*Chapter 62*

Movin’ on Up

Uktar, 1376

Maiko had been shocked by the disappearance of Kedrik. It was unlike the feller to just up and leave. He had been so faithful to the group and would be sorely missed. The bard had supplied the entertainment on the commemorative boating outing for Kedrik. She had brought in a friend of hers to help with the music and her girls were on hand to dance among other things. The bard later had written a letter to Allisa letting her know the details.

The brothel was growing well, as new customers joined from word of mouth alone. She was looking into finding a pair of girls just to attend to the bath area. There had been several requests for such entertainment. Maiko had her eye on a pair of identical twins. She had spoken with them several times and even joined them in bed. The two crimson-hair beauties would be perfect and worked well together.

From her leftover funds, she donated two thousand gold pieces to Gambit and planned for her business to make a monthly deposit as well. The Gambit organization had grown too, with most of the founders having students to teach. Maiko had sponsored several people as new members to Gambit. This included a couple of bards: Kara Musica, was her most prized student; the dancer didn’t think her last name was official, but didn’t bother with it as she taught. The three worked with different string instruments, as well as studying local history, and how the people reacted to each other. “It is always good to learn the locals and their lore.” There were also reading assignments to include several famous works of poetry.

As the month passed, Maiko had a surprise; she realized she had not bled at the appointed time. This meant only one thing: she was pregnant. The bard was overjoyed and could not wait ‘til Sarge returned home. A day or so passed and as the dancer peered out her bedroom window she saw the joy of her life coming home. She dashed down the stairs and though the house meeting him in the back yard. She practically leaped into his arms all smiles. “Honey, Honey, I’m pregnant!” she yelled at him while squeezing him around the neck.

Sarge was taken off-balance somewhat, as much by the news as the impact of Maiko’s news. While her eventual pregnancy was expected, he didn’t plan on it happening quite this soon. Having concerns about her safety as the pregnancy progressed and after the child arrived, given the Gambit’s habit of collecting enemies, he had been diligently conducting research into a way to improve security for their home and fortunately his preparations were all in place.

“That’s wonderful news, m’love!” he answered, “I think we should obtain a guardian for you while you are carrying and for the child once it’s here. Tell me, do you like dogs?”

The next day, Sarge visited a dog breeder that he had scouted out sometime before. Picking out a pair of mastiffs for their combat training and a terrier for its intelligence, he brought them back to the brothel and put up a dog run he had been storing materials to build. Then, that evening, Sarge put his ultimate plan into action. Performing a carefully-researched ritual, an arcane bond was forged between man and beast, then another ritual to transfer some of his magical ability to the now-enhanced canine.

The dog cocked its head at the sudden influx of knowledge pouring into its mind as its mental comprehension vastly expanded. Satisfied that the rituals had worked by the look of humanlike intelligence the dog acquired, Sarge spoke to it in a growl-like language, “Welcome to the family, Rex.”

The hound accepted its new name and replied in the same manner, “Glad to be here, boss.”

Sarge smiled and motioned for Rex to follow. “Come on: I have someone I want you to meet. She’ll be your responsibility to protect and those other two dogs are yours to supervise.”

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Maiko thought Sarge was a little overprotective, but did not mention it to him. She enjoyed the company of the terrier throughout the weeks that followed.

As the weeks passed, the woman began to feel burden of pregnancy. Some mornings she would be sick; others days some smell from the kitchen would turn her stomach. She began having cravings for pickles and pickled pork feet.

Maiko continued to do her work even after the revolution. She spent a good bit of her time overseeing her business. She helped out with whatever was needed. This included things like doing the dishes, serving the patrons in the dining room and other behind the scene chores besides the management of the business. At times she would pleasuring one of the town’s upper-class women in her own bed. She even made time to minister to her own girl’s sexual need without them having to feel they needed to perform.

It became necessary to hire a cook, and when the bard met James McServer she knew she had a winner. Now the establishment could provide better fair for the customers. The twins also came on board. Hanna and Fay Dewmont worked well together as they took over the day-to-day operation of the bath suite, giving customers a unique threesome experience. The cook, bartender, and the twins lived at their own residence. Maiko was glad they had a place because she had no room for them. Thoughts of a bigger build were in her head.

Maiko had made several contacts in the community, some through the patrons she had acquired and some she had met on her own. There were the dwarven father and son brewers Durwin and Morum Alemister, from whom she got a good deal for alcohol. Both occasionally used the Folly’s facilities. The tailor Jonathon Taylor from a block over helped with clothing needs. His daughter, Jade had suggested him but made sure Maiko would not tell that she made frequent visits the brothel. She had also made friends with the grocery next door whom she bought most of her food. Samwise the halfling also enjoyed the company of his neighbor.

Lauren had been keeping the others informed of what Allisa was up to. The half-elf sent letters almost weekly. Maiko had asked the drow not to tell the druid of her pregnancy as she wanted to go visit her mentor. She helped Lauren with gathering supplies and some furniture items requested by Allisa and made plan to join a supply caravan heading to the Westwood. By the time the trip was scheduled to depart Maiko’s pregnancy had just started to show, though unless you saw her nude you would not know. The women was a bit leery of taking the dogs with her to Allisa’s and managed to slip out without them with the help of Lauren’s magic carpet.

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A new beginning

Allisa kissed and hugged her spouse, “I will make preparation to build a house.” She smiled from ear to ear. “It won’t be here in the town proper but somewhere in the forest. Nothing fancy, mind you.” The woman’s whole expression and mannerism showed she was over joyed, but then a slight frown came to her face. “I guess one of us has to go back and make arrangements with the rest of Gambit.”

Lauren nodded. “I have things I must attend to and close out.”

“Then you will be leaving today?” asked the redhead.

Lauren replied, “Yes, my love. I will.”

The two kissed and the druid called out to the duskblade as she mounted her horse, “I will come up before for the final move to say goodbye to everyone.”

The news was shared with the others. Allisa’s father and mother where overjoyed and offered to show her some nice spots for a home. The ranger and the druid looked at each other and nodded. The druid responded. “We shall make our home here also.”

That afternoon, Lauren returned to Waterdeep with the warrior and the druid. As they rode off, Allisa heard the drow speaking to others about joining the Gambit. Allisa spent the next couple of days with her parents as they caught up each other with what had been happening in their lives. Later she, Ben and her father explored the woods. Her dad pointed out good spots that would give his daughter some seclusion as they journeyed.

Two weeks later, the druid finally chose a spot. It was located in the center of the forest. A hill rose from the forest floor, ascending to about the height of nine feet. The hill stretched out north and east and held the upper forest, whereas the southwest was the lower forest. At one point the hill dropped off forming a small cliff that ran for 100 to 150 feet in both directions. At its center was a waterfall, the source being somewhere to the north. At the base extended out a pond which turned into a creek as it meandered southwest. Flowers grew along the banks of the pond along with willow trees and a cypress. Moving away from the pond was an area of birch trees before the pines took over. The spot was perfect. She would build her home up against the cliff removing only one birch tree and several pines. A porch would extend out to just over the pond’s edge.

Another week passed before her plans were set. The log cabin would have one master bedroom, one workshop for her herbs and whatever Lauren might need, a root cellar dug into the cliff side, a large open room for sitting and dining, and an open kitchen area. A bathhouse would be built. Both the building would have running water from the waterfall. The druid chose trees that could provide wood she needed while helping the growth of the forest by thinning out thick patches. Most of the cut trees came from the outside edges. The townspeople were glad to help. They had no healer and the prospect of Allisa being among them was exciting. The girl set up a hammock at the house site and with some tarps from the town had her roof and small shelter.

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13 Nightal, 1376

The house on Shipshape Way was quiet. The chirping of birds outside in the late autumn morning was muffled only by the sound of the marching pikemen outside the perimeter of the manse, and the occasional gust of wind that woooed into the house through the chimney. Then the sound of the door opening disturbed the silence inside, and soon thereafter, the voices of a bard and a warmage were interspersed with those of a cleric, a duskblade, a druid, and a trapsmith.

They entered, having all gone shopping for provisions and other goods, and set down their haversacks before beginning to convey their purchases to their proper places. They were all in a jovial mood, despite the fact that as of yesterday, the investigation into Kedrik’s disappearance had been closed. Nothing had come of it; no amount of Divination could render anything useful, and even the Gray Hands agreed that the City Watch was right to close the case.

Though they’d been a band of heroes for a few years now, it was finally nice to be basking in the limelight of luxury now. It wasn’t so much decadent opulence that they embodied, but they did not need for anything, and their new equipment was as grandiose and gilded as their deeds and reputations.

Maiko had become the key benefactor to the Gambit’s coffers by contributing a steady cash flow from her brothel and related enterprises. Rook, on the other hand, had organized his pupils into a lawful ministry of Red Knight, while Sarge had made a reputation for himself as a solo hero, as well as with an outfit that brought him as much income as he could dispense with. The others had pursued other ambitions during the last tendays and months.

And then there was another twist to the Gambit’s story: Maiko was now with child, and she had just Divined this.

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All in all, 1377 was looking to be a fortuitous year for the Gambit’s members, and though they hoped that Kedrik was alright, wherever he was, they looked to the future with optimistic hearts and words of gladness upon their lips as they began to put away their groceries and sip on some of the sangría that Fingers had found on sale.

They would later be on their way to the docks, where a 20’ schooner had been chartered for the afternoon. It was a half-day vacation, intended to commemorate Kedrik’s deeds and goodness, and their crew—a few fans from the neighborhood—were honored to take them out for such an occasion.

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Allisa sent letters to Lauren about every other week, telling of what was accomplished. This included the deal with the goblin tribe to gather flat stones in exchange for items they needed. The druid had made an arrangement with the general store up to the amount of the goblins’ deal to pay for what she needed. She and the other druid would bring a wagon to collect the stones that fit her need and also offered some small healings for some of the sick goblins. The house was coming along nicely the outer log walls needed filler to keep the wind and cold out. The roof was finished and the final structural work would be complete in a week or two. The home would be ready to move in shortly. This would account for three months of her stay in the woods.

23 Ches, 1377

On the following afternoon, one of the town’s teens rode up to the worksite. “Ms. Allisa! Ms. Allisa!” The redhead heard the excited call and came out of the pond to see what he needing. Coming around the corner she stopped, water dripping from her hair as she stood nude.

The lad’s mouth dropped open as his eyes took her in. “Timothy, is it? What is the emergency?” The young man was speechless. He tried to speak but stammered until Allisa called his name again. His eyes made it to her face, but as he talked, they wondered to her breasts.

“Ah, no emergency, mama. You have a visitor in town.” By now the young man’s face was bright red.

“Thanks. Let them know I will be on my way shortly.” Allisa went back around the house to dry herself off with a prestidigitation spell and gather her clothes. Dressing, she waited just long enough for the boy to have delivered his message, then turned into a bird and flew to town.

Upon arriving at her mother’s house, that being the only one with two extra rooms, she reverted into herself and was surprised at her visitor. To her surprise Maiko sat on the porch. The two greeted each other with a hug and the druid could feel her tummy slightly pouching out. “My, my! You *have* been busy. Sarge’s I presume.”

Maiko smiled proudly, “Yes, it is, and he is very proud of his handiwork.” The two girls giggled. Then Allisa hugged her mother and kissed her father’s cheek.

“How long are you here for?” asked the druid.

“I am thinking a couple of weeks; then I must go back.”

“You must come tomorrow and see my home. Mother! I will need a room tonight as well,” the elf nodded.

The next morning Allisa turned into a horse and took Maiko out to the house. On the way, the two discussed pregnancy. The half-elf was curious about how it felt to carry a child. They also discussed Maiko’s business, its progress, and Allisa’s plans. By the time they arrived, the workers were already hammering away as they created the foundation for the bathhouse.

“This is a nice spot, and your home is going to be wonderful.” The dancer said as she slipped off Allisa’s back. The druid showed her where everything would be and Maiko offered décor suggestions. Afterwards they entered the tent structure where the druid served a snack and a drink. They spent the day talking and relaxing and when night came, Allisa stripped down and climbed into the hammock with Maiko to sleep. The dancer smiled, remembering when she had first met the half-elf and how several times they had lain with each other.

The next morning, after breakfast, they took a quick dip in the pond before the workers arrived. The two women planned to go exploring and have a picnic in the woods. Allisa gave Maiko an herbal brew that eased the woman’s morning sickness.

The druid had spent time getting familiar with the southern part of the woods and had only made a trip or two into the upper forest. Ben padded along beside them, not too keen on the backpack the druid had strapped on. They moved through the forest at the base of the hill towards the east where there was an easy path up the slope. Along the way, Allisa talked of how she intended to help the forest, planting new trees removing vines that would damage the trees, and taking care of the animals. As they came to the upward trail, the druid paused and held her hand up. Coming down the hill was a fawn and her mother. Once they reached the bottom the mother looked up worriedly but then spotted Allisa. The animal moved toward them with its young. The druid reached out and rubbed the mother and then the fawn. She nodded to Maiko how held out her hand, letting the deer sniff at it. Then she rubbed its back as well. Other encounters of this nature happened as the two traveled.

Noon came and the two women stopped by a brook where they eat the food that was packed. As they ate the forest grew quiet. At first, Allisa did not pick up on it as they were talking of old times. Then the druid’s sixth sense kicked in. “We are in danger.” She stood and scanned the surrounding forest. Moments passed, then the sound of a growl was heard. More growls followed and even a howl.

“We have a pack of grey wolves; be prepared.” The druid did a few quick puffs on her whistle. She cast *barkskin* on Maiko as Maiko piped a song to give courage. The pack moved out of the trees, surrounding the two women. The alpha moved in front of the others. Allisa attempted to calm him, using slow hand motions. Others of the pack growled as they waited on the alpha. Her attempts kept the animals from attacking outright. They seemed to be irritated by something. It was only a matter of time before they moved in.

Allisa transformed into a grey wolf and gave the challenge of leadership. The pack did not like this but the alpha controlled them and accepted the challenge as the other animals backed away, leaving the two in the middle of the circle. Allisa circled the male, growling back at him. He charged in, but the she wolf dodged out of his way and snipped at his flank as he went by. She advanced her front paws, bearing down on the other’s back, but the male pulled free. The battle went back and forth for several minutes before Allisa won, Instead of running the loser off, she let him stay. She took a few minutes to commune with the pack to find out the source of their irritation.

Maiko breathed a sigh of relief as Allisa explained. “They have respect for me now. I allowed the alpha to continue to be leader. They say there is trouble in the woods that has them worried. I need to investigate this. I made arrangements for the pack to guard us.” At that moment the sound of a mad bear was heard. Turning the two saw Ben standing on two legs ready to fight. “Ben, you are late, silly bear. These are our friends now.” The bear went down on all fours and accepted what the druid said. He moved to Allisa’s side and she scratched his head.

The group moved up the creek with the alpha leading. Ben stayed near Maiko as Allisa instructed. They continued on for three hours, taking breaks as Maiko needed, then finally stopping to make camp. Maiko sat on a long log. Taking her boots off, she rubbed her feet. The half-elf fixed dinner.

On the morning after Maiko’s stomach had settled, they began their trek. It took them until noon to find the signs of the threat to the forest. The druid knelt examining the foot prints then looked at the broken trees nearby. “I think we have an ogre.” The two followed the obvious trail. The wolves had taken to guarding their backs. Ahead they could see a rock outcropping rising from the forest floor. Maiko pointed at what she thought was something but Allisa shook her head. The ground vibrated and the two stopped. They waited, then more vibrations and the sound of something heavy moving. Both women crouched as they moved forward, using the bushes as cover. The wind changed direction blowing the small of dead animals over them. They could now see a cave and what looked like a spit over a pile of wood. On the ground were several deer. Then, from their right came the ugly beast.

The ogre paused and sniffed. He looked around. “You no hide from me. I smell you.” The creature laughed as he raised his club and walked toward their hiding spot. Seeing they were found out, Allisa cast *barkskin* on herself and stood up. “Oh, company. Come join me for dinner.”

“No” Allisa called. “Leave this forest or die.”

The beast laughed as he moved faster toward Allisa. Maiko had managed to move farther to the druid’s left, while Ben was more to the right. The bear stood on its hind legs and roared at the ogre. Startled, he turned his focus to Ben, which was a mistake. The druid called down holy fire upon the beast. He roared in pain as he beat at flames on his furry coat until he finally ripped it off. Ben charged forward, taking a swap at the creature’s leg, leaving red marks but no real wound. Maiko flanked him on the opposite side, her crystal blade breaking the skin. The creature swung its arm around, knocking the dancer down. Then, it tried to smash her with its club. A quick thought and the girl’s anklet activated, moving her ten feet farther away.

Allisa backed away, casting *bear’s endurance* upon herself. Ben attacked again, but the ogre swatted him aside. He had been protected by the link between him and his master as they shared the common spells. The bard cast *hideous laughter*, causing the beast to laugh. It laughed so hard that it doubled over, holding its gut.

The druid spoke magic again and a bolt of lightning appeared in her hand. She immediately sent it to the ogre whose laughing mixed with a howl. Allisa felt pain as she was batted across the clearing. She lay there dazed as she saw the second ogre that had slipped up behind them. Thinking fast, Maiko spoke a word and *grease* appeared just where the new beast placed its foot down. The thing tittered and fell like a tree. Ben, back on his feet, attacked the merry beast, biting and clawing his leg, ripping shreds of skin.

Blood soaked the half-elf’s side as she hit the second beast with a *lightning bolt*. It tried to stand, rising slowly, then fumbling for its dropped weapon and at the same time, almost stepping back into the *grease*. “You die, rodents.” Maiko cast *mirror image* upon herself, causing the ogres to see nine bards. The second ogre threw its club, taking out two of the mirror images and narrowly missing the real one. The first continued to laugh but not as hard as it stumbled toward the Maiko. Ben full-attacked it again, rending meat from its leg. The ogre shook the bear off.

The druid summoned a juvenile arrowhawk. The creature swooped through the air spitting an electricity ray right into the first ogre’s face. The creature howled, its nose now blackened. Maiko dodged as the second beast swung at her. She peered, inflecting a bad wound to the ogre’s arm. Ben again attacked the laughing ogre as the spell broke. He managed a passing claw before dodging the blow that came his way.

“Me mad now. You die. We eat.” Allisa’s form changed growing into the hulking form of a dire bear. She full-attacked the ogre, grabbing and holding it as is struggled. The arrowhawk attacked the second ogre with a full attack, going for the head and shoulders. Even though it scored a hit, ripping out an eye, it had been a bad decision as the screaming beast grabbed it and ripped it apart. Maiko took up a song to inspire the trio as she had to pause from movement. Ben attacked, limping into the fight with the dire bear.

The ogre almost broke free, but at the last moment, Allisa reasserted her strength. Managing to get her teeth upon the beast’s throat, she clamped down. Two more of Maiko’s doubles died as she blinked ten feet away and cast *crushing despair*. The ogre started to cry with great sobs.

Ben limped away from the body, licking at his paw. He had some bruises, and possible a broken bone. Allisa’s wounds had healed as she turned into the dire bear, but she had sustained some muscle strain and deep bruises from the ogre trying to hold the bear’s head back from its throat. Maiko was feeling tired from her condition, and a bit woozy. She had some bruises and some cuts. Blood ran down her right arm and forehead.

Allisa moved quickly, pouncing on the last ogre. The two went down and rolled in the dirt. The beast made several good punches, each struggling to grasp the other. The two broke free and separated. They began to circle each other. Maiko finished loading her crossbow and fired off a bolt that missed its mark.

The she-bear spoke, surprising the fell monster, as holy fire rained down upon it. The creature stumbled forward, attacking the bear with a dagger he had taken from somewhere on his body. Allisa howled as the blade cut into her flank.

The druid swiped at the ogre, leaving deep gashes across its chest. The ogre wiped blood from its face and took a step back as it teetered. Maiko called out, “You leave forest; or you die.” The bear made a fake charge as the ogre moved back farther. It looked between the two, deciding what to do.

“Me leave,” said the ogre.

“Never come back,” Allisa said, “*I* protect this forest.” The ogre picked up its club and several other items along with a deer carcass and then stomped off.

The druid returned to her normal shape and gestured to the wolves to follow the ogre. Then she gathered Ben and Maiko to examine their wounds and cast her *mass* *cure light wounds* spell. She then burnt her *polymorph* spell to finish up the job. The two searched the camp and the dead body but nothing was found of any value. They lit the dead body and the remaining rotting carcasses on fire. “Let us move away from the stink and find a better camp site,” said Allisa.

They took a new path and began meandering back home. After about an hour and a half they came across a nice, open area. “Let me provide us some security.” Maiko said, then conjured up a *secure shelter*.

The redhead looked amazed and said, “This will come in really handy. Wish we had had one on the Best expedition.” The two spent a comfortable night and left in the morning for Allisa’s home.

The rest of Maiko’s stay was basically uneventful except maybe the visit to the goblin tribe for more stones. The little followers were tripping over each other just to be around the women. Several goblin females dragged their mates off by the ear.

All in all, the two friends had enjoyed the visit. They hugged as Maiko mounted her horse, then Allisa handed up a package of herbs for her morning sickness. The bard waved as she rode back to Waterdeep with the supply wagon merchants.

The next three months were spent finishing the homestead and leaning the forest. Seeing that the townsfolk would stop by at any inconvenient moment, Allisa set aside a day for the townsfolk to come by to be cured of their ailments.

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Part III

Back in Waterdeep, Sarge was upset that Maiko had slipped off without the dogs. Rex made sure to stay closer to her. Maiko and her head courtesan kept close company. At times when Sarge was away for several nights, the two would sleep together. Selena had taken it upon herself to watch over Maiko for Sarge. This included sex. Selena enjoyed rubbing the bard’s abdomen and feeling the child kick as well as touching her swollen breasts. The courtesan arranged her work so she could accompany the expecting mother when she made trips out into public. Maiko was grateful for since her protruding belly got in the way at times. Maiko would have mood swings, sometimes feeling as if she was not pretty or would ever get her figure, but Selena told her “Don’t worry, honey. Your figure will come back. Anyway, just being with you makes me hot… makes me want to get some of you.” Little things like this kept the bard’s spirits up.

Two full months passed. Allisa had promised her spouse she would return to Waterdeep before the end of Mirtul. Seeing that there were not any caravans leaving for the big city she decided to fly there herself. She packed what she needed locked up the homestead and turned into an eagle. The druid enjoyed flying with the wind flowing over her body and the natural strengths of the eagle where perfect. She soared high in the sky just beyond most beings sight range, coasting on the air flows as they dipped and rose. Her eyes could pick out the small rabbits and mice as they scurried across the ground.

Half way to her destination, trouble arose in the form of a male eagle who didn’t like another eagle in its territory. Allisa had been enjoying the view when she heard the shriek and was buzzed by the eagle. She righted herself from the fall and was able to see the intruding bird. Its brown feathers were tinged in white and it was clearly twice her size. The bird attacked again and the druid’s eagle instincts kicked in she quickly swing back so both where in a head on approach. The two collided and grappled with each other as they plunged toward the earth.

Allisa did all she could do to keep the great bird’s beak from finding a purchase. She had never observed an eagle in battle but something told her that one of the two need to give way or both would be dead. She called to the male, as they struggled, saying she relented and begins to pull away. The male was not satisfied, but Allisa pulled way some fifty or so feet from the ground and righted herself, missing a tree and gliding feet from the earth. Slowing herself, she landed and reinserted herself as a human. The damage had been minimal and the changing had healed her body thou her arms shoulder where still sore from the battle. The male eagle came flying through the trees and was startled by the half-elf. Allisa again tried to calm the animal and finally succeeded. Once she explained to the wise eagle he accepted her and they were friends. The druid decided she would walk for the rest of the day and take back to the air on the morrow.

The druid was glad to see the Northgate come into view. She swooped down and returned to human form. The plan was to walk into Waterdeep and follow the High Road until she got to her turn off. This was the North Ward. It catered to a richer sort of people, with its nicer homes and expansive businesses. The high road was busy this morning, wagons loaded with goods traversed in both directions. Horseback riders and buggies trotted in an out of the slower traffic. Here and there some soul darted across the wide lane of traffic. Allisa kept to the right of the road. The smell of freshly baked bread wafted from a bakery down one road and the ring of a blacksmith hammer came from the next. The redhead made a stop at the Singing Sword Tavern to relieve her parched throat then continued on her way. She wanted to make it to the compound before night fall and see her darling love Lauren. She thought about what had to be done before they could pick up and stay permanently at their new home.

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Evening (or later), 30 Nightal, 1376 (New Year’s Eve)

Kir had been away from Waterdeep for quite a long time. She had not actually planned on coming back but she had gotten word that her mother had passed away. She knew her mother understood why she had left. Kir had written her mother on occasion though she never said where she was, at the time.

As Kir had made her way into the city, she had completely forgotten what the day was. The New Year’s festivities were in full swing in the City of Splendor. For her this was good; this meant that she could make sure she had extra coin to spend on a room and some drink.

Kir had arrived in the late afternoon. She had made her way to the Singing Sword Inn and had collected enough to cover her stay along the way. For her it was the thrill of collecting the purse off the snooty lady, the coin pouch off the snobby, young Lord. Slipping though the crowds under the noses of the guards. ‘Oh, so much fun!’ she thought as she stood just outside the inn. She had missed the city.

As Kir entered the inn, she noticed a male drow leaving. He seemed a bit familiar, like she had seen him before; even had possibly talked to him at some point. She would have to think on it. She found the innkeeper and procured a room for a few days. After obtaining the key to her room, she went to the common room, and ordered food and wine. Her food and wine came; she ate slowly and watched those around. Listening to conversations, getting the lay of the land, what guilds she should look out for, has there been any big hauls lately and who might have been behind them.

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Meanwhile...

The Singing Sword Inn was bustling this evening as the new years’ festivities across the City of Splendors were in full swing. **Xaryn Yril’Lysane** sat in his room on the second floor, studying his singed and soiled spellbook under flickering candlelight once more. This had become his routine on nights where the main room was too busy for one of his ebon skinned ilk to wander about the dining room floor unmolested.

Xaryn’s elegant robes stitched with patterns of spider webs across the fine fabric with many bejeweled baubles also depicting the eight-legged servants of The Spider Queen hanging from the spiked pauldrons that were included in the garments he was given as heir to the archmages chair hung from the cloak rack by the door, bathed in the flickering orange light of the several lanterns and candles that Xaryn had positioned to light the room. This night the elegance of his official clothes was... unnecessary. Instead, the drow was dressed in simple trousers of black silk tucked into knee-high leather boots with buckles of gold, he also wore a cream-colored tunic that hung loosely over his chest. He pulled his piwafwi tighter around his body in a futile attempt to ward off the biting cold of the winters night.

A muffled thud followed by the cackling laughter of what seemed to be the entirety of the dining room jarred Xaryn out of his studies. “Another drunkard must have fallen through one of the tables.” He mumbled to himself before looking back to his book. The aged tome had barely begun to grab his attention when another thud and chorus of laughter erupted from below. A bar fight perhaps? The trifling conflicts of humans were naught but an annoyance to the seasoned mage, but he had to admit that they were exceedingly good at interrupting his meditation. Perhaps, he thought, these interruptions were his cue to make his way onto the crowded streets of the Castle Ward. And so Xaryn closed his spellbook with an audible \*thwap\* as the pages came together and the leather-bound faces closed upon each other and stood from his seat by the shut and shuttered window of his room, pulling the hood of his piwafwi over his face as he made his way to the door and out into the hallway leading to the stairwell, and eventually the dining room and the bustling streets of Waterdeep.

As Xaryn stepped out onto the cobbled streets, stepping over the several passed out partyers that littered the floor of the Singing Sword, the biting cold wind caused a shiver as he pulled his piwafwi tighter around his torso, the air carried the scents of the sea as it always did in Waterdeep, but this night the smells of various street foods mingled with the smell of the refuse of those who had imbibed too heavily during the nights festivities. Unpleasant was the best word the drow could use to describe the scent, though undeterred by foul smells, Xaryn soldiered on. He kept his hood pulled over his face and his eyes to the ground as he wandered, exploring the city that was to become his home while using the crowds drawn by the New Year’s Eve festivities to blend in, the best way, he surmised anyways, to inconspicuously pick up town gossip and landmarks all at the same time while all of the street-dwellers were too drunk to determine his heritage. And so he partook of the festivities that night, making his way back through the Castle Ward and into his room at the Singing Sword Inn, considerably more geographically educated and several drinks drunker.

~\*~

The months that passed between Deepwinter and Mirtul…

Water flowed ever towards the coastline under the bridges that led to Waterdeep.

~\*~

22 Mirtul, 1377

Kir had been sitting and eating when she heard a name that she had not heard in several years. Kithris. She knew that name. A young, red-haired halfling girl who had joined the guild a year before Kir had killed its master. The name was spoken with a bit of respect.

“You’re not saying that she had anything to do with it are you?” said an older farmer.

“No, no. Just sayin’ that I heard that she knew someone who may have been involved. That’s all,” his friend replied.

Kir wondered, as she took another bite of her meal, if Kithris had quit. Kir was kinda hoping that the girl had. At the time she was struggling with certain aspects that the profession required. If she moved on and was still in the game, then Kir would have to look her up.

While Kir was musing over this information, she noticed the drow had come back. As he moved through those there to head upstairs, Kir caught a glimpse of his face. She recognized him. Xaryn, she believed was his name. It had been a few years since she had seen him. \*What was he doing up here?\* she thought. Her curiosity got the better of her, so she got up and quickly made her way to catch him before he got upstairs.

“Xaryn. Is that you? It has *been* a few years. Look at you, though: haven’t aged a bit. Come, come sit down. Eat, have a drink. It’s on me.” She motioned to her table.

The door to the Singing Sword Inn opened again, letting in a fiery redhead. She stood about 5’ 7” and looked to be 120 to 130 lbs. She brushed her left hand through her hair, making sure it was still in place as she moved sensually to the bar. The woman looked to have a nice figure by human standards, but it was hard to tell by the robe she wore. One could tell this woman had a bit of coin because of the bracelets, rings, and necklace that she wore.

Bartender: “Good day, Miss Selena. You come for that package Maiko asked for?”

Selena: “I have, Sam. How have you been? Have not seen you over at the Follies in the past week or so.” Her voice seemed to entice those around her and had a very pleasant sound. The look on her beautiful face was pleasant and caused one to want to stir into her green eyes. What could be seen of her skin was well bronzed to a nice delectable shade.

Bartender: “I’m fine; have to lay low a bit. The missus is getting suspicious.” The man laughed. The woman laughed also. “Henry,” the man called toward the back room. A young man entered through the double-doors from the kitchen. He paused, first seeing Selena, then blushed as she smiled at him. Before he could speak, Sam spoke out. “Go get those packages in the back.” Glancing at the woman, “You might need help. There’re a couple of boxes this month. Henry will be glad to escort you back.”

Selena: “Now, Sam, that is funny: Henry escorting me. That is normally *my* job.” She smiled. The woman hopped up on the bar, still turning to look out over the common room. The robe parted to reveal one leg from just above the knee down. It was encased in black hose and ended with high heel ankle boots. Her eyes graced each person in the room, her smile warming those who looked upon her.

Xaryn cast a sidelong glance at the ember haired woman who had deftly hopped onto the bar to the awe of many a drunk taverner. Having embraced Kir earlier, giving a slight chuckle as the halfling tugged on his coin purse, he said, “You know how well things go for people who steal from me, Kir.” He said, looking down on her with a sly grin, “I trust you don’t want to become a pile of smoldering ash.”

He followed Kir back to her table laughing at her jab about the dwarven spirits, “Wine, my small friend. You know that!” He said jokingly. “As for what brought me out of the proverbial bowels of Faerûn... That’s a long story for another time. Let us suffice to say that I am... no longer welcome back home.” He said, thinking back to the night he made his first foray onto the surface after nearly falling to his father’s elite guard. “Teleportation magic can be... useful.”

Kir gave the drow a big smile. “You remembered. I am so glad. Come give your favorite halfling a hug.” She reached out and gave Xaryn a hug. As she did, she will purposely put her arms under his cloak and tugged on his coin pouch. Making sure he felt it, then hugged him tightly. Once they parted, she backed away and shows her hands to let him know that she was just playing. “Come, sit, what are you drinking? Oh, never mind; I remember. That rock gut dwarves spirits stuff, right? (she giggled) I still owe you for what you did for me during the heist.” Kir moved to the table she had and sat down.

“Trinkets and gifts?” a robed and hooded gnome vendor with pox and halitosis approached their table and displayed a velour rectangle with about a dozen pins, clips, and broaches. He smiled a half-toothed grin before being eschewed by both the drow and the halfling.

“Trinkets and gifts?” he asked the folks at the next table, and the next one, before finally reaching some sympathetic fool three tables down who actually bought one of the clips.

Kir motioned for the serving girl to come over to take Xaryn’s order. “Order what you want. It’s on me.” She grinned. “I have had a great day today.” She giggled. Kir took a sip of her drink and sat it back down. “What am I doing in Waterdeep? What am I doing in Waterdeep?” She looked around the room, her eyes stopping on a woman sitting up at the bar. She was quite the beauty. Legs that Kir was sure were nice and.... Kir shook her head slightly and looked back to Xaryn. “Well, I figured it was time to come home for a bit. Visit the family. Catch up with old friends. Do some sightseeing. Have some fun.” She gave Xaryn a mischievous grin. “I am also awaiting my ascendance to the grand priestess of Leira. So there’s that.” This last was said with sarcasm. She took another sip of her drink, then, as she was putting her drink down, her eyes were drawn to that lady at the bar again. Those eyes looked as if they could see one’s soul. Without looking to Xaryn, Kir spoke. “What brings you out of the deep?”



Madelgarde Silverstring—a rather easy-to-please halfling performer and lifelong Waterdhavian—was also captivated by Selena, whom she’d only met once through Maiko. Selena was something to behold, even if one did not crave the feminine form, and never disappointed an onlooker. Madelgarde stroked the strings of her lyre ever so gently as she studied the seductive human’s moves. She’d come to get away from some of her cohort mates who had—after hours of study—grown quite tiresome. Ms. Silverstring took a sip of her mead, thinking absentmindedly of what she would say to Rook tomorrow regarding the reconnaissance errands he’d sent her on and dwelling on Selena’s style.

At the table in the southeastern corner of the squarish tavern, the drow looked Kir up and down while he decided his next move, “Are you staying at the Singing Sword?” he asked.

Kir was very happy to see Xaryn. She loved his dark humor. The fact that he was very handsome was just a bonus. It was always a thought in the back of her mind about the one that had gotten away. For her, she was even a bit surprised that it had turned out to be a dark elf that had caught her eye. They had spent enough time together during the heist. She had made it abundantly clear that she had been interested. She got as if he had done the same, yet there had not been time. Then again, she might have been completely wrong.

Her attention was again drawn to the woman at the bar. She looked to know the bartender due to the fact that she was very at ease with him, and he with her. She couldn’t help but feel an attraction towards the woman. Her skin that perfect sun-kissed color. Those legs, mmm, those legs. What she cou.....



Kir’s full attention immediately turned back Xaryn when he mentioned that he was no longer welcome back home. There was genuine concern on her face. Which switch to an exaggerated pouty face. “You should have gotten ahold of me. You know I would have come to help. But noooo. You have to do things on your own. Typical male thinking. Never ask for help.” For a small moment she turned her head away dramatically. As if she was completely crushed that he had not asked for her help. She made it very obvious, by glancing back at him to see his reaction, that she was playing. Kir couldn’t hold it any longer turned to face him and laughed. As her laughter died down she reached across the table foe his hand. “I would have. You know that, right?” her voice full of concern and friendship.

Letting go of his hand, she sat back and nibbled a bit on her food. She could see him eying her up so she purposely gave him a demure pose. When he asked if she was staying here, she smiled warmly, yet with a hint of mischief thrown in. “Why, yes, my dear. I am currently lodging here at the inn. (she leaned forward, grinned) You are not planning on getting me drunk, then offering to take me to my room and then taking advantage of me. Are you?” Kir leaned back in her seat, sipping at her drink. As she did, it was very plain to see in her eyes the possible wanting she had for him.

Setting her elbows on the table, drink in both hands, she spoke over the cup. “If that is you plan, my darlin’, you need not worry about getting me drunk, nor offering to walk me back to my room, or even trying to take advantage of me. (the rest came out as a dusky whisper) All you have to do is ask,” she said, giving him a wink and a grin.

With her packages gathered, Selena got one of the more enthusiastic adolescent boys from the back room to offer to carry these for her in a wheelbarrow, and so the two left with smiles upon their faces. Selena was like a magnet for the eyes of most in the room, whose heads turned sharply towards the exit before she and the erect boy disappeared and headed to Maiko’s Folly.

Selena finished her short conversation and took another sip from her glass the waitress had brought. Saying her farewell to the bard, she continued her path towards the corner table, glass in hand, where only the halfling sat. Taking the measure of the other she spoke.

Xaryn let a slight chuckle escape his ebon lips as a smile snuck its way onto his face, “You should know better than that, my friend. I’ve never been one to take advantage, now have I?” He said, his words dripping with sarcasm.

“Coincidentally,” He continued “I am also staying at the Singing Sword for the time being. That is, until I figure out another plan. I’m still not quite used to surface life and I doubt it will become any easier with time. The sun is indeed quite bothersome, if I do say so myself, quite a pain to the eyes.” He exhaled sharply, rubbing the bridge of his nose with the thumb and forefinger of his left-hand exaggeratedly.

“Naturally,” he went on, ever one for the occasional monologue, “I’ll be in need of work, so if you happen upon anything... out of your depth, per se, you can find me in room 13.”

Xaryn let his last sentence hang in the air for a moment before he stood from his seat across from Kir. Reaching into his coin purse to retrieve two gold, he bounced each gold piece off of the wooden table and into the air, catching them both with a flourish before he tossed them to his halfling companion, “Of course you can always come find me for other reasons as well.” He finished with a sly wink before he turned to head back across the barroom floor towards the stairwell that led to their rooms.

Kir listened as Xaryn joked around. She gave him a wicked grin when he commented that he was staying at the inn as well. “Well that is very convenient.” Kir responded. She listened intently as he spoke of not being up on the surface for very long. Still getting adjusted to things and the sun. At the mention of work she gave him a nod. “If I hear anything. I will keep you in mind darlin’.” Xaryn let her know what room he was in. Which she fully intended to invite herself in later in the night.

“Well met, again, Kirschvasser!” He called as he walked away back to his room. The mage’s spellbook called to him, and he was never one to turn down his natural urges.

It was at this time that the woman who had been at the bar, moved to sit at a table near Kir. This, of course, had caught Kir’s attention, and Xaryn had also caught this out of the corner of his eye before disappearing up the staircase. With all the talk in the room, Kir couldn’t get what she was saying to the halfling she had just joined. Kir had seen some beautiful women before, though this one was just that much more. When the woman smiled, Kir returned one of her own. Warm yet a touch of mischief thrown in.

Her attention brought back to Xaryn when he got up to leave. Kir raised her glass to the drow. “Room 13. See you soon friend.” She gave him a wink as he turned and headed to his room. Kir finished her food and her drink. She ordered another glass of wine. When it came she took a sip and started to run her finger along the rim, occasionally looking at the woman who had given her a smile.

“Good evening.” She flashed her smile as she stood before the table. “Seems you friend walked out on you. Have you been in Waterdeep long?”

Her eyes took in the clothes the other wore. Selena was intrigued by the woman even thou she was not upper class. She had at times indulged herself with certain of the lesser status people when she met someone interesting.

“Oh, did they contact Allisa also?” She blows out air in disgusted manner and the gives Lauren the whole story thus far.

“They were very impolite with no regards for my pregnant state. What if they had caused me to lose the child.” She placed her hand upon her belly. “I have my attorney looking onto weither I can sue them.” Maiko finished up.

As the dancer walked the drow out she said, “I will let you know if there is any new information.”

Ooc. The informing of Allisa can happen off screen.

Lauren rose with her friend. “May I stay here until Allisa arrives? I know Sarge is here, and I don’t have anything else pressing to do until my wife gets here, anyway.” The unspoken statement in the drow’s eyes was that she didn’t want to be alone. She’d previously told Maiko of her nightmares and sleeplessness, and how Allisa helped her cope with them.

Yes you may, go fetch what you need, or if you don’t mind we have some night gowns if you need such.” She smiled. “You sleep on my room with me. I will send Sarge over to the Gambit house.” She clasped her hands together and said, “We will make it a sleepover.”

Lauren smiled and nodded. “I’m sure you have something I can wear, but I do need to fetch my armor and gear.” With that, Lauren went back to the Shipshape Way house, collected her gear, and returned to Maiko’s home.

“It is good to meet you. I am Selena, and no thank you.” She lifted her glass. “I am still working on this. I would but it looks like my packages are ready.” Selena slipped her hand into her robe pulling out a piece of stiff paper. “Here, this is where you can find me. Come to the back door and tell them you are my friend and wish to talk.” The one by three card was titled Maiko’s Follies followed by and address. The women reached back into her robe this time revealing a flash of her bare midriff. Withdrawing her hand she passed Sereda another card. “If you need work these are good people, you can bring your friend along.” The card read The Gambit followed by the address.

Selena smirked. “I look forward to seeing you at a more convenient time.” The bartender motioned for her she returned to the bar.

Selena teased the youth as he pushed the wheel-barrier. “You should come up to my room. I will teach you the womanly pleasures.”

Kir looked to the serving girl and ordered another glass of wine. When the girl left she looked to Selena. “Tis a shame that you cannot stay.” She took the cards from the woman, looked them both over as she explained what they were. She did catch the flash of Selena’s bare midriff. \*So smooth and tan yet the well-defined muscles of someone....\* Kir looked up at this gorgeous woman and smiled. “Back door. Your friend, talk.” Her smile went from warm to mischievous with a bit of sass thrown in. “How could I turn down such an offer. I will have to find my way to Maiko’s Follies soon. Very soon.”

When Selena spoke of work, Kir looked at the other card. The Gambit. It sounded interesting. She would ask around in a bit about the place before she decided on whether to head to Maiko’s Follies or upstairs to have some fun with Xaryn.

When Selena spoke of seeing her at a more convenient time, Kir gave her a nod and a quick grin. “I look forward to our next meeting Miss Selena. Hopefully I will be better dressed for the occasion.” She giggled. “Then again I could wear a little less.” With that the serving girl came back with the glass of wine.

Selena answered with a charming smile. “Less would do just fine.”

Kir took it and raised it towards Selena then took a sip. Just as Selena was leaving Kir blew her a kiss. As Kir watched Selena leave, thoughts of such impropriety run through the halflings head. Which manifested in a slight tilt of her head, a wickedly mischievous grin with a devilish giggle.

Having watched the interchanges all around her, Madelgarde finished her drink, and also left, drawing the attention of about a tenth of those with a line of sight to the exit, given her wee stature. She saw Selena heading east to Maiko’s Folly, and she herself headed south to her parents’ home, the starlight and streetlights guiding her way in the night.

~\*~

Evening, 22 Mirtul, 1377

A knock came at Allisa’s door in the Westwood, where she be had been staying for the last few months. “Yes?”

She was recognized by—and recognized in turn—the younger man from the City Watch who had come all the way out here on official business. “Arch-Priestess Allisa, I bid you a good afternoon, though I regret it’s with serious tidings.”

“Oh?”

The elven male produced a folio, which he handed to Allisa.

“Eriven, what is this?” she asked as she unfurled it.

He summarized, “I am hereby entrusted to serve this mandate upon you to appear in before the marshal court on 28 Mirtul regarding an investigation of yourself and others under your influence.” The man was evidently perturbed at having to be the person to convey this to the druid woman, as he had gained a deep respect for the Gambit over the years, and did not know the exact charges.

She scanned the document, not having read anything in Common for tendays. Apparently, Maiko and Sarge, and everyone working in the brothel, had been involved in some crime, and because the accusations were not made directly against Allisa, they were not contained within the document she’d just received.

She looked up, and Eriven added, “You’ve been cleared to attend on your own recognizance, though I must ask for your badge.”

“My City Watch badge?” Allisa was taken aback. “That’s back in Waterdeep, on Shipshape Way.”

“Then I’m sure the other agents have confiscated it by now,”

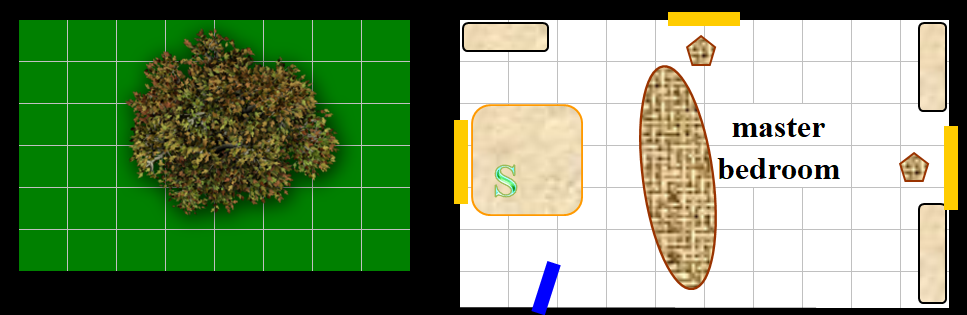
“Well, *this* is something. I have not been in Waterdeep for almost a year and a half. I have no idea what this is about. I will be there by the date in question.”

Eriven then bowed his head in respect to the druid, mounted his horse, and was off back to Waterdeep, which still held limited jurisdictional sway over the southern expanse of Westwood.

Once the man was gone the druid began thinking of what to say to the others. She had set up a system to communicate with Lauren. This included dwarf yaupon holly bush she had planted at their headquarters and a potted version at Maiko’s home. She would learn the spell *forest voice* four times on the morrow and probably the next day to make contact with her friends to find out what was going on. The spell would allow her while touching the plant to speak to anyone within 10 feet while she was in contact with her bush of the same type.

~\*~

Earlier that day...



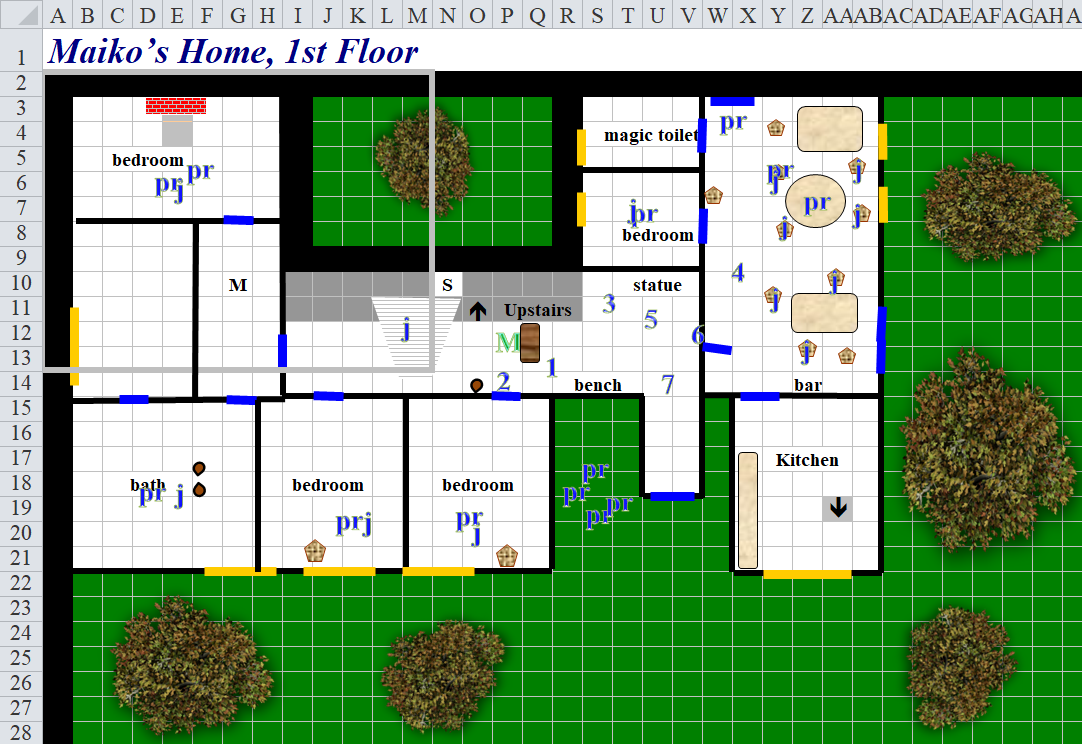
Sarge slept soundly in an otherwise unused upstairs bed while most of the rest of the mattresses generated a constant cash flow for Maiko’s place of business.

Two City Watchmen—one a Watchwoman—entered Maiko’s upscale whorehouse, Maiko’s Folly, the ringing of miniature sleigh bells affixed to the door muffled by the conversations and other chatter in the busy brothel. Maiko was busy tending to some minor financial discrepancy in the books, and by the time she looked up, having noticed that everyone’s conversations had abruptly wrapped themselves up in the dining room, there were now six, no, seven officers of the City Watch inside her establishment.



She blinked, thinking for a few milliseconds about the possible circumstances that might’ve brought this many uniformed and armed officers into her brothel. “A good day to you, Messieurs and Mesdames.” Maiko was not as active a member of the City Watch as some of the others in the Gambit, though she’d been deputized a few years ago; she did not recognize two of these officers, with whom she’d rubbed shoulders at least once at some function or other, but they remembered *her* spectacular performance. Still, it was evident by their faces and postures that they were not here for an encore. One of the newer courtesans made for the exit via the north door of the dining room, wishing for their recent pasts to not catch up with them tonight. She was spotted by the fourth officer to enter the house, and instructed to remain where she was.

The woman with the highest rank—a Captain—approached Maiko’s desk and made eye contact. Maiko’s nuanced sense of social heuristics kicked in, and she realized the officers were taking up tactical positions, mostly as a response to the circumspect and dubious body language of more than one whore, john, and jane in the dining room. Now was Maiko’s moment to either speak, fight, or flee to parlay another day.



*pr = prostitute; j = john or jane; 1 – 7 = City Watch officers*

Round 1

Maiko nudged Rex with her. He being an above intelligent animal scampered quickly up the stairs to warn Sarge. As soon as this profoundly unwise decision was executed by the human and dog, the officers resolved their own contingencies, and the bard didn’t even have time to say what she thought they would permit her to say after commanding a dog to scamper quickly away.

A cleric—Officer 3—held out her right hand and faced her palm to Maiko’s, ready to cast a rather debilitating spell upon the bard should she reprise her hasty reactions.

City Watchwoman 1 threw a magical net.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Attack Type** | **Damage** | **Ranged?** | **BAB** | **Str Mod+** | **Dex Mod+** | **W+** | **Total Score** | **Roll** | **Total** |
| City Watchwoman 1 | Net of Ensnarement | Ensnarement |  | 10 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 15 | 10 | 25 |

*Hit.*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Save vs.**  Ensnarement | **Rank** | **Ability & Mod.** | **Misc. Mods.** | **Total** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| **Maiko, Reflex** | **8** | **Dex (+2)** | 2 | 12 | 2 | 14 |

*Fail.*

Maiko was ensnared. Watchwoman 1 then nodded to her cleric for good measure, and the cleric among them cast *hold person* upon Maiko.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Save vs.**  *hold person* | **Rank** | **Ability & Mod.** | **Misc. Mods.** | **Total** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| **Maiko, Will** | **8** | **Wis (+0)** | 2 | 10 | 3 | 13 |

*Fail.*

Maiko was now both ensnared *and* magically *held*, freezing in place as one of the City Watchmen—a formidable fighter-wizard—cast *hold monster [expired on Round 12]* upon the dog.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Save vs.**  *hold monster* | **Ranks** | **Roll** | **Save** |
| Rex | Will | 10 | 6 | 16 |

*Fail.*

The terrier remained in place atop the fourth, fifth, and sixth steps of the staircase, just a few steps from the john who’d needed to use the restroom upstairs because the downstairs one was occupied.

Having subdued the dog with an overpowered *hold* spell, and the bard with a magical net and a justly powered *hold* spell, the non-caster Watchmen rushed to bind Maiko’s hands behind her back.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Attack Type** | **Damage** | **BAB** | **Str Mod+** | **W+** | **Other+** | **Total Score** | **Roll** | **Total** |
| City Watchman 2 | Touch Attack | Grapple | 10 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 12 | 11 | 23 |
| City Watchman 3 | Touch Attack | Grapple | 10 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 11 | 9 | 20 |
| City Watchwoman 5 | Touch Attack | Grapple | 10 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 13 | 8 | 21 |

*Hit, hit, hit.*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Character** | **Attack** | **BAB** | **Str Mod+** | **W+** | **Other+** | **Total Score** | **Roll** | **Total** |
| City Watchman 2 | Grapple | 10 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 12 | 6 | 18 |
| City Watchman 3 | Grapple | 10 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 11 | 5 | 16 |
| City Watchwoman 5 | Grapple | 10 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 13 | 12 | 25 |

*No resistance while Maiko was held.*

The young woman about to exit through the customers’ entrance to the north of the dining area held her ground, and the fourth and sixth Watchpersons held their hand crossbows pointed in her direction with telltale bolts of *sleep* already loaded and cocked.

Officer 4 began to take a few steps towards the would-have-fled-if-she-hadn’t-been-spotted girl.

Sarge remained asleep upstairs, snoring.



Round 2

Officer 4 apprehended the young woman, and ushered her out to the main lobby where Maiko was now being arrested.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Save vs.**  *hold person* | **Rank** | **Ability & Mod.** | **Misc. Mods.** | **Total** | **Roll** | **Check** |
| **Maiko, Will** | **8** | **Wis (+0)** | 2 | 10 | 7 | 17 |

*Fail.*

Maiko was shocked that just a fleeing dog would set these disrespectful officers to lock her down, but they had orders *and* contingencies, and knew full well the bard’s capabilities. She had been given the opportunity to speak, but had forsaken it by setting to dog in motion instead. If they treated all people like this, something was sadly wrong again in their ranks. Sarge would have their hides for this. When the officer spoke the charges, Maiko’s mouth would have dropped open. None of hers were kept against their wills. It was their choice they even got paid well for their services. But why Shelly Bedwarmer? She had been working the streets when she was found, staying in some abandoned building in the town.

Everything had happened so quickly that those having sex in the adjacent rooms didn’t even pay attention to the brief sounds on the other side of the closed doors. The officers began to move Maiko and the young courtesan towards the front door, careful to keep them spaced apart from one another.

Then, as the lead woman assessed that they had the situation under control, and stated, “Maiko, the mononymous, you are hereby charged with the kidnapping of the individual you see before you,” the officer waved an open hand towards the young lady also in custody.

One of the officers put a muzzle on the *held* dog.

The lead officer parted her lips once again to speak into a recording rod, “The City Watch hereby identifies Maiko as the accused executor of a single charge of kidnapping. The City Watch has apprehended the suspect as well as the victim, Ms. Cordelia Zendar,” the officer was interrupted by the young whore.

“That’s not even my *name*! My name’s Shelly! What *is* this?” said the prostitute who spoke slightly above her social class, possibly as a result of having rubbed shoulders with other charming women who made it their business to speak eloquently when needed.

The City Watchwomen and Watchmen looked at one another, and the fighter-wizard who had cast *hold monster* now cast a divination that Maiko could not identify. “It’s her, Captain,” said the warrior-mage. “No two ways about it.”

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Having been restrained with caster gloves—which prevented somatic gestures from being emitted—and gags—which silenced their ability to cast spells with verbal components—Maiko and Shelly had been ushered into the back of a wagon before Sarge could even be roused by the staff. By the time they left, the warmage was abruptly seized from a lovely dream and told of the situation. It was another 20 minutes before the bard and her employee were placed in separate cells, and several hours passed before Maiko was placed in an interrogation chamber.

“What is your relationship to Ms. Zendar? How do you know her?”

“When did she become certified? When did she begin working for you?”

“What are her duties at Maiko’s Folly? How much do you compensate her?”

The questions were a blur to the bard, who could not fathom what on Toril was happening.

“How long have you lived in Waterdeep?”

“Do you now or have you ever conspired with necromancers or other evil agents?”

“Are you now or have you ever been an agent of Amn?”

“Who is Ms. Zendar to you? Why did you recruit her into a life of prostitution against her will?”

Maiko sat before the interrogator as he popped off question after question until she was given a moment to speak. “I cannot answer any of your questions until I have spoken with my attorney.”

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Selena arrived with her boy-toy in tow and the packages she’d just picked up for Maiko, and was instantly briefed on what had transpired only minutes earlier.

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It was all so bizarre! Maiko had been triple-cautious about ensuring that all of her operations were above board, even going so far as to retain an attorney who kept her on the green side of the law.

That attorney now entered.

“Maiko.”

“Sabrina!”

“Sarge notified me; he’s outside, but they won’t let him talk to you.”

“Let me have a moment with Sabrina here and then I will chat with you,” Maiko said to no particular law enforcement officer on the other side of the once again closed door.

“What’s happening? This feels like the time that Allisa and the others were arrested by doppelgangers,” bemoaned the human.

The elven lawyer summarized what she’d read, “Apparently, the woman you know as Shelly has been identified as a missing adolescent named Cordelia Zendar.”

“A minor?”

“Afraid so. Just under 19 *[legal human age for prostitution within City limits]*.”

“So all of her documentation was forged? I thought she was 20 already!”

“That’s still being determined by the diviners upstairs. Her family has gone in to see her, but she doesn’t recognize them, and insists that her name is Shelly Bedwarmer.”

“That’s what *I’ve* always thought,” Maiko spoke truthfully, and her lawyer could tell.

Maiko’s face displayed dismay and bewilderment. “Please find out all the information you can on her and her family. Tell Sarge so he can look into it too,” said Maiko, shaking off the bewilderment, “and find out what we can do about their harsh treatment of a pregnant lady. That was unacceptable.”

Sabrina nodded, “This should be resolved in a matter of hours, Maiko. If you weren’t cognizant of her true identity, and the deceit was wholly on her part, I’ll likely be able to argue this out of court today; we just need to wait for the diviners’ reports.”

“And why do they think *I* did this?”

“Apparently, there was an anonymous tip provided to the City Watch,” shrugged the lawyer. “This also has to be investigated; they’re trying to ascertain the identity and location of the person who sent the message. It’s not evidence that can be used against you in court, but it was enough to issue the warrant for your arrest.”

There was silence for a few seconds as Maiko took in all of the new information, filling in the gaps that had grown sore in her mind in the last few hours. “She seemed like such a sweet girl…” sighed the madame.

The interrogating officer returned, greeting them both as he and his two guards stood in front of the once again closed door.

“Here are your answers:” Maiko prefaced. “Ms. Zendar—as you call her—is my employee of her own freewill. I found her doing tricks in the back alleys and offered her a better life. When did she begin working for me? When I opened my business, she was among the first few women that joined with me. That was well over a year ago. Her duties are to entertain the customers and her salary is above average for Waterdeep. More specifically you need not know the exact amount. What else? Oh, and I’ve lived in Waterdeep about 15 years.”

The robed inquisitor nodded and stroked a few check marks before repeating one of the unanswered questions that he deemed important, “And have you ever conspired with necromancers or other evil agents?”

“I am sorry,” said Sabrina. “She is not a liberty to answer that question due to closed records of the government.” Maiko closed her mouth as she had been ready to answer the question.

“Duly noted,” the bureaucrat accepted the waiver dispassionately before moving to the next unresolved question. “Are you now or have you ever been an agent of Amn?”

“Been an agent of what?”

“Amn, only that major superpower of a nation south of us?”

“Oh... no.”

The interrogator looked at Maiko for a few extra seconds, then at her attorney, then down at his checklist again, “Did you recruit her into a life of prostitution against her will?”

“As I already stated, she was a freelance prostitute when I found her. She is now my employee.”

~\*~

Sabrina had come through on her promise, and by the end of the day, Maiko was released on 3,000 ₲ bail, which Sarge promptly paid. The case was not over, and Maiko’s release was conditional upon her returning to face a hearing on 28 Mirtul. This hearing, Sabrina assured her, was convened to certify not only that Maiko was indeed innocent, and formally clear her of all of the charges, but also to determine the motives for Cordelia’s deceit, which remained to be discovered. Nevertheless, Maiko’s testimony *was* required at the hearing.

“So I’m free?” asked Maiko.

“I mean, we have to show up on the 28th, but no, they can’t detain you again unless they bring new charges,” the bard’s lawyer assured her.

Maiko waddled into Sarge’s arms and kissed him. “I have never been treated so badly in my life.”

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Dawn, 23 Mirtul, 1377

Allisa caressed her dwarf yaupon holly bush, casting *forest voice [expired in 15 minutes]* in order to speak to Lauren.

Lauren awoke from a dream about fighting some vile fellows, but was already beginning to forget the events as the light and breeze of the early day. Her bed was near a plant that Allisa had potted and placed near the kitchen, and the duskblade realized that she’d been roused by her lover’s tender voice.

“Hello, my love. If you are near, I am talking through the plant.”

“Hmmph?”

“Were you sleeping? I miss you, hope you are well.”

“Yeeeeessssss,” Lauren stretched. “Ohhhh, how I misssss youuuuu!” the groggy daughter of drow and human smiled at the realization that she was safe. “How are you?”

“I am fine and the house is finished. I had a messenger from Waterdeep summon me to a hearing in 5 days concerning Maiko, and they pulled my badge. Please find out what you can.”

“Oh, they didn’t tell me a damned thing,” Lauren said testily. “I come in from my afternoon exercise, and there they are, rummaging through our rooms. They were quick to show their writs, of course.” The duskblade bared her teeth in a parody of a smile. “They were also quick to point out that the details of the case are sealed until your summons.”

“Ok, get with Sarge and Maiko. I do not like this.”

Although she was much better, the half drow still had nights where she was unsettled unless Allisa was with her.

“Me also; I am returning to you, anyway, about the end of next tenday, give or take a couple of days.”

“In two days, at this same time I will contact you again. Love you always.”

“That would be nice,” Lauren said.

“It’ll take me two days to reach Waterdeep unless I fly; we’ll see.”

“That long?” Lauren tried to keep the disappointment from coloring her voice. She took a breath. “I understand. Do your best.” She decided to not tell Allisa about the nightmare. “I wish I hadn’t left now,” Lauren grumped. “My aunt needed me to help her with selling her house, as there is apparently no one else suitable.” She had complained to Allisa about having to leave their home in the forest and make the trek back to Waterdeep. Although she was much better, the half drow still had nights where she was unsettled unless Allisa was with her.

The druid had detached herself from the dwarf yaupon holly bush, and thought of what she would now say to Maiko to prepare her for Lauren’s visit later today. She had prepared four castings of *forest voice*, and didn’t know whom else she would contact beyond her dear cohort, but for now, Allisa began to concoct an introductory paragraph, hoping the bard-madame would be by her desk during the fifteen-minute window between the casting and its expiration.



As it happened, fate preferred that Maiko not be at her desk—where her potted plant was situated—and so the spell was wasted. Allisa knew that Lauren would convey the news of Allisa’s subpoena to Maiko, and little did she know of Maiko’s own run-in with the law and subsequent stay in their custody.

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Morning, 23 Mirtul, 1377

Lauren sighed as her wife’s voice faded, and continued her walk to the kitchen. She opened the breadbox a grateful wizard had gifted her with, and extracted a still-warm roll from within it, the box having kept it bakery fresh for three days now. She set the roll on a clean plate, sliced it open with a knife, and slathered it with butter and honey. Stepping over to the icebox, she took out her personal jar of milk and sipped from it as she ate. Lauren cleaned up after the meal, and went to dress for the day. As was her custom on a normal day, she wore no armor and took only her sword, but she did wear her bracers and other magic items. She favored dark clothing, although Allisa had gotten her away from wearing black all the time. This day, she had dark green trousers, black ankle boots, and a light green tunic.

Lauren stepped into the street and made her way to Maiko’s home. She nodded to one of Rook’s newer acolytes who stood guard at her friend’s door while the woman knocked twice, and then opened it. “Is Maiko up yet?” she asked the young woman who answered the door. The girl may have been one of Maiko’s workers, but her armor and sheathed sword spoke of her filling a different role this day.

One of the guard dogs met Lauren as she entered the property. The dog, knowing this was a regular visitor, gave what sounded to be a friendly bark, but was mainly to alert rex of someone approaching the house.

The hefty terrier, Rex, lay in bed beside his master’s wife. Hearing the bark, he nuzzled the sleeping dancer.

Meanwhile, downstairs, Zendala Mithalvaelen, or Zen for her close friends, moved to the door to intercept whoever had knocked.

“Hello, Lauren right? Hmm, I will have to check. Normally she *would* be, but with her time soon approaching, I am not certain. Please, have a set in the common room. Breakfast should be ready.” The elf in chainmail stepped back and held her arm out in the direction of the main room.

Zen caught Azar as she exited one of the rooms. With a slight nod, she said. “Azar, would you check on Maiko? Lauren wishes to see her.”

The human seductress smiled and said in a pleasant voice, “Will do.”

Luther greeted Lauren, asking if she would like anything?

One of the other prostitutes walked up to the duskblade. She smiled, turning up the charm. “Hi, there! Been awhile since you were here.” She placed her hand on the drow’s shoulder. “Have you had a change of heart on my proportion? I really would like to show you a good time.”

The woman knew who Lauren was and her mate, but had an obsession with drows, some kind of fetish or such. This was not her first time seeking the drow’s acceptance, and she was making about as tempting an offer as Lauren could resist. Her loins began to miss the touch of another woman, or man for that matter.

Lauren smiled and took the girl’s hand. “Alas, fair maiden, my heart, and everything else, belongs to my goddess, Allisa.” Lauren leaned in and kissed the girl lightly on the cheek. “Such is my lot in life, I’m afraid.” She gently disengaged and looked to Luther. “No, thank you. Is Maiko up, yet?”

~\*~

Maiko had slept in a bit, and now that she’d been awakened with the announcement of her duskblade friend, she took a few moments to come down.

During those moments, the young seductress put some impressive moves on Lauren, leaving the half-drow speechless with her lips parted. By the time Maiko got downstairs, Lauren had regained only most of her composure, and when the two hugged, Maiko could sense her friend’s arousal. Catching the young prostitute’s gleaming eye out of the corner of her own, Maiko held back a smirk before they started talking.

“Lauren, how good to see you!” the woman said as she took a seat and the two began to discuss recent happenings. Momentarily, Luther brought out breakfast for Maiko, along with some orange juice.

“So what brings you here this morning?”

Normally, Maiko would have immediately begun telling Lauren what she had just gone through, but this morning, the bard wanted some information for herself before having to divulge information to others. She noted that she was a bit testy after her mistreatment while in the custody of the City Watch, and wondered whether she even wanted to have any further association with them, let alone membership in their ranks.

~\*~

The next day…

According to the writ she’d just been handed by a City Watch message boy, Maiko’s request to speak to Cordelia Zendar—as such had been her confirmed identity—had been duly denied until the conclusion of her hearing, during which time the two were to be separated at all times. After this time, Sabrina had assured Maiko, the two would be allowed to speak... unless Cordelia was charged and jailed for an additional amount of time.

The bard paced back and forth in the lobby of her brothel just minutes before opening time. Anticipating the myriad things she would say in reply to a hundred hypothetical lines of interrogation, the madame of the establishment drank a potion of *eagle’s splendor* before going outside to meet and greet the late afternoon’s patrons and guests who had been waiting for the last few minutes as the parlor and bedchambers were primped and primed for the ensuing night’s events.