if you have been contacted by the Upland Council about helping the city watch."

"Why, yes. A rider came yesterday with a message from Underhill. Wanted to know if the Plainsmen would help the watch against the Mages and dwarves, if it came to it."

"And, did you answer the message?" Mac asked.

"No. I need to talk to the leaders first."

"Good. Before you do that, you need to know exactly what you are up against," Emily said.

She explained all the details to him and his face grew hard. He had no idea that the Shields would

enlist the drakken and warks.

"This puts a whole new light on things. We have no problem going up against the Shields, but the rest are a different matter. I've fought warks before and nearly lost my life. Twice. I'd sooner not try that again."

"I thought Underhill might have omitted that little detail."

"The drakken are bad enough, but the two together would be suicide. I will tell my leaders that tomorrow."

"Great. Glad we got to you in time," said Mac.

"So, with no Plainsmen to help them, I doubt the watch will want to follow Underhill's orders," said Emily.

"Probably not. It's what I will tell Kyle Baas when I see him next," Von stated.

Emily stood, shook Von's hand and said,

"Thanks for seeing us, Von."

"Sure. Always a pleasure to help stop a war," he grinned.

Word came to Giltar Dunst that Gandrath wanted another meeting to discuss the resources needed to build the new bridges. He instructed him to meet him at the Bearded Lady in Strehen. Aran Reider is close friends with Giltar and is very interested in the new bridges. He believes it will bring new businesses to Strehen and Heemskalt. He gets permission from Giltar to attend the meeting.

The three meet at the Lady one sunny morning and the meeting lasted about two hours and many decisions were made. The lumber would come mostly from Granton Mill. There are a lot of Clanner dwarves working the mill and they are sympathetic to the northern dwarves. The Valeman and Plainsmen that work the mill don't like the idea that new bridges can't be built, so they have agreed to help.

The lumber will be taken by wagon to a dock on the south Binter Sea and then shipped to the Shipwright Shop in Port Sorrel. It is owned by Bentley Mathes and has the best woodworkers, shipbuilders and craftsmen in Losandia. And, it's the only place with construction yards big enough to build both ships and bridges.

The foundations of the new bridges would need a lot of stone. It would come from the Cygnal foothills in Strehen and also brought through the pass from Wynven to the Kline docks below Strehen. The dwarves own several barges that run the Kline down to Port Sorrel by way of the Binter Sea.

That afternoon Emily received a message from Gandrath, including the details of everything decided so far. He thanked her for her help with Von Terrel and invited her to be included in the rest of the meetings. She answered the message, saying she or Mac would like to attend all future meetings.

Emily knows she must decide soon on the sale of the mill. And, also she needs to talk to Mac about their relationship. She has liked Mac for sometime now and the fact that he was willing to step up and help with the bridge issue, as well as take over as mill manager, makes her realize her feelings are stronger than ever. So, today she would go to Granton tell him of her decision to sell the mill.

In the carriage on the river road to Granton, Emily decides to make a stop at Sutterton to see Tolar Brent and the smith Jonas. She wants to find out just where they stand on the new bridge and if they would be willing to help.

Tolar is the best human woodworker on Losandia and he would be a very valuable asset. And, they really need at least two smiths to handle the amount of iron work needed. She knows Erik Darkman from Port Sorrel is committed, working for Bentley as he does. But, Derrik Jons of Derwend is with the Upland group. So, Jonas is a critical asset and she hopes she can convince him.

Her first stop in Sutterton is at Tolar's house. Nobody answers the door. He must be out on a job, she thought. She headed to the Sign of the Rooster to see Marinda. If anyone knew where Tolar was, she would.

As she walks in the Rooster, she spies Tolar sitting at a table talking to Marinda. She smiles at him and asks if she could have a word. Miranda excuses herself and heads to the kitchen.

"To what do I owe this honor?" asked Tolar.

"Business, I'm afraid."

"I expected as much. And, it probably has to do with the new bridges, right?"

"Yes. Care to talk about that?"

"Maybe. But first, what is your interest here, besides your mill at Granton."

She felt that since she was going directly to see Mac when she left here, she could say,

"The mill is not involved in this. And, it may not be mine much longer."

"Oh, you finally selling it?"

"Yes. To the people that run it."

"Very commendable. They are lucky to have you as an owner," he smiled.

"Tolar, I need to know exactly how you feel about the bridge issue and whether you would be willing to be a part of it," she stated, bluntly

His face lost it's smile. He started to say something when Miranda appeared. She asked Emily if she cared for anything. Emily said she would have a pint of dark. Miranda smiled and headed to the bar.

"The Upland folks have sent me a lot of work over the years. If I commit to the new bridges, that supply will dry up...quickly," he said.

"I understand. But, have you thought about all the new work generated by the new building in the north? The mill would double it's shipments to the northern villages and the Clanners only have a few good woodworkers. Not nearly enough."

"No, I'd not thought that far ahead, really. But I see your point. Maybe it's time a few more skilled workers split with Underhill's Council."

"It would certainly help cut the stranglehold they have on progress in the north."

"I will think on it Emily. Oh, one more thing. There is talk that Gandrath and the dwarves are planning to go ahead with the building. That will not set well with the Council."

"It's more than talk, Tolar. They are starting in a few days."

"What happens if Underhill sets the watch on them?"

"Not a problem with a few thousand Shielders, goblins and warks watching over things," Emily grinned.

"You're kidding!"

"No. But it would be best if that weren't generally known, ok?"

"Sure. Thanks for thinking of me, Emily. My best to Mac."

"Of course."

"I'll let you know soon what I decide."

After finishing her pint and a short conversation with Marinda, Emily headed to the smithy to see Jonas. She felt that things went well with Tolar and hoped to have as much luck here. As she pulled the carriage into the smithy yard, Jonas came out to meet her.

"Emily Bandar. What brings you to my place this fine day?"

"Your help, Jonas. But not for me personally."

"I already know what you are about young lady, and the answer is no."

Damn. This was going to be harder than she thought.

"Well, at least hear me out, Jonas."

"No need. I've been talking to Derrik Jons and he says that the Mage Gandrath is trying to undermine the Council on this."

"Not at all. Have you talked to Erik Darkman?"

"No, he works for Bentley. I know where he stands."

"The issue here Jonas is what is best for Losandia, not what's best for Underhill's interests. Gandrath is simply trying to break the stranglehold of the Council. The villages to the north deserve a chance to compete with the river towns, wouldn't you agree?"

"To some degree, yes. But the Black Forest is above the Sorrel. Why can't the lumber come directly across the Shell Plains to the Port?"

"They would have to build another mill at the Port. Why do that when there is already one in operation at Granton. It's that finished lumber that needs to get to the Northern villages and the new bridges would ensure that."

"And, it's your mill we're talking about here, right?"

"It is right now, but not for long. I'm selling it to the workers."

"Really, I hadn't heard that."

"Well...I'm just on my way there right now, to give them all the news. You've heard it before them, actually."

So, now the Council would be in competition with the mill and Vale lumber, right?"

"Just like all the taverns and inns are in competition with each other. Is that really a problem?"

"I suppose not. I just don't like the way Gandrath is going about it, thats all."

"And just what do you think he should do? The minute the dwarves start laying stone for the first bridge, Underhill will have the city watch on them. And, they have Plainsmen to help."

"So, Gandrath is trying to call their bluff? He might be a Mage, but he can't stop it alone."

"Well, he has some help. The dwarves really want these bridges as much as anyone. They have not been able to bring their product across the Sorrel without enormous taxes, you know."

"And, they have their Shielders, right?"

"Yes. And more. But this is not the real issue here, Jonas. The problem is free enterprise for all the people of Losandia, not just those with lots of money and power."

"Hmm...let me think on this a while, ok?"

"Of course. We will need two good smiths for the building. I was hoping those would be you and Erik. Let me know your decision soon. The construction starts very soon."

"Wow. How soon?"

"In the next few days, Jonas. It's been needed for years."

"I will be going to see Erik soon. I will give him my decision then. Thanks for explaining things, Emily."

"You're most welcome. I hope, for all our sake, that you and Tolar agree to help."

"I'd best get back."

"Thanks, Jonas."

Emily thought that things with Jonas went as well as she could have hoped for. She felt that these kind of discussions were critical and was glad she had the time to do them. She headed to Granton now, excited to tell Mac all about her side trip to Sutterton.

Olt Grond, bridge-master, stood at the Black Forest end of the Sorrel bridge and watched the wagons as they approached. They were loaded with lumber from the Great Black heading for Alvarstad Craft & Lumber and the Shipwright Shop in Port Sorrel. He knew these big loads meant a healthy toll, which meant a nice profit for him.

Olt has worked this bridge all his life as was his father before him. The Underhill family hired his father for life and all his heirs. Olt's son would take his place some day. It would not be good if more bridges were built, with new blood as watchmen. He was sure they would want new guidelines on the toll structure, something that he now controls. As long as the Council is happy with the way he did things, he was set for his and his son's life.

He had discussed this with two businessmen that also stood to lose with the new bridges, Sloan Millard and Mark Bonds. They own the Beggars Lot and Pathway Inn, respectively. Even though the Beggars Lot was on the bad side of Derwend, it served all the lumbermen and dock workers as well as thieves and cut purses. Sloan was not anxious to lose any of his customers to other taverns, especially to the Bearded Lady or the Valeman. He was not fond of dwarves and was not in favor of their businesses prospering.

Mark Bonds had a nice tavern that was a favorite among the lumbermen. He didn't mind dwarves as long as he didn't lose any customers to them and Sloan had him convinced the new bridges would cut his profits considerably.

This situation was perfect for Olt. He made a deal with these two and assured them they would be safe from losing any customers. With just a small amount of money from them, he could hire the right people to sabotage the new bridges. These people frequented the Beggars Lot and several of them lived under the bridge, with Olt's permission of course. They would be more than happy to take on the job, as a favor to Olt. And, a little bit of money would ensure their keeping quiet.

Emily pulled her carriage into the mill late in the afternoon. She made her way to Mac's office and found him deep in conversation with another worker. He looked up and smiled and said he would be right with her. As the worker was on his way out, she asked him if he would notify everyone to meet in the dining hall in thirty minutes. The worker assured her they would all be there.

Mac gave her a puzzled look and said,

"What's up now? Do we have shortages again?"

"No, there is no problem. In fact, it's good news I bear."

"What a treat. Things are really getting slow here. I hope you have new business for us."

"In a way, yes. I first want to update you on the Gandrath meeting."

"And, second?"

She gave him her most gracious smile and said,

"You'll see."

She gave him the details of the meeting and finally said,

"Now, the second piece of news. I've decided to sell the mill to the workers. Immediately."

He was dumbfounded. He knew they had talked about it, but thought for sure it would not happen till after the bridge issue was solved, maybe next year. She looked at him for a second, then came over and hugged him tightly.

"I want to tell the workers personally. Ready to go?"

"You couldn't keep me away!" he answered, smiling widely.

The mill was at a standstill and very quiet when they made their way to the dining hall. Mac took a seat and Emily stood at his right hand. She explained that she was selling the mill to all the workers, as equal partners and each worker would share in the profits. The writ was being drawn up now and Mac would be the foreman. She would not be involved at all in the running of the mill any more.

There was a few seconds pause and then the stunned workers let out a loud hooray! Mac was beaming and got up and hugged her. Emily was asked several questions which she answered as best she could and told them she would give each one a copy of the sales agreement as soon as it was finished being drawn up.

And, so the first part of her task was over. She and Mac went back to the office where she proceeded to tell him the main reason she was selling.

"I have enough to do with the Sorrel and Grub&Grog. This mill was something I really was not interested in."

"Is that the main reason?"

"No. That would be the secondary reason. I think you know the main one. I want to work on our relationship and I can't do that as your boss."

"Exactly the words I've been hoping to hear! You've made me very happy. I feel exactly the same way."

Mac closed the curtains on the office door, which meant he was in conference and not to be disturbed. It turned out to be the best conference he had attended all week.

They made many plans that evening, including dinner at the Mystic, in Lady Mortan's private room. She seemed to know what they were up to even before they told her. Mystics seemed to have a way of knowing these things, she told them.

They asked her not to mention anything, since nothing was definite yet. After the bridge issue was resolved, they would make their decisions and make it known. Lady Mortan was friends with Kevin Bandar and has known Emily since she was born. She told them both how happy she was for them and that she could recommend a great ship Captain, when the time came.

They both smiled at her and she left them to finish their dinner.

Three

Construction started right on time at both bridge sites. The foundations were finished in one long day. Two Caver dwarves were assigned at each site, just in case. There was no sign of the city watch.

All of a sudden there were two huge explosions, simultaneously, one at each site. The cement blew in every direction and all the support girders came down. Many man hours of work destroyed in a second.

But worse, the two dwarves on watch were crushed by falling cement. They both died instantly.

Nobody saw the men that set the charges, but almost everyone in Sutterton heard the blast. Riders were sent immediately to Gandrath and Gitar. Those in Strehen also heard the blast from the bridge on the River Kline. Gitar himself dispatched a rider to Gandrath. About an hour later, the rider reported to Gitar about the Sorrel bridge. He immediately sent word to Orgar to organize a party and be ready to ride within the hour.

While the rider was reporting to Gandrath about the bridge on the Sorrel, another rider came galloping in and reported the same thing happened to the Kline bridge. Gandrath gave instructions for the Strehen rider to take a message to Gitar to meet him in Upland as soon as possible.

Of course, it was not necessary, because a very large group of Shielder and Caver dwarves were already heading to Underhill's house. Fortunately, Gandrath got there way ahead of them.

"Do you realize what you have done?" shouted Gandrath.

"I've done nothing...yet! I still have to talk to Kyle Baas. He is wavering for some odd reason," answered Underhill.

"Wavering? I think not. Did he set the charges and blow up the foundations?"

"Charges? Blow up? What in the hell are you talking about Gandrath?"

"There were explosions at both bridge sites during the night. Surely you're not saying you knew nothing about it!"

"That's exactly what I'm saying. I would never do that and risk outright war. Was anyone hurt?"

"Two Caver dwarves were killed. I expect Gitar and a large group of Shielders are on their way here right now," responded Gandrath.

"You have to believe me. I had absolutely nothing to do with this. But, I can find out who did, that's for sure."

Gandrath looked straight into Underhill's eyes and saw something there. He decided that he may be telling the truth.

"You do that and get word to me as soon as you know anything. I will head off Gitar and his dwarves."

"Thank you, Gandrath."

"Don't thank me yet. I still have some very hard questions for you...and Bass," Gandrath said as he stormed off towards the Sorrel bridge.

That's where he would head off Gitar. He thought about it as he waited on the Alvarstad side of the bridge. Who else besides Underhill benefits from the bridges being stopped? Any of the merchants in any river town, for sure. But who has the most to lose?

Just then, he saw someone walking toward him from the middle of the bridge. He recognized Olt Grond as he was approached.

"Morning Gandrath. You're up early today," said Olt.

"Just waiting on Gitar Dunst and some dwarves to come this way. The new bridge foundations were blown up during the night and two dwarves were killed," Gandrath replied, looking closely at Olt.

"That's terrible. Anything I can do to help?"

Gandrath studied him just a moment longer and said,

"No, but you better watch out, here comes Gitar."

Just then, a hundred angry dwarves entered the forest side of the bridge. Gandrath moved to the middle of the bridge and halted the lead dwarf, Gitar. He caught a quick glimpse of Olt running down the street towards Alvarstad. He wished he had time to follow him. Something in his eyes said he knew something.

"Hold, Gitar!" he said as he backed up, letting all the dwarves come to a stop on the bridge.

"Have you found Underhill yet?"

"Yes, and he denies any knowledge."

"Of course he does. Maybe he will be more forthcoming with a sword to his throat."

"Not necessary. I believe him. Someone else has planned and executed this thing and I intend to find out who. Meanwhile, you take these dwarves and go perform your ceremonies for the two that were killed." ordered Gandrath.

Gitar hesitated, looking directly at Gandrath and finally said,

"Very well. We will leave this with you. But, if you don't find something in a couple days, we will be back to deal with Underhill and his cohorts."

"I'll get word to you by tomorrow, latest," said Gandrath.

Kyle Baas was just coming out of his office when he ran into Gandrath. He was shocked to see the Mage in Derwend. Something must be really wrong.

"A word, Kyle?"

"Of course," said Kyle as he headed back into the office.

"Have you heard the news yet?"

"No, what news?"

"The bridge foundations were destroyed last night. Two dwarves were killed."

"Damn. I knew something bad was going to happen," he responded, shaken.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I've been waiting for Underhill to tell me when to go out and stop the building process. I can't believe he would do something so risky."

"Risky?" asked Gandrath.

"We all know the dwarves want these bridges. He knows I don't have the manpower to go against the Shielders and whoever else Gitar brings into it. The dwarves would clobber us."

"I don't think Underhill was responsible. It was someone else."

"Oh, good. I wasn't even sure how I would stop the construction. Any idea who did it?"

"No, but I'm working on it. Thanks for your time."

At the same time, Dean Underhill went to see Mark Bonds. He suspected Mark and Olt were involved and he needed to know how.

"Tell me what you know, Mark," ordered Underhill.

"Nothing, I swear," said Bonds.

"I don't believe you. If you don't tell me what you know, I'll send some people to turn the Pathway into a pile of smoking ruins. Then, I'll tell Gandrath you know who did it, but you won't tell. He has very interesting ways to make people talk," Underhill bluffed.

Bonds looked terrified.

"Ok, ok, I'll tell you. It was Olt Grond's idea. He said my Inn would suffer greatly by more bridges and he offered cash for my help."

"Olt Grond? I don't believe it."

"It's true. I can show you the cash he gave me."

"Is there anyone else involved?"

"Yes, Sloan Millard supplied the manpower to set the charges. He can verify it was Olt's plan."

"Very well. You'll be hearing from the city watch soon. Do not try to leave town. I will find you."

Underhill immediately put the word out on the street that he needed to see Gandrath. He went to his office to wait. He knew it wouldn't take long.

Sure enough, within the hour Gandrath knocked on his door. He explained everything he learned from Bonds. He was hoping he would not be the one to confront Olt, since they were old friends and it would be hard to do.

"I'll go find Grond. You get word to Kyle Baas to round up the other two."

"What will happen to them?" asked Underhill.

"Not sure yet, but it won't be pleasant. The dwarves are very hard on those that kill their own."

"Yes, I can imagine," Underhill winced.

"Thanks for your work on this. I'll make sure the dwarves know."

"Appreciate it," said Underhill, relieved that that he was not suspected any more.

But, he still wasn't sure this little stunt of Olt's would stop the building. He still needed to figure out how the watch could be used without causing a war.

Olt Grond was starting to worry. He hadn't heard back from Sloan or Bonds all day. He decided to go to the Beggar's Lot and find Sloan.

"Thought you might show up here," said Gandrath.

"Again we meet. Just what do you want with me, Gandrath?"

Gandrath was almost going to enjoy this. He handed a pair of wrist straps to Olt and said,

"Here, put these on."

"Why? What have I done? I'm not doing any such thing!" shouted Olt.

The next thing Olt knew he was sitting in a chair at a table with the leather straps firmly around his wrists. He didn't even see the Mage move.

"You're not cooperating very well, Olt. That won't help your situation. Bonds gave you up. So, you might as well talk."

For the next half hour Olt pleaded for his life. Gandrath showed no sympathy. Kyle Baas came in then with Millard and Bonds in tow. They both had wrist straps on also.

"I've sent several city watch to round up the ones who set the charges. Millard was kind enough to supply me with what I needed. Wasn't that kind of him, Gandrath?"

"An absolute model of courtesy," smiled Gandrath.

"What will we do with them all?" asked Kyle.

"I need you to take them to Gitar in Strehen. The dwarves have a ritual to perform for the slain dwarves and they will be the guest of honor, I imagine."

"We'll go as soon as my men return with the other two."

"Thanks. Better guard them well. It wouldn't do to cheat the dwarves out of their ceremony."

"Count on it, Gandrath."

By now most everyone knew of the bridge explosions. When Kyle returned from delivering the culprits to Gitar, he decided to get the word out on the five men. He wanted to make sure that everyone, including the Council, knew that they were found and would be punished. Maybe this would stop all talk of war between the city watch and the dwarves. The bridges were going to be built, period. Everyone that had an interest in this so called war needed to stand down.

He had his men post filers in all the river towns, Granton, Barrowdale and many villages in the Shell Steppes and the Plains. Now he could get on with more important things.

Four

The bridge foundations were eventually fixed and building continued. Temporary detours were setup on both the Sorrel and Kline so as not to impede existing boat traffic.

There weren't many boats on the Sorrel these days and that's why one in particular could not go by unnoticed. It was an old wooden boat with only a few people on board. One of the Shipwright Shop employees in Port Sorrel noticed it heading inland one day and ask his co-workers if they had seen anything like it. Nobody ever had. He reported it to Bentley and forgot about it.

Bentley was heading to Alvarstad today to see Carrey Danworth about a lumber purchase and he would ask around. When he arrived at the Craft&Lumber he put the word out about this unknown boat. Nobody had ever seen it. This intrigued Bentley, so on his way back home he stopped at several taverns in Derwend and Sutterton. Nobody had ever noticed it before.

Now he was really interested. He stopped at the Sign of the Rooster to talk to Marinda. They cater to sailors at the Rooster and she knows about all the traffic on the river.

After explaining about the boat, Marinda put the word out on the streets of Sutterton. Within an hour two reports came back that it was seen by several people in town, but none know of its origin. Bentley decided to find the boat and he calls on a friend that lives in town. He agrees to go out and investigate.

Bentley and Marinda were just finishing dinner when in walked his friend.

"We found the boat you described and asked the crew their origin. They were very cordial and said they were from Norinda, an island about a twenty miles east of Losandia. They were just exploring the island and meant no harm to anyone. We believed them and invited them to stop by here the next time they came. I hope that was alright, Marinda," the friend reported.

"Of course it was. I would love to host strangers from an island we didn't even know existed."

She asked everyone in the tavern if anyone had heard of Norinda. None had. She sent runners to the Derwend and Alvarstad taverns to see if anyone knew anything. This was very exciting news and she asked Bentley if they should take it to the Upland Council.

"Not so fast. Lets see what these people are all about before the Council gets their hooks into them."

"I agree. They will find out eventually, though," Marinda said.

"But maybe we can befriend them and set up some trading before they do, eh. Please let me know the minute they come back, ok?" asked Bentley.

"You will be the first to know," answered Marinda.

It was the next day that Emily and Mac were having lunch at the Sorrel Tavern and discussing what they knew about the explosions and those that were apprehended.

"I've heard so many different stories about who was responsible, I'm not sure what to believe," said Emily.

"And, I think I've heard even more. I even heard that Underhill and the Council planned the whole thing, which I think is absurd. That would be too easily proven and cause a war for sure," Mac responded.

"I think the best thing we could do is ride up to the Keep and talk to Gandrath."

"I agree. When do we leave?" Mac asked.

"How about first thing in the morning. I have some tavern business to finish this afternoon."

"Ok. See you for breakfast."

He kissed her and headed out. She realized how much she depended on him. And, how he was always there for her. Sure, she could get anyone to accompany her to the Keep, but it was his company she liked best.

Just then, a couple sailors came in for lunch. She recognized one and greeted him as she was going to her office.

"Afternoon, Emily. Heard the news about the mysterious boat?" he asked.

"No, I haven't. What boat is this?"

"One was spotted on the Sorrel yesterday and was stopped by someone from Sutterton. Turns out it was from an island east of here called Norinda," answered the sailor.

"Well, what were they doing here?"

"Not sure. Just looking us over I guess."

"I've never heard of Norinda."

She turned to face the crowd having lunch and asked if anyone has ever heard of this island. Nobody had. She was very intrigued and decided they would ask Gandrath about it tomorrow.

"Thanks for the news," she said to the sailor.

Right after breakfast the next morning, Mac and Emily set out to see Gandrath. They discussed the possibilities of an island neighbor during the ride. They both thought there could be many benefits for both islands if they were friendly and had some things Losandia did not.

They would discuss it with Gandrath right after getting the details of the bridge explosions. Gandrath invited them up without delay. He liked Emily as he did her father Kevin, and his father before him. She was smart and understood the way of things, he thought. Just like her father.

"Morning, Gandrath," Emily said as they came into the library.

"Or is it afternoon by now?" asked Mac.

"You rode all the way here just to ask about the explosions?" Gandrath asked.

"How did you know...never mind. Yes, we did," Emily smiled.

"Seat yourselves and I'll tell you everything."

When they had heard all the details, Emily said she had news herself. She proceeded to tell him all they had heard of the boat and Norinda.

"Have you ever heard of this island?" Mac asked.

"Yes. A long time ago. I wasn't aware their population had advanced enough to build a boat, however. The island was very poor and were mostly farmers. They did have an iron ore pit, though. Maybe they are hoping Losandia needs some. Did Bentley's friend say anything about them wanting to trade?"

"Not that I heard," answered Emily.

"I will talk to him directly. Then maybe a visit to Norinda is in order," Gandrath said.

"Must be nice to be able to travel like that," Mac responded.

"Like what? By ship? You can do that too, right?" answered Gandrath.

"Yea, but your ships go a bit faster than any I've ever been on," smiled Mac.

"So, I presume the bridge construction is back on track?" asked Emily.

"Yes, it is"

"Why do I have this feeling there will be more trouble?" she asked.

"Not from Underhill, there won't. Kyle Baas has just about decided to take his watch independent. And Underhill knows I'm watching him. I think he has accepted the inevitable."

"I hope you're right," Emily said.

"Maybe the time is ripe for us to think about restructuring the watch. Cut their ties to Upland," Mac added.

"I think you're right. I'd like to see all the cities along the Sorrel benefit from the watch. Even river traffic. I will have a talk with Kyle and give him some suggestions," stated Gandrath.

"And, a Council that represents all the cities, also," Emily added.

"Sort of like an island wide Council, you mean?" asked Mac.

"Oh, yes. And it could be comprised of not just humans, but all races on Losandia.," added Emily.

Gandrath thought about how he would like a Council making decisions about Losandia, taking some of the pressure off him.

"I think it's a fine idea. Shall we put it to some of the more prominent business owners to get their opinions?" asked Gandrath.

"Emily and I will put a list together of all those we think would good candidates for a new Council and get it to you."

"I like the way you two think. Maybe we will name one of you Council chairperson," Gandrath said, smiling.

As the two headed back home, they discussed all the benefits of an island-wide Council. It could help relations between the races as well as benefit all businesses. The only issue would be the Upland Council. They would not be happy losing any control of anything. Men with money and power seldom do.

Emily was not sure how they would handle wresting control from Upland, but she was sure there were those on the island that would. She wished her father was alive. He would definitely have ideas that she could use. He always was able to make her see all the possibilities of a situation and helped her many times to choose the right one.

Gitar and Orgar were discussing how to handle the five men responsible for the explosions. The dwarves that gathered at the Kline bridge site represented Clanner, Hillers, Cavers and Shielders. Even though the two dwarves killed were Cavers, they all had a say in the decision.

Generally, any human that killed a dwarf would be hanged. But with five of them, something else needs to be done. After long discussions, it was decided that they were all equally to blame, even though there were only two that set the explosion. The other three planned it and hired it done.

Even though Gitar and Orgar were generally the ones to made most clan decisions, the healer Eres was the most respected. So, it was he who decided the fate of the five humans.

They would be turned over to the families of the two slain dwarves. It would be up to the families how they would die. But, die they would. It was dwarven justice and could not be ignored. And, it would not be generally known what the families decided upon, especially by other races.

With that resolved, Gitar asked the dwarves present about naming the bridges after the two who gave their life protecting them. It was unanimously agreed. The bridge on the Kline would be called the Oren bridge and the Sorrel bridge would be the Prather.

Gitar would notify the bridge builders of their decision and did not think there would be any objections. He also announced to those assembled that the Mage Gandrath did not expect any more trouble from Underhill or the Upland Council. But, he asked Orgar and his Shielders to keep a light patrol on both sites, just in case. Orgar agreed.

All dwarves and most humans believed the bridges would help all business owners prosper. Even the Warrows living in Barrowdale would have increased business. Dunkel Ratherby and his son Picker, who owned the Barrowdale Supply Co, believed the bridges were a good idea, too.

Mallor Dunharrow, owner of the Cutpurse Inn in Barrowdale was not so sure. He grew all his own vegetables and took game out of Apslee Downs and The Vale to serve his customers. He bought very few supplies from either Granton or Sutterton.

He hired Picker for odd jobs and liked the wee Barrow. Picker believed the bridges would bring a lot more things to Barrowdale from the north, like stone, lumber and building supplies. This would help their village grow and maybe even more businesses would be started. Someday he dreamed of owning his own small tavern. He did not want to take over his father's Inn because he thought it was too big and hard to manage.. He was sure he would inherit the business, but he would sell it and build his tavern. He didn't say any of this to Mallor, however.

Picker was aware of some that did not care about the bridges. There was a witch that lived in a place called Hideaway in the Harn Wastes on southern Losandia. She was rarely seen by anybody. When Picker was young he explored the Wastes and did see her, but never talked to her. He always said he would find her again, but had never made the time.

There was also believed to be Conjurers that lived in the Fens. They had almost no contact with anyone except warks. But, nobody saw much of warks either.

Some believe this is all folk lore passed down to scare little children into behaving, but Picker knew better. He just didn't know anyone that was interested enough into finding these creatures. What would be the reason, he thought?

Mac had wrestled with this decision for quite sometime now. He thought about all the things coming up that he and Emily were an integral part of and he finally made up his mind.

He went to the Sorrel Tavern for breakfast and greeted Emily. It was a little early for regular customers, but Emily always made sure to take care of any early risers. It was just one of the things he loved about her. She was always obliging others even if it meant extra work for her.

She smiled at him as he took his regular seat at the back table, and said,

"You look like you have something heavy on your mind."

"I always think heavy thoughts, especially about you and me."

"So, what will we be up to this morning?"

"Not, we. Me. I've made the decision to quit the mill and work with you full time," he said.

"My...how long have you been considering this, may I ask?"

"You're not pleased?"

"Of course. It's just the first you've ever mentioned it, thats all."

Their breakfast arrived and they discussed things as they ate. He told her about hiring another foreman and who he thought would do a good job. As he was expounding on the man's qualifications, she interrupted him,

"You don't have to convince me, Mac. It's not my mill anymore."

"Oh yeah. Habit, I guess."

"What exactly do you want to do?" she asked.

"Well, I don't know much about running a tavern and since you have two to take care of, I could learn and help you."

"And would you leave Granton?"

"Yes. I thought I could get a room at the Grog and help run it. But, I don't want to learn from anyone else but you."

"So, maybe you could live here at Sorrel with me and I could teach you."

"And, I could see you every day. Wow! That sounds great to me. Wouldn't you get tired of me under foot?"

"Oh, I can think of many things you could do that would take you out of the tavern. Even out of Derwend. That would help keep up from getting on each others nerves."

"So, you approve of the idea?" he asked.

"If you are willing, I am," she smiled.

"Ok, great. We'll try it for six months and re-evaluate things then, ok?"

"That long, eh?" She grinned and he knew she was kidding him.

Later that day, they sat down in her office to discuss making the list for Gandrath.

"Have you given some thought as to who should represent?" Emily asked.

"Yes. I think one person from each race should represent their own. Maybe two for humans, since we are more in numbers."

"Each person would be sort of a delegate for their people, with one vote each. There are seven races on Losandia and an extra human would be eight delegates."

"What about the name of the Council. I kind of like Island Council of Losandia, or Island Council for short."

"Sounds perfect. And, not much of a change for everyone. Upland to Island." Mac said.

They continued discussing exactly who the delegates would be. When they had their list, they decided to set out in the morning to talk to each prospective delegate and discuss it with them.

Then they discussed the place this new Council would hold their meetings. It had to be somewhere sort of neutral and central on Losandia. They both agreed on Port Sorrel since both humans and dwarves lived and worked there. It was central to the northern and southern cities. And, if Bentley is chosen, he lives there and could build new Council chambers near the Shipwright.

Satisfied with their list, they headed out the next morning to interview everyone. It would probably take several days, but it was necessary. They would first make sure the candidate agreed to be a delegate. If not, who they would recommend. Then they had to make a prioritized list of things they would like addresses. There would be a meeting in two weeks time with Gandrath to discuss more issues.

Emily was still not sure how they would inform the Upland Council about this, but it should be all of the delegates and Gandrath. He would be the peace keeper when Underhill exploded, she thought, smiling.

While Mac and Emily were doing their interviews, Gandrath was heading to Norinda. He wanted to see the changes since the last time he was there. He found the island to be small compared to Losandia and the only industry was an iron ore pit. It was called Cullen Iron Works and a man named Bradley Cullen owned it.

Things on the island were very primitive. Everything the people needed they made themselves. Cullen said he wanted to modernize the island and needed information on trade possibilities. Gandrath explained that a new Council on Losandia is being established and he will get him an appointment. They would definitely be interested in trading lumber and other supplies for iron ore. Cullen is pleased.

Gandrath also talkf to the boat crew that was on the Sorrel last week. They said that they were invited to a place called Sign of the Rooster the next time they come over. The owner, Marinda, would love to have them. Gandrath doesn't doubt this for a minute. She would be the talk of Losandia.

He told Cullen he will send him a message when he can come before the Council, but it may be a month or more. On his way back to the Keep, he vowed to find another island, preferably a deserted one. He thinks it's time for him to leave Losandia and let the people manage things on their own. They have a good start with the new bridges and possible new Council and he is confident they don't need him anymore. It's time for a few hundred years of peace and quiet.

Mistress Kallie had no idea that Port Sorrel was being considered for the new Council headquarters. If she knew, she would sell the Ridgemont and start another one there. She knew that her best chance of getting another place is with Horace. She also knew that he was in the Mercantile business and doesn't know much about taverns. But if she offered him part of the Ridgemont as collateral on a loan, he may decide to help her.

One bright sunny day, she went to the Mercantile to see Horace. He had finally finished the inventory and agreed to see her. She made herself comfortable in his office.

"I think you can guess why I'm here, right?" she asked.

"Yes, I think I can," he grimaces.

"So, Horace, this time I have an idea you may just like. How would you like to be part owner of the Ridgemont?"

"Really? You would consider that?"

"I want a new restaurant in Port Sorrel and this is one way I can get it. I would be willing to give you twenty percent ownership for a loan to start the building. What do you say?"

"How much money are we talking about here?"

"Well, the Ridgemont is valued at a hundred thousand. I would need at least twenty thousand to get my place going. I would get the rest from a bank after I break ground."

Horace knew the Ridgemont was worth more, so he must have a default clause. This could make him a small fortune if he got her to agree to part ownership in the new place also.

She knew he was considering his options.

"What do you say, Horace?"

"I'll agree on one condition. If you default on the loan I get another ten percent of the Ridgemont and ten percent of the new place. What will you call it, do you know?"

"The Skylark Inn. And, I agree to your terms. I think you will make a sound partner."

He almost felt bad for what he had been thinking, but not quite.

"Done then. Will you have the papers drawn?"

"Yes. I'll be by next week with them ready to sign. I'd like to start building right away, do you have the cash?"

"I do. I'll have it ready when you return."

"Pleasure doing business with you Horace. Till then," she said, giving him her most pleasant smile.

Kallie couldn't have been happier about how that went. But, before she went to the solicitor to draw up the papers, she would run this by Underhill. Just to make sure she couldn't get hurt. He was a businessman and would give her sound advice, she thought. Little did she know that it was the best business deal she had ever made. And the new tavern would be a gold mine.

Horace had the same idea. He checked with a friend also to find out what could go wrong. His friend assured him it was a very good deal. He felt very good about it all.

Mac had to do a lot of talking to convince Emily she should be one of the human Council delegates. They both agreed Bentley Mathes should be the other. Next came the dwarves. It was a tossup between Eres Ferryman or Paren Dunner. Eres was very well respected by all the dwarves and he was very level headed and would make an excellent delegate. But, Paren was from Granton and it would be very wise to have a dwarf from a southern city as a delegate. This would be a very difficult decision, so they needed some help. They would go to Gitar. They could trust him to keep it quiet and give them good advice.

They arrived at Gitar's store early afternoon and asked to see him. They were escorted directly to his office. They explained their dilemma.

"I believe Eres is probably a better choice, but he is a healer and his time is in great demand. He may not be able to devote the time to such an important position," Gitar said.

Both Emily and Mac noticed that if Gitar was disappointed by not making the list, there was no sign in his response.

"So, Paren should be the one. We liked him because he was from a southern city," Emily explained.

"Quite correct. This would make two of the eight from the south. Excellent idea," observed Gitar.

"So that's it then. We will head to Granton and talk to Paren. Then to Barrowdale," Mac said.

"This is all so exciting and will be very good for everyone on Losandia. I congratulate you both on the plan and with Gandrath behind you, it should succeed. Providing Underhill doesn't cause too many problems," Gitar said, smiling.

"We will let Gandrath deal with him. He seems to be very good at it," Grinned Mac.

The construction on the bridges was moving forward exactly as planned. No more trouble had arisen. Apparently, Underhill was shaken by his encounter with Gandrath and, along with realizing his city watch would not be enough to go up against the dwarves, he decided to stand down.

The workers on the Oren bridge on the Kline consisted mostly Caver and Hiller dwarves. Working with them were several woodworkers and craftsmen, and the smith was Erik Darkman, all from Port Sorrel. They all worked very well together and the city watch was not even present. Orgar's Shielders were seen riding around the site from time to time, however.

At the Prather bridge site, things were going just as well. Workers there were predominately humans, with a few Caver dwarves for those special jobs only they could do. The smith was Jonas from Sutterton. Bentley had a lot of his workers handling the pieces of construction where his yards were needed. And, of course, the Shielders were also seen every once in a while.

Gandrath was kept apprised of the bridge progress by Gitar and Bentley. They were meeting one week at the Bearded Lady in Strehen and Gitar commented on a visit he had from Mac and Emily. He didn't give any details when questioned by Bentley and Gandrath nodded his approval.

"I think I can depend on your discretion," Gandrath said, looking at Bentley.

"Of course," Bentley said.

"There is a movement underfoot to start a new Council for all of Losandia. The Upland Council has proven where their loyalties lie and it does not benefit anyone but them. I am working with Emily Bandar and Mac Finnegan to decide who would sit on this Council and what they would be doing."

"Bold move. Do you anticipate trouble from Underhill?" asked Bentley

"Always. But we will deal with it," answered Gandrath.

"How will this affect the dwarves and the other races?" asked Gitar.

"They will have equal delegates on the Council with the humans."

"This will be a very difficult thing to do, I think," said Gitar.

"You don't know Emily and Mac, do you?" Gandrath

Mac and Emily were shown a private table at the Valeman Pub in Granton and Paren joined them.

"Glad to see you both," said Paren.

"We are happy to see you too, Paren. We have, what we believe, is some very exciting news to tell you," Emily started.

"Oh. I love exciting news."

"Attached to it is a very important question for you too," Mac added.

Paren's face hardened and he said,

"That sounds serious."

Emily gave him the details on the bridges and where the Council stood with the city watch. She did not believe Paren knew the details and when she was finished, he looked paled.

Mac continued with the details on the idea about a new Council. He explained about the list they compiled.

"We have selected you to be the delegate for the dwarves. I've explained a little of what would be required of a councilman and it would take up quite a bit of your time while it was being established. Then we believe things would settle down."

"What do you think, Paren?" asked Emily.

When he found his voice, Paren said quietly,

"Of all the dwarves on Losandia, you chose me!"

"Honestly, it was between you and Eres Ferryman. But, since he is a healer, it didn't seem fair to ask him to commit so much time," explained Emily.

"Just to be remotely compared to Eres Ferryman is quite an honor," he said quietly.

"That's what Gitar thought also. He thinks very highly of you both," Mac added.

They talked about the position for a while longer, answering all Paren's questions. In the end he finally agreed.

"It will be great to work with you, Paren. Thank you for taking the time to listen and accepting this position. You should get a formal writ in a couple weeks explaining in detail how the Council will work," Emily said.

"And, please be prepared to come to Port Sorrel after that for our first meeting," Mac added.

"Thank you both. I will be there. And, I promise not to tell anyone about this just yet."

"Good. See you then."

As they headed the short distance to Barrowdale, they discussed the choice they made in Paren.

"I think he is honored and will do very well," Emily said.

"I agree. Now, how do we calm an excited Barrow down and make him understand just what we are asking of him?"

"That's a really good question. I have no idea," grinned Emily.

It was late afternoon when they walked into Barrowdale Supply and asked for Dunkel. He was surprised to see them and escorted them to his office and shut the door. Emily started again explaining the events of the bridges. Dunkel had heard less than Paren, so there were many questions.

Once Mac started on the new Council, Dunkel got very excited and really started firing questions at them.

"Please, Dunkel, let us finish and then we will answer all your questions," Emily said.

A bit embarrassed, Dunkel nodded and Mac started again. But when they finally finished answering his questions, Dunkel said,

"I would be honored to accept your proposal. Just one more question. Why not Mallor Dunharrow?"

"We just never considered him. And, remember Dunkel, not a word to anyone until you get your notice," answered Mac.

Dunkel nodded and beamed.

When they left Dunkel's store, Emily told Mac that was a very nice thing to say to Dunkel about not considering Mallor. She could tell it made him feel very important. And, for a Barrow that was a good thing.

It was too late to get all the way back to Derwend, so Mac suggested they stay at his old place in Granton. Emily grinned and said,

"With dinner at The Mystic?"

"Absolutely. But what shall we tell Lady Mortan when she asks us why we are there?"

"Mill business," answered Emily.

They couldn't let Lady Mortan know any of their real purpose or it would be all over Losandia in hours.

"That's two down, I hope the rest go as easy," said Mac.

"Me too. I think Bentley will be easy. I'm not so sure about Bentore and Spinthorn."

"And, do we talk to the drakken or have Bentore do it?"

"I think we will ask Bentore. He knows how to find them easier," answered Emily.

Gandrath was very pleased with the reports from both Gitar on the progress with the bridges and Emily on the progress with the new Council. He decided it may be time to stop helping Losandia with their growing problems and let them handle things for themselves.

After talking with his staff, they all agree they should find another island and move the Keep there. They would close this one up and magically seal it from any unwanted intrusions.

After a short search, they found an uninhabited island and moved all their belongings there. He told only one person on Losandia where they would be and how to reach him. He gave her a small crystal and instructs her on how to use it to contact him. He told her to use it for only dire emergencies. Emily agrees. He said that if anyone wants him, he is busy with a new project and can't be disturbed.

The last thing he did before he left was to check in with Underhill and Gitar to make sure everything is ok with them. He doesn't tell them he is leaving, but asks not to be contacted. He is starting a new project and does not want to be disturbed for a while.

Gitar seems worried, but Underhill seemed pleased with this request. Gandrath notices this and is sure he will be up to no good soon. But, that is not his problem. The new Council and city watch will have to deal with it.

Mac was having coffee a couple days later, when Emily came in. She said she just heard that the boat from Norinda was back and stopped at the Sign of the Rooster. Marinda is hosting them for lunch today.

"I wonder if Gandrath ever went there," said Emily.

"And, if so, what he learned."

"Well, we can't ask him. He is busy on his next project and doesn't want to be disturbed," Emily said with as straight a face as she could.

"Maybe Marinda will know. Want to go see her this evening?" Mac asked.

"Sure, but we can't stay late, We leave early to go see Bentore and Bentley. Will be another long day."

They got to the Rooster just in time for dinner. Marinda welcomed them and put them at her special table. She then proceeded to tell her all about her special guests that afternoon.

"They have an iron ore pit and want to trade with us for things they need.. They are waiting for someone to contact them about how to do it. Do you know who that might be?"

"No, but probably Underhill or Gitar or someone like that," Emily answered.

"Well, anyway, they said they would use the Rooster as a base each time they come. Isn't that wonderful?"

"Sure is. Lucky you," said Mac.

"They will eat here and have meetings if they need to. It's just so exciting!"

They had a pleasant meal and listened to some local gossip. Everyone seemed to know all about the bridges and who was responsible, but not what happened to them. Emily didn't offer any information, though.

When they finished eating they thanked Marinda and headed back to Derwend. They had to do some work on their carriage first thing in the morning before the long trip to the Central Plains. Having the carriage sure was a lot more comfortable than riding horses. They would have to take it to Derrik Jons, the smith, if Mac couldn't fix it.

They ended up at Derrik's smithy the next morning early. He fixed the axle, greased the wheel bearings and they took off for the Plains. It sure was nice not having to pay a toll on the Sorrel bridge anymore. Since Olt died, the Council had not replaced him. Emily thought they were waiting to see what would happen with the new bridges.

The found Bentore in his cabin late morning and he invited them in. He was small for a Goblin, only seven feet tall. Most of the other goblins were covered in massive amounts of hair. Bentore was not. He was very well spoken, too. Emily knew that he had lived among humans when he was young and that's

probably the reason. He was very smart, which probably why he was chief, she thought.

They explained everything to him and what would be required of him. He had many questions, the first being who would listen to a Goblin? Emily explained that it would be the whole Council that made the decisions, not just one individual. He wanted to know if the dwarven delegate would accept a Goblin. Mac assured him that Paren Dunmar did not dislike goblins and would accept them just like he would the warks or drakken.

"Besides, having a goblin on the Council will give us clout. We will have a hard time convincing the Upland Council and some business owners of the new ways. Your presence will help keep any unpleasantness to a minimum," Emily smiled.

"I don't want people to fear me, that's Gandrath's job," Bentore said.

"True, but he will not be around much when we first get started. I hoped you could help fill his shoes, if you know what I mean," Emily replied.

"Well, if you two think it will work with a minimum of problems, then I accept. I will be asking your advice when I have a problem, though."

"Oh, thank you, Bentore. What a relief. And, we will always be there to help if need it," Mac replied.

"We are so glad to have you on the Council, Bentore. We will send the formal writ by runner in a week or so. It will explain in detail how the new Council would work," said Emily.

"And, I'm glad the goblins will have a say in what happens on Losandia. I never thought I'd see the day!" replied Bentore.

They said goodbye and headed across the plains to Port Sorrel. Bentley will be surprised, thought Mac. They arrived late morning and headed for the Shipwright Shop. Bentley was expecting them, which surprised them both. He told them that Gandrath told him and Gitar what was happening, but not many details.

Emily and Mac gave him the whole story. He was indeed surprised they got Bentore to accept.

"So, Bentley, how do you feel about sharing the delegate responsibilities?" Emily asked.

"I thought you were our delegate," he said.

"We determined that since there are many more humans, there should be two."

"Well, Gandrath never told me that!"

"Not surprised. He seems to only give people just exactly what they need and not one bit more," laughed Mac.

"It will take some adjusting here in the shop, but I can handle that. I have several good employees that would love more responsibility and more pay," Bentley said.

"Great! We will send you the papers in about a week. It will be great working with you Bentley," Emily said, shaking his hand.

When they left, they decided to cut down to Granton and have a late lunch at the Valeman Pub. Mac wanted to check on things at the Mill and said everyone would love to see her. She agreed, but wanted to get home right after that.

Over the next few days Emily worked with a solicitor to draft the official Council writ. There were lots of issues she needed to record so they could be voted on. She swore the solicitor to secrecy for just another week until after the first meeting of the new Council.

She knew that since Gandrath was gone, she would be responsible for starting the new Council on the right footing. She was glad that she had the others on the Council to help her deal with Underhill and the Upland Council. They were going to be furious, she knew. But with Bentore on her side and at least the threat of calling on Gandrath, they should be able to handle things.

Right after breakfast the next day, she and Mac headed to the East Fens to see Spinthorn. She had very little experience with warks and wondered if they would be able to explain what they needed.

"Have you ever talked to Spinthorn, Mac?"

"Yes, once. It was at the mill, when a group of them wanted to see the operation. He actually communicates very well."

"Oh, good. I was worried."

They were intercepted as soon as they entered the East Fens and escorted to Spinthorn. He was very surprised to see them and remembered Mac. They sat down and were offered a strange drink that

Emily thought was very strong. She just sipped it as she explained everything.

Spinthorn knew nothing about the bridges or anything else that had happened in the last month.

"It takes some time for events to come to the Fens," said Spinthorn.

"So, how do you feel about serving as a delegate?" Emily asked.

"I would be excited to do this thing. But, I wonder what others might feel about me being there."

"Everyone would welcome the wark Chief!" Mac said loudly enough for all of those close by to hear.

They all smiled.

"Then I accept. I will explain everything to my warks after you leave."

"Can you read, Spinthorn?" asked Emily.

"Not too well, but my son has learned this very well. Why?"

"I will be sending you an official writ next week giving you more details and where to go for the first meeting," Emily explained.

"Very good."

"We also have a favor to ask, Spinthorn" said Mac. "Can you go to the drakken village and explain things to them and ask if they want to have a delegate?"

"Yes, I will do this thing tomorrow morning. But, I know the drakken chief, Culgat, and he will not want to go to the meetings. I will ask him tomorrow even so."

"We appreciate it. Can you get word to us with his answer?" asked Emily.

"Yes. I can have my son take the answer to Granton. Just tell me who to see there."

"Can you have him go to Barrowdale instead?" asked Mac.

"Yes, is much closer to our home. Do we see Dunkel Ratherby?"

"Just so, Spinthorn. We appreciate it very much," answered Mac.

"I look forward to working with you Spinthorn. Explain everything to your warks and have some questions for us at the meeting next week," Emily said.

They said their goodbyes and headed home. It was finally done. All the delegates had been chosen and have accepted. Mac also thought the drakken would not want to be involved, but it would be good to ask them.

The papers were sent to all the delegates and the meeting day was tomorrow. It was going to be in a meeting room at the Shipwright. Mac and Emily headed there right after breakfast. She was very excited and Mac could tell she was also nervous. This was an enormous step for Losandia's future and he thought there wasn't a better person for the job. He was very proud of her.

He leaned over and kissed her cheek and said,

"Do you know how proud of you I am?"

"No. But it's nice to hear. I just hope I live up to it. There is a lot of work to do."

"But you have a lot of good people helping you, too."

"I know. And, I am so glad. It feels strange not to have Gandrath to go to."

"Well, if it is an emergency, I sure he wouldn't mind that much."

"No. He said it must be a dire emergency," Emily said and changed the subject.

"I hope everyone can find the Shipwright," she said.

We can have people out on the road with signs, ok?"

"Good idea. Especially for Bentore and Spinthorn."

Mac and Bentley were discussing seating arrangements when Emily came in leading Bentore, Spinthorn and Dunkel. She learned from Dunkel on the way in that the drakken thanked them for inviting them but did not accept. She whispered this to Mac as everyone took their seats. Mac said he would be out in the shipyards waiting for her to be done.

Just then, Paren Dunmar walked into the room. He was directed to a seat. He looked at Bentore, smiled and nodded. Emily noticed this and was immediately more at ease. This just may well work after all, she thought.

Emily made introductions all around and Bentley had coffee brought in. Everyone knew of each other, and some had already met. The all seemed comfortable, Emily thought.

"I will start the meeting this first time and Bentley has a scribe to take notes. Then we can rotate the leader at each meeting and hire our own scribe. Is that OK with everyone?" Emily asked.

Everyone agreed..

"The first order of business is to name our Council. I recommend the Island Council of Losandia.

Does anybody have a name they like?"

Several names were put forward, but in the end they all agreed on Emily's name. Too easy she thought.

"OK we are officially the Island Council of Losandia."

The meeting progressed and they discussed where and when to have meetings. Bentley offered this meeting room until a permanent building or offices could be established. Everyone agreed.

It was also agreed the meetings would be held every two weeks until most of the important things were taken care of, then monthly.

The following items required a unanimous vote:

They would take control of the currency making equipment from the Upland Council.

All taxes paid from now on by the businesses would go to the Island Council treasury.

They would require the Upland Council to transfer all money in their treasury to the Island Council treasury. Several said this would probably not happen, but they should try anyway.

All items got a unanimous vote.

She said at the next meeting they should discuss summoning the current council, the setting up of their own treasury and the city watch. She asked everyone to be thinking about these issues. Dunkel volunteered to chair the meeting.

Emily thanked everybody for their time and attention and congratulated them on completing the first Island Council meeting. They all applauded and started talking among themselves.

She headed out to find Mac and told him how things went. He gave her a big hug that she really needed. It was wonderful to be able to rely on him always being there for her..

Seven

Mistress Kallie and the construction foreman were discussing a problem, in the rain. There were several leaks in the roof that needed fixed before she would give him the last payment. The Skylark Inn was nearly finished. She thought it was beautiful and it came in under budget.

She already had hired the staff and was spending so much time here, that she was considering moving to Port Sorrel. She could live in one of the Skylark rooms until she found her own place.

Something she hadn't counted on was the fact that there were no taverns in Port Sorrel. Luckily, she anticipated this and built a large kitchen and eating area on one side of the Inn. If it did well, she would consider building a new tavern here.

When the new bridges were finished, the Port would be a very busy place. Horace will be disappointed when she pays his loan off early. She may even sell the Ridgemont and put all her resources here. Her head swam with the possibilities.

When word got out that Dunkel was on the new Council, as everyone in Barrowdale now knew, they held a celebration on main street to honor him. Everybody in town showed up with food and drinks. They all wanted a speech from him, too. Finally he relented.

"Good citizens of Barrowdale. I am honored to be your delegate to the new Island Council of Losandia."

A rousing cheer went up and lasted for several minutes.

"In case some may not know, it will be my job to take your questions and concerns to the Council to be resolved. Some issues may not be put on the agenda, but I can assure you, anything important to our community will."

"Who decides if it's important?" asked an old Barrow in the front row.

"Probably the number of barrows that want it," Dunkel answered.

He talked for another hour before finally thanking everyone and explaining he must get to his shop now. He had really been neglecting the shop and Picker was probably worn out trying to get it all done by himself.

He will have to get him some permanent help since the Council will be taking up a lot of his time for the next few months.

"Hello, son. How are things in here?" he asked as he entered the shop.

"Way more busy than I can handle, for sure," Picker answered.

"I'm sorry to leave you alone in here. I will be hiring another person to help you right away."

"It would be better if you hire them to take my place, Pa. I've told you before, this is not what I want to be doing."

"I know, but I can't afford to hire two more barrows. Besides, you would have to train them for several months and I should be freed up by then," Dunkel reasoned.

"Well, I've kinda made up my mind. I'm leaving Barrowdale for Port Sorrel. There is a new Inn there that is looking for help. Hopefully that will lead to a tavern job. And, someday my own tavern."

"You can't leave me now!" shouted Dunkel.

"Can and will. I'm heading there in the morning to talk to Mistress Kallie about a job."

"You would really leave me so suddenly?"

"Suddenly? I've been telling you for months that I really don't want to do this work. You haven't been listening, Pa"

"Fine. I had better start right now talking to a few barrows. Can you at least stay for the rest of the day?"

"Sure. Try the Barrowdale community center, There are a lot of barrows there without much to do."

"Good idea. Thanks," Dunkel said dejectedly, and headed out the door.

The time has finally come for Emily's first real test as an Island Council member. She must summons the Upland Council to appear tomorrow. She is not sure what to expect and they may even refuse to come. What then?

She asks Mac the best way to get word to Underhill and he said he would hand deliver the note. They should be summoned to the new temporary meeting room in Port Sorrel.

"Maybe it would be better if we have the meeting here. I could ask the delegates to come tomorrow," Emily said to Mac.

"No. The new Council must show strength. Summoning them to come will do that."

"But what if they refuse?"

"I think they will show. Out of curiosity if nothing else. If not, we will send Kyle to escort them. They are more or less independent now."

"Really? How are they being paid?"

"Not sure, but Gandrath had a talk with Kyle and gave him some suggestions."

Mac handed Underhill the sealed note and waited for the reply. He was standing in front of the full Upland Council as Underhill read the note. He looked up at Mac with a shocked expression and said,

"This is a joke, right?"

"Do I look like I'm laughing?"

He passed the note to the other councilmen and they all laughed.

"Well, we are."

"Laugh if you will, but I would recommend you take this very seriously, Dean."

These young kids still insist on not giving him the respect he deserves by using his first name, thought Underhill. He sat back in his chair, thought for a moment and said,

"And if we refuse to answer this summons?"

"At your peril, Dean."

"Threats? What could you possibly do to us?"

"Me? Nothing. But, the new city watch could escort you, I suppose."

"New city watch? Has Kyle thrown his lot with you then?" asked Underhill.

"You would have to ask him about that."

"We pay their salary. They do as we say."

"That's not what I heard from Gandrath," Mac bluffed.

"Alright, enough of this. You tell your new Council we will be there. But, they will have to reimburse our expenses. There are six of us, you know."

"Again, you will need to ask them about that," Mac said smiling as he turned and walked out the door.

That went well, he thought as he headed home. I think the city watch issue made him a bit nervous. I had better have a talk with Kyle to see just where they stand.

He reported back to Emily how things went.

"Underhill didn't like it one bit, but when I mentioned Kyle and Gandrath, he finally agreed."

"Oh my, that's a load off my mind."

"I going to see Kyle to find out where things are with the watch."

"Right. Make sure he is up to date on everything. And, Mac, thank you. I love you for always being there," Emily said as she hugged him.

"See, I told you it was a good idea for us to be together every day."

"You are so right."

Mac once again knocked on the watch Captain's door and got the familiar, "Enter".

"Hey Kyle. How are things?"

"Could be better, but we're surviving."

"Emily wanted me to update you on things. And, see where things stood with you. Got a minute?"

"Shoot."

Mac updated him on the new Council and their whirlwind ride through Losandia getting delegates. He told him of their first meeting and what was decided and voted on.

"And, I just came from the Upland Council where I delivered a summons from the new Council to be in Port Sorrel tomorrow."

"Hmmm. And how'd that go?"

"Underhill was reluctant until I said maybe we could persuade you to escort him. He then agreed to be there."

"I never told him we don't report to the Council anymore. He will know for sure when we don't accept

his next payment."

"This is good news. As soon as Emily gets the new Council treasury situation settled, they can pay you. They you'll report to the new Council, right?"

"That's a possibility. Another is to do what Gandrath suggested. Be an independent watch, paid directly by the businesses."

"Is that possible? How could the businesses pay enough to support all the watch?"

"Not sure. I have more investigating to do."

"If you work for the new Council, you would effectively have jurisdiction over all the cities in Losandia, since the Council is made up of delegates from all races," Mac said, smiling.

"That's true. Which means we would have to grow considerably."

"Correct. I think I see a Commander Baas in there somewhere."

"Not so fast. The new Council will only have money if the old one hands over the treasury. Somehow, I don't see Underhill doing that."

"If not, I'm sure the new Council will come up with money until the taxes start coming in. There are some very smart people on that Council."

Picker waited in the Skylark office for Mistress Kallie to come in. He asked about a job and was told he would have to talk directly to her. He was worried that maybe she didn't want barrows working here. He's seen it in other places.

She came in and sat at her desk and looked directly at him. He looked right back at her without flinching.

"So, you're not embarrassed about being a Barrow?"

"Are you embarrassed about being a human," he replied without even thinking, realizing that was not a way to impress a potential employer.

"No, I'm not."

"Neither am I," he said, smiling.

"I have several positions open, which one are you applying for?"

"The one where I can learn as much as possible about running a tavern."

"But, I don't have a tavern," she answered, surprised.

"Mistress Kallie, I'm sure a lot of things done in an Inn are very similar to those done in a tavern. It would all be good experience."

"Why do you want to learn about taverns?"

"It's been a dream of mine for years to get out of Pa's supply store and start my own tavern."

"Hmmm. I know all about such dreams. How about if I hire you to help in the small kitchen and if you do well, I'll consider you for the new tavern I will be building."

"Really! You're building a tavern?" he asked excitedly.

"I think now I am. I just found out that the new Council is meeting here in Port Sorrel. They will need a tavern closer than Sutterton."

"Excellent idea, ma'am. I can see you're a woman of vision."

"How old are you Mr. Picker?"

"Over thirty summers, ma'am," he answered.

"Really! Now it's my turn to be surprised. barrows don't show their age, do they?"

"Neither do beautiful women," he replied, staring her in the eyes.

"Oh my, I think we will get along famously. You may be just what my lady customers need!"

The new Council was called to order by Dunkel the next morning. He had reviewed the notes from the last time and remembered the agenda for today. Before he started, though, Emily asked to be heard. He nodded.

"I just want everyone to know that Dean Underhill and the old Council will be here this morning. Do we want to wait for them or stop when they arrive."

It was decided to wait for a bit and then start. Within 15 minutes there was a knock on the door and one of Bentley's employees announced the visitors. There were six chairs arranged for them, facing the row of tables used by the new Council. They filed in and all took seats. They all looked smug.

Emily whispered to Dunkel that she needed to do this and he gladly agreed. She waited while the old Council took in all the faces from the different races. Eyebrows went up when they saw Bentore. Good,

she thought. The desired effect had been achieved.

"Welcome to the Island Council of Losandia meeting, gentlemen. We are here today to..."

"Enough with small talk, get to the business." interrupted Underhill.

This brought two Councilmen immediately to their feet. Bentore and Spinthorn with their hands on their weapons.

"You will address this Council only when spoken to, Mr. Underhill. And that goes for the rest of you too," snarled Bentore.

The entire old Council blanched. Underhill wanted to crawl under something, but said,

"Of course."

"As I was saying, we are here to inform you that the old Council will be disband and everything turned over to the new one," Emily announced.

Every member of the old Council wanted to jump up in rage, but restrained themselves while looking a Bentore and Spinthorn.

"First, we need the currency making equipment. We are taking over the printing of money based on an entirely new count of businesses, including ALL the races on Losandia."

Again, Underhill barely restrained himself.

"Second, all future taxes paid by any business on Losandia will go the the Island Council treasury."

"Third, we require the Upland Council to transfer all money in their treasury to our treasury."

This brought immediate cries from all six old Council members at once. Like a flash, Spinthorn was around the table with a knife to Underhill's throat.

"You were told Underhill. Must we now show you we mean business?"

Underhill turned completely white. This little creature could kill him in an instant and there is nothing he could do.

"Please, Spinthorn. There is no need for violence. I'm sure Dean is sorry he spoke out of turn," Emily said smugly.

Spinthorn took his seat, but continued staring intently at Underhill.

"Please, you must realize. We don't have very much money in our treasury. If you take the future taxes away, even from those in Upland, we will have no salaries," Underhill said.

"Why would you need salaries if there is nothing for you to govern?" asked Bentley.

"If we are forced to disband our Council, the money should be split six ways as payment for our years of service."

"Service that benefited only the Council and Upland," Paren said sarcastically.

"Thats not fair. We did a lot of good work on the island."

"How much money are we talking about here, Dean?" Emily asked.

"Less than thirty thousand dollars. Thats only five thousand a piece! You'll get more than that in one month taxes from all the businesses," he answered.

"He is right, looking at the other delegates. Let's concede this, as an act of good faith. We are not monsters, after all," Bentley said.

Underhill looked like he had something more to say, looking directly at Bentore, but kept quiet

"A show of hands then. All in favor of conceding this point?" asked Emily.

All six hands went up.

"Very well, Dean. Keep your treasury money. We will expect the currency making equipment within the week, though."

"Now then, if you will excuse us, we have to finish our meeting. Thank you for coming, gentlemen," said Dunkel.

The six defeated Councilmen walked out of the room. By the looks on their faces, they felt like a ton of stone had been dropped on them.

"Dunkel, Bentley, you handled that very well. I'm proud of you. Spinthorn, I loved it, but please don't repeat it as it might have been a little excessive. It did, however, get the point across immediately," Emily grinned.

"Yes, we don't want to give the wrong impression to the good people, dwarves, goblins, warks and barrows, now do we?" asked Bentley.

"And, Mr. Mathes, just where do you think we will get money for our treasury?" asked Paren.

"Well, I would be willing to contribute several thousand and I know a few others that would not hesitate to help the new struggling Council," he answered, grinning.

"Come to think on it, I'm sure Gitar Dunst would also be happy to contribute," Paren said.

"If all they had was thirty thousand, which of course, we will never know, I think we can raise that with little effort," Bentley said.

Emily smiled to herself. This Council looked like they could handle themselves very well. Mac and I made good delegate choices, I believe.

"Now, to the business at hand," said Dunkel.

Mistress Kallie called over the foreman. She asked him how long it would take to build two new meeting rooms onto the Inn. He said, depending on their size, probably two or three weeks. She gave him the sizes and told him there would be a bonus if they were ready in two weeks.

She was not wasting any time capitalizing on what she heard about the Council. They are using temporary rooms at Bentleys place. That's hardly acceptable for Losandia's new Council.

She headed straight for the Shipwright Shop to talk to Bentley. He met her coming out of the Shop and she asked for a minute of his time.

"What can I do for you Mistress?"

"I have just instructed my foreman to build two new meeting rooms onto my new Skylark Inn. They should be ready in about two weeks. What are the chances of reserving one for the Council on a permanent basis?"

He thought for a moment and said,

"That sounds workable. I will bring it up at our next meeting."

"And, of course, lunches could be provided from the Skylark kitchens," she added.

"Well, of course," he smiled. "I'll get back to you soon."

"Thank you, sir. I appreciate the opportunity to help our new Council."

"Too bad there is no tavern attached, too," he said.

"Give me a little more time. One is in the works," she responded.

"Excellent. I think we can come to a very good arrangement, Mistress. Congratulations on your new Inn, by the way. I hear it's outstanding."

"Thank you. I look forward to doing business together. Good day, sir."

"Until we meet again," he said, smiling widely.

She was beside herself. Horace, eat your heart out, she thought. Things were working out very nicely here in Port Sorrel. I just needed to get in the right environment. Upland is just so old fashioned.

As it turned out, once word went out about the treasury problems with the old Council, there were a dozen offers to help. The Council treasury had almost fifty thousand in it before the next meeting. Now Emily was starting to worry about paying it back. She was amazed to learn that Gitar gave ten thousand. Strehen stone must be doing very well indeed.

Her and Mac were discussing this when there was a knock on her office door. Mac saw who it was and yelled,

"Come".

Kyle opened the door and grinned.

"Very funny, Mac."

Emily looked confused, but quickly realized it was a private joke between the two of them.

"Hello Kyle. Nice to see you," she said warmly.

"You too, Emily. I hear you had a run-in with Underhill. I hope it came out to your satisfaction," Kyle said.

"It did. We got almost everything we wanted."

"I'd like to discuss the watch, if you have the time."

"We'll make the time. Something to drink?" she asked.

"A dark one would be nice."

"If you don't need me, I think this is Council business. And, besides, I have plenty to keep me busy," Mac said.

Mac left and Kyle took a seat across from Emily.

"Emily, is there anyway you can tell me what the Council plans are concerning the watch?"

"Yes, Kyle. Mac and I are working on several things, contingent upon Council approval, of course."

"Care to share, or is it too early."

"No, not really. We are going to ask to have the watch doubled in size, to include dwarves and goblins. You should have seen Underhill's face when Bentore jumped up and put his hand on his sword,

just because he interrupted me."

"Oh, I would have loved to have been there!"

"Any way, the Council has dwarven, wark and goblin delegates and I think the watch should have the same thing. We plan to change the name from city watch to Island Police Force. That was Gandrath's idea."

"Police. So does that mean we will be walking beats and arresting pickpockets?"

"It means that your force will be the authority in all cities on Losandia. With the exception of a drakken village, since they are not represented."

"Really. Double? Thats almost three hundred men."

"Men, dwarves and goblins. You really need to start thinking about the other races and including them in your speech. The time has finally come."

"Right. I'll work on it. Anything else in the plan?"

"Yes, you will also be responsible for the rivers. You will get a new patrol boat and a small force to run it."

"Oh, this just gets better and better," Kyle said grinning.

"And, thats not all. How does Commander Baas sound to you?"

"You're kidding! Tell me you're kidding."

"No. Mac suggested it and I agree. Captain is really for a smaller force. You should have several Captains reporting to you."

"Incredible! Boy am I glad I came in today. Say, just where is the money coming for all this?" he asked.

"You just let your Council worry about that. You concentrate on rounding up a couple hundred new men, dwarves and goblins."

"I really have a limited knowledge of goblins and not much more of dwarves."

"Sounds like you better learn. Actually, all the contacts you need will come from Paren and Bentore, don't worry."

"Wow. It sure is nice to have competent people running the Council for a change. And, dwarves, warks and goblins," he added, smiling.

"I will talk to you after the next meeting."

"Right. Thanks, Emily. I must remember to tell Mac how damn lucky he is."

"He probably already knows, but a reminder wouldn't hurt."

The work was piling up faster than he could keep up with. And, Picker had several more hours to work on his shift. He was handling almost all the kitchen duties now. He wondered if he took on too much. He really wanted to impress Mistress Kallie, though.

He learned all the menus and kitchen procedures in a couple days. Now he was suggesting shortcuts on some things, saving everybody time. He had even tried cooking a few times and that seemed fairly easy. He thought about his Pa and if he got the help he needed. He really should go visit him, but he worked long hours and just wanted to sleep on his time off.

Picker saw that there were new meeting rooms being added and heard what they were going to be used for. He would ask the Mistress if he could be the one to serve the lunches there. Maybe he might even see his Pa at one of the meetings. He was very proud of his Pa and must tell him so the very next time he sees him.

Underhill was soaked when he got back to his office from lunch. It had been raining all day and he felt as bad as the weather. He spent all afternoon trying to come up with a way to salvage what was left of his Council. He had no money. He had no city watch. He lost his control over the local currency. And, no more money would be coming to them from taxes or bridge fees. He had no choice. He had to abandon it.

He called his other Council members together that afternoon.

"We are finished, gentlemen. I am abandoning the Upland Council effective today. If you have any outstanding debts owed to you, I would suggest you go now and collect."

"Well, it was a good run, Dean," said one of the Councilmen..

"Yes, it was. It still scalds me though. Just because Gandrath likes these kids, they think they can just take over things. And, call on him when they get in trouble."

"Looks like they have more muscle than just Gandrath. They now have the city watch, a goblin and a wark." "

"I guess. I'm liquidating all my holdings here in Upland and moving to Norinda. Any of you that want to come along are welcome."

"No, I'm through. It's time to retire from this kind of pressure. I think I move to Granton and become a farmer," said another.

"Good luck to you all, then."

When the Council met again, it was Bentley presiding. He gave an update on his conversation with Mistress Kallie and asked if they could reserve one of the meeting rooms. Everyone agreed. This was their third meeting in this meeting room. It was ok, but kind of noisy and drafty. It would be nice to have their own chambers. And, lunch provided.

It had been six weeks since their first meeting and they had accomplished quite a lot. Emily explained what she wanted to do with the city watch. The new name, Island Police Force or IPF for short, was accepted. And, when she said she wanted dwarves and goblins on the force, they were all very pleased.

There was now plenty of money in the treasury to start hiring new policemen. Everybody agreed on three hundred. She asked Paren and Bentore to supply the names of anyone they thought would make good policemen. They both said they had plenty of good dwarves and goblins that they could recommend. They would talk to Kyle.

"I would also like a new patrol boat so they can patrol the rivers," Emily said. "Anyone object?"

Both Dunkel and Bentore wanted to know why they needed to patrol the rivers. She explained what Mac told her. With the Police Force in all the cities now, any smuggling of goods will probably move to the rivers. It was necessary they control the smuggling of goods on both the roads and river, especially if they start going to Norinda. They both understood and voted for it.

"I have another issue to be voted on," said Bentley. "Because the drakken opted out, we have six delegates. I think we should have seven, to break any tie votes. How do you all feel?"

Everyone agreed but not sure who would be added. Bentley explained that with the number of Shielders and other clan dwarfs, there are almost as many dwarves as humans. Maybe the extra delegate should be a dwarf. Everyone agreed. He said he and Paren should talk to Gitar and come up with a candidate. Paren was pleased another dwarf would be added.

The Council then discussed an issue brought up by Bentley about Underhill. The word was that he sold his house and other properties in Upland and moved to Norinda. He believed that there was a reason someone like Underhill would leave his rich friends and fine lifestyle and move to such a backwards place.

He would be dependent on businesses in Losandia for the supplies to build there. How would he get them? The discussion opened with Paren,

"Do you think he has another reason for moving there, Bentley?"

"I know Underhill. He always has some scheme or another in his mind. If there is a way to turn this to his financial advantage, he will certainly do it. No matter who may get hurt in the process."

"I agree. Think about how innocent Cullen and his people that own the ore pit must be. They could easily be exploited. And, who knows how much money Underhill took with him," Emily said.

"But, what can we do at this point," said Dunkel. "Underhill certainly is free to move where he wants."

"Yes he is. But based on what I've seen and heard about him, I believe we should at least warn Cullen of the possible danger," added Bentore.

"Your thinking just like a human, Bentore," said Bentley, smiling.

Bentore nodded to Bentley, not taking any offense. Emily could see something needed to be done, but she was not sure what. She needed to talk to Mac. Or Kyle.

"I agree there is a possibility here that Underhill is planning something. He will be living rough there on Norinda for a while. I remember what Gandrath said about the living conditions there. For Underhill to make that kind of sacrifice, he must be planning something," Emily said. "But I'm not sure how much we should interfere here. I think I need to talk to Kyle, he knows Underhill better than us. Then I will report back at our next meeting."

Everyone agreed. The next meeting should be in their new meeting room at the Skylark.

"See you all in two weeks. I really don't think the Council should devote too much time to the Underhill issue, but we must do something. Maybe all of you can do some investigating on the quiet. See what you can find out about his intentions," Bentley said as he stood. He closed the meeting.

Eight

It was just by sheer luck that Marinda noticed two of the old Council members at the Rooster early one morning. She was very curious to know what had become of them all, so she placed herself in a position to hear their conversation without being noticed.

She learned that Underhill had a scheme to befriend the people of Norinda and make himself an important figure on the island. He wanted help getting supplies for his new house from some of the old Councilmen. It looked to her that one was recruiting the other.

Once Underhill was well known and liked, he would try to buy into the ore pit. And, then Marinda was interrupted and couldn't hear anymore of the story. She was sure this information was important to someone. But whom?

Marinda thought about it for a minute and decided to get this information to Bentley. She went to Port Sorrel that day and told Bentley everything she overheard. He thanked her and said he would bring it to the Council right away. He didn't think this should wait two weeks for the next meeting, so he sent runners with a note to Emily, Bentore, Dunkel and Spinthorn. He would tell Paren when they went to see Gitar today.

Bentley and Paren secured a small boat and headed up the Kline towards Strehen. They were going to see Gitar Dunst in hopes of getting him to help them choose a second dwarven delegate. It wasn't long before they came to the new Oren bridge. It was being heavily used by dwarves and wagons. They saw no sign of the earlier explosions.

"The dwarves have done some beautiful work on this bridge, haven't they?" asked Bentley.

"Yes. We have always been builders, especially with stone."

Since this bridge was a lot smaller than the Prather bridge down on the Sorrel, it was made entirely of stone. The Prather had stone foundation, but the rest was wood.

"It was very generous of Gitar to donate the stone. Everyone should be proud of this accomplishment," said Bentley.

"True. And, we should tell him so when we see him."

They met with Gitar and explained what they needed. After many discussions with Paren, they came up with a name. Aran Reider. He was the owner of the oldest tavern on Losandia and very well liked among all the dwarves. He has lived in Heemskalt all his life and knows dwarven lore better than most.

Bentley thought this was an excellent suggestion and accepted it right away.

"Should we go now and ask him?" Bentley asked Paren. "It would give us a chance to go over that beautiful bridge on the Kline."

"I don't see why not," answered Paren.

"We wanted to tell you, Gitar, how pleased we are with your donation of stone for the Oren. It was a most generous offer," Bentley said.

"Thank you. It would be more perfect if Oren had not given his life for it."

"Very true," Paren replied. "But since the bridge has his name, dwarves will always honor him."

"Say, Gitar. What ever happened to those responsible for the destruction of the foundations?" asked Bentley.

"They are no more. As the dwarven custom requires," replied Gitar. And Bentley knew that was all he would say on the subject.

They bid goodbye to Gitar and headed to see Aran. It was late in the day when they arrived in Heemskalt. When they found him he was very glad to see Paren. He had never met Bentley, but said he had heard nothing but good things about him. Bentley smiled and nodded.

After they explained about the Council position and what was required of him, Aran agreed to serve. Over dinner, they brought him up to date on all the items the Council has agreed to since it started. Aran was impressed that dwarves now had a voice in what happened on Losandia. Paren agreed with him.

Mac and Emily were discussing how to go about calling an emergency Council meeting.

"Well, since the new dwarf has not been approved by the Council yet, you only need four delegates for a majority. The closest ones besides you are Bentley, Dunkel and Paren. Want to split up and go see them?"

"Paren and Bentley went to see Gitar about the new dwarf delegate. I'm not sure they are back yet."

"Ok, we'll stop at Granton on our way to Barrowdale. If Paren is not there we can leave word at the Valeman for him to contact you right away."

"Good plan. Lets leave right after breakfast, ok?"

"Sure. Have you finished that mound of paperwork yet?"

"Just about. Another hour or so."

Right after breakfast, the two headed the carriage for Granton. Emily discussed all the things the Council could do about Underhill. Maybe the best thing to do is summon Cullen and just tell him outright what Underhill is up to, It would be very hard to prove if Cullen had doubts, though.

Mac suggested they send a few Council members to see Cullen, just on a fact finding mission. Emily thought it had merits and would suggest it to the others. In any case, Cullen must be warned. If Underhill gets his hooks in him and gets control of the ore pit, it would be bad for everyone on Losandia and Norinda.

She even considered contacting Gandrath, but decided to save that until, and if, Underhill succeeded. Once he did, Gandrath would be the only one who could stop him, she was sure.

They arrived in Granton just an hour after Paren. They brought him up to date and Emily apologized for asking him to go to Port Sorrel so soon after his trip north. He said not to worry and he would be in Port Sorrel in an hour. Emily said make it two hours because they still have to get to Barrowdale and get Dunkel.

It was almost dinnertime before the emergency Council members gathered in the their new chambers. Bentley was surprised that an emergency meeting was necessary, but agreed to attend. He had just returned himself and Emily was sure he was tired.

Mac found Mistress Kallie to asked her if she could provide dinner for five in about an hour. She said it was no trouble at all, she would have Picker bring it in. Mac entertained himself while the Council met.

"I want to thank you for coming on such short notice," Emily started. "But I thought this could not wait until our next meeting."

Bentley asked what their course of action should be now. Emily explained the two things she had considered. Summoning Cullen here or sending a delegation to Norinda on a fact finding mission.

They discussed these and other options until a knock on the door. It was Mac, informing them that dinner had arrived. They decided to eat dinner and make the decision right afterwards.

When the dinner plates had been removed, Emily asked the three if they had any objection to Mac staying for the decision and nobody minded. It was quickly decided that a delegation should be sent to Norinda to check out the trade possibilities. And, they could discuss Underhill with Cullen also.

They would talk to Cullen about trade, but all decisions would have to have full Council approval. The delegates to go would be Emily, Bentore and Dunkel. Mac would go to help the them navigate the boat and whatever else they may need. They would leave in the morning.

Kyle was given plenty of names by Bentore for potential policemen. He headed to the northern plains to find as many as he could. He had traveled several times through the plains where the goblins made their home, but never really talked to them personally.

This time he was asking for goblins by name and found that most of them were very helpful. The ones that weren't didn't understand his language. They were leery of this human moving among them asking questions. Quite natural, he thought. I would be more than leery if a seven-foot goblin came to Derwend and started asking questions.

He talked to a dozen goblins during the day and they were all interested and they would ask their friends, too. They were all concerned that they would have to come to the river cities to work. They didn't think the humans there would want their presence. He said it should not be a problem and that he would

be establishing satellite offices in the Plains and Strehen and they could work out of there if they were uncomfortable.

When he got back home he made a note to ask Emily if she could approve the satellite offices. He would probably need them in Granton and maybe Port Sorrel. This is going to be a nightmare trying to keep track of three hundred policeman. His office in Derwend would need an administrative staff of several clerks and scribes to handle it all.

The next day when he went to see Paren, he found that he was out and would not be back for several days. This was intriguing and he suspected he was part of the delegation that went to Norinda. He was sure that it wouldn't hurt to talk to Gitar and see if he could arrange a meeting with Orgar Sandspar of the Shielder dwarves, since he didn't know him personally.

A dozen or so Shielders on the force would be a really good thing. He would make a couple of them Captains, he thought. Then there was the river patrol. He was not sure about who might be best for that. Certainly not dwarves or goblins. They did not like water. He would check with Bentley's friend to see if he had any ideas.

He headed to Strehen to see Gitar and found him on the road to the mine. He explained what he wanted and Gitar said he would put the word out. He also said he would have all interested dwarves come to see him at his office. This made Kyle's day.

Trying to find all these dwarves all over northern Losandia could take days. He had better get back to the office and start putting together the list of questions he would need to ask all of these perspective policemen. That alone was going to be a chore. He would ask someone to scribe for him as he interviewed.

Mistress Kallie was contemplating a name for her new tavern. She didn't want to use her last name, as is was known only to her close friends. She wanted something different and not the name of any place in Losandia. She would keep thinking and something would come to her eventually.

Kallie grew up in Derwend and her family was not wealthy. She was very close friends with the previous owner of the Ridgemont and she worked there. He had never married and had no family and when he died suddenly of the fever, everyone, including Kallie, was shocked when he left the place to her. She did well running the upscale tavern and knew she was a good business woman. Her deal with Horace was another good example. And now with the Skylark success, she was ready for the next phase of her life.

She would sell the Ridgemont and use the money to build a very nice tavern here in Port Sorrel. Construction could start right away, since she was sure the Ridgemont would sell fast. She may even offer it to Horace. He once said it was worth a hundred thousand. This tavern would be her security well into her old age and the best part was she would not have to rely on a husband to take care of her.

That's it, she thought! The Freedom Tavern. She smiled and headed to find the construction foreman.

As the Council docked in Norinda, the delegation was greeted by a dock man. He escorted them to Cullen's house. Introductions were made and Cullen said he was very pleased to meet them all.

"It's the first time anyone on Losandia had been to Norinda, except for the Mage Gandrath, of course," Emily said.

This surprised Dunkel and Bentore, but they did not say anything.

"How is it you and your poeple are here?" asked Bentore.

"Well, that's a long tale, but I'll give you the short version, There was an island close by this one where I lived with my family. My Ma and Da and his Da before him lived there also. Selkonian, it was named. We grew our own food and took what little game there was for meat. One day, when I was very young, there was an enormous explosion and the island sank into the ocean. My mother and I were the only survivors in my family. There were just a dozen or so others that made it here with us."

"That's incredible," said Emily.

"We have since surmised that it was a volcano eruption that sank the island. My Ma died shortly after I turned twenty. We discovered the ore pit one day while searching for hard rocks to use as tools. It was mostly ignored until about five years ago. I became the leader of our small group of survivors and one

day I realized the value of iron ore and what things could be made from it. The idea of trading it to Losandia came just last year. You know the rest about sending a boat down the Sorrel. We did that several times before someone finally challenged us."

"Were you afraid we would harm you?" asked Emily.

"No, we just wanted to see what things you had there and if there would be a need for our ore. I am glad we finally made contact with someone. And, Lady Marinda has been very kind to those on our boat."

"Yes, we've heard that."

"We will be glad to answer any more of your questions later. Now, to the reasons you have come to our little island," Cullen said.

"We have come for two reasons, Cullen," Emily said. "First to talk about trade between our islands. And, second to deliver you a warning."

"Oh, a warning? About what?" he asked, surprised.

"Do you know that we had a Council previous to organizing the current one?" Emily asked.

"No, I wasn't aware."

"It was disbanded recently. The head Councilman was involved in a dispute over new bridges being built. He didn't want them, for economic reasons. He threatened to stop their construction with the city watch if they began. Unfortunately, the bridge foundations were blown up by another party and the Councilman didn't carry through with his threats," Emily explained.

"Was he behind the actions of the other party?"

"No, he wasn't. But, he would have gone through with his plans to stop the construction, we are all convinced. He was not liked in the business community and was very angry that we started the new council. His Council was made up of rich men and they represented only one town and its interests. Our Council represents the entire island and is made up of one delegate for each race."

"That sounds reasonable, since all races live there. You talk like this head Councilman is no longer around."

"He is not. He is your problem now. He moved here and is building a house," Dunkel responded.

"Oh, yes. I heard a rumor of that happening. Very recently, right?"

"Yes. The man's name is Dean Underhill. After he left we found out that he is planning to befriend the people of Norinda and hopefully get some control of your ore pit. What his plans are after that we can only guess," Emily continued.

"But they will not be good," Bentore said, looking down straight into Cullen's eyes.

Cullen flinched. He had never seen anyone so large. It was the first time he had encountered a goblin.

"Well, this is definitely interesting news. I am very grateful you have given it to me early enough to protect ourselves. What do you suggest I do about this Mr. Underhill?" asked Cullen.

"Well, that's up to you and your people. But, we hope you will be very careful in your dealings with him. He is very determined, I'm sure," said Emily.

"I'll consider myself warned. And, I'll let the appropriate people know right away. Now how about a tour of the ore pit?"

"Excellent," answered Dunkel.

The delegation spent that day and left the next morning. They discussed how they would trade the iron ore for the things the people on Norinda needed. And, they needed everything: lumber, food, building materials and sturdy clothing and boots. Emily thought it would be a great benefit for both peoples. She made a note to talk to Gitar about the value of iron to get a better idea of its worth.

They all exchanged warm goodbyes and headed back to Losandia. Cullen told them he had never married, so he had no children. He relied on friends to help him run the iron ore pit. Emily guessed there were about fifty people on the island. The idea that he may take advantage of these warm innocent people really upset her. She would discuss with both Mac and the Council if there were anyway to prevent that from happening.

It was time for the Council meeting again and Emily had her notes ready to give her report on their trip to Norinda. It would be the first time the full Council met in the new chambers. It was early afternoon when everyone arrived and they were very impressed with the job Mistress Kallie had done. It was

Emily's turn to chair and she started,

"It was a very successful trip to Norinda. We met with Cullen, toured the iron ore pit and met just about everyone that lived there at a large outside dinner in our honor," she said.

"We also need to bring Spinthorn and Bentore up to date on our emergency meeting," said Bentley.

He explained to Spinthorn and Bentore all about what they learned about Underhill's plan and that there wasn't time to wait for today's meeting, so an emergency meeting was held. It was decided to send the closest delegates to Port Sorrel to meet with Cullen.

"Emily made up a report on everything that happened there for those of us that did not go. And the items they want to trade for," reported Bentley.

"I spoke to Gitar to find out the value of iron ore. He said it was valuable for two reasons. One, it makes very good tools and weapons. And, two, we don't have very much on the island," Emily said.

"Of course, we will need a factory built to process the ore," said Bentley.

"That could be built in Barrowdale since Granton has the mill. We are close to the Binter, too," said Dunkel.

"Excellent idea. Another place for good jobs. Paren, will you talk to Gitar and come up with some skilled people to get it started?" Bentley asked.

"Yes, of course. So, we should start trading with Norinda right away?" asked Paren.

"If we are all in agreement, yes," Emily said.

It was unanimous.

The next item was commissioning a barge to be made to move items back and forth to Norinda. Bentley said he would build the barge, but his company would not take any money for it. The Council would just pay for the labor. It was accepted.

The next item was the new Council member. Paren explained that he and Gitar came up with a suitable new member. Aran Reider, the owner of the Bearded Lady in Strehen. Everyone on the Council voted yes.

The last thing on the agenda was for Emily to update everyone on what she wanted to do with the Island Watch. She explained about the conversations with Kyle and he agreed to the Commander position. He was in the process of recruiting new policemen. The patrol boat issue and everything else was discussed and approved.

"I think with that many policemen, Kyle will need several offices and an administrative staff," said Bentley.

"Do we have the money for all this?" asked Bentore.

"We do. And, now that the taxes are coming to us, we have even more. We should be able to pay back those that contributed to get us started," answered Emily.

"Gitar said he did not want paid back," Paren said, proudly.

"He did! That's amazing. How very generous. That should be posted in one of Klye's fliers he puts in the river towns," Emily said.

"What fliers?" asked Spinthorn and Bentore together.

"Well, he posts fliers with updates on different things that happen with the Council and Norinda. Things we decide here. Do you two want to do the same in your area?" she asked.

"Yes," they said.

"And I'd like to do it in the towns up north. Can I see Klye for some fliers?" Paren asked.

"Yes, I'll make sure he has extras scribed."

The Council was about to adjourn when there was a knock at the door. It was Picker and several kitchen staff with dinner. They didn't realize it was so late and this was a nice surprise. Picker hugged Dunkel and helped serve the food. They finished serving and left. A few minutes later Mistress Kallie came in. She asked how the food was. Everybody raved. Spinthorn was especially impressed.

"Well Mr. Spinthorn, you will be able to enjoy it for a long time then, I started construction on my new tavern and the cook agreed to work there for me," Kallie announced.

Everyone applauded and congratulated her on her success.

She looked directly at Dunkel and said,

"And, Picker is going to run the place for me."

Dunkel beamed as everyone congratulated him.

"What will it be called?" asked Bentley.
"The Freedom Tavern," she said.
"That's an interesting name. Freedom from what?" asked Paren.
"A husband," Kallie said, grinning.

It had been almost six months since Mac had moved into the Sorrel tavern with Emily. He had learned a lot from the people at the Grub&Grog, when he wasn't on Council business.

He and Emily were having dinner one night and he asked her if she had time to talk about their arrangement.

"The six month one, you mean?" she said, smiling.

"Yea, that one. How do you think the arrangement is working?:

"I don't think you are here much. I have you running all over the place on Council business. And, from what I hear, I think you may be getting a bit busier."

"Oh, really. How?" asked Mac.

"Kyle said he is establishing a police commission."

"A great idea, that is. He is running himself ragged. And, he wants me to be on this commission?"

"He wants you to head it," she replied.

"You're not serious. What do I know about police work?"

"You don't have to. Kyle does. What he needs is a good administrative team to help make all the decisions."

"And, he thinks that I could do that!"

"Well, I'd help, of course. We are a team, too, you know. All we need to do is make us official."

"So, that means I need to ask you a question, right?"

"That's usually the way it's done," she smiled.

"You want the knee thing, too?"

"Of course."

So right there on the floor of the Sorrel taven, in front of all the customers on this crowded evening, Mac proposed. And, Emily accepted. The customers started cheering and applauding and did so for several minutes. There were beers all around, of course.

The word was out by the next morning. Everyone came in to the Sorrel all day long to congratulate them. There was no date set, but they knew they wanted a small wedding in the Bandar house where Emily was born. A small party afterward would be at the Sign of the Rooster in Sutterton. Marinda would be pleased and besides, she had the biggest hall attached to the tavern of any place except for the Shipwright.

When Kyle got the word, he immediately had a flier scribed and brought it to the Sorrel. He handed it to Mac and congratulated him.

"All I need is the date and place, and I'll have more of these scribed," he said.

They gave him the details over a dark beer and then Marinda came in. She hugged them both and said it was about time this really happened.

"If it pleases you, could we have a party in your hall?" asked Emily.

"Oh my! Yes, of course. And I'll take care of all the food and drink. You won't have to worry about a thing."

"Great, now I can go finish my flier," said Kyle.

He hugged Mac and Emily again and started to go.

"Hey! Where is my hug. I'm helping too," asked Marinda.

Kyle came over and gave her a hug and soundly kissed her on the mouth. He then picked up his flier and left.

"Wow..." was all Marinda could manage to get out.

"Is he sweet on you Marinda?" asked Mac.

"Not that I know of. But, well, it wouldn't be a bad thing, would it?"

"I think it would be a good thing," replied Emily, smiling.

"I'll just have to explore that some more, won't I?"

For the last several weeks there had been numerous breakins in businesses, mostly in Upland and Alvarstad. The damage was extensive, but very little was taken. The first time someone was murdered, however, Kyle and several of his best men started a full investigation.

There weren't any clues to go on and it seemed like there were never any witnesses. Kyle put up fliers in both towns for people to start watching during the night. What he needed was a solid lead. After the second murder of an Upland ex-Councilman, people started really getting scared.

Kyle called in more men and several goblins on the investigations. Then one night very late, a house in Upland was set on fire. It belonged to another former ex-Councilman. But, this time a neighbor saw a man running from the scene that looked like Olt Grond. Kyle realized this could only mean one thing. Ben Grond, Olt's son. Olt has been dead for months.

The IPF picked up Ben the next day. He was questioned but insisted he was innocent. After several hours of intense interrogation, Kyle said,

"Two people are dead here, Ben. You were seen running from the house. Why not just admit it?"

"Because it wasn't me!"

Kyle knew it was time for a bluff.

"Ok, you leave me no choice but to go get Gandrath. He has very convincing ways of making you tell the truth. What is your favorite animal, Ben? I can at least put in a request for you," Kyle said..

"He wouldn't do that to me. Everyone would know he did it."

"You're probably right. I guess I will just have to turn you over to the dwarves. Tell them you were working with your father on the bridges."

Kyle was desperate now. He had no idea Ben was so afraid of the dwarves.

"Ok, ok! I'll tell. It was me. Don't send me to the dwarves. I just wanted to get back at those responsible for getting my Pa to do those bridge explosions."

"I think that was his own idea, Ben," Kyle said quietly.

"No, he was put up to it by the old Council, I'm sure of it."

"Well, thanks to you, two of them are dead and Underhill is gone. So, you at least did that much. You'll still be hanged, you know."

"I don't care. I made them pay."

And, within the week, the twenty-two year old was hanged in the Alvarstad courtyard. Nobody came to mourn. What a waste of a life, thought Kyle. Sometimes I hate this job.

Life on Norinda was really not as bad as he expected. Underhill was renting a small cottage while his house was being built. It was costing him a fortune because everything had to be shipped from Losandia. He spared no expense though. He wanted to impress these backwards people here to help gain their confidence. He talked to everyone he met. He went to meetings he heard of and pretended to be very interested in their issues.

Soon, he was asked to dinner at Cullen's home. This was the break he had been hoping for. If he could gain his confidence, he would be really respected. Everyone on Norinda loved Cullen and he owned just about everything. Granted, it was a primitive island with primitive buildings and a poor lifestyle, but they were sitting on a fortune with that iron ore pit and probably didn't even know it.

"Welcome to my home, Mr. Underhill," said Cullen.

"Dean, please! Thank you for inviting me."

"I've been hearing good things about you from the village. But, I can't help but wonder why such a distinguished person would want to live here on this poor island."

Underhill was taken aback. Somebody must have gotten to him. Probably the Council. Damn, they are going to spoil my plans here, too. I have to be extra careful, which means going slower. That's ok, I've nothing but time, he thought.

"Well, sir, to tell you the truth, I got tired of the lifestyle in Upland. Everybody competing with each other. And, the Council job was starting to wear on me. I thought it was time for new surroundings and I didn't want to live in the north with the dwarves. I would be an outsider. Then I heard about the contact with your boat and thought it would be just the quiet place I needed to retire."

Covering all his bases, thought Cullen. Smart one, he is.

"If you're looking for peace and quiet, you certainly have come to the right place."

"I am getting to know some of the villagers and they are treating me very well. I feel so bad for them, struggling as they are. I just hope there is a way I can be of some help here."

Safe, but to the point, thought Cullen.

"Oh, the villagers have lived this way all their life. They don't know anything about the fine things you have on Losandia. Most of them have never been off the island."

"Well, maybe I can just do a few small things, like start a food and supply stand in the village. I could offer food and staples at very cheap prices. I'm embarrassed to say it, but I was able to make quite a bit of money when I liquidated all my assets in Upland. Especially by your standards here."

Yea, from what I heard, you left with a good part of the old Council's treasury, too.

"I'm sure the villagers would appreciate that very much, Dean."

"It's the least I can do."

They ate dinner and discussed many things afterwards over drinks. Underhill, never once mentioned the iron ore pit. Cullen thought he was biding his time till he got more entrenched. Underhill thanked Cullen for the wonderful dinner and said he would be sure to reciprocate just as soon as his house was finished.

The building of the house went very fast because Underhill had the money to hire plenty of top quality craftsmen. The villagers came by constantly and stared at the building. They had never seen anything like it. It was only a two story, but had very ornate siding and plenty of colors. All of the villagers talked about was when they would be able to see the inside.

Underhill built his food stand in the middle of the village. He shipped over a huge assortment of vegetables, meats, staples and clothes. He hired one of the villagers to run the stand and sold everything very quickly. At a loss, of course. But he didn't care. The amount of goodwill it brought was very valuable to his plan. Soon everyone wanted to talk to him and invited him to their humble cottages on a regular basis.

These simpletons of the village were so easy to impress, he thought. And, it doesn't take a lot of money, which he liked best. Soon he will have made enough friends so that Cullen will have to be impressed. Then he can approach him about the ore pit. He wanted total control of the pit. The first thing he would do was stop the trading and start charging for the iron ore.

He knew this would cause problems with the villagers and those on Losandia getting the ore. But, in time, they would come around. He would start out charging a small amount and gradually increase it. His plan was to build modest houses for the villagers with the profits from the ore. They would have a small mortgage on their house set up for five years, then the balance would come due. He knew most of them would not be able to pay and he would get the house back to sell again.

He could even visualize the day when people or dwarves heard about this and moved to Norinda. They would be sold houses at a different price, but with the same five year plan. Then he could start working on building taverns and other businesses. It would just keep getting better and better.

The offices of the Island Police were extremely busy these days, with constant interviews and meetings. Kyle managed to hire almost two hundred new policemen. Most dwarves and goblins. He obtained permission from the Council to build his satellite offices in not only the Plains and Strehen, but in Barrowdale also. The new factory would be built there and that means lots of workers frequenting the Cutpurse Inn. There were usually problems when dwarves and humans drank together and he wanted an office to make sure that situation was covered.

He talked to Emily about starting the new police commission and she didn't object. It would be made up of four people, two policemen, probably Captains and two civilians. He already knew he wanted Mac to be one of the two. In fact, he wanted him to head the commission. He knew Mac was busy these days, but this should only entail one meeting every couple months.

One day he found Mac in the Sorrel and asked,

"Hey Mac. Hows things?"

"Good, how about you?"

"I need a few minutes to ask you a question."

"Ok, over at our table. Want a beer?"

"Nope...on duty."

"Oh, yeah, thats right. You never drink on duty."

"Nor do any of my men. Or so I've instructed them."

Mac brought his beer over and sat down. He knew what this was probably about.

"I know you're very busy these days helping the council and learning the tavern business, but I need a favor."

"Well, I pretty much know how the tavern runs, so I'm not that busy. What's the favor?"

"I'm starting a police commission and I'd like you to be on it. In fact, I'd like you to head it."

"Now, what do I know about police work?"

"You don't have to know about policing, just administering," Kyle smiled, "And, I know you're good at that."

"How much time are we talking about?"

"No more than one meeting every couple months. Maybe two or three hours. What I really need is an idea guy. Someone that sets the direction of the force."

"You mean, like determining what is needed and how to go about getting it?"

"Correct. See, you're a natural. You know this island as well as anyone. You know about the businesses. And, you know the issues between the races. Plus, you have a direct line to the Council. Now who better than you?"

"Hmmm. All of that is true, I suppose. Who are the others?"

"Two of my Captains and one other civilian. Not sure who that is yet."

"And, a scribe to take notes, I hope."

"Absolutely. Who would you like working with you on this?"

"Can it be a woman?"

"Sure, if you want it to be."

"Well, I think it would be a tossup between Marinda and Mistress Kallie."

"Kallie. Really?"

"We get along well and she definitely has a head for business."

"Your choice. Want me to ask them or you?"

"It better be you. More official, you know."

"Just let me know when you've made up your mind and I will go see them."

"Ok, Kallie then."

"See, you're a natural decision maker. And I like that choice better. I have other plans for Marinda that really doesn't involve police work," grinned Kyle.

He entered the Skylark about an hour later. Kallie was in the kitchen talking to Picker. He took a table and ask to have her join him.

"Hello, Kyle. How are you?" she asked.

"Fine, Kallie. How's the Freedom coming along?"

"Grand opening next week. The Council will be there as well as the IPF Commander, I hope."

"Wouldn't miss it. I have a question for you?"

"I'm listening."

"How do you feel about police work?"

"It's fascinating. But not sure I would be interested in being the first policewoman."

"Good, it's not that. I'm starting a police commission that will have two civilians on it. Mac is one and he wants the other to be you."

"Well, isn't that interesting. What would I have to do?"

"Help Mac set the directions of the IPF. Attend a meeting every couple months. Basically, give suggestions to the two Captains on the commission."

"That sounds easy enough. I love giving people suggestions."

"Then you'll do it?"

"Sure. When is the first meeting and how do I prepare?"

"Wow. Another natural. You and Mac will do just fine, I can see that. I'll contact you when the meeting and agenda are set."

"Thank Mac for considering me, will you?"

"Of course. See you at the Grand opening."

Cullen had been hearing about the food stand for days now. He checked it out and realized why everyone loved it. The food was as fresh as could be considering it was shipped in and the prices were terrific. The Norinda women were feeding their family like never before. And the men could buy sturdy clothing and boots. Underhill was a hero, thought Cullen.

He must get word to everyone about Underhill's motive. A general meeting would be easiest, but he couldn't take the chance the Underhill might show up. He has been doing that lately. He is trying his best to get involved in all activities in the village. Cullen decided he would start going cottage to cottage and informing everyone. It would take longer, but he had no choice.

It was just after leaving an outlying cottage that Cullen met Underhill out for a walk.

"Why hello there Cullen. Beautiful day, isn't it?"

"Yes, great day for a walk."

"I'd like to ask you something. Can I walk with you?" asked Underhill.

"Certainly."

"There is talk that Norinda will be trading with Losandia soon. Iron ore for supplies. Is this true?"

"Yes."

"I wonder why you will be doing trading instead of selling the ore, do you know?"

"When we first thought that Losandia might need ore, we had trading in mind. It's never changed."

"Well, maybe you should consider selling the ore. I happen to know that Losandia needs iron ore badly and would pay a good price for it. You could then buy all the supplies you need and really improve your quality of life here."

"I think we can do the same thing by trading, so we will just keep it that way," Cullen said.

"Too bad. I know a fair bit about buying and selling and I could be very helpful."

"That's generous of you, but it won't be necessary. I turn here and get home. I have lots to finish this day."

"Certainly. Talk to you again, soon."

That did not go well at all, thought Underhill. He suspected the Council was advising Cullen. Would he never be shed of those damn kids on that Council? He was sure he could not change Cullen's mind, so the next thing he had to work on was finding out who owned the barge. He would just have to buy it and start charging a toll for moving supplies back and forth. That should stop the trading. If the toll was

high enough, Cullen would be forced to charge for the iron ore to pay the tolls.

He needed to find out who owned that barge and make them a very generous offer for it.

The grand opening of the Freedom Tavern was in full swing. The Council was there, as well as Kyle Baas and most of the business owners from the river towns. Mac and Emily were sitting with Kyle and Marinda at a table together.

"This tavern is unlike any on Losandia. It has a larger capacity and Kallie has streamlined the servers so the service is much faster. She certainly is a good business woman." observed Marinda.

"And, there seems to be no natural separation between humans and the other races. Everybody is mixing with everyone else," said Emily.

"Yes, I hadn't noticed that. It's something she needs to explain to Mallor Dunharrow at the Cutpurse. I'm concerned that when the new iron ore factory is built, the Cutpurse will be jammed with humans and dwarves," Kyle stated.

"And, that's a recipe for fights, right?" asked Mac.

"Yes. I think with Kallie's help Mallor can implement the same thing there."

Bentley then gave a short speech welcoming Kallie and her new tavern to Port Sorrel. He said that he hoped the Council would get their own table here. Everyone laughed and Kallie said both the table and the private room were already being built. More applause.

Kallie was noticing how well Picker was handling this good size crowd. It seemed like his serving idea was working well. It was surely a lucky day for her when he came into her office looking for work. She thought maybe she should give him another raise. She certainly could afford it. Selling the Ridgemont to Horace had positioned her very well. He balked at her price until she reminded him what he said about it being worth a hundred thousand. They finally agreed on ninety thousand. He still came out on top, she thought.

There were two men sitting alone at a small table near the bar conversing very quietly. They kept looking around at those in attendance and it seemed to Kyle they were taking measure of some sort. After watching them over the next few minutes, his instincts told him they were up to no good. He excused himself from the table and casually strolled over to theirs.

"Afternoon gents. Enjoying yourselves?" Kyle asked.

He was not in uniform and didn't think they knew who he was. They gave him a scowl and one said, "Well enough. Kallie has a nice place here."

"She sure does. You two look like sailors. Are you from a boat on the Sorrel?"

"No. We do have a small dinghy that we use to come to town in, maybe that's it," answered the other, a little too nervously for Kyle.

"I'm Kyle Baas. What do they call you?"

"Kemey and Logan. We're from the Granton area. And, we had better be getting back too. Nice talking to you Kyle."

"You too. See you around."

That was definitely wrong, thought Kyle, as he headed back to the table.

"Who were those two?" asked Mac.

"Named Kemey and Logan, from Granton area. Strange though," said Kyle.

"How's that?"

"When I asked them if they were sailors, they said no, but they owned a small dinghy they used to get to town," answered Kyle.

"That sounds reasonable," said Marinda.

"You don't need a dinghy to get from Granton to Port Sorrel," said Kyle with a frown.

Kyle thought he would do some investigating with some people in the Granton area to see if anyone knows these two. Things that didn't make sense had always bothered him.

Underhill was talking to some villagers at the food stand one morning, when he saw two men walk by. One gave him a sign and then they both sat on a bench near one of the other stands. He pretended to ignore them and started walking around visiting with more people shopping.

Eventually he made his way to where the men were seated. He motioned for them to follow and headed for his house. Once there, he asked,

"What have you found out?"

"The barge used for trading is owned by the Council. It was built at the Shipwright Shop," said the man named Logan.

"Damn! The Council again. I can't seem to get away from them."

"Another thing," said the other man, Kemey. "We were at the grand opening of the new tavern in Port Sorrell and were approached by the IPF Commander. He was asking questions."

"What were you two doing there?"

"Trying to learn more about that barge. The guy that actually had it built was a man named Bentley," answered Kemey.

"A Councilman. He owns the Shipwright, so that makes sense."

"So, are you going to try to buy it?" asked Logan.

"Absolutely not! There is no way the Council would even consider it."

"What should we do now?"

"Well, Cullen will not sell me the ore pit. And now I can't buy the barge, so the next best thing to do is sink it."

"Sink it? Are you crazy? The IPF will be all over you."

"They could try, but if I'm at the food stand talking to several villagers when it happens, I'm in the clear."

"You want us to do it?" asked Kemey, surprised.

"Sure, there is no way to connect us. I live here and you live in Granton. What's the problem?"

"What if they connect us somehow? We would be arrested, or worse. And, besides, how would we do it?"

"Well, you have friends in the lumber business, right?"

"Yea, so?"

"They use explosives to blow up tree stumps when they harvest wood, right?"

"So, now we have a person that knows we bought explosives. And, that Commander knows we own a dinghy. He would surely figure it out," answered Remy.

"How does he know you own a dinghy?" asked Underhill.

"We told him we did. He asked us if we were sailors on a boat on the Sorrel. We had to say something."

"I still think you would be fine. And, to make it even more interesting for you, I will pay each of you five hundred dollars if you sink it. Just let me know the day and time, so I can make my alibi."

The two men looked at each other and thought for a moment. Underhill knew he had them. They agreed.

"Plan on the next barge sailing from Norinda. Do you want the details on how we will do it?"

"No, it's better if I don't know."

Emily and Mac were discussing the details of the wedding a few days later when she suddenly realized they needed somebody to give her away.

"That's right. Do you have someone in mind? Mac asked."

"If could only be Bentley. He was my father's closest friend. I'll ask him at the next meeting."

"Any more items on the checklist?"

"I guess Kyle is your best man, right?"

"Yep."

"Are we happy with the guest list?" she asked.

"I think so. We won't have room for everyone and I wouldn't want to offend someone by not inviting them, so I think we should keep it to just those needed and my Father's close friends. Do you have someone special?"

"Just Kyle."

"Good then. It will be the ship Captain, Kyle, Bentley, Marinda, Lady Mortan, you and me. Seven people at a wedding? That sounds depressing."

"Ah, but the party will be much larger. It will probably go on all day and hundreds will eventually come by."

"As to when. How about just after the next Council meeting?"

"Isn't that next week?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Wow, that fast, huh."

"Do I detect cold feet?"

"Not me. I just want to make sure we talk to those coming. I'd hate to have anyone not get the word."

Just before the next Council meeting, Emily pulled Bentley aside to ask him about giving her away.

"Mac and I decided the wedding will be next week. I was hoping you would give me away."

Bentley stared at her without saying anything for a moment, then said,

"Of course, I will. I never thought this day would come so fast. Mac can take over for me now," he said, quietly.

"Take over?"

"When your father knew he was dying, he asked me to keep watch over you. I've tried to do that all these years. Now, that will be Mac's job," he answered, smiling.

Emily gave him a hug and said she never knew. He said Kevin asked him not to let her know. He knew how headstrong she was and probably would not approve.

"If I were to let anyone watch over me, it would be you, Bentley. Thank you for that."

"You're welcome, dear. You've been like the daughter I never had."

"And, there is no reason for that to stop, right?" she asked.

"No reason at all."

The meeting started a few minutes later, with Bentore presiding. He asked if there were any more news on the trading issue with Norinda. Emily reported that trading had started and the iron ore was being stored near where the factory was being built in Barrowdale. Everything was going as planned and the dwarves were anxious to have the iron. They needed a lot of tools for their operation in Strehen.

Bentore was about to ask for an update on the IPF, when a knock on the door interrupted him. One of Bentley's foremen put his head and motioned for him to come over. They spoke quietly for a moment and Bentley returned.

"My foreman just got word that the barge carrying a load of ore was blown up. It had just left port in Norinda."

Stunned faces looked at him from around the table. Bentley sat down and was deep in thought when Spinthorn said,

"Underhill."

"Probably so," replied Bentley.

"Was anybody hurt?" asked Emily.

"Not that we know of yet. There were only four crew members and they are usually all forward. The barge was sunk by explosives from the back."

"This is terrible. Is there anything we can do?" asked Paren.

"I think we should end the meeting now and go find out whatever we can. I will go see Kyle Baas. If you find out anything that might help at all, get word to Kyle," Emily said.

Most of the people in the village heard the explosion. They had absolutely no idea what it was. It came from the direction of the dock, so they all headed that way. Underhill was with several others that had been at his food stand. When they arrived at the dock, there were several small boats going out in the direction of Losandia. Cullen arrived and after seeing one of the boats returning with two crew members of the barge, he knew what had happened.

He immediately found Underhill and asked,

"And what would you know about this Underhill?"

"About what. I'm not even sure what happened."

"Judging by the hurt barge crew members, I'd say there was an accident."

Underhill said nothing, but just watched the small boats returning. Cullen went to the first boat and asked one of the bargemen what happened.

"Don't know, sir. There was a large explosion at the back and within minutes she sunk. How about the Captain and the tender. Are they ok?"

"Not sure," answered Cullen.

He looked at the second small boat and saw the Captain. He looked unharmed, but the tender was not moving. He ran over and was told that the tender was dead. He was checking lines near the back when the explosion happened. Cullen knelt down beside him and wept.

Underhill was talking to several villagers. They were asking him if he knew why this happened. He denied having any knowledge.

"There are those on Losandia that will try to implicate me in this because they do not like me. They are jealous of how well I did when I lived there."

"We have heard that you want to take control of the ore pit." one of them said.

"I would like to buy into the pit as an investment, yes."

"I don't see that having anything to do with this barge exploding, though," said another.

"I assure you, it does not. This explosion was done by some on Losandia to make me look bad in the eyes of Cullen and the villagers. In a short time, word will be spread that I was responsible, mark me," Underhill said, with a very straight face.

Some of the villagers believed him. Some were not convinced, after what Cullen had told them. In any case, it looks like the end of trading with Losandia which they were not happy about. The villagers were just getting used to some of the finer things trading brought.

Underhill would wait a short amount of time and then approach Cullen again about selling the pit. If trading had stopped, all the ore would just sit there and be of no use to anyone. Cullen could not let that happen.

After the barge crewmen were attended to, Cullen headed home. He was not sure what to do now. Trading was over and he suspected Underhill was behind it. He would probably contact me again about selling the pit. And, this time it will be harder to refuse, he thought.

Emily headed straight to Derwend and found Kyle in a meeting in his office. When he looked up at her through the door and saw the look on her face, he ended the meeting and called her in.

"What is it Emily? That look says there is trouble," asked Kyle.

"Underhill has struck again."

"Oh damn, not again. What has he done now?"

"He has hired someone to blow up the Norinda barge. And, it was full of iron ore on it's way here."

"Was anyone hurt?"

"Not that we know of, yet."

Kyle's face grew very hard. He knew they had not heard the last from Underhill. He was going to have to deal with that man sooner or later.

"Why would he do this, do you think?"

"Well, we know he is making friends of the villagers. We think he may have already asked Cullen to buy part or all of the ore pit"

"And, if Cullen said no, where does that leave him?" asked Kyle.

"He wants to control that pit. Then he can regulate trade. If he can't get control through Cullen, he has to find another way."

"With no barge there is no trade. That's the ammunition he needs to get Cullen to agree?"

"Yes. And, once he owns the pit, he will charge a huge price for the ore."

"And, if Cullen still does not agree?"

"Let's not go there just yet."

"Do you think I should take some men and go to Norinda?"

"Probably wouldn't accomplish anything. I'm sure he has a foolproof alibi. What we need to do is try to find the person or persons he hired."

"I will start an official investigation immediately. I have a few things to check on. As soon as I know something I will contact you."

"Good. The Councilmen are checking around. They will report to you if they learn anything helpful."

After a few days and things had settled down a little, Underhill went to see Cullen. He asked him again to buy the mine. He tried his best, citing all the things Cullen could do for the villagers with the money. Cullen was adamant. He would not sell or let Underhill even buy part of the pit. It was a very hard thing for Cullen to do, but he believed what the Council told him about Underhill. Trading was very important to the villagers. If Underhill owned the pit and start charging for the ore, that would be the end of it.

"I know you and the villagers all desperately want the trading to continue, right?"

"Yes."

"And, I believe it will, just as soon as I have control of the ore pit."

"So, that means you will not stop the trading by blowing up the barges again, right?"

"Now, Cullen. Do you really think I have that much power?"

"No, but you have that much money," Cullen replied.

The next morning, Cullen headed to Losandia to see the Council. What he suspected was true. Underhill was behind the barge explosion and the death of a villager. He was furious. He had to get the Council to get Underhill put away. But, how? They had no proof he was involved.

The Council was not scheduled to meet again soon, so Cullen went directly to Bentley. When he arrived at the Shipwright, he asked where his office was. He was told that Bentley was talking to the IPF Commander, but he could wait. He said it was urgent and asked to interrupt them. A few minutes later, Bentley and Kyle came out.

"I'm Cullen from Norinda. Can I have a word with you both?"

"Of course," answered Bentley.

The three of them went back into Bentley's office and Cullen explained what happened with the explosion, the death and Underhill approaching him again. Bentley was visibly shaken. Kyle was very angry.

"We will need to go see Emily. Do you want to attend, Kyle?"

"Yes."

"Are you willing to come to Derwend, Cullen?"

"Certainly," he answered.

It was the first time Cullen got to ride in a carriage. He also got to see Sutterton on the way. He was very impressed and wished these kind of things for his villagers some day. He thought that maybe when this Underhill thing was over, he would talk to Emily about having some villagers come to Losandia to see things first hand.

They found Emily and Mac having lunch. She was very surprised to see Cullen and feared the worst, especially since he was with Bentley and Kyle. She asked them all to sit down and have some lunch. She motioned for three more specials.

"I hate to ruin your lunch, but we've more bad news," Bentley said to them both.

Cullen explained in detail everything he had already told Bentley and Kyle. Emily could see he was very distraught about losing a villager. She could also tell that Bentley was very upset about losing his barge. Kyle was also angry, but he kept it well hidden.

"I don't know how much longer I can keep refusing his offers, even though I now what would happen to both islands if he controlled the pit," Cullen said.

"You have no idea what this man is capable of, Cullen," Kyle said through his teeth.

"But I promised my people some prosperity with this trading and I hate to take that away from them."

Emily put her hand on Cullen's and said,
"Whether you sell the pit or not, your people may not realize the prosperity. Underhill will stop trading no matter what you do. He wants control of the pit for the profits."
"Maybe not. What if we build another barge," asked Bentley.
"And this time run it at night with an escort boat of Shielders and goblins," Kyle said.
"Might just work," Mac replied.
"Where do we get the money for another barge?" asked Emily.
"I think I can get most of it," Bentley said, smiling.
"You paid for the last one!" Emily said.
"Well, maybe we can sell the first load of ore and use that money," Cullen added.
"Maybe. We would need to line up buyers," said Mac.
"I'll start on that right away," Bentley said.

"I have some things to check out in Granton, so I will excuse myself," said Kyle. "Thank you for lunch, Emily."

"Welcome. See you soon."

"I guess Cullen and I will head back, too," said Bentley.

Emily and Mac bid goodbye to Cullen, telling him not to worry, they would do everything they could to start shipments again. He thanked them and left with Bentley.

Mac and Emily talked some more and both decided they had better postpone the wedding till this thing with Underhill was resolved. She said she would send a note to Marinda too.

Emily thought about contacting Gandrath, but decided it was not an emergency yet. She was bound and determined to resolve this without Gandrath.

Both Kemey and Logan were laying low in a shack on the outskirts of Granton. They went on a small spree the day after the attack, but since then they only went out for needed food and supplies. Underhill had paid them in cash, so it was easy to do. Especially in Barrowdale. Nobody there asked any questions at all.

Kyle took several of his men and a few dwarves and headed to Granton. He had this nagging suspicion about the pair he saw in the Freedom that day and wanted to talk to them again. He stopped at the mill and asked several workers if they knew of them. None did. They checked the Valeman Pub and had no luck. When they went into the Mystic they asked for Lady Mortan. Kyle gave her a description of the pair and the names they used and asked her to check around. He would be back in a couple hours.

He then went to Barrowdale to see Dunkel. In his back office Kyle gave him all the details of what had happened. Dunkel couldn't believe all that had happened and he didn't know of it.

"Well, you are pretty well out of the way here, Dunkel," Kyle said.

"But, I still usually get word of things. Must be because Picker is not here anymore. Everybody always talked to him and he had time to listen. I'm just too busy these days."

"I'm also looking for a couple that are from the Granton area, but may have been here. They said their names were Kemey and Logan," explained Kyle. He gave Dunkel a quick description of the two.

"I've never seem them, but maybe my two office workers have. Let me check."

He was back in a few minutes. One of the office workers remembered two men a couple weeks back buying supplies.

"She remembered one of them calling the other Kemey. It was an odd name she had never heard before."

"Did they say where they lived?" asked Kyle.

"No, just bought their supplies and left."

"Ok, thanks, Dunkel. If you spot these two let me know right away."

"Will do, Kyle. Good luck."

Kyle and his men headed back to Granton. When they got back to the Mystic, Lady Mortan met them at the door.

"I found someone that knows them," she said, smiling.

"Great. And?"

"They live on the outskirts of town and do odd jobs around. They used to work at the mill, but were fired last year," she explained.

"Damn, I need to hire you in the IPF."
"Would I still be able to work here too?"
"Afraid not."
"Then I would lose all my contacts and be useless to you."
"You've got a point. Guess it's better to have you here. Are those their real names?"
"Yes. Want me to let you know if we see them again?"
"That would be great."
"Ok, I'll get a note to you if I learn anything else."

Several replies had come back to Bentley, all promising to help with the new barge. Donation of supplies were pouring into his shipyard. The Council may even have enough in the treasury to cover what costs were left, he thought. Building started right away and he even had a dozen men donate their time on it. He was absolutely amazed at the good people he had working for him. At this rate, the new barge could be done next week.

He sent a note with a runner to both Emily and Paren, updating them on the progress of the new barge. He also thought about a better way of the Council talking to each other with this kind of critical information. They could not keep calling emergency meetings. Maybe they could buy a carriage and hire some reliable runners for Paren, Dunkel, Bentore and Spinthorn. Aran Reider was the farthest away. Maybe a messenger bird for him. He would check into this.

Thinking about Bentore and Spinthorn reminded him that they had not been updated in a while. They only knew about the barge explosion and nothing since. He wrote notes for them both and sent a runner to deliver them. So many things were happening so fast, it had been a while since they had a complete full Council meeting. And, the meetings were changing to monthly after the next one.

Bentley decided to try for another meeting. He put the word out with runners to the others that the next meeting would be in the morning. He talked to his foreman and asked him to have a special carriage built for speed. It would need to be very light and fit only one person, with just two wheels. A special harness would have to be built too.

He would hire two young men to be used as runners and they would deliver all messages for Council business. Two fast horses would be purchased from Bentore. They bred special horses for the Steppes and Plains and they were sturdy and fast. He would call this the Sorrel Express and he would charge a delivery fee for non-Council messages to help pay for it.

The next morning the Council members met at the Freedom early. They had a private room where they took their meals. Afterwards, they headed to the chamber and Bentley called the meeting to order,

"Lets try this again. Since the last meeting was interrupted as soon as we got started, we will pick up from there. I was about to ask for an update on the IPF. Emily?"

"They are almost at full staff. Three hundred men, dwarves and goblins. Kyle is the Commander and has four Captains, a man, dwarf, goblin and a wark."

She could tell everyone was pleased to hear this, especially Spinthorn. Just think, he thought, a warks Captain on the Losandia police force. He would have never dreamed of such a thing. He wished his father was still alive.

"And, Kyle has established a police commission, consisting of two Captains, Mac Finnegan and Mistress Kallie."

This time there was silence. She looked at each Councilman and tried to determine the reason.

"Does anyone disagree with the commissioners selected?"

"A woman tavern owner? Does she know anything about police work?" asked Paren, with both Spinthorn and Dunkel agreeing with the question.

"Exactly what she asked when Kyle recruited her. He was quick to point out, however, that she didn't really need to know police work. Thats what the Captains are for. She was chosen for her knowledge of business and administration. We have a lot of businesses on Losandia and they all need to be protected by the IPF. Mac is just learning the business end of things and he will feel more comfortable with her expertise."

"I guess that makes sense. She is definitely a good business woman. One look here and the Freedom tells you that."

Spinthorn and Dunkel nodded their agreement.

Bentley reported on the new carriages he is having built and their purpose. And, on the progress of the new barge.

"Should be ready soon. We have had so many donations of supplies and free labor from my workers, the treasury will hardly even be used," he smiled.

Unanimous applause.

"I have a question for you, Aran," Bentley said.

"Yes?"

The new fast carriage will be good for getting messages to the river towns and Granton or Barrowdale, but they cannot get through the Steppes to Strehen. Is there a fast way we can get a message to you on Council business?"

"Maybe. I can talk to some of the Clanner dwarves to get one of the birds they use. It could be housed here in the chambers. I'm not sure who would take care of it, though."

"I'll take care of that," answered Dunkel. "Picker would love to see to the bird."

"Most excellent. Thank you gentlemen," Bentley said.

Emily gave everyone an update on where things stood with Underhill and the Cullen. Hopefully, the new barge would convince Underhill that he could not get control of the ore pit. Cullen refused to sell or even let him buy shares, maybe he just might give up.

She then gave a report on the treasury. They had plenty of money and taxes were coming in exactly as planned. Every business on Losandia was paying a tax, based on their income. Even the small businesses not in towns were paying taxes. The dwarves, goblins and warks paid a set amount. They were glad to pay since they had good representation on the Council and the IPF.

She said the next meeting would be in one month. But, warned them, emergency ones would be possible until the Underhill issue was solved. Bentley adjourned the meeting.

Underhill went to see Kemey and Logan very early one morning. He beached his small boat on the opposite shore from Port Sorrel and nobody saw him. They were in their shack outside of Granton.

"Have you seen the new barge yet?" he asked them.

"New barge? Didn't know they had one," answered Kemey.

"Well, they do. Bentley made them another one."

"So, do we blow that one up too?"

"Yes, but you have to be very careful, they will be on the lookout. Is there a way for it to blow while docked?"

"Sure, we just put the explosives in the very front of a dingy and ram it."

"Good. Make sure it happens just as soon as they start unloading at Port Sorrel."

"Will do. We need money for this job and another dinghy."

Underhill gave them each another five hundred. They were very excited. They wouldn't have to look for work for the rest of the year. Underhill bid them goodbye and headed back home. He made it to his house without anyone even noticing him after he docked at Norinda.

Kemey bought an old dinghy for next to nothing. They still had enough explosives from the first batch to do this job. They concealed the dinghy on the south shore of the Binter and Logan went to see his friend that worked at the shipyard.

He handed him some money and said,

"Get word to me as soon as the new barge leaves for Norinda, ok?"

"Will do," his friend answered.

Everyone felt good that the barge had an escort boat with half a dozen IPF police. Hopefully, this would deter anyone from trying to blow it again. As the barge headed for Norinda early one morning, a young worker in the shipyard headed to a shack outside Granton.

Kemey and Logan loaded the dinghy. They positioned themselves just out of sight and up the coast from the Port Sorrel dock and waited. About three hours later they could see the barge, loaded down, heading to Losandia. Luckily, the escort boat was on the other side of the barge and would not see the dinghy. They started for the dock, hugging the shore. The barge docked and started unloading the iron ore.

Kemey set the timer on the explosives for one minute. They rowed until they were very close to the back of the barge. They gave one last row on the ores and both slipped into the water and swam to shore

back the way the came. They would hide out until things died down and head back to their shack.

Just then, the dinghy ran into the back of the barge and a few seconds later exploded. They used all the explosives they had left, a bit more than the first time. The explosion was so big that it took out the whole back side of the barge and a part of the dock. Luckily, the workers unloading were at the front of the barge and were not hurt, except for being pelted with ore raining down on them.

Everybody in Port Sorrel heard the explosion. All the Shipwright workers came running out, along with Bentley. He could not believe his eyes. He immediately called for the IPF to start looking to those responsible, but by then Kemey and Logan were far up the coast and inland. A clean getaway.

One of the IPF policemen came into the Sorrel tavern about an hour later. He sat down and asked for a dark beer. He was obviously winded. He also asked for someone to water his horse. Emily heard the commotion and came out. Mac was right behind her.

"They got us again!" he shouted. "The new barge full of ore at the dock was just blown. It sank in thirty feet of water."

Emily was stunned. She could not speak.

"How in the world did they get past the escort boat?" asked Mac.

"They rammed it from behind while it was being unloaded."

"Was anyone hurt?" she finally asked.

"No, not this time. They were all up front unloading. It tore up part of the dock, though."

"Are you going back now?" asked Emily.

"As soon as I finish this beer and my horse rests a minute."

"Tell Bentley to call an emergency meeting," Emily said and walked back to her office.

"I can't believe they did it again," said Mac walking into the office.

He could see Emily was close to tears. He walked over and hugged her and told her it was ok. Nobody was hurt or killed. And, they could build another barge and fix the dock.

"That's only part of it. Underhill is winning this fight and that hurts."

"I know. He is very determined."

"So am I," she said.

"What now?"

"We have to go see Cullen. Convince him to hold off selling the pit. He may not be able to. I have to decide whether to contact Gandrath or not."

"Ok. I'll get us a boat. We can head up river to Port Sorrel and talk to Bentley, then go on to Norinda."

They arrived in Port Sorrel and found Bentley. He was absolutely furious. He wanted to get the entire IPF and go get Underhill. Emily explained that there is still no proof against him.

"We are heading to see Cullen. He must not sell until we can figure out our next move," Emily told Bentley.

"Should I wait then on the emergency meeting?"

"Yes, for now. We will stop and let you know what Cullen says."

When they got to Norinda, it was all quiet. Nobody knew what happened. They headed straight to Cullen's house. They explained what happened and he sunk down in a chair.

"I knew he was going to do this again. He almost said as much when we last talked."

"You can't give in to him Cullen. He is determined to wear us down, but we can't let him get that pit or your villagers will be put right back in poverty. And, he will control all the ore that Losandia needs. That cannot happen," Emily said emphatically.

"I know. But it gets harder and harder."

"Just promise me before you agree to sell to him, you will contact me. I have one more idea I can try. Please trust me on this, Cullen."

"Ok. I won't sell until I check with you."

"Thank you," Emily and Mac said together.

Marinda was in her office when Kyle stuck his head in the door.

"Got a minute?" he asked.

"Always, for you," she said sitting back in her chair.

"Did you get the word about Mac and Emily's wedding?"

"Yes. A note came the other day."

"Did she say how long they are postponing?"

"No, but it will definitely take a while to get this Underhill thing resolved. Could be months."

"I don't think that long."

"Something you want to share?"

"No, just a hunch. I am trying to find those two we saw at Kallie's opening. I think they may be involved."

"Really? You think maybe Underhill hired them?"

"Something like that. Did you know I hired Kallie to be on the police commission with Mac?"

"Really? Is she good at police work?"

"No, but she is a good business woman. And an administrator. She and Mac will be very good, I think."

"Why Kallie?"

"Actually Mac ask for either her or you."

"Me. What makes him think I would qualify?"

"Well, actually, I think he really wanted Kallie and I kind of encouraged it."

"Oh, and why is that?"

"No special reason, I just thought..."

"What is it you're trying to say, in a round about way, Kyle?" interrupted Marinda.

"What I'm trying to say is I didn't want to put any more responsibility on you than you already have."

"I don't have that much."

"Well, what spare time you do have, I'd like it to be for us."

"Is there an us, Kyle?"

"I certainly would like there to be," he said, smiling.

"I think that's a fine idea. Let's work on that, if you have any spare time, that is."

Kyle came around the desk and took Marinda in his arms and kissed her soundly.

"That's the second time you've done that Mr. Baas."

"And?"

"I think I could get used to it," she smiled and leaned in for another kiss.

Eleven

The emergency Council met the following morning. Emily, Bentley, Dunkel and Spinthorn were in attendance. Emily explained what happened during their meeting with Cullen.

"Do you think he will wait?" asked Paren.

"He promised he would. We have to come up with a plan to deal with Underhill."

"I notified Kyle and he and his Captains are discussing it," Bentley said.

"How about if we just hand him over to the dwarves like we did Olt and his men?" asked Dunkel.

"I wish we could, but the villagers would be up in arms. I'm sure they all think he is innocent," Emily answered.

Discussions went on for several hours with no decision made. Building another barge was out of the question. Somehow, Underhill was going to pay for those two he destroyed, thought Bentley.

Just before the meeting concluded, there was a knock on the door. Emily admitted Kyle and he said he had news.

"I sent several goblins looking for the ones responsible for the explosions. They tracked them to the woods above the Prather bridge. When they tried to apprehend them they put up a fight. Both had long knives."

"Was it the two you thought?" asked Emily.

"Yes, Kemey and Logan from Granton."

"Did they confess?" Bentley asked.

"They didn't get a chance. When the one named Kemey cut one of the goblins, it was a fatal mistake. They were both killed instantly. When faced with a bunch of armed goblins it's a terrible idea to cut one of them."

"Damn!" exclaimed Bentley.

"We don't know who hired them," said Kyle.

"Exactly. But at least our barges will be safer now," said Bentley.

Underhill learned the second barge was sunk from one of the villagers the next day. He was sure Cullen also knew. He headed to his house and knocked. Cullen let him in but did not offer him a seat.

"So, come to gloat, Underhill."

"Not really. This could have been completely avoided if you had agreed to sell."

"Not a chance. We are not selling, period."

"I guess that is to be expected. You had no vested interest in those barges. They Council paid for them, right?"

"I have a vested interest in the trade they would have provided."

"True. Now, do you have a vested interest in your villagers?"

"What does that mean?"

"I would hate to see any of them get hurt because you are so stubborn," Underhill sneered.

"Are you threatening me?"

"Not a threat. Just something that could possibly happen if you don't cooperate."

"I'll ask you to leave my house!"

"Of course," Underhill said as he walked out the door.

Bentley was on his way to a meeting when he saw Cullen pull up to the dock. He walked out to meet him. He could see by the look on his face he was extremely worried.

"Hello Cullen. Are you ok?"

"No. I need to talk to you and Emily."

"I was just on my way to Alvarstad. We can stop and see her on the way."

"Good."

When they got to Derwend they went directly to the Sorrel. Mac met them and knew there was trouble right away. He sat them at Emily's table and went to find her. She was down the street talking to a supplier. He told her who just walked in the Sorrel. She grimaced, excused herself and headed back with him. After they sat down, Cullen said,

"He said he would hurt some of the villagers if I didn't cooperate. He said he would hate to see them hurt because I was so stubborn."

Bentley was stunned. Mac and Emily exchanged glances.

"I can't believe he would do this," said Bentley.

"Believe it, Bentley. We are dealing with a man that has absolutely no scruples and he will stop at nothing to get what he wants," Mac said.

"He has become very dangerous and a menace," Bentley spat.

Emily was quiet for a moment with a far away look in her eyes. Mac knew what she was thinking, but the other two did not.

"Ok. Cullen, you just go home for now. Do nothing. Wait till I get word to you," Emily said.

"And don't talk to Underhill," added Mac.

"What are you going to do?" asked Cullen.

"I can't explain it now, but it will be clear very soon," Emily said.

Bentley was not sure what Emily was up to, but he had an idea. He asked Cullen to have lunch while he kept his appointment, then he would pick him up on his way back.

Emily decided to contact Gandrath. She told Mac to come to her office and they shut and locked the door. He pulled the curtains closed, while Emily unlocked the safe. She took out a small object wrapped in a cloth that Mac had seen, but had no idea what it was. She unwrapped it and set it on her desk in front of her.

It looked to Mac like a piece of quartz with sparkles inside. When Emily picked it up with both hands, the sparkles got brighter. She closed her eyes and concentrated. Mac knew to be quiet and very still. After just a few moments, Emily put the stone down and wrapped it back in the cloth.

"Is that all there is to it?"

"That's it. I followed the instructions carefully," she replied.

"Now what?"

"We wait for Gandrath to come."

"How long?"

"I have no idea. But, I hope it's very soon. No telling how long Underhill will wait before he acts again."

"This is scary business, Emily. Are you frightened here at all?"

"No, not frightened. Just very tired of worrying about Underhill and what he might do next."

"That makes two of us."

Cullen returned to Norinda that afternoon and was met at the dock by angry villagers. They said they were confused about what was going on and wanted a full explanation from him.

"I've heard Underhill is being framed by the Losandia Council," one said.

"And, I've heard he is behind it all because he wants the ore pit," said another.

Several started talking all at once then. Cullen felt bad for them and finally held up his hands and said,

"I've spoken to the Council and they assure me all this will be settled very soon. Lets give it a couple more days," Cullen said.

"And if nothing is done by then?"

"We will take matters in our own hands," said an irate villager.

"Just be patient, please. I will have an answer for you all very soon," Cullen assured them.

They didn't like it, but trusted Cullen. They all went to their homes.

The next morning early, Emily decided she wanted Gandrath to hear all the details from the entire Council, not just her and Mac. She felt he would be here very soon. She took a fast horse to Port Sorrel to see Bentley. It would be best if all the council was notified and made ready.

She found Bentley having breakfast with Mistress Kallie at the Freedom. She sat down with them, ordered breakfast and said,

"I think we need the entire Council and not just an emergency one. Can you get word to everyone quickly?" she asked Bentley.

"Yes. Do you want them to come today? What if they aren't needed for several days?" he asked.

"It will not be that long. Today or tomorrow at the latest."

"OK, say they all get here today. Then what?"

Before Emily could answer, Kallie said,

"I feed them dinner and put each one in a room at the Skylark. They can wait in comfort."

"You're a gem, dear," Bentley said as he patted her hand.

"I'm sorry we can't tell you all the details, Kallie, but I have very strict orders," said Emily.

"I'm sure you will tell me when it's time," she said.

"I'll be off then. Word should reach everyone in a couple hours. They will be here this afternoon," Bentley said. He felt certain he knew what Emily was up to, but kept quiet.

Kallie and Emily finished their breakfast and continued talking.

"You look tired, Emily. Are you sure you are ok?"

"Yes, I'm fine. And, I am tired. Very tired. Once this is settled, Mac and I are going to take a break from everything."

"That sounds wonderful. Where will you go?" she asked.

"Maybe Norinda. There are parts of it we have not seen yet."

"I just hope Underhill gets what's coming to him for all that he has done."

"I think that will happen, very soon," Emily said with a grin. She could see that Kallie was dying to know what she meant, but she kept a straight face.

Emily watched her for a moment and said,

"I'd better get back to my office. Lots to do today."

"You take it easy, dear. Rest every chance you get. I want to see those rosy cheeks again very soon."

"Thanks, Kallie. For everything."

They hugged and Emily headed back to Derwend.

Emily and Mac just finished lunch and were doing writ in the office when Gandrath walked in. Emily got and ran to hug him. She couldn't help herself and start crying.

"Now, now. What's this? A Bandar sobbing. What would Kevin say?" Gandrath said, smiling.

"I wish he was here to tell me," Emily said drying her eyes.

Mac came and put his arm around her and let her back to her chair. They both sat down and Gandrath said,

"So, what is the problem, dear?" asked Gandrath.

"I really want you to hear all the details from all the Council members. They are right now on their way to the Council chambers in Port Sorrel."

"Chambers? In Port Sorrel. I do need updated, don't I?"

"I'll get the carriage ready," Mac said.

"We can update you on everything except the emergency on the way there. Care for something to eat first?" Emily asked.

"That would be nice," he answered.

Both Emily and Mac gave Gandrath all the details of everything that's happened since he left. They did not, however, mention anything about Underhill. They talked about marriages, bridges, new taverns and Inns. They told him about the Council members and how that was working. Mac explained all about the IPF and it's Commander. Emily told him they even have a Police Commission and who served on it.

Gandrath was well pleased with all the progress. He felt certain when he left that those involved would do a very good job with things, and they did. He was not looking forward to what they were not telling him, though.

It was late afternoon when they got to Port Sorrel. They went directly to the chambers and everyone was waiting, except Aran Reider. Emily asked everyone if Mac could attend and nobody objected. Bentley greeted Gandrath warmly and said that Aran was coming from Strehen. The bird had returned an hour ago, so he should be here any moment.

"Bird? You use messenger birds?" Gandrath asked.

"Yes, sir. And we have two fast carriages now to carry Council messages. It's called the Sorrel Express," said Dunkel, beaming.

"You are all just one surprise after another," Gandrath said.

"Did Emily tell you about the trading with Norinda? And their iron ore pit?"

And the barges Bentley built to haul the ore here?" asked an excited Dunkel.

"We are waiting on that part, Dunkel," Emily said gently.

"Oh, right, for Aran," he responded.

The Council and Gandrath chatted for another few minutes and then another dwarf entered the chambers and took a seat.

"Ok, we are all here. We can begin by formal introductions for those you have not met, Gandrath," Emily stated.

"These are our dwarves, Paren and Aran."

They both stood and bowed.

"This is our Goblin, Bentore."

He nodded his head deeply.

"This is the wark, Spinthorn."

He also stood and bowed.

"And this is our barrow, Dunkel."

He stood on his chair and bowed deeply.

"Everyone, this is the Mage Gandrath."

"I am pleased to see the diversity on this Council. Compared to the old one I believe Losandia is very well represented. Now, lets get down to business. What has Underhill been up to?" asked Gandrath.

The Council spent the next hour updating Gandrath on everything that happened since Underhill moved to Norinda. Each member had a tale or two. Paren explained about how the iron ore would help the dwarves build new tools for the stone mine. Emily told about how they discovered Norinda and Cullen. Bentley told about the two barges and their fate. Bentore told about the two men responsible for the explosions and their fate.

Finally, Emily got very serious and looked straight at Gandrath and said,

"Now, we hear from Cullen that Underhill is threatening to hurt or kill villagers unless he agrees to sell the ore pit. At this point, I decided this constituted the emergency you requested."

"As well you should. Sounds like Underhill has lost track of reality. I will leave immediately and have a 'talk' with him," Gandrath stated.

Everyone on the Council pretty much knew what that meant and they were all glad they were not Underhill right now. Emily concluded the meeting and everyone bid goodbye to Gandrath as they headed out.

"Sure you won't join us for dinner, Gandrath," asked Bentley. "You haven't seen the Freedom tavern, have you?"

"No I haven't. And I understand Mistress Kallie runs the Skylark Inn also."

"Yes, she is quite a woman," Bentley answered.

"And, she is a police commissioner too," Dunkel added.

"Amazing, I remember when she young and how wild she was. So was her mother at that age. Who would have guessed she would become such a responsible adult. I guess dinner is in order. I'm sure Underhill won't mind a late evening visitor."

"We will meet you at the Council table, then," Bentley said, looking at Emily and Mac. They all left and it was just the three in the room.

"Thank you again for coming, Gandrath. I just know you will explain to Underhill the error his ways," Mac said.

"And, there should not be any more emergencies, I hope," added Emily.

"We shall see," Gandrath said. "And congratulations on your marriage."

"Thank you." they both said.

"You two have done wonderful things here on Losandia. Maybe someday you might even look to some of the other islands."

"There are more than two?" asked Emily, amazed.

"Oh, yes," he replied.

She hugged him and they headed to the Freedom.

They all had a wonderful dinner and Kallie was very excited about seeing Gandrath. Finally, it was time for Gandrath to head to Norinda. Bentley asked him if he wanted someone to boat him over. He said it wouldn't be necessary, he had his own transportation. He and Mac exchanged glances and smiled at each other.

Underhill was enjoying a glass of wine when he looked up and there stood Gandrath. He jumped and said,

"Oh! You startled me Gandrath. What do you want?"

"I hear you've been up to your old tricks again, Dean," said Gandrath.

"What business is that of yours? You don't even live on Losandia any more."

"Ahh, but I care about everyone living there. And here, too."

"Well, they can take care of themselves, I guess," Underhill sneered.

"I feel in a generous mood, Underhill. I will give you two choices: Sell your house and give the proceeds to Cullen and Bentley, to cover their losses, or come with me to the place I've been living. It's a very inhospitable place for one such as you, but I have a job opening for a butler. You would be a natural. What say you?"

Underhill called his bluff.

"I will not be bullied Gandrath! Besides, you would never do such a thing."

Immediately, a note appeared on the table along with a signed deed. The note was from Underhill and addressed to Cullen and Bentley. It explained that he had to go away suddenly and would not return. He instructed Cullen to sell the house and everything in it. He was to pay Bentley for the cost of two barges and give the rest to the villagers. Gandrath grabbed Underhill and they disappeared from the island.

Author's note:

If you ever come upon an inhospitable remote island and see a Mage's house, knock on the door and when the butler answers, it will probably be Underhill.

Twelve

As the months went by, things on Norinda improved daily. The Underhill house was dismantled and what wasn't used by the villagers was sold to businesses on Losandia. The Mercantile in Upland bought back most of the expensive things and Cullen made quite a lot of money. In addition, the villagers found several stashes of money hidden in various places in the house. It was all split between them and Cullen. They agreed that Bentley should have most of the money to put towards the new barges.

They even built several small businesses on the village square. Some of the villagers were given money to order new personal boats to travel back and forth to Losandia. The village women were extremely interested in shopping there now that they could afford to buy things.

When the last of the house was sold off, Cullen went to Losandia to see Bentley. He used his own small boat and thought how nice it would be to have regular ferry runs between the islands. He would mention it to Bentley.

"Good to see you Cullen. How are things in the village these days?" Bentley asked.

"Very well. Many of our villagers have improved their cottages in ways they never thought possible."

"That's so good to hear."

"And, we are anxious to start trading the iron ore again."

"Well, it may be some time before we will have another barge, I'm afraid."

Cullen smiled and handed Bentley an envelope. He said,

"Maybe this will help. A gift from the villagers."

Bentley opened it to find a large sum of money. More than the cost of both barges. He was shocked.

"I can't take this Cullen!" he said.

"Sure you can. It's only fair that part of the gift from Underhill go to pay back what he destroyed. Besides, the villagers all voted on it. They want trading to start again sooner than later. And, we would also like you to consider building a ferry to run between the islands."

"My, this is very generous. The Council will be as pleased as I am. The next meeting is tomorrow. Can you attend?"

"I'm afraid not. I have an appointment in Upland and then I must get back home. Please give my best to everyone, ok?"

"Certainly."

Mac and Emily finally had their small wedding. All they did was continue the plans that were in place before it was postponed by the events with Underhill and Gandrath. Bentley gave Emily away and Kyle was Mac's best man. A small reception at the Grog followed. They were both glad things were kept small and Mac gave Kyle a flier to put up announcing that it had occurred.

The Council meetings were monthly now and everyone attended. Spinthorn chaired this one and Bentley asked him to go first with some rather good news. He told of his meeting with Cullen and the gift. It was enough money to build two barges and almost completely pay for a passenger ferry that would carry people, horses and carriages back and forth. Everybody was surprised, and Emily said,

"I didn't realize Underhill had that much money. I think he was not truthful about how much the old Council had in the treasury."

They all agreed. With the new ferry, travel between the islands could be very fast and easy. It would run several times a day allowing the villagers to come to Losandia and spend the day visiting and shopping and return home the same day.

"I would like to discuss sending a delegation to Norinda to see if they are interested in what I call 'training sessions'. I've been thinking about this for some time now and I believe that with the trading the villagers will prosper. They already have a couple small businesses in the square and more will come. Someday, probably even a tavern. I think we could help them learn how to run these businesses by having them come here for a month or so. They could stay with a business owner or a family and get the training they need. I'm sure Marinda and Kallie would be happy to sponsor one or two. What do you think?" Emily asked.

"I think it's a great idea. I will ask Gitar if he could take a few families and teach them how the Strehen Stone shops are run," Paren answered.

"And, I will be glad to have my workers do the same in the Supply store," Dunkel said.

"This is a great idea, Emily. They have been without the benefits of commerce and nobody really knows how to run a business. I will ask Cullen if any of them want to learn shipbuilding," Bentley added.

Emily was pleased that everyone liked her idea. She would go see some business owners tomorrow and line up some places for villager training sessions.. Then she would go see Cullen and have him find several potential villagers or families to sign up. This would go a long way to help the villagers become confident that they could start a small business if they wanted to.

She wondered if her and Mac could go over and spend time helping also. It would be exciting to be a part of the growth there. Maybe they could even build a tavern. She was getting way ahead of herself, she thought. Lets just take one idea at a time.

The Council finished the meeting and scheduled another for the next month. Bentley said he would contact everyone if anything came up on the trading plan that needed their approval. Otherwise, he would continue discussions with Cullen as planned.

Picker loved his job running the Freedom. And, everyone seemed to love him as well. He was very quick to learn new things and made most of the decisions on the operation of the new tavern. Kallie considered herself very lucky to have him running the place. Even Marinda and Emily commented on how well he did. He was working long hours and saving most all his money for something and she had a good idea for what.

Both the Skylark and Freedom were doing well and Kallie was very pleased with her position in the community. She knew that with the new ferry, villagers from Norinda would be coming regularly and her two places were the first thing they would see when they left the dock. She had elaborate signs made announcing the Freedom and people wondered why. Now they would see. Maybe some day people from other islands would visit also.

One afternoon Mac and Emily were in her office discussing the Norinda delegation idea when out of the blue she said,

"How would you like to live on Norinda?"

Mac stared at her a moment.

"What? Leave Losandia?"

"No, not really. I was thinking maybe splitting our time between here and there. We could help the villagers with their new businesses and maybe even build a new tavern there," she answered.

"What about your two businesses here?"

"Well, I'm sure I could find someone to run the Sorrel."

"And the Grog?"

"Sell it. We are hardly ever there, anyhow."

"Are you sure about this, Emily?"

"Well, it's something I've been considering for a while now, and I think we should discuss the possibilities. How do you feel about it?"

"I think it would be fun. A new place. New adventures."

"Good. Who do you think we could get to run the Sorrel while we are gone?"

"Maybe Picker."

"Oh, Kallie would never let him go. He would be perfect though."

"Well, perfect for us, but according to what Kallie says, he has bigger things in mind."

They looked at each other for a moment, obviously both thinking the same thing.

"The Grog!" they exclaimed together.

"He has always wanted his own place. But how would he ever afford it? Mac asked.

"I'm sure we can work something out."

"Think he would object to being so far from Barrowdale?"

"We won't know till we ask him, huh."

They discussed the idea late into the evening. With Mac's experience in the mill, he would be a great help in the iron ore operations. Emily could help all those setting up new businesses. They could build a tavern and hire the villagers to run it when they were back on Losandia.. The more they talked the more things they realized how much they wanted this.

So, as the hour grew close to the mid of night, the decision was made. Mac wondered what Cullen

would think of the idea, but Emily thought he would welcome them. They would find someone to run the Sorrel and sell the Grog, hopefully to Picker. They had several candidates in mind for the Sorrel, but Lady Mortan was their first choice. She could divide her time between her Mystic in Granton and the Sorrel. They decided to talk to both Picker and Lady Mortan in the morning.

Lady Mortan was just finishing breakfast in the Mystic when Mac and Emily walked in.
"My, you two are up very early this morning."
"Yes, we have some important errands today and needed to get an early start. Do you have a minute?" asked Emily.
"Always for you," she said, smiling. "Did you have breakfast?"
"No, but coffee would be great. And, well maybe one of your rolls," Mac said.
Lady Mortan ordered for them and asked,
"How can I help?"
"Well, we would like to know how busy you are these days?"
"Here at the Mystic, you mean?"
"Yes, mainly," Emily answered.
"We are thinking of spending some time each year on Norinda and need someone to look after the Sorrel," Mac said.
"Oh, my. Thats a surprise."
"If you are too busy, we understand. But you are the one we trust the most," Emily added.
"Now, how can a person refuse that compliment?"
"You could split your time between here and there and you could hire more help if you need it," Mac said, grinning.
"That sounds like it would work," she said.
"So, will you do it?"
"Sure. You have very good people working there and they would pretty much run it themselves. All I would do was make purchasing decisions, right?"
"Thats right. And, we would only be a short ferry ride away, if you needed us."
"What are you going to do about the Grog?" she asked.
"We are working on that. We'll let you know on our way back from Port Sorrel," Mac said.
"And, please. Not a word about this. We still have to talk to Cullen," added Emily.
"Ok. You two are the most adventurous people I know," said Lady Mortan.
"You think so? I think we are a bit boring some time," Mac said.
"Far from that, my dear," answered the Lady.

As they headed to Port Sorrel to see Picker, they wondered if they should talk to Cullen before getting Picker's hopes up. They couldn't imagine Cullen being against it, but you never knew.
"Maybe we should sell the Grog, even if we don't go to Norinda," Mac said.
"I suppose so. It really would be perfect for Picker and one less thing for us to worry about," Emily replied.
They found Picker in the kitchen of the Freedom and asked for a moment of his time.
"I'm so glad to see you," he said. "What brings you to our fair tavern?"
"Well, your cooking for one," Mac said as they sat down. "I'm starved."
Picker smiled and took their order to the kitchen. In just a few minutes he returned. Mac dug in.
"So, how can I help you?"
"We were wondering. Do you get to Barrowdale much these days?" Emily asked.
"Some. But my father is very busy and is hardly ever there. He spends a lot of time in the river cities filling orders."
"Much time in Alvarstad?" Emily asked.
"Yes, there and Derwend."
"How would you like to live in Alvarstad?" blurted Mac.
Picker looked at him with a confused look.
"Why would I go there?"
"To run your own tavern," Emily smiled.
"The Grub&Grog?"
"Yes, we would like to sell it to you."
"Really? I would love to own it! And, I have some money saved for a down payment, too," he said

excitedly.

"How much do you have?" Mac asked.

"Nearly two thousand dollars."

Mac looked at Emily and they both smiled and nodded.

"Sounds like a fair price," Emily said.

"And I could make payments every month," he said.

"We mean fair price, period."

Picker stared at the two of them, hardly believing his ears.

"You're not serious. The place is worth ten times that."

"Actually, you would be doing us a favor. Soon we will not have the time to worry about it," Emily explained.

"What will you be doing?"

"Living on Norinda six months of the year," Mac said.

"Wow. That's so exciting! But I can't let you lose all that money. How about I make payments for a couple years. I'm sure you could use it."

"For now, just pay us what you have saved and later we can talk about payments," Emily said.

"We want the place to prosper. And, we know you are the one to do it," Mac added.

"Oh dear, how will I tell Kallie?"

"I'm sure she will be sad to lose you, but very excited for you too," Emily offered.

As if on cue, Kallie appeared and greeted Mac and Emily warmly. She could tell by the look on their faces that something important was going on. She asked Mac if he enjoyed his lunch. Then asked Emily where they were heading. Emily could tell she was stalling with small talk.

"We would like you to meet the new owner of the Grub&Grog," Mac blurted out.

Kallie sat down quickly and stared at Picker.

"Is this true, Picker?"

"I'm afraid so, Ma'am," he answered.

"Afraid? What a wonderful thing. You finally have your own tavern. Something you've always dreamed about," she said with tears in her eyes.

Picker got up and came around the table and hugged her tightly. He explained that he never thought it would happen this fast and he was so sorry he would be leaving the Freedom. He hoped she wasn't too upset and she could find someone to replace him.

"Now, just don't you worry dear. This is far too important for you to be concerning yourself about that."

"See, Picker. I told you," Emily grinned.

Now, the final leg of this trip was to go see Cullen. They arrived at his house and knocked.

"Good afternoon, Cullen," Mac said.

"Oh my, what a surprise!" he answered. "Come in, come in."

"We have something to discuss and get your approval on," said Emily.

"Council business, eh?" he answered.

"Not this time," she smiled. "Personal business."

"We would like your permission to live on Norinda for six months of the year," Mac stated.

"Really! I think that would be wonderful. And, you certainly don't need permission from me. We would all welcome you," he answered.

"Great. We think we could help the villagers as they grow their village."

"Absolutely. I know your help would be invaluable," Cullen said, hardly able to contain himself.

"The only thing we haven't figured out is where we would live," Mac said.

"Now don't worry about a thing. You can live right here with me until you have your own place built," he explained. "You are going to build a house, right?"

"Well, we were thinking of building a tavern with a cottage attached."

"Excellent idea! I was discussing that very thing with the villagers the other day. We figured it would be next year before we could have someone properly trained to run it."

"I don't see why we can't start building right away. And, the villagers can help."

"And, they can help run it too!" Mac said.

"Oh, this is wonderful news. I will tell the villagers today. What about your own businesses?" he asked.

"We have someone to run the Sorrel tavern and we've sold the Grog," Mac explained.

"Let's go tell everyone and have some dinner, ok? Cullen asked.

"Sounds good. Of course, we will have to figure out where to stay tonight. I'm sure it will be a late

evening."

"And, you'll have so many offers you won't know which one to accept."

The second barge was lowered into the water at the Shipyard dock. With the money from Cullen, Bentley was able to put all his crew, plus extras, to work and built them in record time. Trading could finally begin again with out worry of losing them. The first barge was already on Norinda, loaded and on it's way back. Bentley was building a new dock on the shore of the Binter near the Barrowdale factory. The dwarves from Strehen and men from Granton were busy building the factory outside Barrowdale to process the iron ore.

Orders were coming in from the shipyards, smiths, the mill and other places around Losandia. Few orders were for weapons, which was only needed by the warks and drakken for hunting game. A few orders still came in for single-bladed axes for the dwarves and double-bladed axes for the goblins. They were mostly ceremonial, though, as there was no fighting between races anymore.

But, the orders from the shipyard and smiths were many and would take a while to fill. The barrows were hired mainly to fill the orders. Even Gitar had several orders in for special equipment to work in the stone quarry. All in all, it was a prosperous time for both islands. The villagers that worked the iron ore pit would get credit for the ore at the factory and they would use this credit to shop in all the businesses on Losandia.

One of their favorite places to shop was the Barrowdale Supply store. They had lots of fabric for curtains and dresses, furniture, and general supplies for upgrading their cottages. It was the first time that many of the village women actually went shopping in a store for something they needed for their cottage.

The ferry was the next boat to be finished by the Shipwright. It held sixty passengers, a dozen horses and several carriages in the normal configuration. It could be easily reconfigured for special trips and could hold around one hundred passengers. It made four runs a day - two in the morning and two in the evening. The last run was late to accommodate all the day shoppers. Of course, late here was 8:00 pm.

It was the ferry that would carry the villagers that were part of Emily's training sessions. There were eleven villagers in the first training group. She had asked both Marinda and Kallie to take on a couple and train in their business. Dunkel took one villager for his shop. Gitar took three husband/wife teams for his Stone shops. They were very excited about riding the ferry and seeing Losandia. Those going to Strehen were very anxious about meeting dwarves, since it would be the first time they had ever seen one. Gitar had instructed all the employees doing the training to be on their best behavior and be patient with the villagers.

They would spend two weeks in training with their hosts and return home to help in the new village square shops. None of the hosts would accept any compensation for the training, either. The next training group would be given the opportunity to stay on with their host and work there. It was a very successful program and everyone congratulated Emily whenever they saw her.

The two new bridges, Oren and Prather, were a huge success also. Strehen Stone was now able to ship their product directly to Heemskalt and the Shell Steppes without going via the Binter. The other made it very easy for both servicing the river towns and to move goods north. There was talk of shutting down the old Sorrel bridge, since it wasn't used much anymore. Most of the wood from the Black Forest was heading to the Granton mill and they used the Prather bridge for that.

One cool summer morning, a large boat pulled up to the dock at Derwend and a dozen dwarves and men headed to the Sorrel tavern. They were hired by Bentley to move Mac and Emily's belongings to Norinda. It took several hours to load up the boat and it headed up the Sorrel to the Binter and on to Norinda. Mac insisted on all his tools and supplies to start building the tavern. Emily had all her stoneware and enough supplies to get it started. She would store it at Cullen's during the building phase.

They were both very excited about this adventure and had lots of ideas on what the new tavern would look like. It would not be built to look old like the Sorrel, but more modern like the Freedom. In fact, they asked Kallie if they could use some of her ideas when building the new tavern and she pleasantly agreed. At first it would only be frequented by villagers and some of the workers from Port Sorrel. But, eventually, all the races would be visiting the village square and they need to make everyone feel welcome, just as

Kallie has done with the Freedom.

Staffing would not be a problem, since many of the villagers had been trained on Losandia and were very good. Several were even excellent cooks. Cullen was happy to see them and showed Emily where to store all her supplies. They had picked out a building site the last time they were here. It was just a hundred yards up from the dock and the foundation was already started.

Bentley had instructed this barge crew to stay and help build the tavern. Each one had a place to stay with a villager. They figured it would take a month to build and a week to setup. A food and dark beer order had already been placed.

"Everything is right on schedule," Mac said proudly one evening at dinner with Emily and Cullen.

"Except for one thing," Emily said.

"What's that?" asked Mac

"A name for the tavern," she answered.

"We will have to think on that for a while," said Mac. "I'd like to call it something common to both islands since we live on both."

"We don't have to decide for a while yet," Emily smiled.

"I've been talking to some of the villagers and they want a community hall built. To be used for celebrations and the like," Cullen said.

"Sounds like something useful. Do you have regular celebrations here?" Mac asked.

"Not really, but they want to start some."

"Are there enough skilled villagers to build it?" asked Emily.

"I think so, but if not, I can get a few from Bentley."

"What would we do without Bentley?" Mac wondered aloud.

"Don't even think about it," Emily stated.

While the building was going on, Emily spent a lot of time with the villagers. The kind of questions she was asked covered both business and cottages. The amount of things that she took for granted were never known or needed by most women in the village. She learned a lot from them too. Baking was one of her weak points and she had several women help her until she could produce a very good pie. Bramble berries from the northern part of Norinda were the favorite, especially with Mac. He was very impressed the first time she served him a large piece after dinner one evening.

"This is proof enough that we made the right choice in moving here," he said.

They all laughed.

Emily and Mac were sitting on the porch one evening talking quietly. Cullen was in the square meeting with some of the ore workers.

"You have to go to an IPF commission meeting tomorrow, right?" asked Emily.

"Yes. And, it will be a long one I think. We are interviewing some prospective policemen.:

"And the next day, I have a Council meeting. Right in the middle of my sewing class with the village women."

"Such busy bees we are, eh? Are you tired of it yet?" he asked.

"Well, I was thinking of stepping down from the Council. That would be one less trip each month over there."

"You're kidding, right?"

"No. I even have someone in mind to fill my seat."

"How would the Council get along without you?"

"How do we get along without Gandrath?"

"Hmm... You're right. They will adapt. Who do you have in mind?"

"Tolar Brent," she replied.

"Excellent choice. Some new blood. And a tradesman to boot."

"That's what I thought. I'll talk to Bentley tomorrow to see what he thinks."

"Of course, even after I step down, I will still attend a meeting while we are in Losandia."

"Of course," Mac smiled.

Things were changing at the Grub & Grog these days. And, by all accounts, all for the good. Everyone liked what Picker was doing with the place, especially his cooking. People were coming from Derwend and Upland to sample his dishes. The Ridgemont in Upland was not doing well and there was talk of Horace closing it. If he did, everyone said that most all the Uplanders would head to the Grub. In

fact, business at the Mercantile was even slower. Lots of people were moving out of Upland to other river towns and Horace wasn't sure if he could keep it open much longer.

Picker was in Port Sorrel one day buying supplies for an addition when he ran into his Pa. They hugged fiercely and Dunkel said,

"It's been too long since you've been home, son. I know you're busy with your new tavern, but a lot of people would love to see you again."

"I know, Pa. As soon as I finish this new addition, I will come home for a couple days."

"Promise?"

"Yes, I promise. I need to get caught up on all your employees and hear about the training of the villagers. That's quite a program, eh?"

"Indeed it is. I hear we're on schedule to train over twenty villagers. Emily certainly outdid herself on this one."

"I owe her and Mac a lot," Picker said seriously.

"I know you do, son. But I think they were lucky to get you to take over the Grub, too."

"It's becoming quite popular, Pa. Even the folks from Upland are coming on a regular basis."

"So I've heard."

"The next time I see Emily, I have to ask her, again, about starting the payments."

"What payments?"

"Well, all they would take for the Grub was my savings, just under two thousand dollars. They said we would talk about starting payments, but they don't seem concerned about it."

"They are very busy building their own place, you really need to remind them."

"Yes, I will, Pa."

"I will see Emily tomorrow at a Council meeting. Want me to ask her?"

"Maybe that would be good. I'm not sure when I'll see her again."

"I'll do it and let you know."

They hugged again and headed on their way. Dunkel was very proud of his son and glad now that he didn't insist he stay in his shop. He is a natural for running taverns. Ask anyone.

The Council meeting started with Aran chairing. Emily started the a report on the trading and the factory in Barrowdale. It was named Barrowdale Ore Works by the barrows and was doing very well. She then told them she visited Tolar Brent on the way to the meeting this morning and he agreed to replace her on the Council. Everyone in the room was stunned, except Bentley. He half expected this would happen once she moved to Norinda.

Spinthorn was the first to find his voice.

"This is a surprise, Emily. I didn't know you were even thinking about it."

"Nobody else knew either. It was a decision Mac and I made the other night and hadn't told anyone yet."

"How will we get along without you?" said Dunkel.

"Yes, you've been our leader in so many things," Bentore added.

"I appreciate that, but I think the time has come for new blood in the Council. It's something the old Council should have done many times. And, you will be getting a tradesman. He is very smart and has always sided with our Council, clear back to the impending war over the bridges."

Several eyebrows raised with that news. Many did not know that there was almost a war over the building of the new bridges. But, it never took hold due to what Olt Grond did and the fact that Kyle Baas would not cooperate with the old Council.

"That's a story I would like to hear more about," said Spinthorn.

"Me too!" added Paren and Bentore together.

"Someday, over some beers, I will give you the whole story," smiled Emily.

"We will hold you to that," said Dunkel.

It was voted on and passed. Tolar would replace Emily on the Council. They then discussed establishing a yearly festival. It would be called the Island Festival and each year it would be hosted by a different race. Emily suggested that maybe one year it could even be hosted by Norinda. Everyone agreed and the festival was official. Fliers would be scribed up and Kyle's police would post them all around the island. The first one would be this summer.

The Council adjourned and Dunkel stopped Emily and said he talked to Picker this morning.

"He told me about the payments he needs to start."

"Oh, yes. We are not really concerned about it."

"It would make him feel better if he made at least token payments."

"I see. Well, ok then, I'll let him know he can pay fifty dollars a month for the next couple years. How's that?"

"Perfect. And he will probably want to do it for several years," said Dunkel.

Emily then asked Bentley if she could talk to him a minute.

"Were you surprised by my decision to withdraw?"

"Not really. Sad, but not surprised," he smiled.

"I will miss working closely with you, but promise to see you each time we come back. And, we will be here six months a year too."

"We have accomplished a lot together, dear. I know that Gandrath would be pleased."

"Yes, he would," she said, hugging him.

Thirteen

As busy as he was these days, Kyle Baas still had time for Marinda. He would take her on boat rides on Sorrel Lake and she would fix him delicious dinners at the Rooster. All their friends knew things were getting serious and were just waiting for the announcement. But, Kyle was nervous about marriage. His parents were not married and he saw no need for it, really.

But, he knew it was important to Marinda. He could see that by the way she talked about Emily and Mac. So, he knew he would have to ask her soon. His work took a lot of his time, but that was no excuse. Then there was the other thing. As IPS Captain, he was involved in situations that were dangerous. He didn't want to leave Marinda a widow someday. Sounds like excuses, not reasons, he thought. He knew what he had to do, but he wanted to do it differently. A traditional knee bending proposal didn't appeal to him.

It was just after lunch when he entered the Rooster. Marinda was in her office and he knocked on her door. She waved him in and arose to hug him.

"You just missed lunch. What are you up to in Sutterton today?"

"I've come to see you. I need to discuss something serious and need some privacy."

"Oh? IPF business?"

"Kind of," he lied.

"Well, give me ten minutes and we can take a walk to the river."

He had a ordered a dark beer while he thought about how to do this. He wanted to surprise her, but didn't want to disappoint her too much by avoiding tradition altogether. She probably already guessed what he was up to, but he thought it would still be a surprise.

"Ready?" she asked.

He finished his beer and they headed to the river path. She gave a curious look at him, wondering why he was drinking beer on duty and in the middle of the day. He knew she knew something was up. He had better play it out all the way. They sat on their favorite root of a large tree and there was nobody around.

"So, lets hear about this kind of business."

"Ok, you know that I have to deal a lot with the Council and travel to the IPF offices in Strehen and the Plains, right?"

"Yes."

"And, I sometimes get into dangerous situations with smuggling on the river?"

"I know. What are you getting at, Kyle?"

"Be patient. I'll get there."

"Ok," she smiled.

"I have to spend a huge amount of time in the office in Derwend helping with the administrative stuff. I am constantly sorting out problems of over three hundred officers. And, now there is talk of cutting back the amount of officers, since we just don't have that much crime on the island. That will mean a lot of hard decisions. I'm hoping to get the Commission to help with that."

"You're rambling. Kyle."

"Yes, I know I am. What I'm trying to say is that I'm not sure I want to continue as IPF Commander. I think I'd like to open a small business and just be an ordinary citizen again. Maybe build a small cottage in the Vale."

Marinda stared at him for several long moments and said,

"Have you lost track of your senses? You have a very respectable position that you worked very hard for and everyone looks to you for..."

"I know, I know," he interrupted. "But, there is so much pressure on me. I'm not sure I want to continue."

"And, if you resigned the Commander position? Who would fill it?"

"I'm sure Bentley and Emily could come up with someone. Maybe one of the Commission Captains."

"Maybe what you need is just a break. Some rest away from the office for a while. How about going to Norinda and do some fishing with Mac for a week. They would love to have you, I'm sure."

"Yea, maybe you're right. I've never had much time off."

"Not since you were the watch Captain," she added.

"Of course, I would only do it if you came with me."

"Well, that is different. I'd have to get someone to run the Rooster and do the ordering and..."

"You're rambling, Marinda," he interrupted, grinning.

"Yes, I am, aren't I?"

"I'll go on one condition. If you go with me."

"Consider it done. When do we leave?"

"I need a few days, and you probably do too. Say in one week?"

"That's perfect."

He took her hand, kissed her gently and said,

"Can we call it our honeymoon?"

She smiled and said,

"Is that a proposal of marriage?"

"I guess it is, huh?"

"Sure sounds like it to me. But, how can we have a wedding in less than a week?"

"Well, it could be just a small ceremony, with just a few friends. Then we would be off to Norinda."

"You planned this all along, didn't you?"

"Kinda," he answered.

"And, what about all the talk of starting a small business and building a cottage in the Vale?"

"Well, I just wanted to see how you felt about me being the IPF Commander after we were married.

Now I know."

"Oh, you're crafty, you are! And, what if I said I like the idea of running a small business and living in the Vale?"

"Then, I would get someone to replace me as Commander and buy a small business in Granton and build a house in the Vale, right after we returned from Norinda."

"Sure is something to think about, isn't it?"

"Well, we can. All the time I'm fishing with Mac and you're visiting with Emily and the women of the village."

"It's a plan then. How many do we want at the wedding?"

"I figure just ten or so. We'd have to get word to Emily and Mac. Then there would be Bentley and Lady Mortan."

"And, Kallie, of course. As well as several of my workers at the Rooster."

"Are you disappointed that I didn't propose on my knee?"

"No, not really. Flowers would have been nice though."

He reached over and picked a small flower from a nearby bush and handed it to her. She took it, kissed him and said,

"Never let it be said you're not a romantic."

The ceremony a week later was intimate, with only eight guests, just like they planned. It was held at the Rooster and notices were put all over the island by Kyle's IPF. Kallie and Lady Mortan looked splendid and cried a lot. Bentley gave Marinda away just like he did Emily. He was definitely the island's father figure and he loved it. There was no ceremony afterwards and the Rooster was turned over to Marinda's capable staff.

They headed to Norinda the next day with Mac and Emily. Mac was so excited that Kyle was coming. He really needed a break from building their tavern. And, he knew of several good fishing spots on the island. The tavern was nearly complete now and they still had not chosen a name. It was modeled after the Freedom with their living quarters upstairs. They built a double insulated floor between them and downstairs to keep the noise level down. Some of the villagers could get quite loud after a few drinks. But, it was better than the quarrelsome dwarves and goblins, thought Mac.

Cullen had insisted that Marinda and Kyle stay in his house with Emily and Mac. He gave them his room and stayed in the village with a friend. So, Emily and Marinda spent each day together exploring the village and parts of the island. Mac and Kyle were gone most of the day for the first several days, then tired of fishing and started exploring, too.

The week went by very fast for them and soon it was time for Kyle and Marinda to think about heading back. They were so relaxed and having such a good time they really wanted to stay longer.

"Maybe you could send a message to one of your Captains that you are staying another week," Mac said.

"I could, yes. And, he could report back if there were any important decisions that I need to attend to," answered Kyle.

"And, what would you two do for another week?" asked Marinda.

"Well, I could help Mac build the tavern. I need the practice," Grinned Kyle.

"Practice?" asked Emily.

"Yes," said Kyle, looking at Marinda. "Should I?"

"Oh yes. Let me, ok?" she answered.

Marinda told Emily and Mac all that they had discusses about him retiring from the IPF and building a cottage in the Vale. She would turn the running of the Rooster to her staff and they may even open a small business in Granton to keep their hand in.

Emily was very pleased. She said to Kyle,

"You have worked very hard to establish the new IPF and the Commission and it runs very well. I think you deserve some time off. You could still keep your hand in by being a silent Commissioner."

"What is that, exactly?" Kyle answered.

"It would be a Commissioner in name only. You wouldn't have to attend regular meetings, but when you wanted to you could attend one and give some report you think is important."

"That sounds interesting," he replied.

"Yea, like a consultant," Mac added.

"Precisely," Emily smiled.

"Would I still be an active member of the IPF?" Kyle asked.

"Sure. You still draw a salary, but you wouldn't have all the regular duties and reports you have now," Emily answered.

"Would that be legal?" asked Marinda.

"If the Council agreed, it would be. And, I happen to have some influence there," Emily smiled.

Kyle and Marinda stayed another week and nearly finished the tavern. They set an opening date for the following week and sent out word via the IPF.

"We still haven't decided on a name," said Emily one evening while they were all sitting on the porch.

"Well, Kallie named her place after something she felt strongly about. Freedom from a husband," Kyle said.

"So, what do we feel strongly about, dear?" asked Mac.

Emily thought about it for a moment and said,

"We are both committed to the unification of the races on Losandia," she answered.

"Thats true," said Marinda. "How about The Unity?"

"Oh, I like that," Mac answered.

"Or, maybe The Harmony," said Emily.

"Thats even better!" replied both Mac and Marinda.

"Done, then," Emily beamed.

The villagers were all excited about the grand opening. They all planned to open up their cottages to guests from Losandia. And, outside sleeping areas were set up all around the village square with fire pits and supplies for more guests. Nobody knew how many dwarves, goblins, warks and humans might show up.

One morning, two days before the opening, the ore barge arrived at the dock. It was loaded with supplies and about twenty men, women and dwarves. A few minutes later the ferry appeared with about thirty more souls: goblins, warks, barrows, humans and more dwarves. Bentley was with them and he explained that they were there to build temporary shelters for all those attending the grand opening. Mac looked confused and said,

"Really? Do you think all that will be needed?"

"Well, I expect several hundred Losandians here in a couple days. Where were you planning to put them?" asked Bentley.

"Several hundred?" asked Emily, astonished.

"You bet. The word is out, thanks to the IPF and it seems like everyone wants to attend. Hope you have plenty of dark beer on hand."

"Our initial order was way more than a regular one. Maybe I'd better order some more real quick," Emily said.

"Not to worry. We brought several kegs," smiled Bentley.

"Wow. You thought of everything," Mac grinned.

For the rest of the day, temporary shelters were built which were nothing more than poles with canvas covers. Privies were dug on the outskirts of the village. Beer stands with kegs were set up around the square. Women brought huge amounts of food and huge tables were setup to hold it all.

Emily and Mac were speechless. They couldn't believe what was happening to this tiny little village. Before they knew it, Bentley bid them goodbye and he and the barge and ferry left. It looked to Emily and Marinda that they could accommodate hundreds. They just couldn't believe that kind of turnout would happen.

Mac was sitting inside the new tavern arranging supplies, when Kyle came in and said,
"When do you think you will be able to move in upstairs?"

"Anytime, I guess. We just need to take all our things from Cullen's house up there. Why, feel like helping with that?"

"Sure. And, I bet if you set out some dark beer, several of the village men would show up, too."

"Good plan. I'll do that now."

Word got out around the village square and about ten men showed up to help. Within an hour, all their things were in their living quarters and put away. Emily thanked all the men and went to see Cullen.

"I can't believe how helpful everyone is with our tavern," she said.

"They all love the idea of a tavern in the village. Many thought they would never see it happen. And, they all love you and Mac, too."

Emily was so touched she nearly started crying. She hugged Cullen and told him they were all setup now above the tavern. She thanked him for giving up his home for them and told him that the day after the grand opening Kyle and Marinda would be heading back and the house would be his again. He said that it was great having them, since he really didn't like an empty house.

"Maybe you should fill it with a wife and several children," she said.

"Oh, I'm too old for that. I wouldn't have the patience. I'll just have guests stay once in a while, that will be enough."

The grand opening day finally arrived. Before noon the dock was full of ships, boats and the ferry. In fact, it had to make several trips to get everyone there. Bentley estimated the count at four hundred. Spinthorn brought many warks and Paren and Gitar brought dozens of dwarves. There were even a few Shielder dwarves. There were barrows galore, brought by Dunkel and Picker. Every business owner on the Sorrel river was there. The entire Council and IPF Commission showed up also.

It was almost like the Island Festival that the Council envisioned, but they hoped that would draw a lot more participants. There were many speeches and toasts to Emily and Mac and the new Harmony Tavern. Kallie and Lady Mortan brought special lamps and placed them all around the inside and the courtyard out back. Gitar surprised everyone with a beautiful sign that he brought over on the barge. It was granite with a wooden frame and it took many dwarves to carry it to the tavern and put it in place. These words were carved in it:

Harmony Tavern

prop: Emily Bandar and Mac Finnegan

Evening found most heading back home and just the villagers were sitting in small groups talking. Mac and Emily were talking quietly to Bentley, Kyle and Marinda in the courtyard when Cullen joined them. He asked Emily if they had all the staff hired yet.

"I think so, why?"

"Well, I had a request from one of my favorite villagers to be considered for the cooks job. He was the one that made a lot of the cooked meat today and I highly recommend him."

"Oh my, I had some of that, deer I think it was, and it was very good. I just figured one of the women cooked it," Emily said, surprised.

"No, it was Jasper. He is very shy and asked me to talk to you."

"Well, have him come see either Mac or me tomorrow and we will talk about it."

"Thanks. I had better get to bed. We have an early ore shipment in the morning. Goodnight all."

Everyone bid Cullen good night and they all found their beds. It had been a glorious day and they were all exhausted.

Kyle and Marinda left with the ore barge the next morning. As they gave Mac and Emily goodbye hugs, they promised to come back soon. Mac said that once the tavern was running smoothly, they would

come to Losandia for a few months. They had gotten quite close during the last two weeks. Kyle and Mac had renewed their old friendship and Emily and Marinda did the same.

When Kyle returned to his office in Derwend, he was pleasantly surprised. Things were neat and orderly and there had not been any major problems while he was away. His Captains all updated him and told him the next Commission meeting was the next day and maybe he should attend. He said that he needed to because he would be filling in for Mac, who was really busy with his new tavern.

Marinda too, was pleased with how her staff handled things during her absence. The orders were all up to date and the books looked good. She couldn't wait to tell Kyle. There seemed to be a larger than usual amount of flowers scattered around the tavern and when Marinda asked why she was told they had had been delivered to her and Kyle. They were mostly from the Council members and Spinthorn in particular. He had his warks comb the fens for the most rare and beautiful flowers on the island. The notes included said they were to congratulate them on their wedding.

"Apparently they somehow knew you would be back today and just brought them in the last couple days," said her manager.

"Well, he was at the grand opening of the Harmony the other day and he must have asked when we would be back. Aren't they just beautiful? What a thoughtful warks he is."

"Sounds kinda strange, but true, I guess," the manager laughed.

Later that evening when Kyle and Marinda were having dinner, they both told each other what they came back to. Kyle had given up his small place in Derwend and moved into the Rooster.

"Are you thinking the same thing I am?" asked Kyle.

"I think I am. Your plan seems to sound very feasible, doesn't it?"

"It does indeed," smiled Kyle.

"How do you think we should go about it? And, how soon?"

"Well, I need to talk to a couple men that work at the Granton mill and see where a good piece of land might be. When we've identified that, buy it and build the cottage. The small business can come later, probably close to or in the town."

"You've been thinking about this some more, I see."

"Yes, and I talked to Mac. He gave me the names of the men. He has a lot of friends there, what with being foreman all those years."

"And, I'll start talking to my staff to see which ones would like to take over as permanent manager. I don't think we should sell the Rooster yet, just in case we change our mind, right?"

"Right. Are you getting excited about it yet?"

"Kind of. Once we buy the property and start building I will really be excited. Maybe we can get those dwarves that helped with the Harmony," she smiled.

"Maybe. Or better yet, Bentore and his goblins. They really know how to build sturdy, warm shelters. We could apply their knowledge to a cottage."

"And I will have Emily, Lady Mortan and Kallie help me with the inside."

They talked about other plans and ideas before they went to bed.

At the next Council meeting the issue of more delegates came up again. They all agreed it would be good to have the drakken included. Dunkel said he would like to see the witches represented, too.

"I would like to try talking to the drakken again," Bentore said.

"So would I," added Spinthorn.

"Do you think you could convince them?" asked Bentley.

"We might. We can tell them about the festival coming up. And, explain how they can improve their villages by trading with other races. We can give them examples of how Bentore and I have helped in our own villages," said Spinthorn.

They all agreed and approved the visit.

"Now, about the witches. While I would love to see them included, I'm not sure how we would even find them," Emily said.

"My Picker knows how," said Dunkel proudly.

"He does?" asked Paren.

"Yes, he told me he and his friends went to Hidesway one time and met one. I can't recall her name, though."

"That's wonderful. I will ask him about it tomorrow when I'm in Alvarstad," Emily said.

"If he agrees to try, lets approve their inclusion," Bentley said.

All agreed.

Storms rarely came to Losandia and they mostly blew in through the Binter Sea and were not very strong. High winds and surf along the shores of the Binter were fairly common in winter. Even when the winds came up the Sorrel did they cause many problems to Port Sorrel or Sutterton.

The storm that came one gray day was different, though. It came from the west and entered through Marrow Bay and up the Sorrel with very high winds. It lasted all day and caused major flooding to all the river towns. It first hit the Sorrel bridge destroying the west side of the bridge completely. Upland was spared from flooding somewhat because it sat up on the high cliffs from the Sourson Ocean. But, high winds caused major damage to all the expensive homes and businesses. Both the Ridgemont and Mercantile were destroyed. Horace Witherspoon managed to survive, but everything he owned was wiped out. Two other people were killed from flying debris.

Next was Alvarstad and Derwend. The Sorrel tavern, Grub&Grog and Alvarstad Craft&Lumber all had major flooding because they were so close to the river. The Beggar's Lot and Pathway Inn were farther inland and had wind damage, but minimal. Several small boats were destroyed as well as many small docks. By the time the flooding got to Sutterton, it was not very severe. Minor damage to the Sign of the Rooster that sat right on the river.

Port Sorrel was completely spared from flooding and had only minor wind damage. In all, sixteen people lost their lives to drowning and flying debris. Two of those people were in a small boat and were never found. This was the worse storm anyone could remember. The IPF was out in force helping flooding victims. Word went out to both the northern and southern cities and villages to help in the cleanup and rebuilding. All the races that were not affected rallied to the stricken areas to help. There was minor wind damage to both goblins and dwarves that lived in the Plains on both sides of the Sorrel.

When word reached Cullen from a bargeman the next morning, he organized and brought over several dozen villagers. In all, it took five days to cleanup and another week to fix the damage to buildings. Picker lost the entire side of the Grog. Carrey Danworth at Alvarstad Craft&Lumber suffered the most damage of all. At least half of his store was washed up river. Much of his inventory was lost. He would have to visit all the villages on Losandia and take him weeks to replace it. The Shipwright and Barrowdale Supply both contributed items to help him restock.

It was an island wide effort and all races contributed. The Council had an emergency meeting to coordinate things. All delegates attended. They all agreed that because of the Council bringing the races together, the people affected had plenty of help that they would not have had otherwise. When several goblins got together to pull a tree off a human's cottage, it was very gratifying to see.

When Kallie got word of what happened to Horace, she immediately went to help. She found him at the site of the Mercantile salvaging what little he could. She hugged him and cried with him. She had held no ill-will towards him since the Ridgemont sale, and felt terrible about his loss.

"Do you have a place to stay, Horace?" she asked.

"Not in Upland. I do have a friend in Alvarstad I can stay with for a while. I have to find work now, though."

"Don't you worry. I have a place for you in the Skylark and you can work either there or the Freedom. You're one of my oldest friends, Horace, and I will not let you go without," she said through her tears.

He hugged her again and thanked her over and over. She thought he was probably still in shock. A couple weeks at the Skylark and he would be back to his old self again.

This was happening all around Upland and Alvarstad, the two places hit the hardest, by wind and water. People from all over were taking in victims and giving them shelter and helping them find work. The Council immediately setup a relief fund to help those in need. Many businesses were subsidized by them to help with repairs and rebuilding. Many of the well to do Uplanders were now destitute and completely dependent on help from others. It was a sobering experience for most of them and it changed their lives.

Many decided to not rebuild in Upland. Most of the town was destroyed and the people that lived there got together and all decided to move to other places. The place would be a reminder to those that lived there and how they used to be. People like Underhill and the old Council members were a thing of the past and nobody wanted to be that way anymore.

About a week after the storm, it was learned the the Sorrel Lake over ran it's banks and flooded into

the northern Plains. Many of Bentore's goblins had their homes destroyed. Kulggor brought all of them to the Steppes and gave them shelter. Many humans and dwarves brought extra food, clothing and other supplies to the Steppes.

Another thing the swelling of the lake did was flood the southern end of the Black Forest. Many of the trees would topple sitting in several feet of water for weeks. And when they fell, they couldn't be harvested because of the water. The only way to harvest trees now was to bring them to the northern edge of the forest through the Plains to the Prather bridge. The Sorrel bridge into Alvarstad was destroyed and would not be rebuilt. This storm changed a lot of things on Losandia, some for the good and some not. Some peoples lives were changed forever, but everyone was brought closer together, as these kinds of disasters generally do.

Many things, big and small, had happened since the last time Gandrath was here, Emily was thinking one evening. Maybe it was time to send an update to him. No emergency, just an update on all the things, including the storm. Then there was Kyle and Marinda's news. And the Harmony tavern. Yes, she thought, a lot had happened in a short time. She took out the crystal, held it tightly and thought about all these things, making sure to tell him first that there was no emergency. She hoped he would be pleased.

Fourteen

The Sutter mountains were very high and the tops of each peak was usually in the clouds. That was what Bentore and Spinthorn saw this morning as they picked their way up the trail to the largest drakken village. It was not easy going and the horses slipped on the loose rocks. They finally crested a small plateau and saw the village in the lea ahead. The dismounted and walked into the village.

The drakken they saw eyed them nervously but did not speak. Spinthorn pointed to a large cottage surrounded by a low row of bushes.

"That looks like the cottage of Culgat, the leader. Lets head there."

"Everything looks exactly the same as the last time I was here several years ago," said Bentore.

"Yes, no improvements in their lifestyle at all. Of course, that may be as they wish it."

"True. But I tend to think all leaders want to improve their tribes."

Just then a large drakken emerged from the cottage and walked towards them. He was easily a foot taller than Bentore, which Spinthorn could hardly believe.

"Kanu. I am Culgat, leader of this tribe. I know you Bentore, but do not know your friend."

"Kanu, Culgat," said Bentore, repeating their greeting. "This is Spinthorn, wark chief of the eastern fens. We come in peace to hold court with you and your tribe."

"It is good. We welcome both goblin and wark leaders. Come inside and we will assemble our court."

Culgat issued orders to several nearby drakken and they ran off. He lead Bentore and Spinthorn into the cottage and offered them seats at a very large table. Spinthorn had to sit on his feet to see. A drakken woman came to him with a round log end and placed it under Spinthorn.

"Many visitors need to be as high as drakken. It is not a worry for us," she said, smiling.

"Thank you," was all Spinthorn knew to say.

Several very old drakken entered and took seats around the table. Culgat spoke with them in their own language for a minute or so and then said,

"Our elders welcome the wark and goblin. It has been long since we held court with them."

"We are pleased to be here honored elders," said Bentore.

"How is it you chose to visit our tribe today, Bentore?" asked Culgat.

"I was here many months ago asking you have a representative on the new Council. You elected not to then. We would ask again now, since we have made many improvements on Losandia."

The elders all ask Culgat a question. He spoke to them as if explaining something.

"The elders do not know the word representative. I told them what it meant. Why do you think we should be on your Council. It is not a war Council, is it?"

"Definitely not. It is a Peace Council. We decide how to help all races and make sure everyone has equal say as to what happens on the island. The Council was started by the Mage Gandrath and the human Emily Bandar. It is a good thing and we have helped many races improve their lives," Explained Bentore.

"Gandrath the Mage is well known to us. He is a drakken-friend. If he approves of this Council, it must be a good thing," one of the elders said.

"What races are on this Council?" ask another.

"The races include dwarves, humans, warks, goblins and barrows. Each race has a representative on the Council and has equal say in all matters. We hope to include drakken and witches also. Their concerns are just as important as all others," spinthorn explained.

The elders all spoke excitedly together while Culgat patiently waited. When they were finished, he said,

"This sounds very fair indeed. But, what could the drakken need that these others have?"

"Many things. Food supplies, building supplies, weapons for hunting, wood and stone to make cottages and plenty of dark beer," answered Bentore.

"And how would the drakken get these things, we have no money?"

"Ah, but you make many things, like bear quilts, deer hides, fine leather cords and much more that the others would be proud to have. You could trade these things for what you want."

"That sounds very fair," said Culgat.

"There has been a new bridge built across the river Kline that you could use when you travel to the west. And there are now boats traveling the Kline from Wynven, Strehen and Heemskalt to the river cities and to the south. You could travel on these boats when you need to," added Spinthorn.

"And, no others would question us in using this bridge or the boats?"

"No, you would be represented on the Council and your people would be equal to all others," said Bentore.

"I must discuss this with the elders. You can wait outside while the village women serve you some food. And, you must be thirsty, too."

"That is very kind. The drakken have always been thus," answered Bentore.

Culgat smiled and gave orders to a drakken woman. She escorted Bentore and Spinthorn outside. They were served plenty of cold venison and vegetables and a drink that Bentore thought was some kind of wine, but very strong.

About twenty minutes later, Culgat and the elders came out. They all had smiles on their faces. Spinthorn thought this was a good sign.

"We have made our decision. We will join this Council and add our race to the others. It is a good thing, we believe," Culgat announced.

"It is a good thing, indeed, Culgat. Will you be the representative?"

"Yes, since I speak the human tongue best," he said.

"The Council and all the races will be very pleased," said Spinthorn, shaking their hands.

When Emily talked to Picker about trying to find the witches in Hidesway, he was excited about it. She told him the Council approved and he could speak for them. She asked him if he knew what they wanted and he said he did.

"Just don't agree to anything you're not sure of, ok?"

"OK, I'm not sure we will even find them. And, if we do, if they will even talk to us."

"Well, do you best. I guess if there aren't very many of them, they won't need representation."

"I'll check with my friends tonight and see how soon we can go."

"Ok, if you incur any expenses, just let me know and we will see you get reimbursed."

"Oh, good, we may need horses and feed. And, food, I'm sure. We will have to carry food and water into the wastes."

"No good tavern down that way, eh?"

"No," he said, grinning.

"If you get in trouble, and need help, see Von Terrel. He would be the closest to the wastes. Do you know where his place is?"

"Yea, we've been there before."

"Ok. Good luck," Emily said and gave him a hug.

That surprised Picker. She had never done that before. Maybe she is worried about him going into the Harn, but more likely it's just she is married now and hugs more people. He thought that sounded strange, but marriage changes people, he knew.

He left the Grog to go see his friends with a full pack of food and water. He was certain they would want to go with him. When he got to their house, they were not home. Their Ma said they were hunting and wouldn't be back for several days.

"Do you have a spare horse I can use. I will be glad to pay you, ma'am."

"Sure, you can use the gray in the barn," she replied.

He gave her some money and packed his things on the horse and was off to the Harn. It took several hours to get there and he saw nobody at all to ask where Hidesway was. He went to the cottage he and his friends had seen before and it was empty. He wandered around trying to find anybody to ask and finally stopped to eat. He watered the horse and was sitting on a log eating and jumped when someone said,

"You lost, boy?"

He turned around and there was the oldest person he had ever seen wearing a long black robe with scraggly hair. She was almost smiling, but not quite.

"No, ma'am. Just eating. I am looking for a eitch, though. Are you one?" he said, standing up.

"Might be. You are very young to be in the Harn by yourself."

"I'm over 30 summers and I'm a barrow. We are all small."

"Ah, never seen one of those afore. Heard about em, though. What do you want with a witch?"

"My name is Picker Ratherby and I represent the Island Council. May I have your name, ma'am?"

"I'm not a ma'am, I'm just Seylyn. And, I guess you could say I'm a witch, although we don't use that name much anymore."

"Is this Hidesway, then?"

"Sure is. How'd you know that name? Been here afore?"

"Actually, I learned it from Gandrath. I just wasn't sure exactly where in the Wastes it was."

"Ahh. Gandrath. How is that old coot, anyhow?"

"He was well last time I knew. I don't think he lives in Mage Keep anymore, but I'm not sure."

"Well, next time you see him tell him Seylyn asked about him."

"I surely will ma'am...uh...Seylyn."

"So, lets go to my cottage for some tea."

Picker followed her back the way he came to the little cottage. She led him inside and had hot water going before she said,

"What is it you're after, Picker?"

"Why you, of course."

"That so. What do you want with me?"

"How many witches live around here?"

"Well, I think there are only a about a dozen of us left in the Harn. Why?"

"The Council has asked me to invite you to be represented with all the other races. You would have a say in what happens on the island."

"What other races?"

"All of them. The witches are the last one not present."

"You have warks and goblins?"

"We do. They are all very nice and Spinthorn and Bentore are their representative."

"Well, I'll be. And, dwarves too?"

"Yes, all of them! Paren and Aran are their representative."

"I would not think that possible. Those races have never got along afore."

"There have been a many good things happen on Losandia since the new Council started. Gandrath and Emily Bander started it after they disband the old one. It was the best thing ever happened, I say."

"The old Council run by Underhill?"

"Yes, and he is gone. Nobody knows were, but the old Council members are gone too. I think Gandrath did it."

"Hmm... That's very interesting. Never know'd Gandrath to take that much interest in the races."

"I could spend hours telling you all the things that have changed."

"Well, I got time. Ain't goin nowhere."

So, for the next hour and more, Picker told Seylyn everything that happened on the island since the new bridges. He spun a wonderful Barrow tale and had to have several more cups of tea. He opened his pack and shared the food he brought, which he cooked at the Grog. Seylyn was very impressed and said she had never had anything so good.

He told her he owned the Grub&Grog and would be happy to serve her anytime she wished. He then asked her about being on the Council and explained all its advantages. He could tell she was very interested. She told him there were several things the other witches would love to have and he assured her she could get them easily.

By the time they finished talking it was nearly dark. She said he could stay the night in the spare room. He agreed and went out to feed and bed down the horse. He was so pleased by the results of his trip, he slept in until way after sunrise the next morning, something he never does.

"Mornin. Sleep well?" she asked him as she put out breakfast.

"Better than I have in a long time. Did you have anything to do with that?" he ask, grinning.

"Not me."

"Well, whatever it is, I feel more rested than I have in many months. I appreciate you letting me stay the night."

"Twern't nothin. You're quite the talker, I'll say. Must be cause you're a Barrow, eh?"

"Probably so. My Pa is quite the talker too. He is also on the Council and you'll meet him at the next meeting."

"Did I say I would join your Council?"

"I don't see how you could refuse, with all they have to offer," he grinned widely.

"I will talk to the other witches in the Harn and then decide. How can I get word to you?"

"Just come to the Grog and ask for me. Or, if you know Von Terrel, you can tell him."

"I would want an escort to this meeting when it's time. I'm not too familiar with the river cities."

"It will be in Port Sorrel and I would be happy to escort you myself. Do you prefer horse or carriage?"

"Carriage? Really?" she asked.

"Absolutely. Nothing to good for the witch Seylyn" he answered, bowing low.
"Well I'll be. You're quite the charmer. Thirty summers, you say?"
"Actually thirty-three."
"Well, I guess I'm old enough to be your great mam."
"Wow. How many summers are you?"
"Can't rightly say exact, but probably over a hundred?"
"Well, it's the first time I've met a witch and I'm glad it was you."
"Why thank you, sir Barrow."
"Picker is just fine. I'll come back just before the next meeting to give you the details, ok?"
"Look forward to it. I'll introduce you to some of the others."
"I'd like that very much. I'd better get back to the Grog."

Kyle was busy reading reports when a knock came on his door.
"Come" he answered.
"Morning Kyle," said Kallie.
"Morning. You're up early."
"Well, we have the Commission meeting this morning and I wanted to talk to you before."
"Will Mac be there?"
"As far as know, yes."
Kyle put the writ aside and said,
"So, what was it you wanted?"
"I've heard rumor that you and Marinda are leaving. Is it true?"
"Depends. Leaving what?"
"You are resigning as Commander. Marinda is leaving the Rooster."
"It's something we have been discussing, yes."
"And, you don't want anyone to know, right?"
"Yes. How'd you find out?"
"I heard from a customer, who heard it from someone at the Rooster."
"Damn. I thought we could be farther along before anyone found out."
"What does it matter. Nobody would hold it against you leaving this job. You certainly have put in your time, Kyle. But, I'm certain Marinda has told you that, right?"
"Exactly. And, if things work out, we will only be in Granton."
"Really! I thought you'd be going to Norinda, to be with Mac & Emily."
"No, we want to build a cottage in the Vale and start a small business of some kind."
"Oh, how lovely. You both deserve it. I hope you find a nice place to build."
"I have some men that work in the mill looking for us."
"What kind of business, do you know?"
"Not yet. Just something very small. Maybe selling novelty items or something. It wouldn't be open all the time."
"Marinda would be perfect. I am so happy for you both. Give her my love, ok?"
"Surely. Thanks."
"I'm off to the meeting," Kallie said as she went out the door.

Mac put his head in a few minutes later. Said he had to get in to the meeting but maybe they could have a beer afterwards. Kyle agreed. He continued reading his reports, when he read something that disturbed him. Apparently, one of the policemen from Strehen reported several fights had broken out between dwarves and humans in the Bearded Lady in the last couple weeks. It didn't go into much detail and he wondered if Aran knew about it. He then found two more reports on the fights, from a different policeman.

They had ended in injuries that required the healer Eres Ferryman. This concerned him and he decided to check it out as soon as he finished his drink with Mac. Fighting among dwarves and humans was not normal and he needed to know the reason. He would go see Gitar to see what he knew.

Kyle knew what Mac wanted to talk about. He must have heard from Kallie about their plans. By now, the entire island must know, he thought. So much for keeping things a secret around here. They went to the Sorrel tavern and ordered two dark beers. Mac updated him briefly on the meeting. Kyle then asked,
"Is that what you wanted to talk about?"

"Well, not really. I heard a rumor the other day."

"I know, I know. It's all over town. And, yes, it is something Marinda have been discussing, but no decisions have been made yet."

"I think it is a great idea! When you asked about land in the Vale, I thought it was for a getaway cabin. I had no idea what it was really for," Mac grinned.

"Well, it's all still in the discussing stage, but we both know we are ready for a change."

"Just remember, we are here for you. Anything you need to make this happen, let me know, ok?"

"Of course. Who else would we go to first?"

They finished their beer and Mac headed back to Norinda and Kyle went to see Gitar. He needed to get this problem resolved before someone really got hurt. He felt that Gitar could help make that happen. When he got to Strehen, he went straight to the Stone shop and asked for Gitar. He was led to a room where several dwarves were in conference. They all broke up when Gitar saw Kyle and he went in.

"How are you today, Kyle? Married life suiting you?"

"I'm fine and yes, it seems to suit me well."

"Great. What's up?"

"I've received reports about the fights in the Lady."

"Yes, I've heard too. There are a group of dwarves that are upset that all these advancements by humans will destroy some of the dwarven customs. I think they want the dwarves to leave the Council and get back to our old ways. They are young and their minds are full of our history."

"Is there a way around this?"

"Maybe. If we sit them down and explain some things."

"Can you give me their names? I can at least go talk with them and ask them to come to a meeting with you and the Council."

"That could be dangerous for you and I cannot get away right now. I have some very important people coming this afternoon that I need to meet with."

"I won't press them or anything, I'll just ask politely if they would be willing to sit down with us. They can say yes or no. If they refuse, I'll be on my way and you can deal with them."

This sounded ok with Gitar and he gave Kyle the names and when they usually are at the Lady. Kyle thanked him and left. He wanted to find out exactly what these dwarves wanted so he could discuss it with the Council. And, so he could have all his men in the northern offices keep a watch on them, discreetly of course.

When he got to the Bearded Lady, he immediately saw a group of four dwarves that fit the description from Gitar. He sat at the next table and ordered a beer.

"Afternoon. How are things today?" he asked them.

They didn't respond and continued to quietly talk among themselves.

"I understand that there has been some fights here lately. Can you tell me anything about that?"

"Why should we? It's not us that is the problem," one said.

"Oh, ok. Can you at least tell me what the problem is?"

"Don't waste your time. They are just young hotheads," said a nearby customer to Kyle.

"If you don't mind, I am talking to the dwarves here," Kyle responded to the customer.

"There is no talking to them. They have no manners and just want to fight," another customer shouted.

One of the dwarves turned and shouted something in their language at the two customers. They quickly jumped to their feet and came over to the dwarves' table. Things happened very quickly at that point. One of the dwarves took a swing at a customer and then steel was drawn. One of the other customers went down from an axe swing. Another customer put a sword into the side of a dwarf.

As Kyle stood to try to push the customers back, he caught the swing of an axe across his side. The pain blurred his eyes and he went down in a heap.

"Are you crazy? Do you know who that is you just axed?" asked one of the dwarves.

"I don't know, just another meddling human," the young dwarf answered.

"That's Kyle Baas. Commander of the IPF. And, a friend of Gitar's."

At that moment Aran Reider came through the door. He took one quick look at the form bleeding on his tavern floor and ran over to him. He ordered towels and started working to stop the bleeding.

"Why did you just leave him bleeding here?" he asked the dwarves as they stood staring at Kyle.

Aran ordered for someone to get Eres Ferryman, fast. He was afraid to move Kyle but had the bleeding mostly stopped. He made him as comfortable as possible and waited. Within five minutes, Eres came in and took over from Aran. Kyle is fevered and looks very pale. He orders him to be taken to Aran's

room and follows with his medical bag.

Aran looks at the young dwarf still standing by the pool of blood and says,

"You better go see Gitar right now. Tell him everything and that it was an accidental swing. It's your only hope."

All the young dwarves leave. Aran waits another fifteen minutes and then goes to see Eres. Kyle is stitched up and the fever is lessening. Eres says he lost a lot of blood, but will live. Aran breathes a sigh of relief and heads to get Marinda.

Hopefully, Marinda would be at the Lady and not down in Sutterton. When he entered the Lady, Marinda was behind the bar counting inventory. She stopped and stared at him as he walked up. Aran doesn't usually come here and the look on his face was not good, she thought.

"There has been an accident," aran said.

Marinda steeled herself and asked,

"Kyle?"

"Yes. There was a fight in the Lady between some dwarves and humans and Kyle was hurt."

"How bad?"

"An axe to the side. He lost a lot of blood and is fevered. He will live. Eres is working on him in my room."

Marinda immediately dropped inventory pad and ran out the back. She asked Aran to help her hitch the wagon. He tried to explain that Eres said Kyle would live, but Marinda wasn't listening. After the wagon was hitched, they both jumped in and headed for the Lady.

Eres was still working to reduce the fever when she came into the room. She knelt down beside Kyle and started talking quietly to him. Of course, he was still unconscious and didn't hear a word she was saying.

"How soon can I take him home?"

"I wouldn't move him for at least two days. The fever is still in him and the stitches could tear if you try it."

She looked up at Aran and asked,

"Can I stay right here with him for that long?"

"Of course you can. I will set up a bed right next to him. You shall have round the clock care by my staff. I will close the Lady until you take him."

She gave him a half smile and said,

"My thanks, Aran. Can you get word to Bentley and the Council?"

"Already on their way. Will you need Lady Mortan or Kallie?"

"Yes. Either one would be great. They can help me sit with him."

"I'll go myself," said Aran.

Gitar was very upset that afternoon as he sat and listened to the young dwarves. He wasn't aware of Kyle's exact condition, but was concerned that if he died, it would cause a rift with the humans and impact all the good that been done these past months.

"You will all go before the Council and explain exactly what happened. Then we will decide your punishment. Kyle Bass is well loved on this island and it will cause many problems if he dies."

The dwarves all hung their head.

"I didn't mean to hurt him, Gitar," the young dwarf said.

"I know. But hot heads prevailed in this. Something honorable dwarves do not do. Consider yourselves lucky it was not a goblin you hurt. I could not guarantee your safety. But humans are very tolerant and will understand the ways of the young."

"I hope you are right," responded the dwarf.

"I will now go see how he is. His wife will be with him and I will try to explain to her. She is a good woman and I think she will not want retribution."

Both Kallie and Lady Mortan arrived that evening. They were sitting at a table when Gitar walked in. He went directly to them and asked,

"How is he?"

"He will live. It was a close thing, Gitar," answered Lady Mortan.

"But Eres is the best healer on the island. We are lucky he was so close when it happened," Kallie added.

"Yes, you are right, on both counts. May I see him and Marinda?"

"Sure. I will relieve her," Kallie said, going to Aran's room.

Marinda came out a moment later and sat down at the table. She looked exhausted, Gitar thought.

"Have you slept at all?" Gitar asked her.

"A little. Thanks to Kallie and Lady Mortan."

"When does Eres say he can be moved?"

"Tomorrow. Maybe."

"I have spoken to the dwarves responsible. They will present themselves to the Council and explain everything. Then they must make restitution."

Marinda looked at Lady Mortan and explained her and Kyle's plans to Gitar. He was unaware of this, she was sure. She told him she would take Kyle to Emily and Mac's for an extended healing while she selected the property and made plans for their cottage. Gitar smiled and said,

"This sounds like a good plan. And, I will make sure that neither you or Kyle have to lift a finger to build that cottage. My dwarves will take care of everything. And, I will talk to Bentley and we will see that all the supplies needed are delivered to the site."

"Gitar, this is more than you need..."

"I will hear none of it! These young dwarves need to learn to control their emotions and become responsible adults. You will be helping them with that process."

"Then both Kyle and I will be honored to let them do this," Marinda replied.

"It is as I thought. You and Kyle are just the kind of adults they should aspire to be like," he said, smiling.

Marinda got up and hugged him. She excused herself and went back to Kyle. Gitar looked pleased, never being hugged by a human before.

"Nice gesture, Gitar. You're elders will be proud of your decisions here."

"Good decisions are easy to make when it involves good people."

Kyle and Marinda arrived on Norinda three days later. She had asked Bentley to get word they were coming and settled everything with her staff. They had no problem at all with her going off on another extended stay. She was fortunate to have them, she thought more than once.

Several villagers had a small cart with warm blankets ready for Kyle and wheeled him to the Harmony. Kyle was not happy about all the fuss, but they insisted.

"You'd better get used to being fussed over for the next couple months," Marinda said.

"Months! We have property to look at and a cottage to build."

"None of which will be done by you! Or Mac. He will be busy just getting you to your fishing spot in this cart," she smiled at them both.

The Council met one morning a few days later with Emily's replacement attending. Tolar had read all the minutes for the past meetings and was familiar on how things went. It was Dunkel's turn to conduct the meeting and he started out with Kyle's incident. The four dwarves were waiting outside and he called them in. Gitar had briefed him before the meeting and escorted them in.

They gave a detailed explanation of everything that happened between them and Kyle and what their restitution would be. They were to build the cottage for Kyle and Marinda in the Vale, with help from other dwarves in their clan. This would put a debt to them that they must repay in the dwarven custom. The council was satisfied with this and excused them. They left the chambers with Gitar.

"I wasn't aware that Kyle was moving to the Vale," said Spinthorn.

"Many of us were not," added Dunkel.

"They have been discussing this for a while now and Marinda decided with this last incident the time has come. She has turned over the Rooster and Lady to her staff. A cottage will be built for them on the property they selected and later they will open a small business," explained Bentley.

"Kyle deserves this thing," Bentore stated. "He has done much for this island."

"You are right, indeed," added Paren.

The Council then called Picker in to update them on what he found. When he entered, he was accompanied by an old woman. She looked very nervous and was reluctant to talk in front of all these leaders.

"Be at ease Seylyn. You will find us all very interested in what you have to say," said Spinthorn.

She nodded at him, recognizing that he was a wark. She looked at Bentore and Paren and knew also what they were. She explained that she talked to the other witches and they all agreed she should represent them on the Council. They were all pleased to hear this and swore her in right then and there.

Picker brought a chair for her on the end of the table. He thanked Seylyn again for being so brave, hugged his Pa and left the chamber.

"What a nice boy he is. And a great cook, too," Seylyn said.

"You are right about that," Bentley answered.

Bentore then asked Culgat to come in and explained who he was and that he agreed to represent the drakken.

"I am very fine with being on your Council," he said.

"And we are very glad to have you, Dunkel replied.

Culgat was introduced to each Council member and they somehow found a chair for him to sit in. It was really a short log with a padded seat, but when he sat at the table, it was perfect.

"And, so we have all of the seven races represented here. Gandrath and Emily would be proud of this accomplishment," Bentley announced.

Everyone applauded and lunch was served. That afternoon they discussed the first Festival and all of the details worked out so far. It was explained to Seylyn and Culgat and that they would meet all of the races there. They both smiled and agreed it would be exciting. Other items were discussed, including the IPF and Commission meeting results. Tolar was amazed at how much Emily and Kyle had accomplished in such a short time.

Reports were given on the condition of the businesses damaged in the storm. Most everything had been rebuilt and up and running again. Upland was nothing but a ruined reminder of what had been. Bentley explained what happened to Horace and that he was working for Kallie.

The meeting was adjourned and a tour of Port Sorrel in a carriage was given to Culgat and Seylyn. They met many humans, visited the Freedom and were both accepted warmly by everyone. They both said they couldn't believe how things had changed from the old days.

Emily and Marinda arrived at the mill in Granton just before lunch a couple days later. Everyone greeted Emily warmly and they were all excited to see her. Marinda talked to the two men who were looking for property and they told her they found two nice places. They gave her details on each one and offered to show them exactly where they were. Marinda said she could find them and her and Emily set out.

The first place was at the edge of the forest just outside Granton. It was a large area with a nice spot for a cottage, just as the men had described. Emily said that it was close to town, but still had some privacy. There was no river or lake close by, however.

They traveled to the second place about five miles to the northeast towards Barrowdale. In fact, it was almost directly between Granton and Barrowdale on the north side of the Vale. It was smaller in area and had a small stream running directly through the property. A cottage would fit nicely right beside the stream and the forest close by. It was perfect, Marinda said and Emily agreed. It was very quiet and off in the distance you could see the Binter, They both made a mental picture of everything and headed back to Norinda.

Bentley was busy organizing the wood order for Kyle and Marinda's cottage. Gitar already told him he would ship all the stone and other items necessary to him the following week. After placing orders with several other suppliers, Bentley talked to several of his workers and asked them to put the word out that men would be needed to help the dwarves build the cottage. He also sent word to Spinthorn and Bentore to see if they wanted to help.

Kallie and Lady Mortan told Bentley that they would supply all the food each day for the workers. The asked him to let them know the exact count as soon as he knew. They didn't realize the build site was only a few miles from the Mystic and the Freedom. They could deliver hot food each day.

Dunkel had an order for windows, doors, sinks and other such things from the Barrowdale Supply ready to be delivered also. This was going to be a wonderful surprise for Kyle and Marinda and he felt good about doing it.

Mac and Kyle were sitting in the sun on the bank of a river fishing when Marinda showed up. She and Emily had just returned from Granton and she helped Kyle back to the house in his cart.

Both Emily and Marinda explained in detail the second piece of property and Kyle said it sounded perfect. She asked Mac if he would find out from the men at the mill who the owner was and tell him they wanted to buy it. He left right after lunch while Kyle went down for a nap. Marinda's orders.

Word was sent to Bentley where the property was and that construction would start the first day of next week. He sent runners to Dunkel, Spinthorn, Bentore and Gitar with instructions for everyone to meet at his place bright and early that morning. During the next few days, all the building materials and supplies from Gitar and Dunkel, were sent to the Shipwright and loaded on wagons, ready for delivery. Bentley had all the wood needed loaded on another wagon and all was ready for the big day. Kyle still knew nothing about any of this. He thought he was going to the property just to view it. Marinda planned it so they would not get there until after everyone else that morning.

The work party that showed up on the day of construction consisted of the four young dwarves, plus other dwarves, policeman, Council members, Erik Darkman, and several of Bentley's men. When Kyle, Marinda, Emily and Mac arrived later, they were all overwhelmed at what they saw. Everyone wanted to stop work and greet Kyle and he just couldn't thank them all enough. Marinda couldn't believe all the things Dunkel had brought for inside the house. The four watched the efforts until just before lunch when Kallie and Lady Mortan pulled up with a wagon full of hot food. They explained they would do this everyday until it was complete.

"I really don't think I did that much to deserve all this," Kyle observed.

"Nonsense," said Emily. "You have kept the peace for a long time here and everyone appreciates it."

"I didn't keep the peace at the Lady that day, did I?" he replied, smiling.

"Could have happened to anyone," Mac responded.

Their cottage was finished in a little over a week. The Council tried to pay Gitar and Dunkel for their supplies, but they refused payment. And, of course, Bentley would take no money for the wood. It was a grand cottage and Kyle and Marinda were very pleased. It had been a little over two weeks since Kyle's injury and he still needed more mending. Now he and Mac could sit beside his small stream, in the Vale woods by his cottage, with the view of the Binter and fish to their hearts content.

On a bright warm morning the following summer the first Losandia Festival started. Preparations had been ongoing for weeks. The first Festival was hosted by humans and took place in a large field next to Lake Sorrel. The IPF sent out notices to all police stations and they believed that all races got the word. Even the villagers on Norinda were invited.

Emily and Mac were in their six months stay at the Sorrel Tavern in Derwend, so it was easy for them to help coordinate things. There were many tents erected, two large firepits for cooking and massive privies dug on the east side of the lake. It reminded Emily of the grand opening for Harmony on Norinda last year, but on a much larger scale. The estimates were running between five to six hundred souls from all races.

Since it was to be an all day affair, Emily and Kallie made sure that any Norindians that wanted to stay the night had a place to sleep. All the taverns helped supply the food and drinks. There would be games and races for the children and boat races for the adults. It was expected that the drakken would win the races because of their size and strength.

As everyone started arriving, several barrows were assigned to take a tally for Emily. By noon, the count was over eight hundred.

"I can't believe this count. Did you check the sums twice?" Emily asked Picker.

"We did. I believe it is very close."

"Amazing. I never thought we would have so many."

"Now, to the speakers. There is no way a speaker will be heard at the back of this crowd."

"I agree. What do you think we should do?" asked Mac.

"I propose arranging small benches at different places in the crowd. Put a barrow on each bench relaying what is said back behind him," picker said.

"Ingenious," Mac said.

"Just simple barrow logic," Picker beamed.

A platform was built by Bentore's goblins to be used for speeches. The benches were placed with instructions from Picker. Emily and Mac took a ride around the area and determined that no new folks were arriving. They came back to the main tent with the speaker. Emily stood on the platform and said,

"Good afternoon everyone. Welcome the the first annual Losandia Island Festival."

Cheers and applause erupted from the enourmous crowd that took several minutes to subside. Emily smiled at Mac and the other organizers and waited patiently.

"We humans are proud to host the first festival. Next year the warks and drakken will be hosting. Do not miss it!" she said loudly.

More applause. She looked at Bentore and Culgat and they were either bowing or raising their hands in salute.

"Before the games and contests begin, we would like to give special recognition to a few people."

"I will give the first one on behalf of the entire Council. Would Bentley Mathes please step up?"

Bentley was a couple rows down and walked to the platform and stood beside Emily. He smiled, but was clearly shocked by this attention. Emily held up a plaque and said,

"The business owners from Losandia and Norinda, as well as the Council, would like to give special recognition to Bentley for the building of three barges and a ferry and all his tireless efforts and hard work on the new Council of Losandia. Without him, we would not have what we have today!"

Emily handed him the plaque, hugged him and the crowd cheered and applauded for another minute. Bentley was so choked up with emotion that he could not speak. Emily saw this and moved right into the next award.

"The next award goes to Gitar Dunst. Please step up, Gitar."

Gitar moved to the platform and all could see he was totally embarrassed. He had no idea this was coming.

"Everyone on Losandia believes Gitar and his dwarves should get special recognition for building our two new bridges, which has helped businesses in both the north and south prosper. And, also, for his generous donations to the Council in the early days. Without this, we may not have been able to establish our Council."

She handed him the plaque and hugged him. The dwarves went wild. Everyone applauded and cheered for a minute or so.

"Thank you. I was honored to be a part of the historical building of both the bridges and the Council. Together they have unified Losandia like nothing else before them," Gitar said, through tears. He held up the plaque once more and stepped down.

Emily stepped down also and sat in a chair with the other organizers. Cullen then came to the platform and stepped up. He said in a loud clear voice that probably didn't need relayed by the barrows,

"I would like to give a special thank you, on behalf of all the villagers of Norinda, to the Council and all the races on Losandia. With your wonderful help and guidance we have prospered as a people in ways we never thought possible. Thank you again."

He bowed as the crowd burst into applause and cheers again, for several minutes. He stepped down from the platform. Then, the entire council, Bentley, Paren, Aran, Tolar, Bentore, Dunkel and Spinthorn moved up to the platform. Bentley held up a plaque and said,

"There are no words to show our appreciation, but we will try. Emily, please come back up."

Emily looked at Mac and he pushed her back towards the platform. She obviously had no idea this was part of the ceremony. She came and stood beside Bentley.

"You started all this, with help from the Mage Gandrath, and because of all your tireless efforts over the last year or so, Losandia and Norinda are prosperous. Everyone has much to be thankful for."

Paren stepped forward and said,

"The dwarves now have a much better way to get our products to the rest of the island."

Aran stepped forward,

"All businesses in the northern towns are more prosperous."

Bentore stepped up and said loudly,

"The goblins are not a feared race any longer. We live in harmony with all the races for the first time ever."

Dunkel came forward.

"You vanquished the old corrupt council and established the new Council. One that represents all races on Losandia and has helped everyone improve the quality of their life."

Spinthorn came forward last,

"The warks also are not feared and can go freely anywhere on Losandia without worry. We can even shop in businesses we would have never even entered before. Thanks to your efforts, Emily."

The Council members were then joined by the two newest delegates, Seylyn and Culgat. They didn't want to speak since they were so new to the Council. They all, one at a time, hugged Emily and left the platform. Emily was standing by herself. There were cheers from all eight hundred souls that were deafening. It went on so long that Mac joined her and they both raised their arms in salute saying thank you over and over..

Then Cullen came up again and motioned for quiet. He said,

"I would now like to present this writ to Mac and Emily making them honorary citizens of Norinda. The villagers are very grateful for the help they have received from them and the very first tavern on our island."

He handed the writ to Emily and hugged her. He turned to Mac and shook his hand. Had they been in a more private setting, he would have hugged him too, but he feared he might embarrass him. All of the villagers present cheered and applauded, as did all the others.

With the presentations now done, the games and contests begun. After an hour or so food was laid out on all the food tables. Everyone was eating, socializing and laughing together, like it was an every day occurrence. The festival continued till after dark. Nobody wanted to leave. Emily, Mac, Kyle and Marinda were the last to leave.

"What a huge success!" Mac said.

"I'll say. I have never seen a drakken laugh before," Marinda added.

"I think this did more for the races than anything so far," said Kyle.

"Did you notice your four young dwarves in the crowd?" asked Mac.

"Yes, I did. They all came up to me and shook my hand and said they were glad to see me well again," he answered.

"Wow, guess they are becoming the adult dwarves that Gitar wanted."

"I was totally shocked at my recognition. I have never felt so loved in all my life," Emily said, starting to tear up again.

Mac hugged her and said,

"And you thought I was the only one that loved you."

"Want to stay at the Sorrel or head back to Granton?" Mac said looking at Kyle and Marinda.
"Well, it is dark and a lot closer to Derwend. What do you say, dear?" asked Kyle.
"I'd love to. And, the men can fix breakfast," Marinda said, grinning.

About a month after the Festival, Mac and Emily headed to Norinda for the next six month stay. They found the Harmony was all stocked and clean, ready to open for business.

"Maybe we should find someone to run the place during our next stay on Losandia," Emily said.
"And, maybe only stay there a few months. I really like it here better," Mac added.
"Oh, really. The fishing better here, is it?" she smiled.
"Kinda. I wonder how the new Commander is doing. Have you heard anything from Kallie?"
"No, she didn't mention it the last time we talked."
"I'll ask Bentley when I see him next."

One evening, they were sitting on the porch of the tavern enjoying the cool breeze off the ocean. When they look towards the village square, a figure was walking toward the tavern.

"Someone coming," said Mac.

"We really aren't open yet. We just got in from Losandia," announced Emily as the figure turned towards them.

All of a sudden Emily jumped up and ran towards the man. Mac was right behind her, but he had no idea who it was yet.

"Gandrath!" Emily shouted and ran into his arms.
"Well, I'll be..," Mac said.

"I heard you two were just lounging around these days and thought I come by. So, this is the Harmony."

"It's great to see you, Gandrath," said Mac.
"Lets go in. How about a dark beer?" Emily asked.
"Never turn that down."

They sat in the taven for the next several hours updating Gandrath on everything that happened since Underhill mysteriously left.

"Sounds like you two have been enjoying yourselves. Nice place you have here, too."

"We like it. But. I still have to go to Derwend when they have a Commission meeting," said Mac.

"But, you are not going to Council meetings, right?" he asked Emily.

"How do you know all these things? Did you go to Losandia looking for us at the Sorrel?" Emily asked.

"No, I don't really want anybody to know I'm here. I would like to go visit Kallie, but someone would surely recognize me."

"Oh, Seylyn said to say hello the next time we see you. She is a Council member now, you know," Emily said.

"Really. Now that is something I didn't know."

"And, so is Culgat, the drakken leader."

"My, you have been busy."

"Bentore convinced Culgat and Picker badgered Seylyn until she agreed."

"Picker? Dunkel's son?"

"Yes. We sold him the Grub&Grog. He is doing very well now that there is nothing much left in Upland."

"Many changes. I can see that I will have to make regular visits just to keep up with things."

"That would be wonderful. How's Underhill?" asked Emily.

"He is finally turning out to be a half way decent butler. He doesn't send his greetings though."

Both Mac and Emily laughed at that and Mac got up to get two more beers. He remembered that Gandrath could always drink two to his one.

"So, next time I come by, I expect to see little ones running around," said Gandrath.

"That sounds like a good idea. We shall work hard on that," Mac grinned.

They talked a bit longer and Gandrath said,

"Well, it's late. I better let you two find your bed."

"My, it's been so wonderful seeing you," Emily said.

"And you too, dear."

"Oh, one more thing. Are there really more islands besides our two out there somewhere?" she asked.

"Of course, what do you think I am living on?" he answered, draining the last of his beer.

He got up, hugged them both and walked back the way he came.

"I'm not going to say I wonder how he does that," Mac said.

"It's best not to," she answered.

Emily thought about it. Were there really more islands out there, or was Gandrath teasing her. It would be nice to find one, just to see how it compared to Norinda. Who knows what races are living there, if any. Maybe there is only one island out there and nobody lives there but Gandrath and Underhill. It sure would be nice to know.

She stopped Bentley on his way into the chambers at the next meeting and asked if she could address the members.

"Sure," he said.

"I want to give my pitch again about sending out a delegation to see if there are other islands near us."

"Oh? Won't hurt to try again, I guess. There wasn't much interest the last time if I remember."

She was greeted warmly by all the Council members and started the meeting.

"As you know, I believe there may be more islands out there and I'd like to send out a ship to see for sure," she said.

"Why would we want to do that?" asked Bentore.

"Well, maybe there are goblins living there and they are barely scratching out a living. Wouldn't it be nice to help them improve their life?"

"Yes, I guess it would," he replied.

She looked at Spinthorn and then at Dunkel and said,

"Or maybe there are warks or barrows on an island just a few hours sail from here. Wouldn't you like to meet them?"

"Ok, I think I understand," Bentley said. "You think we should send a ship out looking for an island and help the people, just like we did Norinda."

"Exactly. Aren't the villagers much better off today than before we met them?" she asked.

Everyone nodded yes. And, after some discussion and suggestions from Emily, it was decided to send a ship with ten Shielders and ten goblins, just in case the inhabitants are hostile. There would be a representative from all the races, too. They would take supplies for a month and several things for trading, if necessary, to show good will.

The Captain and crew would be paid for their time by the Council. They would stay no longer than a month and go no farther than two hundred miles out. The ship sailed a few days later. A large group were at the Port Sorrel dock to send them off. There would be a watch posted starting thirty days from now to keep an eye out for their return.

Marinda went to Sutterton and Strehen about once a month now to visit her old friends. Sometimes she and Emily would make the rounds together and spend the day visiting Lady Mortan, Kallie, Tolar Brent, Picker and anyone else they could find to get caught up on all the latest gossip. They were both very happy and considered themselves fortunate to have so many friends.

Horace Witherspoon went to work for Kallie and seems to like life in Port Sorrel. He asked Kallie several times now to marry and she just pointed to the Freedom sign above the bar and politely refused.

It was about thirty three days after the ship left when the watchman spied them coming in from the Binter sea. He rang the watch bell and sent out runners to get Emily. By the time the ship was docked and unloaded and all the passengers were on their way home, Emily came riding up in a carriage. The Captain reported to her and Bentley that they searched in criss cross patterns for thirty days and never saw an island or a living soul. And they actually went a little over two hundred miles.

Of course, Emily was very disappointed. She discussed this with Bentley for a while and they decided

it would be the last time they looked. Maybe Gandrath was just teasing her, she thought. It would be just like him. Life on Losandia and Norinda was good, She decided there was no need to look for another island. If they were out there, they would show up some day.