

Heroes and Children: The Diary and Poetry of an Angry Rebel

Bertrem's Note

Brother Crook has been deeply interested for some time in the poetry of Ansalon and, indeed, has worked diligently to rebuild the library's collection of poems. His weakness for modern poetry, as opposed to the great classic collections, has on occasion borne correction, but for the most part his industry and expertise are to be admired.

His notes on the poetry of Genin Crystáltust are enlightening because they show the service to which even verse has been put in these dark days. I have allowed him to include here not only a selection of Genin's poetry but extensive excerpts from her diary, because of its relevance to the history of our times. The notes that accompany the diary and poems are by Brother Crook.

As Krynn's longest lived race, the elves are one of the greatest repositories both for knowledge (facts, events, dates) and commentary available to the historian and social philosopher. Whenever one chances upon personal accounts of a time, even of a modern time, written in the

hand of an elf for whom the recent past may stretch back over seventy years, it is like finding a diamond in the coal scuttle.

Occasionally, one discovers a personal account that is more than mere history. It is literature. Such is the case with the diary and poetry of Genin Crystáltust. Genin was born into these momentous times, and like few others, she is a true child of them. With each entry in her diary we witness the suffering of an entire people through the words of a single young woman. With each poem, we progress with her through the relative innocence of the pre-Chaos world, the confusion of the world after Chaos, and the horror and loss suffered by those involved in the bitter struggle to free Qualinesti from the grip of the Knights of Neraka and the green dragon Beryllinthranox.

A large number of pages at the beginning of the diary are missing. As hinted at in the first surviving entry these pages were destroyed by fire during the invasion of Qualinost by the minions of Chaos. The first entry of the diary dates to just after the Chaos War, but much of what is written in this segment deals with the hopes and dreams of a naïve young elf who had set her heart upon winning the love of the Speaker of Suns, Gilthas of House Solostaran. She was little aware of the events passing in the outside world, not unlike much of her older, wiser kin, but this can perhaps be excused in one so young, so soon after the shock of seeing her home destroyed. Yet even these show a young woman still struggling to come to terms with her shattered world, as she tries desperately to cling to that which has been irretrievably lost—her love for the handsome young king, their old way of life among the courtly niceties of a former day.

The fires of the Chaos War first shaped Genin Crystáltust into a poet and rebel. The destruction and loss of her home robbed her of her innocence, as evidenced by the sudden maturity in the style and subject matter of her later poetry. Sadly, we have only fragments of her poetry and few written in her youth. In these, one glimpses a world that is no more, through the eyes of a lovesick, misunderstood child.

DEAD EYE, DAY OF THE MONTH OF SPRINGDAWNING—2 SC

Mother gave me these two books for my Eleventh Day of Life Gift twenty-three years ago. They were bound here in Qualinost by Uncle Dorthinion, who makes books of this sort for the recording of diaries and journals and such. Mother suggested that I keep a diary with one of them, as she had kept one when she was a girl my age, and a poetry journal with the other, since I showed a fancy for poetry quite early and was fond of scribbling verse into the margins of her volumes of Kierloth and Merturan.* This I did, but not faithfully, I must admit, but I am glad now that I was lax in my promise, for it is fewer pages that were destroyed when the—I cannot say it, I cannot bear to remember that horrible day. Has it only been two years?

Father says that I lack patience. I should never become a Woodshaper until I learn some patience, he says. It is because I was born in a time of sorrow, when we elves were in exile in Qualimori, during the humans' War of the

* Two famous poets of Qualinesti. Kierloth lived during the Age of Dragons, while Merturan was almost contemporary, having died a few years after the War of the Lance. The works of these two great poets is readily apparent in Genin's verse, especially in the poems written before the Chaos War. Both poets are famous not only for their romantic poetry, but also for the shortness of their lives—both died violent deaths at relatively young ages. Kierloth died in the destruction of Istar at the age of 109; Merturan was slain by a green dragon in 354 AC at the age of 112.

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Lance.* I wish I had been born sooner, so that I could be happier. I was not born in my homeland.

Now that I am older, though, I have changed my mind about the diary. Diaries are for silly little girls. When I told him so, Father said that perhaps I should keep a journal instead. Father says that this is an important time in the history of our people. I should say so! Everything has changed, and the feelings I recorded in the diary and poetry of my youth are an embarrassment to me now. To think that I should have fallen in love with *him*, honored *him* with my heartfelt prayers and verse, with my tears that he should be so long away from his people, and to have so worshiped the woman he called his wife—the witch! I see now the foolishness of youth, “the wayward heart so easily stirred by simple beauty.”** He is revealed at last, the treacherous traitor of his people! It makes my blood fairly boil. I am glad that he is dead. It was he who led the minions of Chaos into our beautiful city. I do not care what the others say. If I saw him starving in the street, I think I should not even allow him to lick the dust from my shoe. Thank Paladine that Speaker Gilthas was there to thwart his plans to betray our nation and destroy us all. I shan’t write his

* During the War of the Lance, as the dragonarmies neared their borders, the elves of Qualinesti evacuated their homeland for the safety of Southern Ergoth, joining their Silvanesti kin already hiding there (351 AC). They called the region of Southern Ergoth that they occupied Qualimori.

** The reference is obscure.

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name, nor hers either, for they are cast out of the light. If I wrote their names here today, I should have to tear out this page tomorrow.*

But tomorrow, Gilthas of House Solostaran is to have a Spring Dawning ball. Father says that we are to attend! I shall wear my white dress with the pink roses on the cuffs, and a silver net in my hair, the one Theonathas said made me seem woven of starlight and dreams. The cheek! Still. . . I shan't talk about it, it only makes me angry that I gave him one of my poems. I would that I had it back or had burned it at his feet! I'll wear the silver net, and I hope he sees me in it tomorrow. May the sight of me blast his eyes.

I hope I do not have to sit with Mother in the carriage.

SPRING DAWNING DANCE—13TH DAY OF THE MONTH OF SPRING DAWNING—2 SC

I am so weary that I believe I shall faint! It has been a day that I shall never forget, for all the centuries to come. I have seen him, and he is glorious, more beautiful than I could have imagined. Speaker Gilthas of House Solostaran. His name

* Genin is speaking of Porthios of House Solostaran, and Alhana Starbreeze, queen of the Silvanesti elves, who were married in 362 AC, when Genin was approximately eleven summers old. Like with many elven girls, it appears that Genin fell in love with Porthios at the time of his marriage, both for his own sake, and for the sake of Alhana, who is accounted among the most beautiful of all elves. At the time of this entry into her journal, Senator Rashes had exposed Porthios' and Alhana's intention to sign the Unified Nations of the Three Races treaty. Most elves viewed this treaty as a direct threat to their nation's sovereignty. Led by Senator Rashes, the Senate of the Qualinesti cast Porthios and Alhana from the light, making them dark elves. As such, they became non-entities, shunned by their own people. It was forbidden to even speak their names.

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shall always be upon my lips. His hair is like sunlight falling through aspen leaves upon burnished gold, his eyes deep sad pools of dreams. When I saw him in his yellow robes of state take the sun medallion in his fine hands and look upon it with reverent eyes, I felt my knees go weak! He so looked a king in every fiber of his being. He is a poem come to life.

What is more, never again can anyone call me a child, for Speaker Gilthas is younger even than me! He is only nineteen, they say! The next time Mother tells me I am too young to do something, I shall remind her that Speaker Gilthas is younger than me and yet he is king! They say his marriage has not yet been arranged. Thank Paladine that Father has never let Mother disgrace our family with one of her fits.

But I am beginning in the middle.

Linnet roused us to an early breaking of our fast. She is very pretty in the mornings, with her silver hair, but her facial tattoos truly are beastly.* I once thought them charming, but the older I get the more barbaric they seem. To think I once tried to tattoo an oak leaf upon my cheek. If it hadn't hurt so much, I might have ruined my natural pale beauty, Mother says. She is fond of saying those sorts of things, reminding me of my obligations and my failures at the same time. But she always apologizes when she is feeling better.

* The Qualinesti often kept Kagonesti servants. Linnet appears to be a female servant especially charged with the care of Genin and her sister. Her brothers most likely had their own servant. The Kagonesti, being a rather barbaric offshoot of the race, are fond of facial tattoos, though the practice had already begun to fall out of favor among the younger Wilder Elves.

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Father says we mustn't protest, for it is Paladine's will. But I hardly think so, for where is Paladine now? I have heard that he no longer answers the prayers of his priests, but when I mentioned it to Father, I thought he might actually strike me! After he had regained control of himself, he told me I mustn't blaspheme, that I must have faith and courage. Yet I hardly think it is worth it anymore, after all that we have lost. Why did Paladine not aid us? Why did he not answer my prayers? Was I not faithful to him?

I've digressed again. I am terrible about straying from my point. I fear I'll never be able to debate in the Thalass-Enthia.* Thank goodness, Ardian** will fill that role for our family.

After breakfast, Linnet helped me with my dress. Valursa became quite jealous of the attention Linnet paid me. Oh, and the compliments! The honey that flows from her Kagonesti tongue is collected from strange flowers, but it is sweet nonetheless. Valursa wore pure white—the imp! And light sandals, because she is so vain about her feet. As if *he* might notice her feet in all that crowd! Linnet tried to press some color upon Valursa for modesty's sake, but as she is the eldest sister of course she knows better. At least she had the decency not to wear flowers in her hair, for it is ratty enough without looking like she just crawled from the glades. Linnet could do nothing with it. “Your hair ahs a mind ov its own, Valoshin,” she said, in her

* The Senate of the Qualinesti.

** Ardian is one of Genin's older brothers. She had two, including Chrysostomus, also called Sosti later in the text, who was her senior by some forty years. Ardian was four years Sosti's junior.

peculiar way. She calls Valursa *Valoshin**; it is simply hilarious! I am thankful that I have Grandmother's hair—lively, glossy, and obedient!

When Father came to retrieve us in our room (how I hate this new house, having to share a room with Valursa!), he asked Valursa to please ride with Mother in the carriage. Valursa was only too glad, for it is a tremendous walk from our house to the Tower of the Sun, and she was only wearing her sandals. I had my supplest boots, of course, for I am not such a fool as she. And though it is fitting that I appear charming, for Father's sake if not for my own, it is also fitting that I wear the boots of the Woodshapers, for I shall be one myself in twenty or so years. It seems such a long time, but Linnet says it will pass more quickly than a summer. What a foolish notion! I shall never be fifty, I think.**

Father and I left first, much to Valursa's chagrin. Linnet did not come with us, though she complained most stridently. If she had come, I should have died of shame. Many girls are perfectly happy to parade around Qualinost with their Kagonesti *slaves* in tow, but I think it is a barbaric practice, just as keeping

* Valoshin (Kagonesti)—peahen. Valosha is the peacock. It is obvious, from Genin's comments, that she was familiar with the Kagonesti language, but that her sister Valursa was not.

** Elves live, on average, somewhat over 400 years. They mature more slowly than their human counterparts. An elf of 50 summers is roughly at the same stage of growth and maturity as a human of approximately 16 years. Genin's referral in the previous day's entry that she has seen 31 summers places her at a rough human equivalent of 11 years of age. This is, of course, only a general estimate. Elves mature at different rates, as can be seen in the example of Speaker Gilthas, who was only 16 at the time of his coronation, although some scholars have attributed his advanced maturity to his quarter-human blood. In any case, Genin's use of language is vastly superior to a human of 11 years.

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slaves (call them what you will!) is barbaric. Our family keeps servants. They are free to go if they choose, and always have been. Father is very good about these things, however, and he spared me the disgrace of walking with Linnet in attendance. Linnet must remain behind to serve Valursa, the eldest. Such a curse that Kagonesti witch mouthed! I wonder what it meant. How Father kept from striking the impudent wench, I'll never know. He is so patient with the servants, it is perfectly scandalous. Mother hates it, and for once I agree with her. But then again, were he not patient with them, he might not also be patient with us. Gods know, we do test him so!

We arrived at the Speaker's residence quite early and found ourselves a good place near enough the front without causing a scandal among the greater nobles. It is a pity that we are not of the greater nobility. Really, we should be, there isn't any difference between our family and theirs, except for Mother, but that can happen even in the best of families, they say. The dance was more glorious that I had ever imagined. Gilthas arrived arrayed in robes of noble yellow. His hair was honey poured upon his shoulders in beauty and pride. I cannot describe it in mere words. He was a walking poem, Poesy's very child. I felt my heart stirred by such longing, such feeling. I felt words come unbidden into my heart, sweet verse, and I could scarcely contain myself for want of a pen and parchment to jot it down. So I repeated it to myself over and over until I returned home. Now they burn like a bowl filled with light in my soul. They are the first words I have writ that are

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mature and worthy.* All others were but the prattlings of a child.

NEXT DAY

Linnet says that she has heard that *she*, that Silvanesti witch, has been seen in the forest outside the city, perhaps looking for her long-lost husband. It is a shame she escaped, and with the aid of Tanis Halfhuman and Dalamar. She and Tanis were companions in adventure, Father said. They met during the War of the Lance.** How Dalamar became involved, I am sure I don't know.

MONTHS LATER

I have been so lax, but there really isn't time, what with my studies, to write. I have neglected my responsibility to the future, for as Father says, a diary is private, but a journal is written for future generations. Mother grows worse by the day. She cries out in her sleep of dragons. Father says that she is reliving the battle in Qualinesti when our home was destroyed. How he has managed all these years, I simply can't imagine.

Sosti has come home for a time, but Ardian is still on border patrol. Sosti says that Ardian has been in several battles, but he won't say with whom he is

* This poem is believed to be "Sonnet to the Sun."

** Dalamar did in fact assist Tanis Half-Elven (it is a derogatory term among elves to call those of mixed elf lineage half-human) in his ill-fated attempt to stop his son's assumption of the robes of the Speaker of the Suns. That Tanis was under some spell of Dalamar's is doubtful. Of note: Genin's recording of Dalamar's name is a severe breach of elven law. Such a mistake can be attributed only to her youth. Tanis and Alhana Starbreeze met in Tarsis, where he and some of his companions followed her to Silvanesti to search for her father Lorac. They helped free Lorac from the evil dream that held him and the land in its magical sway.

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fighting. He insists that I say nothing to the other families. I can't imagine why! If we are under attack, surely it can't or shouldn't be a secret.

Sosti took me aside and told me that were I not his sister, most certainly he would be smitten. He said that I had grown into a woman during his absence. I think I blushed. He is so wonderful!

WEEKS LATER

There is to be another grand ball tomorrow, and I hear that certain girls have been asked to dance for the king. I . . . I cannot write the words. I will die if he chooses another. Father must find a way to get me an invitation.

NEXT DAY

Mother said I am not old enough to go to the grand ball. The Spring Dawning dance was different, she says, because everyone was invited. I reminded her that I am older than the king. She . . . I cannot speak of it. I do not hate her for striking me, but I do not know if I shall ever forgive her calling me an impudent . . . my hand cannot be made to write the word, the same word we use in reference to the Silvanesti witch.

Father quickly took me aside and begged me to forgive Mother, for his sake. I told him that I would, and he wiped away my tears, and he took me into his strong arms and held me and wept. He wept on my shoulder. I did not think that fathers wept. He did not even cry when our home burned. I tried to be strong for him, but feeling his sobs I could not help but weep with him. He has suffered so terribly

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on our account, especially for Mother. She cannot help herself. Father then told me that although my birth had been difficult, I was not the cause of Mother's trouble. He said that she is a "sensitive" (I shall have to find out what that means) and that the upheaval of the time of my birth had already nearly driven her mad.

But she recovered. She did, and she was much better, until recently. She has always suffered from pains in her head and flashes of light, he said, but of late these have grown much worse. He said that as a young woman, I am old enough to learn these things. And then he said that Mother has been seeing things, things that are not there, and that she is afraid. They talk to her and tell her to do such terrible things, he says, and each day she grows a little weaker. She tells him what they say, and he tries to reassure her that the voices and the dark figures are not real, but she says that they are coming, they will soon be here, and when they do come . . .

Well, it is all her delusion, but it is frightening. I do feel so sorry for her now, but she should have known that I am her own daughter. I can't imagine that it could ever be so bad that she wouldn't know me.

But this is not the sorest blow I have been dealt this day. For Father then went on to tell me that I mustn't aim my bow so high. What do you mean, I asked him. Speaker Gilthas, he said. He said, certainly in a few years I should be allowed to attend the grand balls, but that our family is not of high enough

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station that I might ever hope to catch the king's eye. I will never be asked to dance for the king, he said. I must be strong, he said. There are gentle elves aplenty, he said, who will compose sonnets to my beauty someday. But not today. And not the king.

WEEKS LATER

Ardian has been taken captive! He is a prisoner, but we cannot learn of whom. I prayed when I heard the news, prayed as I have never done before. I shan't write here what I prayed, for if I do, it shan't come true. Prayers are like wishes, that way.

SEVERAL DAYS LATER

No news yet of Ardian. Father and Sosti have been many times to the Knights' general to ask after him, but nothing can be learned.

NEXT DAY

People are saying in the streets that an army of Knights of Solamnia is drawing near. Paladine grant that it be true! Linnet says that we shouldn't believe everything we hear. Rumors spread faster than fire and sow great sorrow wherever they burn.

The Knights have many of our people under guard.

SEVERAL DAYS LATER

I went today myself to see our people who are held captive. I wanted to see if Ardian was there, because Sosti admits now that he was among the rebels. But the Dark Knights wouldn't let me near the enclosure.

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But from a distance, I saw them, and it quite broke my heart. There they stood, milling about like cattle in a pen, in the mud, women and children with babes in arm, as well as men, warriors. There are Kagonesti there, too, but they did not seem so miserable as our own people—likely they are used to the filth.

Despite myself, tears sprang into my eyes to see them. A Knight saw me, a rough human man, and he began to laugh. He drew near, and I refused even to look at him or acknowledge his presence—my tears became my pride, but he stank so of leather and armor and sweat, I thought I might swoon. “Here now, here’s a pretty maiden. Why do you cry? Mayhap your lover is caught there in our cage? Come, then, into the bushes and let me comfort you,” he said, and he grabbed my arm.

Well, that got my blood up! No more swooning now. I clawed him quick at that, a great bloody welt across his eyes, for I had not cut my nails (Linnet had neglected them, bless her). He let go, and I jumped away, but then I stood my ground again. I was not about to let him frighten me away. I dare say he was in such a rage, he might have lopped my head right off. He drew his sword, but an officer called him down, and he slunk off like the cowardly fool he was. I said farewell to him with my spit. I must say it brightened his dark armor, gleaming there as it dripped from the skulls.

SEVERAL DAYS LATER

I have heard on the street that Sir Thomas, the leader of the Knights of Solamnia, is to link up and

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attack the Knights of Takhisis here on the morrow. They will be some 100,000 strong, and they have silver dragons, and copper, bronze, too, in addition to griffins. That should be quite enough to handle the Knights here! Knights say that most likely Ardian was killed. There was a terrible slaughter on the border. But I do not believe them. The Dark Knights are filled with lies. They lie to see us hurt.

SEVERAL DAYS LATER

It seems the talk of the Knights of Solamnia is only that—talk. So Father says. He says I mustn't encourage Madame Rumor, she is harlot enough already. He really is a jewel! But it is a shame. I would have liked to see some Knights rolled in the dust for once. Still no word of Ardian.

SOME WEEKS LATER

It has been a terribly hot summer. This morning, I took up my journal to catch up on details, but there hasn't been much to write about, except the weather, which has been abominable. There is still no word about Ardian, but Father begged me to quit going to the jail to look.

This morning, the room was so hot and stuffy that I went to the window to open it and let in a little air. While I was at the window, I must have left my journal lying open, for when I turned round, there stood Valursa reading it, and laughing! Laughing! I could have struck her impudent chin, were I not a lady. I asked her, "What are you laughing at, you silly *valurshin*?" And she said she wouldn't tell me until I told

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her what *valurshin* meant. So I told her. What does it matter to me? I was betraying nothing. She could have learned for herself simply by asking any servant, if ever she'd get her nose away from the looking glass. Well, she got her twigs all in a bundle, as the saying goes, and ran off to Mother. Mother, no less!

Well, Mother is Mother. She had had her fill of Kagonesti impudence, she said. She wanted Linnet dismissed, sent away. Let her grub for worms with all her other kin, she said. Father had no choice. Mother can be so obstinate, especially when she is having one of her spells, which come more and more often, it seems.

So Linnet is gone. It is remarkable how quickly she left and how little she took with her. I suppose she never quite gave up her barbarian ways. I shall miss her, I suppose. She hugged me close for a moment, then took her little wrap filled with her things (pitifully little, I take more with me just going to the market), and walked straight off into the forest. She didn't even take a path.

"Who will dress you now, you stupid girl?" I asked Valursa back in our room. I could see already that she was sorry for what she had done, but she has Mother's overweening pride. She turned her back on me, turned back to her only true love—her looking glass.

"Who will tug the knots from your rat's nest now?" I asked. If her middle name is Pride, then mine must be Spite, for I could not stop myself. I have been this way ever since the war. "Who will have the patience not to rip the hair from your head?"

"Oh, do shut up, Genin," she said as haughtily as she could muster. But I saw that she was near to

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tears, so I twisted and drove in to the hilt.

I said, "Do you think the next servant will deliver your scented missives to your lovers in the dark of night? Do you think she will hide your notes under the mattress, or bring you purgative draughts from the Kagonesti midwives?"

Her face, I thought, went white as though I had tapped her with a hammer and all her blood drained out the bung.* Her lip trembled. "What do you know about that?" she said in a whisper.

"Only that it is true, and that I have never said anything about it to anyone. It would kill Father, you know. And what Mother might do, I couldn't say. Most likely she would be beyond retrieval."

She rushed at me, and I thought she wanted to strangle me, but instead she fell to her knees and clasped my hands in hers. "Oh, Genin," she wept. "You mustn't. You mustn't tell. I am sorry. You are right. It would kill Father to know. It would destroy us all."

"You scandalous imp!" I said. "Now you *must* tell me. Who is he, then?"

But she did cry so, all I could do was hold her and stroke her pretty hair. Really, I only call it a rat's nest to be evil. She does have ever so lovely hair, much lovelier than mine.

Finally, she calmed enough to speak, but she would not let me go. She held my hand like a drowning woman. We sat together on the bed, closer than we had sat in many a long year. I had almost forgotten

* A keg, as of wine or beer, is tapped at its bung. However, this image foreshadows a more dramatic usage in the elegy "Gas!" which, ironically, was also written about Valursa.

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how pretty she is. With her eyes full of tears, I loved her so, just then. I would have done anything for her.

“He is of low birth,” she said at last.*

“Do you love him truly?” I asked.

“As true as true hearts may love,” she sobbed prettily. “But that is not the worst. He is allied with the rebels. He fights against the Knights of Takhisis and the noble houses allied with them.”

I hugged her close. “That is wonderful!” I cried. “Splendid! When Ardian and his band drives the Dark Knights from this land, then your love shall be a hero and you can marry him!”

“Do you think?” Valursa asked, daring not to believe me, I know.

“Of course. But you must be terribly frightened for him,” I said. “And it is so wonderfully romantic. Do you think... do you think he might know of Ardian?”

She swallowed hard, her eyes gleaming. “Yes,” she whispered. “Dear Ardian is alive! He fights at my love’s side.”

“You knew this and you didn’t tell me?” I said, pushing her away. “How could you? Well, we must tell Father right away.”

“No!” she cried, clutching at my legs. “You mustn’t tell, because then he will know how I learned, and he mustn’t find out about my love or about the work I have been doing. We are not supposed to know. Father and Sosti say that Ardian has been captured, because if it was known that one of our kin is helping the rebels, the Knights would come and take our

* In traditional elf society, a male may marry below his station, but never a woman. Among noble elves, not even the male may marry below his station.

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house and throw Father and Sosti in prison. Father is to take the Oath tomorrow, for our sakes.”

Well, I didn't know what to say first. That Father intended to take the Non-aggression Oath* fairly boiled my blood. At the same time, I was dying to know what kind of work Valursa had been doing for the rebellion.

WINTER—5 SC

It seems ages since last I wrote. The whole world has changed. I can't begin to list what all has happened, and if anyone were to actually read this, I am sure that they would already know what has happened. But for the sake of future generations, I shall attempt to reconstruct those last days, and what has gone since.

I found Mother nearly out of her mind with pain. Outside, it seemed whole armies were marching, and the air seemed to burn in my lungs. I could not understand it. Outside were screams, the sounds of battle, of people dying. At night sometimes, I awoke to those sounds. This morning, when I pulled my old cloak about me with the first chill of winter, I could still smell the odor of burning flesh clinging to the fibers. It is in everything that we had then, and it won't wash out.

* The Non-aggression Oath was required by the Knights of Takhisis of all elves having dealings within Qualinost. Those who did not take it were not allowed to conduct business, either buying or selling. If a head of a house took the Oath, he or she was considered to have spoken for the entire family. Many took the Oath rather than starve or be forced into the woods for survival. However, once the Oath had been sworn, anyone found breaking the Oath by supporting or engaging in rebellious activities would be treated as a spy, rather than an opponent in war. Spies were usually hung, while captives of war were merely imprisoned.

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The Knights came during the night, hunting rebels, they said. They gathered together many of the lesser families who could not account for the whereabouts of their missing relatives. The men, they marched away, and the women were cast adrift, robbed of their every treasure. Homes, some of them ancient houses, were put to the torch.

Of course, some tried to fight, they tried to resist, and there was terrible slaughter in the streets. Our home was destroyed in one battle. Mother, Valursa, and I escaped it before the flames engulfed us. But Father and Sosti were elsewhere trying to plead for the release of innocents taken in the raid. We were alone, the three of us, and I fear I am the child of my mother after all, because I became hysterical. I thought the shadow wights had returned. I had forgotten them, somehow, I don't know how I forgot them, they were so horrible. I suppose I was still in shock from the horrors I saw when the minions of Chaos entered Qualinost; the shadow wights and daemon warriors. Sosti told me that when a shadow wight destroys a man, it destroys him utterly. Even the memories of that person in other people's minds vanish. It is strange, because it seems to me now that I had a lover in those days before the Chaos War, a boy whom I loved ever so deeply. But it is like the memory of a dream. When I try to grasp it, it slips away. This had preyed upon my mind for some time, all through the year, and then I remembered my diary and my poetry book. I found them among the things I had salvaged from the fire. I looked for him here among these pages, I looked for him among the pages of my poetry

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journal, but though he is here, I don't remember him. He is lost to me now, lost to me forever.

There has been no word of Ardian all this year. Father knows now that we had word of Ardian's fate before the Night of Fire. He gave us such a look as still breaks my heart even to think of it. But now, we are as much in the dark as he. Valursa's love, poor dear, was hung as a rebel. But he died valiantly, they say, and Valursa is changed, but proud. She no longer hides her love for him and openly mourns his death.

Worst of all, perhaps, is that we are still under the dominion of the Knights of Takhisis. The Night of Fire changed nothing, except to rob us of many of our best and bravest, and to slaughter many who were innocent of any crime. Worst of all is that the raid was approved by Senator Palthainon. We had hoped, after the Chaos War and the death of Senator Rashes, that Speaker Gilthas might lead us to a new day. But he is a puppet still. Now, there truly is no hope of rescue, for the world is unmade. There are no heroes.

The only bright light in all this is that Mother is her old self again. She has been a source of inexhaustible strength to us all. When Father needed her most, she has been like a rock to him. Father has found work in the gardens of the king, but our fortunes are much reduced. After our house was destroyed, Valursa and I took it upon ourselves to beg, so we have not done so badly as some others. At least Father works for the Speaker now, so we are still near nobility. But we live in a rented room, all of us in one room, and no servants. There is no privacy, not that we need it any longer.

Jeff Crook

I almost destroyed this journal and all my poems. I could not bear to look upon the world I have lost, but neither could I part with that part of me, recorded in this book, that is no more. I said that Valursa is changed. I, too, am changed. I am not the child I was before. There are no children in Qualinesti anymore.

SOME TIME LATER—5 SC

The Knights are building a proper prison to house the brave rebels whom they continue to capture. The winter was especially cruel and hard on them in their outdoor enclosure. Many died for want of blankets and warm food. Valursa and I did what we could, begging for blankets and shoes, and food when we could get it. They were all so pitiful but so polite and thankful for every little thing we could do for them. There was no fighting among them for the meager provisions we brought, and many I am told died of cold after giving away their blankets to others more miserable than themselves.

SOME TIME LATER

There was an escape, the last night before they were to begin moving our people to the new prison. They had been tunneling under the enclosure for weeks, and nearly half escaped into the forest before the alarm was raised. A few were subsequently recaptured, mostly those weakened by disease or hunger who could not move quickly enough.

In retaliation, the Knights hung every elf who was captured. They hung them from the scaffolding sur-

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rounding the new prison, and made the other prisoners walk under that awful canopy to enter the place few if any of them will ever leave. I stood outside and wept openly. People tried to pull me away, to send me home for my own safety, lest the Knights think me a rebel. But I am a rebel, and to the Abyss with those who will not resist!

TWO DAYS LATER

They have left those poor bodies hanging for the third day now. Some are beginning to come apart! It is a disgrace. How could people, even humans, be such barbarians? I have heard it said in some company that there is no such thing as evil, that what we call evil is only differences in culture and circumstances, misunderstandings, that what may seem evil to me may be perfectly normal in another culture. What rubbish! Evil is evil no matter where you are or who you are or what you believe. If you do not believe evil is real, then look upon those bodies, let the wind blow over them and fill your nostrils with their smell, and then look at the Dark Knights in their skull armor standing there leering at those who pass by with noses covered and faces averted. Hear their laughter, and tell me they are not evil. There can be no reconciliation, no working together with them toward a common goal.

Today I went there and stood before the prison. One of the Knights approached me and said, "What are you doing here, you damned rebel? You'd better go home before you get in trouble."

I said, "I have come to honor these heroes."

Jeff Crook

“What heroes?” he asked, laughing. “I see only carrion.”

“I, too, see carrion about me,” I said. “Only it is still walking and talking. If they could raise their eyes to heaven, they would see heroes hanging above them, with swords of vengeance poised to strike.”

He grew furious and raised his fist to strike me. I did not flinch. “I shall soon see children hanging from these scaffolds,” he threatened.

So I gave him my best. I lifted my eyes and looked beyond him, and such a look of awe and wonder came over my face as I hoped would make him look. I pointed and said, my voice trembling with fear, “Look! They come!”

His face went white, and he spun, drawing his sword. I spit on his back and walked away. As I left, I heard his fellows laughing at him, and he shouted, “Don’t let me catch you around here again, you little whelp.”

Father went tonight to beg an audience with Marshal Medan, the Dark Knights’ leader, to ask that our people be taken down and their bodies cremated. He has not returned home. I hope I haven’t gotten him into any trouble.

NEXT DAY

They have taken them down. Father still has not come home. But apparently he succeeded.

SEVERAL DAYS LATER

They have brought in a new group of prisoners captured in skirmishes east of the city. Valursa and I are going to see what condition they are in. We have been

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knitting socks and begging for blankets to give to the prisoners. Our neighbors on the floor below us have managed to keep a servant, and she showed us how to knit. Valursa acquired the skill more easily than I, for I have little patience. But I am better than her at begging, for I have no pride when it comes to trying to help our soldiers, and I am persistent as a tick.

Still no word from Father.

NEXT DAY

The prisoners are a sad lot. Many are wounded and have not had their wounds treated. We went begging for medicine and bandages for them. They were otherwise pretty well supplied, except they had no boots, for the Knights had taken these. But they have no money to buy food, and the Knights have begun to require the prisoners to pay for their own food. It is criminal, but to whom can we appeal? There is no one. We must rely upon ourselves.

WEEKS LATER

Madame Rumor is at it again. There is talk that Porthios is still alive and gathering an army to relieve us. I have no faith in these tales, however. I have talked to people who saw Porthios fall.*

* In the battle with the forces of Chaos, Porthios and the dragon he rode into battle were caught in a blast of dragon fire. Porthios was last seen plummeting to the ground, trailing flames. Rumors of his surviving the fall began to appear at about this time, but Genin gives them little credence. In any case, it is remarkable that she mentions his name at all, considering her past opinion of him. Perhaps because he had led a rebellion against the Knights before the Chaos War, she felt more inclined to sympathy for him now. Certainly, she no longer considers him a dark elf.

TWO YEARS LATER—7 SC

Things have been more difficult than I could ever have dreamed. Father was in prison for eleven months because of what I had done, and during that time we were utterly, utterly ruined. We were turned out of our little room and were forced to take up residence with Uncle Dorthinion.* He is a true great soul, but he was already poor. Taking us four into his household completely drained his resources. Valursa married, just to take some of the burden off of the rest of us. Her husband is not a particularly bad person, but he is of pathetically low station. Valursa was quite a catch for him, but Mother approved (not without regret). He is proud of her and takes good care of her, but his family is miserable to her because she is of minor nobility.

Father was finally released from prison. That day was a joyful one, but also one deep with regret. I tried to apologize to him. Mother, poor dear, never held me to account for what happened to him, even though it was my fault. But he said to me, "Genin, I do not begrudge you my suffering. Would that there were more like you, and we might throw these black dogs off our backs!"

Mother was aghast. They were the first revolutionary words anyone had heard Father speak. He and Uncle Dorthinion then went off together for a good long while, and no one knows what they spoke about. But when they returned, their faces

* Dorthinion was the brother of Genin's mother. As such, he could take in his sister's family without causing a scandal.

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were set, and they walked side by side, as equals.*

A few months later, Sosti took his leave of us. He was going out to see what was passing in the world, he said, and he slipped away in the dead of night. The Dark Knights do not allow us free travel, and they certainly wouldn't let him just leave. Mother was beside herself with grief, but he went with Father's blessings. Send word, Father told him, if you discover anything that can help us.

So, for the past year Father has been working with Uncle Dorthinion, learning the craft of book-binding. It puts bread on the table, but I can tell how Father misses the forest. Sometimes I will find him staring out toward the edge of the city, where the true forest begins, his head tilted to one side as though listening. And his breast is ever filled with sighs.

In all this time, there has been no word from Ardian. Mother speaks of him as though he were dead. "My youngest son was . . . ," she will sometimes say. It is hard to believe that he would have been gone all this time without sending word. I cannot believe he is dead. Not Ardian.

Meanwhile, I have spent my time as best I know how. I have begged for food, blankets, cloaks, boots, anything to help our brave prisoners. I have gone each time a new group is brought in, to see if Ardian is among them.

Today a thing has happened that I have longed for

* Dorthinion was of lower station than Genin's father. The comment about their walking as equals is of some importance. That they had come to some agreement to work together toward something is obvious. What exactly that was is revealed later.

this past year! Sosti has returned! He came in the dead of night. We keep him hidden during the day, for no one must know that he is here, or the Dark Knights will surely put him in prison. There has been no time to talk to him today, because we must act as though nothing is different. But you can see in Father's eyes his joy, when for so long now there has been so little to bring a smile to his beautiful face.

NEXT DAY

Last night we spoke late with Sosti and learned of all the wonders that he has seen. He was among humans most of the year that he was gone, traveling to Palanthas and Kalaman and Haven. He speaks strangely now, with an accent that is almost uncouth, but somehow charming, and he mixes into his sentences words I have never heard before. He says they are words from the dwarf language that cannot be translated into Elvish. He traveled much of the time in the company of a dwarf named Rexord, and it seems they have become great friends. But he dared not bring Rexord with him, not into Qualinesti, so he left him in Solace while he journeyed here to tell Father of his discovery.

There is a human woman named Goldmoon, one of the original Heroes of the Lance, and the one who first brought word of the gods' return. She sojourned here in Qualinost for a time* and brought hope to us

* Goldmoon brought word to the Qualinesti of the gods' return to Kryn. At first, most elves were reluctant to believe her. "Why should the gods announce themselves to a human?" most argued. Having long admired the Heroes, it is understandable that Genin's father would be excited by word of Goldmoon's discovery.

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in those dark days. Now, she brings hope again to us. She has discovered a new form of healing magic, Sosti says. He has seen her power. She says the power derives from within the heart. It seems so very unlikely, but Father has hope. As long as he is hopeful, I shall try to be hopeful as well.

TWO DAYS LATER

The most remarkable thing has happened. Father has somehow had an audience with Speaker Gilthas and obtained his permission to go north and study under Goldmoon! The Dark Knight Marshal Medan was most unwilling to allow Father to leave, but Speaker Gilthas insisted! He has some backbone after all! (I really shouldn't have said that, but he has such promise, and if only he would lead us, we would follow him!) In any case, he insisted, because if what Goldmoon says is true then House Woodshaper might be reestablished and our powers once again be used to beautify our city. Hearing this, the marshal agreed. No one was more surprised than Father, except perhaps Senator Palthainon. Father is to leave in two weeks' time. Oh, I wish I could go with him! But there is too much still to do here.

TWO WEEKS LATER

Father is gone. I was so miserable all day that I could not bring myself to go begging for the prisoners. I remained inside all day. I could not even compose a poem in my sorrow. My pain is too deep. I do miss him so, more so than when he was in prison. At least then I could visit him daily. I don't know what the

Jeff Crook

prisoners will think of me. I have never before missed a day, not even when I had the fever.*

ONE MONTH LATER

A letter arrived from Father. He has found Goldmoon but doesn't say where he is writing from. He says that the power is real, he has seen it work, and that Goldmoon has taken him and Sosti as pupils. He doesn't know when he will return.

FOUR MONTHS LATER—8 SC

The most remarkable thing happened today. While I was out begging for blankets, a woman stopped me in the street. She wore a deep hood and a heavy cloak against the cold, so that I could not see her face. Without saying a word, she dropped a pair of good winter boots of Kagonesti handicraft into my basket and continued on her way. At the road crossing, she paused and turned back, then lifted her hood away from her face. It was Linnet! She put her finger to her lips, then covered her head again and moved briskly away. I was stunned. I could not believe it.

By the time I had gotten home, I had forgotten about the boots. Only when Mother and I began sorting through the things I had begged did I remember them. I showed them to Mother, and inside them she found a letter addressed to me. I told Mother that I thought Linnet had dropped them into my basket, but she was rather skeptical. "Your memory of her

* In 6 SC, a fever swept through Qualinost during the month of Summer Home. Several dozen elves perished in the plague.

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has faded into the faces of the thousands of other Kagonesti that you have seen since," she said.

In any case, there was still the letter. I opened it, and never in my life have I so truly fainted. I thought it was but a ploy taught to women to help us out of difficult situations. I have used it myself on several occasions. But that isn't important. Get to the point, Genin!

The letter was from Ardian! He is alive! Dear sweet gods, he is alive!

Uncle Dorthinion found Mother and me sprawled side by side on the floor. He said that when he first saw us, he thought that we had been struck dead. But he roused us with a little wine (we haven't had brandy in years), and read the letter to us. I can scarcely breathe for my bruised ribs, Mother held me so tight in her joy. I gave to her as well as I received, though. And I don't think I have another tear inside me, we cried so much!

The letter (as I write this, I clutch it to my heart), Ardian's dear letter, told us of his fate. He had been captured just after the Night of Fire, and sent north to a prison camp. There he languished for years, unable to write or get word to us, his heart breaking to know of our fate, for he had heard such terrible stories about the battle in Qualinesti. Finally, he escaped and returned to our homeland, but he could not enter the city. He hid in the forest for many weeks before finally being found by a band of Kagonesti, some of whom had been in his rebel band under Porthios (yes, Porthios! Ardian is filled with secrets) before the war. They gave him shelter and news, and in one of their villages he ran into beloved old Linnet.

Jeff Crook

Bless her. She told him how we had fared, though how she knew of us I cannot begin to guess. She told him that she could get a message to me, that I often wandered through all parts of the city begging for the prisoners (for his sake, really, for it was ever in my heart that, if he were being held prisoner in some other place, that someone like me might do likewise and take it upon herself to care for him). It would be simple enough to slip something to me, whereas approaching Uncle Dorthinion's dwelling would be far too risky. We are known still as rebels, mostly because of me. So he knew he could trust me.

He has been in contact with Father already. We have not had news from Father for some time, so it was welcome indeed to learn that he and Sosti are faring well.

I have read his letter a thousand times already, and as I look at his words, I can see his beautiful hand holding the pen and scratching them out. Oh, his handwriting is as horrid as it ever was, but I love it so I could scream! Tomorrow will never come, I think. I am going to visit Valursa and bring her the news.

NEXT DAY

Valursa was so stunned by my news that she went into labor! Twins! So rare, and such an omen of hope! I am an aunt twice over and all at once. It is glorious.

TWO DAYS LATER

Hope turns to fear. Today, a green dragon flew right over the city. I have never felt so sick with fear in my life and hope to never again. People say that green dragons have been seen battling in the remote

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parts of the forest, battling each other, but no one knows why.

A WEEK LATER

Another letter from Ardian, and this time with instructions on how to write back to him. Linnet will wait for me at the bakery near Uncle Dorthinion's shop. I mustn't talk to her, simply drop the letter into her basket. Mother is in a state! She absolutely forbade that I should go, then turned around wrote a letter for me to deliver!

NEXT DAY

Met Linnet at the bakery. Her eyes were fierce like an eagle's. She has gone back to the wild almost completely. I am glad to have her on my side, for she would make a dreadful enemy. But it was so wonderfully exciting to be clandestine. It is a thing I could get used to. I felt so alive! Taunting Knights is one thing, but this, this made my heart drum in my chest. It was better than falling in love.

9 SC

Father and Sosti have returned in the company of many others of our people who also went north to the Citadel of Light.* Their homecoming was quite joyous. We were dancing in the realms of rapture!** Father and the other heads of household

* The Citadel of Light was founded on the Isle of Schallsea in 8 SC by Goldmoon, as a beacon of hope promised by the mystic powers she had discovered.

** See Kierloth's Parable—"His hands bound to the helm/ his soul went lofting/ dancing in the realm/of rapture."

Jeff Crook

are to meet with Speaker Gilthas tomorrow to demonstrate what they have learned. I have not seen Father so happy in many a long year. His steps spring with vigor.

During this period, the family fortunes began to greatly improve, although Genin makes little mention of it. In large part, she carried on much as she had done over the last few years. However, her involvement in the elves' rebellion gradually grew more involved. As she spent more and more time working, begging for the prisoners, and carrying messages, she was spared little time for, and had little interest in, her diary. What is more, large sections of the diary covering this period were either destroyed outright or were too damaged to decipher. By 10 SC, her interest in poetry had been rekindled, largely because of her involvement in the rebellion (see below).

10 SC

I have been meeting regularly with Linnet now for many months. What began as a simple correspondence between family members has grown into something of a conspiracy, with me at its hub! It is remarkable, altogether remarkable. During my daily rounds of begging, I also pick up and deliver letters to various households with family and friends involved in the rebellion. I am the link to a vast network of communication. I am sure that there are others like me, but I do not know who they are. What is important is that twenty-odd families like my own are able to maintain contact with their

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loved ones in the forest, and to pass on information gleaned about the Knights' movements. I do this with Father's blessings. He entrusts his missives to me as well! Surely, I am no longer a child, at least in his eyes. I do not know to what depth he is involved in the rebellion, but that he is involved is beyond doubt. Good for him! With such as him working for us, we cannot but succeed.

My little nephews, oh! I adore them. That I might one day have a child half so sweet as they. But until the evil stain is removed from my homeland, my heart must remain true to the rebellion, and no mundane love shall stir *me*. I have been to see the little darlings almost every day. I am sure Valursa has grown weary of me, always hanging about and trying to help. Things are not as they were between us. Where once she was bitter and selfish, now she is quiet and understanding and forebearing, much like Father. Gods! Does that mean I am like Mother?

DAYS LATER

Received a letter from Ardian today. He thinks my idea of a verse code is remarkable. He promises to present it to their leader and let me know. I have already begun to work out the code words, patterns, and meters based on the natural sequences to be found in nature. Linnet has brought me a collection of leaves and drawings of plants that are quite bewildering! If I can catalogue these, I think I shall go a long way to establishing a code that will prove infinite in its variety and impossible to break!

Jeff Crook

There is just one thing. I do not know who is the leader of the rebellion. I suspect, but oh! I shall not, I shall not even think it.

Delivered a letter to M__. Bad news. I do not envy her. That is why I refuse to give my heart to anyone but the rebellion—Father, the gods, and homeland!*

Several pages are missing here. One page remained, but it had been in large part burned. Dorthinion provided no clues as to the contents of these missing pages, but what is clear is that during this period, Valursa's husband leaves the picture. He may have died, but the textual evidence does not support this conclusion. Most likely, he was forced to flee into the forest to avoid arrest for rebellious activities.

12 SC

There is still talk that I shall be sent to Lemnost.** I'll resist every step of the way, if I am! But I don't believe. Father will keep the dogs at bay.

Tonight, I attended a small gathering at the home of Senator Q__. She was a gracious hostess, and so very liberal for a Senator. At this gathering, I was to deliver a verse message to H__, so I brought along my poetry journal. Well, it did get rather warm inside, especially the conversation! I stepped outside for a glance at the stars, and when I returned, I found several people passing around my poetry journal!

"Whose is it, do you suppose?" Senator Q__ asked.

* At forty-two, Genin had begun to attract admirers among her male contemporaries, the most notable Theonathas, her childhood paramour.

** Probably for her own safety.

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I didn't dare speak up, not because there was anything in it that could possibly be revealing except to those who know my code. I stepped back out onto the balcony, and waited there for a moment until the conversation lulled, and then I returned, and as prettily as I could, asked, "Has anyone seen my journal?" Well, that stirred them up. It's not yours, is it, Genin? I had no idea you had such poetry in you! I thought you were only a stubborn patriot! Paladine knows all you Woodshapers have patriotism in your blood.

Of course it is mine, I said.

You must read, they said. They wouldn't let me rest until I had read them something. So I chose my "Heroes and Children," since H__ was in the room at the time, and this was the message I was to deliver to him. It went quite well, and everyone applauded politely, but one clapped more loudly than the rest. I searched round for this enthusiast, and found to my astonishment none other than Speaker Gilthas. He stood in the doorway with his attendants, and Senator Palthainon! Oh, the Senator is ever a dullard. This night was no different, and he obviously found my poem pointless and, at the worst, a waste of breath. But Speaker Gilthas enjoyed it. Did he! He approached, and I curtsied ever so deeply, flushing up to the tips of my ears.

"May I?" he asked.

"Yes, Speaker."

What could I do? He took my journal into his gentle white hand and opened it, scanned a few lines, then asked, "May I keep this for a time? I'd like to read it through."

Jeff Crook

I nearly fainted. To think how I worshiped him once, and to have him there now before me, asking leave to read my poems, and the first one about him! But I couldn't refuse. He is our Speaker.

He has it now. If I live through the night without dying of shame, I shall be surprised.

Genin did survive the night and within several days was called to an audience with the Speaker. Of her work, the Speaker said, "Here is a poet soon to take her place among our great Voices." In an aside to her, he said, "Your work is much admired and appreciated. I sense deeper meanings in many of your verses, meanings that speak to those with the ear to hear. Pray continue in your efforts. They do not go unnoticed." The import of his words were not fully understood at that time.

Much of the diary beyond this point has been lost, except for the last few pages. Many pages survived partially intact, but are largely unreadable except for dates and words along the inner margins. The outer pages were burnt, then soaked with water and other fluids, some of which appear to be blood.

From these hazy references may be gleaned something of the years between 12 SC and 39 SC, where the last entries detail the days leading up to Genin's arrest. A few entries have survived well enough that specific passages may be transcribed or inferred.

Between 12 SC and 17 SC, Genin's life went on much as it had before. The family's fortunes continued to rise,

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though Genin was never asked to dance for Speaker Gilthas at any of the parties. Her regard for the Speaker rose in those years, though the general population continued to think him weak and ineffectual.

Around 16 SC, the name Porthios begins to appear more often, but in what context cannot be determined. A revealing pair of words immediately precedes the first entries for 17 SC, which survived well enough to be transcribed below. These two momentous words are, "meet Porthios."

17 SC

Letter from Ardian today. I have permission to visit his camp and meet some of those for whom I have so longed toiled. Linnet will deliver me unto them tomorrow eve. Valursa has agreed to make my rounds and visit the prison, though she begrudges my trip, for Killaeras* is a member Ardian's regiment now. If, that is, I can escape my nephews! I think they are enamored of me. Ah, to have such beauties at my beck and call. I feel like a queen, sometimes.

TWO DAYS LATER

I shan't go. I am in no danger here. I shan't go. This is my city, my home! They can kidnap me and spirit me to Lemnost on griffin-back, but I'll claw my way back home. There is too much to do here.**

* Probably Valursa's husband, though this may be the name of a new love interest for her.

** The meaning of this passage is unclear. Most likely, she was under considerable pressure from the leaders of the rebellion to leave Qualinost for a time. Her activities, and especially her belligerence in regard to the resident Knights of Takhisis, have been documented in captured military reports.

Jeff Crook

The next four years are time of ever growing rebelliousness. Around 21 SC, Genin is finally sent away for her own safety. The entries for that year are datelined Lemnost, but of her activities there, little is known, for the pages are mostly unreadable. She returned to Qualinost in 22 SC, apparently because her mother had begun to relapse, and Valursa was with child again. But Genin had begun to change.

22 SC

Found Mother suffering from a headache this morning. I heard her cry out last night, but she claims no memory of it. I wish Valursa were here to help, but she has enough on her hands. I have no patience for Mother these days. I feel restless. My hands are ten idle digits forever wandering. I shall die for want of something meaningful to do. There is a feeling of change in the air. I smell it. The forest is stirring. I saw six crows flying west today, a bad omen.*

ONE MONTH LATER

I have asked Father to hire a nurse for Mother. I cannot help her. I have my own nightmares, mostly of dragons. It is all this talk of giant dragons, I cannot abide rumors.** They serve no purpose!

Valursa's child was born yesterday—a girl. They named her Valgenin. There is no joy in this child for me. I do not know what is wrong with me.

* A Kagonesti belief. This remark shows their growing influence, probably as a result of frequent contact.

** The great dragons, like Malys and Khellendros, were battling for territory all across Krynn. So far, Qualinesti had been spared.

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ONE WEEK LATER

I waited all morning at the bakery, but Linnet never appeared. It will give me good excuse to slip off into the forest for a time, to see what has become of her. The city stifles me. There are too many people here. It grows more difficult each day to beg for the prisoners. I am getting prideful, something I truly do not need. I should never have taken up the bow.* The pen is my true weapon, the pen and my natural boldness.

THREE DAYS LATER

Linnet has not been seen by anyone for three days. It is unlike her. But they cannot spare the scouts to carry out an extensive search. She will show up sometime, I am sure. What is curious is, the last time she was seen, she was headed for the city to meet me.

EIGHT DAYS LATER

Linnet has vanished utterly. There are others as . . .

The remainder of this ill-boding page was destroyed, and we never learn Linnet's fate.

For the next two years, the elves continue their rebellion. Captured dispatches from the Knights of Neraka indicate that their activities slacken at this point, and the Knights report a strange restlessness in their own dragons. It is well known that even among

* Indicates that during her sojourn in Lemnost, Genin learned to shoot a bow. It is possible that she used it in anger at some point, but that is only conjecture. Certainly, something important has happened to change her.

Jeff Crook

non-rebellious elves traveling through the forest, disappearances are not uncommon, but this was at first attributed to abductions and internecine murders. But in 25 SC, the culprit reveals herself in all her majesty and fury—the huge green dragon Beryl claims Qualinesti for her own. The Knights broker a settlement with the dragon whereby they will rule the elves in her name, and send her frequent tribute and prisoners to sate her appetite.

Genin's feelings on this arrangement are not known, but can easily be imagined. There is only one surviving line of text from this period, dated around 26 SC. It reads:

. . . while evil piles upon evil. We are as bad . . .

Another fragmentary text from this time period is also suggestive, though its exact meaning cannot be confirmed. It is dated around 28 SC. It reads:

. . . Gilthanis [next few words are blurred] spoke with him at length at the sacred tree of Anaya.”

As the brother of Porthios, Gilthanis (if alive) would be a contender for the throne of Qualinesti, a leader for whom the rebellion had long been dreaming. But no other documents speak of Gilthanis, and the period between Beryl's arrival in 25 SC and the last entries of 39 SC is only unique in that the rebellion neither grew nor diminished. A status quo was maintained, in which the Knights held the populated regions and

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the roads, while the rebels ruled all the wild places except those areas in the immediate vicinity of Beryl's lair.

However, little of this may be gleaned from Genin's diary, for these years are missing entirely, ripped from the binding and lost to history. That she continued her efforts is without doubt, for her last surviving entries, dating from the last months of 39 SC and on into the year 40, pick up from where the previous intact pages leave off, except that some time during this period, Val-ursa took her children and joined her husband/lover in the forest. The first entry begins ominously in mid sentence, and is undated.

. . . killed him. I was not sorry. Ardian dragged the body off the road and gave me the spurs. I returned to the city before nightfall, and left the spurs with F__ to melt down for arrowheads. I spent the remainder of the night sewing a cloak for Ardian and listening to Father try to quiet Mother. I will speak no words of ill-omen, but if the gods (who are no more) were merciful . . .

NEXT DAY—WINTER COME—39 SC

As usual, I did not rest much last night. Whenever I close my eyes, the visions of destruction return, just as though they were images painted on the underside of my eyelids. But unlike tapestries or paintings, these images move, live, breathe, burn, and die. I wish the war would come, that

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Beryl would attack and it could all be decided. Though I have seen but seventy-one summers, I am weary, weary as no elf should be when the first snow falls. It brings no joy to my heart any longer. I see snow and can only think of the misery it will bring to those who have no shelter.

TWO WEEKS LATER

Spent three days in Ardian's camp with Valursa, Killaeras, the twins, and little Valgenin—she is not well. I see it in her eyes. She is a sensitive like Mother . . . and me. But she is so young . . . surely it will kill her if the tension is not broken somehow. The twins are learning to use the bow. They are quite good, better than me at short distances. When they are strong enough to pull a full-sized bow, they will be marvelous fighters. Killaeras is teaching me to combine sword with shield. I can handle the sword well enough, but the shield is a nuisance. I can't remember to use it, so it ends up being nothing more than a weight. Ardian liked the cloak. It looks good on him.

At the evening meal, I had words with Lithoquin, and it almost came to blows. I cannot abide mages, and since his sorcerous powers have begun to fail him (much like all the others), I never resist twisting this into his soul. I can't abide magic users. I once wanted to be one, but now I am glad I never learned the craft. I should have hated myself as well. Ha ha.

They say Palin Majere passed through our camp the second night of my stay. I didn't see him, and I'm glad of it. It is good that cooler heads than mine

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prevail. I should never have made an effective leader. I much prefer doing what I do.

SEVERAL MONTHS LATER

Sosti is to be married. He is marrying a loyalist bitch. I can't imagine why. I'll not attend the wedding, and I told Father so. He merely gave me that look of his, the one that makes you feel about as big as a worm. But I won't go. I'll claim a headache. It works for Mother, so why shouldn't it work for me?

NEXT DAY

Mother has passed. She died last night during the storm, but not from injuries. Her hair went white as snow just before she died.

It is for the best. I cannot write about it. Father is sad, but in his heart he is happy that she no longer suffers.

But I still suffer. It has not lessened for me. But I am younger. It won't kill me. The storm was for me a nightmare from which I shall never recover. Like Mother, I have a streak of white in my hair, won last night battling the horror within my own soul.

There is much to do in the city today. Others died violently last night, crushed beneath trees and fallen walls. At any rate, Sosti has postponed the wedding. That's a blessing.

LATER THE SAME DAY

It is to be a double funeral. Little Valgenin died within the same hour as Mother. That's two. It

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just leaves me. Poor Valursa! Poor us. We cannot attend both funerals, and they cannot bring Valgenin into the city without being arrested. Oh, gods! I hate the Dark Knights. I hate what they have done to us.

TWO DAYS LATER

Of course, Valursa and Ardian could not attend Mother's funeral, but I still I wish they could have been here. I was angry with them, and I don't know why. I don't understand myself any longer.

At the funeral, Father said that Mother's last words were of her children. It was very pretty and sad. He dared not speak the truth, that with her last tormented breath,* she sobbed, "Takhisis, my Dark Queen!" Father was aghast. He turned positively white, and cried, "Do not call upon her, my love. If you must call, call upon Paladine." But by then she was dead. I know what it is that she saw in those last fearful moments. Do I not see it every night?

Somehow, I do not believe she is gone. Sometimes, when I enter a room, I can smell her hair, just as though she were standing right before me. I close my eyes, and I can almost feel her touch upon my cheek, just as she touched me when I was a child. But now it gives me a chill. I can't stand to be in this house when it is dark.

* Foreshadows a similar scene in "Gas!"

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ONE WEEK LATER

Ardian is heartbroken at Valgenin's death, even more than Mother's. He doted on her so. But things are moving now. Madame Rumor is flying through the streets of Qualinost. Leave? Abandon our beloved homeland? I can't believe it. Beryl attacking? Madame Rumor has never been more the whore. I give little merit to these rumors. Besides, so long as evil stains my homeland, I will never leave it.

Nevertheless, something is happening.

A Kagonesti maid stopped me in the street today. She whispered, "They are coming for you soon." I tried to wring more from her, but she wouldn't speak and I didn't want to cause a scene. I was within sight of the prison.

TWO DAYS LATER

It is dangerous for one such as I to keep a journal. Caution warns me to destroy it, but I cannot bring myself to throw away the last of that which I once was. I wonder if it would not be best to escape to the forest. Ardian will have me. I can shoot a bow.

No other journal entries are found beyond this point. Genin was arrested the following day for suspicion of treason, and her diary was confiscated. It appears that most of the damage to the diary was accomplished by Genin herself. The diary was used at her trial, but enough of it had been destroyed that little could be proven against her. She was not executed. She was imprisoned in the same place she had visited nearly

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every day for the past thirty-eight years, chained side by side with those she had worked so hard to help. It was well that she had done so, because for the previous ten years, they had been burrowing an escape tunnel. Genin spent fewer than three days in prison. However, only she escaped. Before any of the others could enter the tunnel, the Dark Knights surprised them, and their escape was foiled.

Little is known about Genin's whereabouts today. Her Uncle Dorthinion, who brought us these manuscripts, refused to reveal more about her activities for fear that the publication of this book might compromise her and her rebellion. His only desire, he said, was to see that history and literature were preserved. For that, he shall long be remembered.

The last surviving documents relating to Genin are her poems. In his last letter to us, Dorthinion told of a night when he wandered near the eaves of Qualinost, and there he met an elf horribly disfigured by fire, but who was nonetheless alive. The man spoke no word, simply handed Dorthinion a small bundle of papers wrapped in a soiled green ribbon, and turned and reentered the wood. As Dorthinion states, upon opening the bundle, he was stunned to find that it was Genin's poetry journal, the very volume of blank pages that her mother had given her for her Eleventh Day of Life Gift. Its binding was gone, and many of the papers were ruined. Only a few of her poems survived, but some of these are among the most visually and emotionally powerful verses that have emerged from

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these times. In the last two poems, we learn perhaps what Genin has been doing since her escape, as well as of the unfortunate demise of her sister. Still, there is hope that this poet, one of the great voices of a generation and a people, yet lives.

SONNET TO THE SUN

In autumn raiment stood he to the sky,
His face a-gleam, his flowing golden curls
Like molten sunlight poured for trembling girls
To break their hearts and make them long to die.
Look once my way, and grace me with your eye 5
Gilthas Solostaran! Speaker! King!
Your very name has set my soul to sing.
Or if my voice should fail me, then to sigh
My simple words, to set your name on high
In no less beauty than a clutch of pearls 10
Or starlight caught upon the harper's string,
Or if the words should fail me, then to cry.
Arrayed in white, the grieving lover hurls
Her body at your feet, to kiss, and cling.

1 Composed in 2 SC in honor of Gilthas of House Solostaran after seeing him at the Spring Dawning dance of that year. Revised in 12 SC after a change suggested by Speaker Gilthas. Of this poem, Genin noted in her diary, "They are the first words I have writ that are mature and worthy." The form is a Kierlothian sonnet, with a rhyme scheme of abba/abba/acb/acb.

10 Originally written "In no less beauty than a stream that purls." The phrase "clutch of pearls" was suggested in the margin by Speaker Gilthas. Genin adopted his suggestion, crossing out "stream that purls."

Drafted according to the manuscript on the 21st day of Autumn Harvest, 2 SC. Fair-copied later, with minor revision, in 8 SC.

[I TIPPED LOVE'S BOLT]

I tipped Love's bolt with kisses
And nocked it to my heart's string,
Pulled full taut my soul's green bow,
And gave my gentle thorn wing.

But gusts of Chance were veering. 5
Grim Fate and a lowly birth
Had already shorn my hopes
Before the arrow kissed the earth.

TITLE Attributed to Dorthinion

3 See Merturan's "The Wildrunner"

Pull full taut thy green bow

And loose thy arrow singing

Begun in 9 SC, the manuscript was extensively revised in 10 SC, and again in the month of Winter Deep in 39 SC.

TO A FORGOTTEN LOVE

Lines written to an imagined lover stolen away by
shadow wights

Marry me, thou sweet somber flower

Tarry thee here another hour

and more

Daringly I sing your beauty, yet

Verily, thy lights are deeper set 5
than a door.

Why how long thy nails have grown of late.

How I long to be thy wanton mate,
thy whore.

Why do you not touch me as I would 10

Try to do, if trembling fingers could
adore.

You grin, I see, your thin lips stretched,

And then I flee your visage wretched
with gore. 15

Nine years now have you been dead

Mine fears fill me with dread
of war.

TITLE Lines written to an imagined lover stolen away by shadow wights
According to her diary, Genin came to suspect that she had had a sweetheart before
the Chaos War, but that the memory of him and all record of him was lost when he
was slain by shadow wights.

5 Lights: eyes.

6 See Kierloth's "To a Dead Love"

Thy lights are set deep as doors

Within thy castle wall.

7 Both an exclamation and a question. The fingernails and hair of the dead are said
to continue growing in the grave.

9 Indicative of Genin's growing restlessness in 39 SC.

16 Though she revised the poem in 39 SC, she kept the time set in the revision of 10 SC.
Drafted in 8 SC and extensively revised in the month of Winter Deep in 39 SC.

[FULL NINE SUMMERS]

Full nine summers hath surpassed
Since supposed treason stained a noble throne
While wondered I all aghast
Had treason stained a name where there was none?

Had some grievous madness come 5
To fool the wise with folly wrapped in verse
Wrought cold to seem like wisdom,
A bitter blight a blessing, a boon a curse?

Had noble Solostaran,
King, been cast to darkness, his soul still bright? 10
Has the star breeze child begun
His life turned from a home his own by right?

When I to my father turned
Cold truth in sadness sat upon his brow
With longing, yet his eyes burned 15
To see the truth turned up as with a plow

Could I but push my shoulder
Into the jingling traces and the hame,
And with a stouter heart, and bolder,
Set my steps to harrow out our shame. 20

TITLE Attribute to Dorthinion.

10 Refers to Porthios of House Solostaran.

11 *star breeze child* – Refers to Silvanoshei, the son born to Alhana Starbreeze and Porthios. Because his parents were cast from the light, he was denied his royal birthright as a prince to the thrones of both Qualinesti and Silvanesti. This acknowledgement of his rights by a patriotic Qualinesti elf is remarkable.

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[THICK NIGHT]

Thick night moves upon the hills
Wolves cry meetings in the wood
Frogs still at any movement
In the endless unmoving night.
Heaven's orbs cross a darkened sky 5
To announce the day.
Swans split Dawn's autumn canvas
Gray wings mute the wind's sound
And tug my soul to rise and fly
An arrow's course into the clouds 10
To course an ancient remembered path
To the winter nesting ground.

TITLE Attributed to Dorthinion.

Written in 11 SC, this is the first surviving example of Genin's coded verse messages, the secret of which has never been revealed. Although the meaning of this message is not known, it is known that animals, plants, heavenly objects, directions, movement, and even the number of lines, are coded references to military matters.

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HEROES AND CHILDREN

The sky bent orange trees, leaves
Everywhere like locusts, buzzing
Birds
Dipped, rose, twisted, spiraled in happy
War 5
The people walked along, unnoticed,
Down the milling road to gather
Acorns, talk,
Scratch, stand, and worry together.
Children hide, dart, giggle and shush 10
And only the strong become
Heroes
But now sunset and dinner's smells
Bring dead emptiness
To the fall dusk. People 15
Sit about tables, fires, ashes
To stop
The whole city wraps
In brown and green and sable night
To sleep, or not, find comfort 20
In the body lying close
Or not.

TITLE Attributed to Dorthinion

Written in 12 SC, as stated in her diary, genin coded this message to be delivered to a fellow rebel identified only as H__. However, the reading of this poem was the occasion that brought Genin to Speaker Gilthas' notice. The coded references themselves are obscure.

Drafted in 17 SC and revised in Lemnost in 22 SC.

[WINTER SONG]

Come Winter, sing of snow to mute the cries
Of Summer Flame so horror filled.
Come covering mantle white to blind our eyes
To blood of elves and dragons spilled.

So sang I while wandering lonely places: 5
Forget, alas, forget and weep
For loss, and loved ones lost. Their faces
Linger at the gray edge of sleep.

But clinging to Hope's grinding ledge
Has honed my grief unto a bitter edge. 10

Now sing I songs more keen than swords
To set round me impenetrable wards.

Come hoarfrost's bitter sting into our woe,
Mind us of what went before.
Not unto a blind complacency we go 15
Again, like lemmings to the shore.

TITLE Attributed to Dorthinion.
Written in 22 SC at Lemnost.

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SONNET TO THE MAGE

Through leafy bower sought I Nature's breast
With weariness of war and all I'd seen
To throw me down among the fronds and rest.

I came upon a chapel fair and green
With somber acolytes in gray bark dressed 5
Like monks, who did upon each other lean

To serve as roof and spire and leafy crest,
And with their spreading branches form the beams
From which depended bats with eyes of red.

Deep by the largest bole I spied a mage 10
Come here to rest and heal, or so I thought.
But sooner learned I that his soul had fled.

I found his wisdom wise as any sage.
His mouth spoke only flies. We never fought.

1 See Kierloth's "A Leafy Bower."

Written in 39 SC, this poem, as well as surviving diary entries of the same period, hint that Genin's rebellious activities have moved from peaceful to violent means. Certainly this poem is indicative of a certain callousness towards death, while the subject reinforces the statements in her diary concerning her dislike of mages. In this poem, the first of her true war poems, Genin makes one last attempt to recall a more innocent past. She reverts back to the Romantic form of the sonnet, using a classic style, with a rhyme scheme of abab/abab/cde/cde. However, the breaking of the lines from the classic sonnet form, and the progression of the poem from classical nature images to that of the dead mage shows Genin's own progression from innocence to grim realism. Her use of dark humor is extraordinary for an elf, who normally revere life.

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[NO HEART WAS EVER PIERCED]

No heart was ever pierced
By any Love so deep
Than by this hungry spear's
Keen prick.

No sweet child's sleep 5
Was ever sweeter than this sleep
Upon the stone,

No kind
Words expressed in word or thought
So fair 10

As 'coming home.'
No silver net for maiden's hair
Was wrought

Weaker than this
Mind, broken by what bitter war 15
Hath bought.

TITLE Attributed to Dorthinion.

This poem seems to be a response to Kierloth's famous poem, "A Heart Unmade by Love." In that poem, Kierloth laments the loss and pain of a loved one slain in war, and how the warrior fears to be left widowed should his wife be slain while he lies abed with a wound.

12 In Genin's first surviving diary entry, she mentions wearing a silver net in her hair to Gilthas's party.

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[GAS!]

"Gas!" she cried.

"Beware! Green dragon's breath!"

And shoving me aside

She drank her bosom's fill of death.

"Lucky for you!" they said

5

But then

You should have seen the cart

They flung her in.

If you'd beheld her beating heart

And heard her breath boiling in her lungs,

10

Atop a pile of fellows once so fair:

A dozen others bleeding out their bungs—

Though dead, their humors sought the air.

And know that her last tortured thought

Was turned to mouth frail words, and plead

15

In voiceless utterance a message wrought

Meaningless by the madness of her need.

TITLE Attributed to Dorthinion.

This poem is dated 40 SC. Although Genin never mentions Valursa by name, it is believed that this poem tells of the death of her sister during the dragon's attack.

2 Unlike red dragons, who exhale fire, green dragons breathe out a poisonous chlorine gas.

12 An image first explored by Genin in her diary. A keg is tapped at the bung.

13 Another remarkable use of dark humor through a pun upon itself. Revealing of Genin's callousness towards death.

17 The dying woman's attempts to utter last words reflect Genin's experience at her mother's death several years previous.