*Chapter 1.1: Tegil’s Mark and Beyond*

From Elsabet’s Journal... < written in the town of Tegil’s Mark, various paragraphs dated accordingly >

“The people of Tegil’s Mark are very friendly, good hosts. I’ve spent some time talking to various of the common folks, not preaching exactly, though if they asked about the goddess, of course I was happy to tell them of Mayaheine and how she teaches us to look after others, especially those unable to protect themselves. I’ve learned a bit better how to read people’s body language and facial expressions, and that helped in getting them to open up more as well. The more different people I meet, the more I come to understand that diversity is a good thing.”

“Mayaheine has blessed me with a new cantrip, an awesome boon, Amanuensis—it allows me to copy writing directly from some other object into my journal! It is amazing! It lasts many minutes and can copy quite a lot of words quickly, much faster than I can write. These are examples of things I came across here in Tegil’s Mark, it made perfect copies!”

< here there are two examples of the spell used, nothing big, just trying it out, with a note as to where they were seen >

“Pollyanna has continued northwards, but I have recorded the location where we buried her kin, and if we pass by this way again in the future, I hope to be able to visit their graves and make sure they remained undisturbed.”

“With permission from the local chief of constables or militia—I’m not sure exactly what they call themselves—I’ve been working out with the warriors, practicing my sword work and footwork, and healing injuries as needed. I feel more confident, but there is much more to learn.”

“I was watching an acrobat do some amazing stunts, performing for coppers and silvers, and after his show, I asked him if he could teach me how to tumble. He kinda shook his head, but apparently didn’t have anything better to do, and I paid for it by using my new cantrip to make some copies of letters for him on some blank pieces of parchment—I didn’t read them as they were private. Anyways, I know how to tumble now! Okay, I’m still totally a beginner, and just getting the basics down was hard, but he also showed me how to use jumping skill to help, which was pretty keen.”

“Well, it looks like there’s a caravan heading south, and they’re looking for guards, so I guess it’s time to leave. Thank you, people of Tegil’s Mark, it has been a good month!”

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Barkley had also enjoyed their stay in Tegil’s Mark. He spent many afternoons transforming into various canine species and entertaining the children of the town. On some occasions he would transform into larger Mastiff Breeds and allow the small children to ride his back. He also spent some time playing hide and seek with the children as well.

In the evenings, Barkley could be found patrolling and practicing with the local militia. He focused primarily on his defensive skills and worked on improving his survival and moving silently while on patrol. Many of the patrols would last several hours, intentionally, so the patrol could build team cohesion and endurance.

Barkley also made friends with one of the bar owners in town and helped him make beer and brandy in exchange for room and board.

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“Nensy!”

Saradette turned as a young gnome approached her. “Keep your voice down!” she told him in a fierce whisper. She looked around the main room, where her new friends had chosen to stay. “Booger, you will get me killed if you don’t shut up.”

“I’m Greenapple, not Booger,” he groused. “They’re not even looking for you anymore. Your mother did something, but I don’t know what.”

“She didn’t pay them off, right?”

Greenapple shook his head. “No, but she did arrest some people about six months ago. Didn’t she tell you?”

“I’ve been away,” Saradette said with a grimace. “Mother sent me away, but I’m back now.”

“Your parents still live in the same place. Maybe you should go see them, yes?”

“Yes, I suppose I can, now that the crisis is over.”

The next morning, Saradette left the inn, and made her way to her parents’ shop. As she approached, she noticed a pair of gnomes standing near the corners of the building. She stopped and stepped into the alley to observe before she walked on. The pair was joined by two more men, and then she caught a glimpse of a blade. The pairs waved at one another, and settled down to wait.

Saradette chewed her lip as she thought. These folk were definitely up to no good, but she had no proof. Then, one of the men on her side got up and moved to the back of the building. Perfect! She slipped behind the row of buildings, and moved behind them. She found the man taking a piss against a tree, and she slipped up behind him, dagger in hand. She wrapped one arm around his throat, and laid the edge of the blade against his stalk. “I’ll cut this right off if you try anything,” she growled in his ear.

“Okay, okay,” the man squeaked. “Who are ye?”

“What do you want with the jeweler, hm?”

“Not him; we are to take the Mairshair, the woman.”

“Alive?”

“If we can. Or not, the money is the same.”

“Who paid you?”

“I don’t know, Alys talked with them.”

Saradette tightened her grip on his throat, and the man began to struggle. She was taller and stouter, and soon the man sagged in her arms. Not wishing to kill him, she let him drop to the ground. She turned, only to find his companion at her back. He lunged at her, and she stepped aside and pushed him down.

He rolled to his feet, sheathed his dagger, and drew his sword. “Now, bitch, let’s see what color your blood is. Maybe I’ll just knock you senseless, and have a bit of fun with ye before I slit your pretty throat.”

Saradette drew her sword with her left hand, and slipped her dagger in its sheath with her right hand. The man lifted his sword and swung it downward in a vicious slash at her head. She swung her own blade to deflect the blow as she stepped to the side and forward. Her opponent had badly overreached, and Saradette took full advantage. In a continuous motion, she brought her blade around in a sweeping, upward slice, catching him right above the hip, and continuing across his abdomen. He wore no armor, so the blade opened him up from hip to shoulder.

Saradette stepped to the side again as the man folded and dropped to the ground with a coarse scream of agony. A flash of movement to her right caused her to turn, and there stood the other two men. In that moment, Saradette realized that, while they were thugs and murderers, they were not trained fighters. “Yield or die,” she rasped.

“You’re a girl,” the older one grunted. “We will spit roast you while you bleed out!”

The rogue didn’t waste time responding. She took two quick steps, and pushed her sword out in a straight thrust to the younger man’s face. The blade tip caught him right in his gaping mouth, and he went down with a gurgling scream. She stepped to her right as the older man recovered from his shock and lashed out with a broad swing. She jerked away, and the blade slid along her armor just over her left breast. It hurt, but the blade didn’t cut the tough material.

She brought her blade up to a middle guard, and thrust out toward his face. His sword rose to block, and he stepped up with his left leg to pass her. Deftly, Saradette turned the thrust into a downward slash from her strong left side. Her blade slammed into the inside of his left thigh just above the knee. The injury caused him to drop his guard; she recovered her swing, and drove another thrust straight into his chest. The man toppled backwards, and Saradette lurched forward, as her blade had lodged between his ribs.

It was well for her that it had, because she screamed as a knife stabbed her right forearm, instead of into her back. “I’ll gut you, bitch!” The first man had awoken, and it was his knife that was stuck in her arm.

Saradette grunted, jerked her blade free, whirled, and drove the tip through his midsection. The man lurched backward, pulling her sword free, and leaving his own weapon stuck in her arm. He stared at her in shock for a moment, and then he fell on his face.

“Aahh!” Saradette screamed as the pain of her injury struck her. She fumbled her sword into its sheath, and grasped her wounded arm with her left hand.

“Tarapple!” Saradette looked up to see her mother rushing toward her. “Are you okay? What happened?”

“These men were after you.” To Saradette’s chagrin, she began to cry. “They said they were here to kill you.”

Her mother looked around at the bodies on the ground. “I will send for the constable and the undertaker. Now, let’s get you to the healer, and don’t touch that knife! It’s sealing the wound.”

Saradette was content to let her mother be her mother, and she leaned on her as they made their way into the street.

Laryssa found it difficult to adjust to her new role as a priestess of Mayaheine. As a paladin, she always favored deeds over words and proselytizing was not her style. Instead, she preferred demonstrating the tenets of the Bright Lady by training those who desired it in bladecraft so that they could better protect themselves and others.

This training came in handy one day when she was leading a patrol out in the woods surrounding the town. Marching thru the newly fallen snow, they came across a trail made by a number of humanoid feet. Following the trail, she spotted who had made it - a group of bandits who were scout out the village for a raid.

Motioning her intent to attack while indicating they others should stay back, she was gratified to see them instead draw the swords she had taught them to use. Realizing the crunching of the snow made stealth nearly impossible, Laryssa led the charge towards the raiders. Unlike the others, she was able to wear her armor thanks to her protective spell against the cold. The blades of the enemies found little unprotected flesh to pierce and they had no such protection against hers. Soon the foes were all slain and fortunately none of her students were killed. Those few who had sustained wounds were quickly stabilized and survived. As the tale of the deeds spread, Laryssa found more adherents in the villagers to the respect for the Shield Maiden.