

# **The Fortunes of Grenceaster**

**Being a compilation of accounts from an Anglo-Saxon  
village, approximately 9<sup>th</sup> century CE**

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“It happens to some unlucky men that the end of their lives comes unhappily in youth. One of them the wolf, the grey heath-prowler, will eat; then his mother will mourn his death. Such things are not under human control. Hunger will destroy one, a storm will drive another to death; the spear will kill one off, battle beat down the next. Another will have to live his life without light, groping about with his hands; or, too weak to walk, ill from aches in the joints, will grumble about the pain, complain in depression about his fate. One, in the woods, will fall from a high tree; he has no wings, but flies nevertheless, twists and turns in the air, till he no longer hangs on the tree like fruit. Then he falls to the ground; crashes down to the roots with despair in his heart; his soul is snatched away, his life leaves him.

[So,] riches to one, hardship to another; to one pleasure in youth, to another fame in battle, mastery of the game of war; one is good at throwing or shooting, gains glory and splendour, another has skill at games, knows the tricks of the chequer-board. Some become wise scholars. For some marvellous gifts are prepared by the goldsmith. Often the powerful king's servant hardens metal and puts fine decoration on it, for which the king gives him broad lands as a reward. He accepts it happily. Another, in a crowd, will please warriors, entertain them as they sit with their beer on benches; there is great pleasure there for the men as they drink. Another will sit at his lord's feet with a harp, and be given money; he always plucks the harpstrmgs with bravura, lets the leaping plectrum cry out, the nail ring in harmony. He shows great verve. Another will tame the wild, proud bird, the hawk in his hands, until the taloned swallow becomes obedient. He puts varvels on it, feeds the strong-winged bird while it is tied, weakens the swift creature by giving it small morsels, until the gervalcon is humbled by its dress and by what its provider does, is taught to return to the hands of the warrior.”

from “The Fortunes of Men,” trans. T. A. Shippey

*Poems of Wisdom and Learning in Old English* (1976)

## Table of Contents

Chapter One: The Smith's Tale .....	4
Chapter Two: The Warrior's Tale .....	8
Chapter Three: The Shipbuilder's Tale .....	12
Chapter Four: Recollections of an Abbess .....	16
Chapter Five: The Falconer's Tale .....	20
Chapter Six: The Shepherd's Tale .....	23
Chapter Seven: A Long-Kept Letter .....	27
Chapter Eight: The Scribe's Tale .....	31
Chapter Nine: The Earl's Tale .....	35
Chapter Ten: The Beekeeper's Tale .....	39
Chapter Eleven: The Earl's Son's Tale .....	44
Chapter Twelve: The Hand of Fate .....	49
Afterword .....	53
Index of Authors .....	55
Works Cited .....	56

## CHAPTER ONE

### The Smith's Tale

**Hwæt!** I come here to speak and recount my tale. My name is Spileman, and I perform Weland's work; I am a smith by trade. At ceaster's edge I fashion well-wrought things for all who can spare a coin, from lowly townsmen and wrights to the Abbot and the Eorl himself. I make all that one might need out of iron, forging nails for the shipwright, and all manner of hinges, saws and picks. But what is the most exciting of all, the pride of all who wield the smith's hammer, is the sword, for all who do great deeds must be bestowed a fine weapon with which fate works through them. And that, good lads and lasses, is why I am here in this fate.

I have always known my path to be at the forge, as it was my father's trade before he caught a fever from the bad air and passed away. He taught me all there is to know about the fickleness of iron, and in what ways you beat it and craft the finest tools and weapons in the land. For he held secrets of the trade, secrets which I now bear.

At dawn I set out, as I do each day, making my way to the edge of town to work the forge. I had much to do, for there were many village folk requesting new plough-blades for the upcoming harvest. My apprentices then arrived, and the furnace's red glow was rekindled, a dragon's heart which I control. Donning leather apron and gloves, worn with many years of honest labor, I took up my weapon of choice, my tongs. With fresh iron dug from the pits and smolten, I wielded those tongs, putting metal to fire, pounding the material to shape, each hammer-fall ringing with more glory than all the bells of every house of God in all of England.

'Twas then when a courier approached, small man, clothed in the simplest of tunics. "I come on behalf of the Eorl, for he has need of your skills," he said, eyes wandering warily about my enclosure. "There is rumor of a threat out of the north, and

our lord requests more spear-heads be made ready should the sea-wolves encroach. You will be repaid in kind for your work, good smith.”

Before turning away, he made one other request on behalf of the aged Eorl: a sword of only the finest craft, and heirloom of his earldom. With this I beamed, for he could look nowhere else for the finest battle-edges that can be made this side of the whale-road with Francia.

Immediately I set to work, as pleasing the Eorl comes before all plough-blades and door hinges. Taking only the finest bog-iron, I thrust great bands of it into the fiery maw of my charcoal oven. With care only surpassed by the giants of old I wrought and pounded the impurities out, binding and beating the strips into one blade, shining battle-edge with serpents dancing along the fuller. This blade would fail no one. Only the finest silvered hilt, shining and garnet-embedded, would suffice to attach to the tang. As warrior must stand strong and loyal with spear in hand, so must I stand at the forge with hammer in hand.

With long toil, my task was complete, and I brought forth the ring-edge to the proud and pious Eorl. Soon I would be given my bounty, shining coin as spoils of my battle with the iron. The spear-heads were on their way to the armory.

But fate was not kind. Smoke rose from the farmsteads at dawn. So it was that the Eorl strode out, proud in spite of his weariness and his decay. To battle he went, new sword ready to bite. All day the clash of arms could be heard. It was late and the sun waned in the distance when he and his host returned to Grenceaster, so few, passing the road by my forge with heads bowed. The sick Eorl stumbled, and trod back to the keep only with the aid of his retainers.

It was not long after that when the courier returned. My presence was requested in the keep. I promptly arrived at the court, only to meet the Eorl’s withered gaze. “The battle went ill,” he exclaimed, breathing heavily, “and I have a question for you, Spileman: why did my sword fail?” He croaked, yet projecting strength through his voice in spite of his frailty. “That blade was not reliable when it was needed most. *You* are culpable for this. As such I do not feel that payment is in order for the blade that failed this earldom.”

I was taken aback. A fine sword such as that one would not have failed him. I would not believe it. The knowledge of proper blade-craft has been held by my forefathers and myself for many lives of men. It is my pride. He must be lying. The greed! Lords are meant to be ring-givers, hosting all in the warmth of great mead-halls. Yet here he stands, accusing me of failing at my finest craft, withholding the pay I was promised!

“Sire, if you would allow me, I would like to examine the blade,” I exclaimed, fighting back my anger. The sickly man who sits upon the gift-stool to steal appeared hesitant.

“It is broken. Its edge could not bite through armor, and the pommel split from the hilt,” he responded. “Now, I must pray. Leave. Your services will no longer be needed in my lands should you fail me again!”

With that I marched back to the forge. There was no fathoming how such a fine blade could have failed. He must be lying! Look at him! He sits from a place of strength yet he is enshrouded in weakness and death approaching! Did he even raise his sword, *my sword*? Surely fate would not allow such injustice to last.

I approached the red glow of the furnace, head down, hammer clenched tightly. I risked ruin, whether I were to accept his theft or challenge it. I could not afford to have as fine a craft as that sword go uncompensated, for it was too valuable. But the Eorl owned the very land I work this forge on, and I could just as easily be rendered an exile for demanding what is mine. Fate cannot be kind to such dragons among men. Fate *wouldn't* be kind to them.

My salvation came through the hands of God. Men in the Church who work in paper and words rather than metal tell me that fate is God's domain, that the *wyrd* my forefathers taught me of is decided by His hand. They say I must go to church each day, trust in a book I can't read and in Latin prayer to find God. But I do not see God in those places. God is in the forge's fire, in the greatness of well-wrought things, in the floor and walls of my forge just as He is the floor and walls of this mid-earth.

But in a pleasant change of fate, my piety was noticed by the Abbot. He heard tell from the townsfolk of my mistreatment at the hands of the Eorl. Just past midday a moon later he approached me, with kindness but a transactional affect one rarely sees in a man of God. Not that I can complain; I enjoy bartering, when the bartering's fair.

“Spileman, that is your name, correct?”

“That is correct. At your service.”

“It was most unpleasant to hear of how the Eorl has blamed you for his failing on the field of battle. He does dishonor to your craft, and I know you cannot respect that.”

“Yes.”

“Now, I have a deal to offer you,” the Abbot said, casting furtive glances about. “I am aware of the tremendous debt he has placed upon you by not paying you for that sword. And I am sure you are aware of how much the Church has need of your services. Your debts could be forgiven in the eyes of God, but only if God and the Church can have your allegiance. The Eorl's rule is failing, and it had better be us God-fearing Saxon men who keep this wic, and not the barbarous Norsemen.”

“I—I shall consider your offer, and report back within the next few sunups.”

“Excellent.”

With that he walked away. That bargain sits ill with me, but what option do I have? Where do I hold my loyalties? It is said that lords shall be generous and noble, and that their subjects shall be loyal, and stand always with their lords. But what of when those lords are greedy and ignoble? What if they contend against one another? What then? And should I not be most loyal to God?

I now brood upon these questions. I battle the iron with my hammer, treason and sin in my mind. Much as I make weapons through which fate works, fate will work through me.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Warrior's Tale

I sit at a wooden table, staring into my goblet as I swirl its dark contents. The chair beneath me creaks as I adjust myself, muttering about a weary back. Though I cannot see it, I know the sun is beginning to dip below the sky as the evening approaches. I glance up from my goblet and survey the empty ale-house. The ale-keeper rubs a dirtied towel over the table furthest from me, occasionally glancing in my direction but dropping his gaze when he notices my own. I smirk, shifting my gaze to the table. I run my longest finger along its lines and cracks. *I wonder what might it took to slay this forest-tower.* A creak comes from the doorway, accompanied with the rhythmic thud of a man's stride. I drag my eyes from the table and stare at the newcomer. Clad in rags, the man approaches the bar and speaks briefly to the ale-keeper, who leans in and whispers something to him, his eyes flickering to me dramatically.

"My arm may be stolen, but my eyes are still my own!" I shout, flashing a glare at the ale-keeper as he flees. The newcomer directs his gaze to me, a slight smirk on his face.

"*Hwæt*, good man! I do not recognize your visage. I would venture that if you had been to this alehouse before we would be familiar." I call, beckoning him to join me. "Come, sit and drink. Let us recount our tales."

He meanders over to my table, sitting across from me. As he takes his seat, he makes a show of adjusting the sheath attached to his belt.

"A warrior, eh? A sword-bearer even? What did you do to earn that boon? Surely there is a great tale attached to the weapon. Please, spin your story to me plain."

"Sadly, I have yet to experience a battle. My father was a great warrior, and wanted his soul preserved, so now I carry his proudest achievement." He pauses for a moment, his glazed eyes pointed to the sky. "I do hope we battle soon, though. I cannot wait to prove myself and continue to bring honor to his name."



My eyes darken as I frown. I notice now what had been obscured by his robes before. His eyes contain a youthful glow, his skin is devoid of any marks and his limbs are short and frail.

“You know not what you speak of, boy.” I growl, tilting my head back down toward my drink. “I frequent this alehouse nigh every day, drowning myself and my sorrows because of what war did to me.”

I point to my stub of an arm. The boy’s eyes widen.

“I meant no offense, I merely—”

I lean back in my chair, rest my hand on the table, and interrupt him. “If you have no story to tell, then I shall spin mine instead.”

The boy gulps and puts his hands at his side, his gaze downturned in a show of respect. I motion toward the ale-keeper, requesting another goblet of mead, and begin.

“I, too was once a great warrior. A sword bearer. I earned my weapon defending our Eorl in countless battles. Those bastard sea-wolves know not when to cease fighting. A hundred men have fallen to my hand, each more deserving of his fate than the last. Have you ever seen the light leave a man’s eyes? Have you ever seen the great fear strike a man’s face when he knows he has been bested? No. And you had better pray to the Holy Lord you never have to.”

I reach into my pockets and come up with a couple small rings, placing them on the table next to me. “It is a terrible thing, war. Yet for reasons I cannot fathom, those who have never seen it yearn for it, as you do. Have you any idea what those savages, the sea-wolves, do to strike fear into a brave man’s heart? When they battle, they do not fight as men. They become beasts. They don capes of wolf-skin and bear-skin, decorate their helmets in the visage of a raven or crow. Much worse than their armor, though, are their cries.”

The ale-keeper brings over a full goblet of mead and quickly sets it down next to me, snatching up the rings I left on the table and scurrying away. “Beast-warriors, we call them. They do not fight as men do. No, they forget their kin and adopt new ancestors in the form of their garb. They howl and snarl, gnashing their teeth as they bear down upon you. These battles against the sea-wolves are not about victory or glory. When those beasts attack our line in droves, we do not cry out triumphantly when we slay an enemy. There are no name-proclamations. We battle for survival, for as we stand over the graves of our ancestors, there is nothing to gain but to continue one’s life.”

I take a swig of mead before continuing, “And remember that no fights on a true slaughter-field are fair. No two men ever fight, one against another. There is too much chaos to allow for a tame duel, and allies are prone to step in. Know that you will likely always stand against impossible odds and must allow fate to

guide your hand. How else could I have survived for so long, had it not been fate's hand guiding my own?"

The boy interrupts, gesturing to my arm. "In what fashion was your arm stolen from you? Was it one of the sea-wolves?"

"Your patience runs thin. So be it. That story begins many moons ago, at a battle not far from where we now sit. A war party of sea-wolves approached our town from the north and I left my farm in the west to defend. We funneled them into a burial ground in the swamplands and fought them there. Above the graves of our ancestors, their spirits watched and likely grimaced as we lost our humanity and became beasts. The only way to defeat a beast, after all, is to meet it where it lies, and best it in its natural state."

The boy nods along, fascinated with my tale. "What happened? How fared our men? Surely we bested those savages."

I grimace, staring into his face for a moment before continuing. "Yes, it fared well. Though we suffered many casualties. A fact that best go unignored. My arm was taken during a skirmish with three sea-wolves. I could only hold them off and hope for assistance. Unfortunately for me, my savior came too late. I was bested and my arm severed only a moment before I received aid. The sea-wolves were speared, and the battle continued. I was thought to be dead by most, my unmoving body but a droplet in the ocean of corpses surrounding me. Luckily, fate lent its ear to one of our men, allowing him to heed my cries, and swiftly I was brought to the town's healer. They called my survival a miracle. But I now know it to be a curse. Thanks to Alba's chanted charms and herbal poultices, here I am still on earth, cruelly locked in this flesh-cage, unable to enjoy life or anything else that lies outside its confines."

I take a long swig of my mead, nearly emptying the remainder in one gulp. "I heard not what happened in the battle until after I awoke."

"What? What happened? Was the Eorl slain?" asks the boy frantically, his eyes opening wider as he leans in.

"No, of course not. You know that he still lives today. My family, they were killed. My wife and my son. I told you I live on the western edges of the town, right? Well I learned when I awoke that more than one war party raided our town that day. Everything I owned, everything I lived for, everything I loved was destroyed." I close my eyes briefly, taking a shaky breath. "Those devils burned everything to the ground. I returned to ash, where once stood my home. How is half a man to rebuild what took a whole man the rest of his life to create?"

I open my eyes and tilt my goblet back and forth. "Now I temper my sorrow in this sea of drink. Mead is the one thing that allows me to venture out of my flesh cage and feel again."

I make eye contact with the boy, catch his gaze fast. "I've thought much about reaching out of the cage and unlocking it from the inside." As I say this, I mime slicing my throat. "But that would be the greatest sin and would guarantee my place in the devil's hall. Instead, I found the ship-maker and earned work under him. Thankfully, one arm serves well enough to topple a tree. It gives me much time to think, my job, and I appreciate that. Though it is a fall in fortune to go from being surrounded by the clashing and clanging of iron on iron to the dull thud of an axe into the base of a tree. No honor to kill what cannot fight back."

"Leofric! Are you here?" A voice comes from the doorway. I turn and see a woman's form standing there, the sky behind her long since darkened.

The boy tears himself from my gaze and exclaims, "Mother!" before turning back to me again, standing now, formal. "I must leave, my mother beckons me."

I turn slowly back toward the boy, remaining seated. "Go, then. Heed my warnings, boy."

He nods and begins to leave before turning around and asking one final question. "What is your name, good warrior?"

Without dragging my eyes from my empty goblet I reply, "Wulfric."

## CHAPTER THREE

### **The Shipbuilder's Tale**

That day, I woke when the sun shone through the wooden boards of my door. Tucked away in the little alcove I usually sleep in, surrounded by the smell of wood and pitch and scraps of peat left in the firepit, I paused to enjoy the early-morning stillness. I stopped being able to hear the noise of the sea, an incessant roaring most people complained about, a long time ago. Nowadays I have to try to listen for it, a strange song always ringing in the background of my mind. That day, however, I had to bid the comforting consistency of the ocean farewell to head up to town. A client of considerable means, the town's Eorl, had hired me to build his family a ship, and I needed to meet him as promised to update him on my progress.

After eating a couple scraps of bread and token pieces dried meat I left my half cave, half hovel cut into the coastal hillside and climbed the bluff towards the center of town and the keep. Aside from just meeting with the Eorl, I had to get ahold of food, and materials for the mast and rigging. We had, at this point, finished work on the hull, and at least for now we had treated it as best we could. The next step was going to have to be a mast, and whatever ideas for hull ornamentation the Eorl asked me for, and then rigging and setting up of sails before setting the boat out to sea for her first voyage.

Caulking the hull, lacing it with supports, trying to make sure it would hold up under the weight of all the trappings and decorations the Eorl might deign to cover it with, these things would all solve themselves as we got further along but the most important part of the project was the ship itself, the core without which none of those things would ever work, made of that rich, strong, solid wood and that smooth, fragrant wax that fueled our entire trade, without which we would be cast adrift.

My apprentice and I headed into Grenceaster that day around midmorning, taking the backroads through the cool, shadowy edge of the forest. Soon enough, the walls of the town keep rose up over the fields in front of us. The grey stone, somehow both immovable and inanimate and yet having that quality of slowly rotting away,

always put me on edge. Wulfric had spent many days in this town, had been named there, and thought of it as his home, if not at least near to his heart, the place where he belonged. I lacked such a connection.

I was raised among the trees, moss, shrubs and moist earth, the oldest and most real of gods, the water churning, roaring a dozen tree-lengths below me down smooth, straight rock. I could sense, in every tree we felled to make this Eorl's ship something akin to the vital center of life. It bewildered me to see that my apprentice apparently felt nothing sacred in our work, only a means to erase the memory of a past full of death. But after all, brought up though I may have been amidst the trees, did I not now spend my waking hours slowly chipping away at the very thing that sheltered me as a baby? How different is this from Wulfric chopping away his memories from the past? Regardless, we have little choice in our fates.

Upon arriving at the market, I was somewhat surprised by the amount of activity we found. The market tended to be busy but today there seemed to be a swarm of people around the many stalls and food stands. However, this mattered little to us. We cut directly through the throng of people to the gates of the Eorl's hall.

As we entered we were greeted by the usual smoky smells of meat and drink from the past night, sounds of activity and muffled voices. We found the Eorl in his personal chamber, directly behind the eating hall and, unlike the vaulted ceiling of the hall, which reminded me somewhat nostalgically of the hull of a ship upturned: small, warm, draped in wool and furs and strikingly homey. These past months, however, it had grown to show the distinctive signs of the lair of an ailing man, the air thick with a milieu of scents, and humid.

The Eorl had given us not just drawings for the design on the figurehead of the boat, but the pendant passed down to him by his uncle that he wanted it to look like. Now, as we walked back to the market to look for the cloth trader and the sails he promised us he'd have, the small bear's head sat heavy in my pocket, and I felt both protected and, admittedly, a little bit more powerful as it bounced against my thigh. However, the brief respite from the anxieties of the market was shattered upon arrival at the cloth trader's stall, nestled as it always was in a corner of the keep to the immediate right of the gates.

It was at times like these that I was glad to have the apprentice that I did. There was little I could do about Wulfric's evening habits, but I tried my best to offer him some kind of purpose in his time working under me, though I worried sometimes he wouldn't stick with the task of the ship to see the final product. The cloth trader, it turned out, had been made a different offer by another buyer, who was willing to barter a couple jewels (the authenticity of which I doubt anybody could really speak to) he had his eye on for his wife. I was livid, but trying not to show it, since I could offer no more money for these needlessly expensive materials the Eorl had asked me for.

The cloth trader had a distinct look of triumph behind his usual calculating gaze. But, one moment my apprentice was slouching just behind me to my left, and the next he stood in front of me, body tensed, and every word his body spoke was of practiced movements, reflex and training.

The cloth trader hastily backed up against the silks and wools and canvases in the shadow of his challenger's upraised arm. Gone from Wulfric's eyes was the usual dull sheen of alcohol, replaced by a calm, clear glint and focus. My apprentice quietly reminded the cloth trader, in a voice that held almost no emotion or inflection but for a barely noticeable note of pride, that it was no other than the Eorl himself who had ordered this canvas, and that the trader would do well to remember the master shipbuilder's consistent honesty, fairness and generosity when it came to trading. We left market that day with the canvas and a slight spring in our step.

Yet as we made our way once again along the edge of the forest which I knew so well, the weight of the canvas bore down on us, as did the weight of this task, over whose outcome I had so little control. We trudged through the red and orange fire of the evening sunset; having to take the long way down to the sea cliffs and our little dwelling, we trod the path past fields occupied by our local shepherd Saewine, enjoying the soft breeze and the smell of grass, though slightly less so the smell of the sheep.

We passed by the farmers' hovels on the outskirts of town and then the shepherd's hut, wicker and wood fences quietly creaking in the breeze. As we got closer to the ocean we could smell the sea air. Our legs grew weary but we pressed on, and as we cut through the strip of forest above the top end of the beach I was once again struck by nostalgia for the forests, the heavy moisture of the moss, and the comforting solidity of the trees, the soft, springy ground and the smells...

You may find it ironic that a shipbuilder like myself, one so experienced with the sea, should pine so for forests. To me, the ocean is like the forest; its size offers a kind of protection. Just as the forest wraps you up in its embrace and keeps you hidden and safe, so too the ocean protects you in that it separates you from civilization and pulls you past the point at which almost anybody would try to find you. It is because of this that, while I can no longer handle seafaring and the anxieties it brought with it, I am content to spend my time in the timberlands and by the forests near the sea.

Eventually, Wulfric and I reached the end of the strip of beach where our little cave-hut sat waiting for us. We carefully stowed the canvas towards the back of the space in an oven-sized cavity hewn into the rock years ago when the water had risen higher than it ever had before, and started a fire among a ring of rocks on the sand.

As the flames spread their light across the sand and glinted off the rocks, and even the crests of the waves, it seemed, we looked up at the hull we had fashioned. It was like a mead hall, bowed and long with a blade-like spine that ran along the entirety of the body to stabilize it, sweeping up to become the prow and the stern and

helmsman's post. The mast, on land, sprouted awkwardly out of the center of the ship, the sails waiting to be draped across the struts, but on the ocean—!

I imagined how the sail would fill, its colors spread across the waves, rippling like a dragon's scales, the beams of the ship slicing through the water, gliding across it like a breeze across soft grass. As we sat and contemplated this sea-beast I looked over at Wulfric with curiosity, wondering if to him, too, it felt less like something wrought and more as though the act of making it had coaxed forth its shape from hiding, an animal whose trust we had to earn before it let us shape it into a tool. I believe we both felt proud that evening in the cave-hut. Slumber took us both after a long day's work, the kind of work that took the greatest toll on me. Yet I felt reassured, and confident in the next steps the ship and our project would take. We had been surprisingly productive for such a hectic day.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Recollections of an Abbess

*The pattering of hurried feet echoes through the stone chamber, followed by the clamor of worried feminine voices. A spike in the din is immediately hushed by an authoritative bark, and the clamor turns to an excited buzz.*

*My needles clack against each other with a renewed vigor, the lamb's wool running through my fingers, ready to be caught between the quick points of my needles. The buzz from outside my small chamber grows stronger until the door bursts open and seven young sisters push their way into the room. They range in age, from Eawynn who just celebrated her thirteenth year, to Mildritha, an unwed woman of twenty-three.*

*They quiet when they see me and bow their heads. I look back down at my work and sigh, shaking my own.*

Oh, like little birds you are. Chirp, chirp, chirp; all in a fuss over the whisperings of the brothers. Worry not, my dears. We have not yet received any news from the Archbishop. All will be well.

*I do not look up, but I can feel their tension, their furrowed brows as they glance at each other.*

How do I know?

*I pause my hands and rest them on my lap.*

You question the knowledge of your Abbess? You see, my dears, I have lived. Far longer and over far greater a range of life than any you could imagine.

*They press forward, questions on their lips and an eager light in their eyes.*

'Sister Bertha!' you all clamor, you who demand to hear my story. Oh, very well. If my words shall grace the ears of the newest girls and bring hope to the wandering, so be it.



*They hurry to the rug before my chair and sit, their legs crossed and shoulders pressed together, leaning towards my familiar voice. I smile at their bright faces, a mix of anxiety and awe. My own eyes flick to the hall, where the continued tread of tense footfalls presses against the sound-dampening walls. I focus on the girls and steady my breathing, as a familiar tale unfolds.*

I was a young maid, only fourteen, but by then in prime marrying years, when I saw my home of Francia for the last time, from the deck of a rocking ship. The salt spray that stung my face was no longer that of my familiar Francia, but the cold weight of England. The land they took me to was called Kent, and that land was ruled by the man whom it was decided I must wed: the good King Æthelberht.

I was to be queen. A girl of fourteen, accompanied by jewels, precious manuscripts, and my favorite slaves. But I was alone. My father believed I was the answer to the tension he felt over the roiling whale-road.

A sign of goodwill. A mother to the future of good kings. A peace-weaver, he called me. A title of honor. Yet a woman behind closed doors will never have the strength of an army at her back, my father should have known this.

*A door slams in the corridor outside of my chamber and loud voices call out frantically. My first instinct is to push up from my chair and follow them to the source of the commotion, but the girls are turning their heads to the noise, fear creasing their foreheads, hands tightening in each other's grasp.*

Shhh...where was I?

*I call their gaze back to my face and a sense of relief is there in finding these comfortably aged features, the face of a home that has protected them in a way their own family never could. My cheeks rise into what I hope is a reassuring smile, though I worry it does not cover the doubt in my eyes.*

A young woman in a land I didn't know with a man who already had a family closer to marrying age than I.

Yet I found ways to occupy my time. You see I never could cut all ties to my homeland, and while my sisters refused to acknowledge my letters, already viewing me as of that *other* land, I had a trusted confidant.

A virtuous woman when I met her as a child, during her time studying the monastic life in Gaul, Hilda became my connection to my past in the place I now called home. You all know of her of course, the greatest Abbess at Whitby, one of the first double monasteries in this land and the model for our own home. A woman so respected in her time, Pope Vitalian himself once called on her as a shepherd of the lord.

You see, the English refused to accept the word of Our Lord in those times, even my king would not hear my old countrymen when they'd come to call and share the

truth of Our Lord. But I was raised in the faith and to turn my back on God was to stop breathing, to abandon this bone-house entirely. I still had my manuscripts, and many a night I'd read them aloud, listening to the words ring throughout the chamber. Of course, when Æthelberht discovered what I did he took my manuscripts from me, citing stories of *wyrd* and demanding I stay true to his ways.

But times were changing. A tide was coming. I received word from Hilda one day; she was being sponsored by Pope Vitalian to establish a monastery in Kent. This would be impossible without the king's blessing, and he showed no inclination of supporting this mission.

Over the years I had learned to stand by my husband, offering advice when he requested, but I found my position tedious. I know other women—slaves, common women, nobles all—saw me and despised my unwillingness to exert any of my *apparent* authority. But what they did not understand: a woman in the seat of power hewn by a man has no power at all. For until the cycle of strength over words prevails, we will exist, insignificant in this tale of the world of men.

*Here my words trail off and I feel a heat rise behind my eyes. Without fail, my old frustrations return, and I feel the mix of hopelessness and steely resolve settle throughout my body.*

My story continues. Perhaps my king was right, and it was his *wyrd* that took him, sooner than we expected, but in reflection, at a time most favorable for the way of the Word in England. Ecgberht, his first son, became king, and I, a widow, sank into the tapestry of history, out of sight.

A woman with no right to keep my lands and property without my husband, there was little for me to do but find a new family. The rejected, the devout, those escaping a troubling marriage, and those like me, who found ourselves alone yet refused to sing the last of our songs just yet. These women were who I found, and soon the words of Hilda, who had by then passed on, rang through my chest. I knew the place I needed to find was one where women could live and learn the art of law, history, allegory, and poetry.

*I smile at the faces before me, remembering the nights we'd sit around the main hall and listen to each other's poetry, the humorous tales of the young girls mixing with the wise stories of the older sisters.*

We live here with our brothers as close to equals as we can in a world such as ours, and this is the way we will continue to live for the years to come. You are safe here, and as long as I sit in this chair my power will ensure that that remains a truth for all those whom seek shelter in the monastic life.

*The hope in their eyes beats a treacherous path to my heart, and it is with a shaking voice that I bid them leave me and ready for the visitors.*

Go now girls, return to the brothers and keep faith. For Our Lord has a plan for us all and his wisdom will be that which carries us through any trials yet to come.

*They file out of the room and my cheeks cave. A moment of silence ensues in which the story I've just told spins through my head in a twirling distaff of images. My own rise to queendom and the subsequent rise of the Church, everything good that had finally come from my place of power.*

*The door opens again and this time it's Brother Edmund, his breathing labored.*

Messengers from the Council of Nicaea?

*He nods, a bead of sweat rolling down his forehead as he frantically wrings his hands.*

Very well, I will receive them.

With the grace of a cup bearer and the dignity of an Abbess, I rise from my seat and make my way out of the chamber, to bear the fate of my monastery.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **The Falconers's Tale**

What am I doing here, you may ask? Well, whether you know it or not, I, Berne, once served as chief falconer to the Eorl. Oh, I remember how honored I was to take on the role of the late Lothbroc, how I excited I was to be able to sit fourth from our good Eorl at the mead table. However, those days were not to last, like all things on this earth. *Wyrð* had decided that I was to pay for my vices. You see, while I may not be a familiar face in this alehouse, I am regrettably familiar with the ale. As a falconer, I was never supposed to drink unless invited to by our good Eorl, but I don't see how anyone could give up drink; it's the only thing you can always count on to be there for you.

Our good Eorl's intense medical requirements are probably why I was never able to give up drinking. It was too hard for him to keep track of just exactly what I was doing when everyone well knew that the healer, his worthy Alba, had to attend upon him for hours each day. Especially more recently, he never seemed to be interested in going out and exercising the falcons himself, so I was left alone in my care and training of them.

Toward the end I was in charge of five goshawks, two sparrowhawks, and a peregrine falcon. I was very comfortable in dealing with the goshawks; they're what every man who calls himself a falconer should know how to train. I've heard some say that goshawks are not high-class hawks, that I should be ashamed of training them for the Eorl. But goshawks can take much larger game than the supposedly superior sparrowhawks that I never really liked for that reason: they're too small to take any interesting game; they really only kill songbirds.

Now the peregrine falcon, that was quite the bird. The first time I took it out after I deemed it obedient enough for hunting, I was glad I had remembered to affix bells to its legs. It was easy to find it circling above me when there wasn't any visible prey, but as soon as I flushed a duck out of some swampy brush, I quickly lost sight of the falcon as it streaked toward its prey that had flown out of my sight over a small hill. When I found the peregrine, it was already halfway through devouring its prey. I must not have fed it for a while before that hunt.

That was then starting to become a recurring problem; I seemed to always forget to feed the birds. I really shouldn't have, as my quarters were in the barn where the falcons were kept for that reason, but maybe our good Eorl's inattention was making me complacent. I suppose my laziness could be attributed to drinking, though that idea continues to seem utterly preposterous.

Despite not handling my duties as chief falconer as well as I could have, it was all working just fine until our good Eorl suddenly indicated an interest in taking up falconry again. I expect he may have been worried about all those reports of Viking raids up north. But honestly because of his declining health, the request caught me a bit off balance. I had been training the peregrine to catch larger prey, and somehow before giving it much thought, I rashly promised that he would be able to take a crane.

Now, it wasn't all that unreasonable of a promise, as the peregrine had taken pheasants with ease before and cranes are not too much larger. It would have been totally fine if I had been paying closer attention to my care of the birds. However, on that fateful day it did not occur to me that I had not taken the falcon out in many days nor remembered to feed it. I must have confused it with one of the other birds somehow.

It was quite a nice day as we rode our horses out of the keep and toward the marsh. The sky was a beautiful shade of blue with a few wispy clouds here and there, and the sun kept a pleasant warmth at our backs in the chill of fall. The peregrine didn't seem to be in as good a mood as normal, but I attributed that to unfamiliarity with the Eorl.

I remember how earlier in my life our good Eorl would often leave me behind when hawking, saying that he didn't need someone to tell him things he already knew. He probably didn't like my attempts to make sure that he was doing everything perfectly, and that hurt me. That's why I was surprised by his request that I accompany him this time. I suppose it had been over five years since he had last engaged in the fine sport.

As I was saying, the peregrine wasn't acting like it normally did, and this became especially apparent when we spied two cranes a couple hundred feet away at the edge of the marsh and approached until we were close enough to easily startle them. Our good Eorl took the hood off the peregrine and released it from his hand. The peregrine seemed to have more difficulty than normal staying aloft and gaining altitude, but I didn't say anything for fear that our good Eorl would suddenly change his mind about having me there.

Finally, the peregrine was circling over us in that perfect sky and waiting for its prey to be indicated to it. We got closer to the cranes, and everything seemed to be going well. The cranes, alarmed by the horses, took to the air, and the peregrine started its incredible dive. Then everything went wrong.

The peregrine collided with one of the cranes and I was horrified to see that instead of just hitting it and flying back up for another pass if necessary, the peregrine just kind of bounced off the crane and fell to the ground. To make things worse, while the crane did falter in its flight and nearly fall, it managed to escape. This was nothing like what had happened any of the other times that I had taken the peregrine out, and the Eorl could probably see the shock on my face.

I rushed over to the peregrine to check on its welfare, and to my dismay it was limp and seemed so much smaller than normal. In short, it had been killed by the collision. This wasn't how the day was supposed to go at all. When the Eorl got over to me and saw what had happened, he expressed his disgust:

“Call yourself a falconer when you don't know what game you can catch, and then you get my best falcon killed? Well, that ends now; you are no longer my chief falconer. Leave your horse and get out of my sight.”

It was a long walk back. I thought a lot about what I was to do with my life now, and that is when I came to my realization that drink is the only thing that will always be there for you. The peregrine died because of my inattention, and the Eorl now hates me for a small mistake, though I can't really blame him. I made a promise to him that I was unable to keep and killed a peregrine falcon while doing it.

The only way I see that this could have gone better is if I had just drunk more on that cursed day. You see, I could have been passed out when the Eorl came, and even if he woke me up, I would have felt horrible enough to come up with a good excuse to avoid falconry that day, or at least not to accompany him. He certainly would have taken my drunkenness better than what did happen, because how can you blame a man for drinking? As everyone in this alehouse knows, it makes life so much better.

I guess it's no use dreaming about what else I could have done, because nobody can escape their fate, and fate decided that I deserved this. All I can do is think about my future. I've decided that I should leave this keep, which is why I am telling you this story. I'd like at least one person in Grenceaster to remember me as a man who simply made a small mistake, and not as the lazy drunkard people hear about whenever the Eorl curses my name.

## CHAPTER SIX

### The Shepherd's Tale

It was early in the morning when I awoke. The sun had just begun to seep through the thatch roof above my head, the darkness had just begun to recede from the corners of my hut, and the birds had just begun to sing their perpetually upbeat songs. Ever since I was a child I had woken at this time—an inconvenience that had led to many a weary day. But what was I to do? It was but one of many things in my life that was out of my control.

Reluctantly I rose from the meager pile of cloth that I called my bed. I glanced around my cottage. A familiar wave of despair began to well up inside me as I remembered what I had lost. I shook my head. This sorrow would accomplish nothing. This sorrow wouldn't bring her back.

I recalled the words that wise men had consoled me with on the day of her death. "It happens to some that the end of their lives comes unhappily in youth," they had said. "Such things are not under human control. This the way of *wyrd*, Saewine, this is the way of the world." A hollow numbness began to force away the despair. Fate was cruel. What was I to do?

I donned the brown tunic that I had cast onto the floor the previous night. I grabbed the shepherd's crook leaning against the wall and stepped out into the world. I paused. I squinted at the rising sun; outside, the songs of the birds were deafening compared to the muffled noises that sank through the walls of my hut. But after a moment my pupils shrank and my ears grew used to the new volume. I adjusted, just as all humans do.

With a glaze over my eyes, I walked through the familiar maze of scattered wooden houses. Grenceaster is a small village, home to perhaps sixty families. But I never spent much time inside the walls, preferring the company of the sheep that I watch over. Yes, mine is a lonely occupation but I would take it over back-breaking farm work any day. I remember how my father would come home every evening—his

hands calloused, and his back bowed over—and collapse, too weary to do so much as greet his family. I wonder if his body made a similar motion when the raiders razed his field eight years ago. Fate has a funny way of stealing people away in the same manner that they have lived.

A sharp pain yanked me out of my musings. Cursing, I grabbed my foot and spat on the rock I had just walked into. I had scarcely realized I had been moving. My legs were treading on their own accord.

Wincing as I stepped forward, I set out again towards the field—this time determined to remain in the present. I was getting close to the flock now. Eadwald, always impatient to return to the village, was probably eagerly awaiting my arrival.

As I rounded the next hill, sporadic tufts of white and black began to come into view. There was the flock. I called out to the scrawny figure standing still in the middle of the field. Eadwald glanced in my direction and then rushed toward me, crook and sling erratically swinging by his side. “Saewine! Here ya go!” he shouted, skipping over pleasantries as he shoved the sling into my arms, a lively grin spreading across his face. I managed a smile back, though it didn’t reach my eyes. “Keep good watch over the sheep!” Eadwald cried as he raced off in the direction of the village leaving me alone in the pasture.

The flock milled around me as I inspected the grass by my feet. It was getting short. It was almost time to move on. I called out across the meadow and immediately all the dispersed sheep ran to me, conjoining themselves into a speckled mob. I stepped behind the mass and took an authoritative step. The sheep surged in front of me with the intensity of the waves that battered the cliffs not far from here. Forward we flew, sheep and shepherd, like fate itself, trampling all living things unlucky enough to inhabit our path.

For the first time since opening my eyes that morning, I felt almost happy. I loved the exhilarating rush of this march, the unquestioning trust of my sheep in the benevolent care that I showed them. I looked down at the sling in my hands and recalled the time some summers ago that a wolf had attacked my flock. It was an unusual thing, to see a solitary wolf. Indeed, it was probably lonely desperation that induced him to surge out of the undergrowth and seize an ewe by the throat.

The flock had splintered every which way, grisly sounds of terror emanating from their maws. But I had remained calm and composed as I slipped a smooth river stone into the pocket of my sling and, swinging it above my head three times, flung the rock directly into the beast’s forehead. After staring back into my eyes for a moment as if we knew something about each other, the wolf turned its shaggy head away and slunk back into the forest, dazed by the gruesome impact. I wondered if the creature had clung to life or just collapsed some feet away. I suppose only fate knows for sure.

The sharp smell of salt pulled me back into the present. A cold wind howled over the meadow around me, inducing a deep shudder down my spine. I was getting



close to the sea now. Stooping down onto one knee, I inspected the field. It was enough to satisfy the sheep. They began to disperse through the surrounding landscape, grazing as they went along. And I stood there, leaning on my shepherd's crook, gazing out across the lonely scene before me. A familiar ache began to rise in my breast as I sniffed the air, closed my eyes, and let the smell of the sea sweep me away.

I remembered the towering cliffs not far from here, whiter than the purest wool, and the abandoned lighthouse, built by giants, seated on top of them. I remembered how the waves railed endlessly against the rocks below in a futile attempt to overtake the land. I remembered how the harsh wind mingled with salt nipped at my thin face. I remembered the endlessness of the sea stretching out far beyond the bounds of this world and the fearsome raiders who claimed it as their home—and how my stomach churned as I looked upon it. Yes, the sea, for all its majesty, had always brought forth a strange sense of dread in me.

Except—except for that one night, two summers ago when I had stolen away to those cliffs with my wife-to-be. It was there, under the great speckled cloth of the gods, that we had danced to the rhythm of the crashing waves and the melody of the wailing wind. The sea would go on forever, the stars would always shine, and the cliffs would always stand. For a brief moment there stood in these halls of eternity two fragile creatures desperately clinging to each other for fear that one of them might slip away.

I let out a sound of painful laughter as I opened my eyes and returned, for a moment, to the present. They used to tell me I was lucky for finding love so pure, so unencumbered by lust or greed. Indeed, there had been no bride-price paid on the day the Weofodthegn blessed the union, no meddling by either of our families. Truly, we had loved each other. But now look what it had all come to. Fate was a cruel and fickle master.

I stood there in that field, present only in body, as the sun moved across the steel grey sky. My flock shuffled around me captivated by the earth-hair on which they fed. And now I pondered all I had lost, all that brought me to this moment. I thought of the day she had died, the way her soul-lights had slowly dimmed, the way her body, weak from fever, had crumpled to the ground. And again I remembered the words of the wise men: "Such things are not under human control. This is the way of *wyrd*." This is the way of *wyrd*.

And suddenly I felt restless. I needed to walk. I needed to leave this place. Without hesitation I stepped forward and then forward again, onward from the pasture leaving the sheep that I had cared so deeply for behind. I didn't know where I was going, I just needed to go.

As I walked, thoughts and memories whirled in my mind. I was nothing but a leaf in the air, buffeted by the winds of fate, powerless over my own destiny. And, like all living things, one day I would fall to the ground and slowly fade into the Earth. Such was the way of *wyrd*.

At last, I paused. I had to—I had reached the edge of the world. To my right was the crumbling lighthouse—a failing mound of stone and mortar perched atop those eternal, white cliffs. The wind whipped at my tunic; the dull moan of the restless waves below brought forth that dark feeling of dread within my chest. I looked forth across the endless sea and saw a single gull making its way across that blue expanse. The slightest shift in the wind and the bird would go tumbling into the waves.

And I wept. I wept for my father, for my wife. For the unceasing march of time, for love abruptly lost. But over it all I knew that it was the meaninglessness of things that brought me to tears. The way that in a moment, fate, for no reason and no purpose, could take everything away, leaving nothing but memories behind. But this was the way of things. What was I to do?

The cold wind stung my wet eyes as I took one step closer to the edge. I looked down at the sharp rocks below, at the foam spray that blew up whenever the waves crashed upon them. In that moment I decided. I would jump. And if I was to live then I was to live and if I was to die then I was to die. Such was the way of fate.

And so, I leapt. As my fragile body hurtled towards the sea all I could hear was the cry of the lonely gull ringing in my ears.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### **A Long-Kept Letter**

Dear Agnes,

I know that we have not spoken in many years. In fact, you may have even been too young to remember the brief time we spent together. I visited you and your mother fifteen years ago, although it is hard to believe that it has been that long. I still see you as a small child, frolicking around in the tall grasses, pulling reeds from the earth, and tripping over your own feet. I know that this image I hold no longer reflects reality. It is a picture of the past. I have recently heard that you plan to marry. I realize that I have not been present in your life and I do apologize for this. I truly wish that this were not the case. I hope that you can forgive me, or at least, I hope that this fact does not prevent you from listening, Agnes.

I wish to tell you about where my life has taken me during my prolonged absence. I'm sure that you have heard stories of Cassex, the old monastery. A place that some remaining women must reminisce about, an empty building between two hills, and a structure that must now be cloaked in vines and shielded by overgrown grasses. Let me tell you of what these empty walls used to hold and hide.

When I was a few years younger than you, my mother passed, birthing my youngest brother. Overwhelmed by the responsibility of me and my six siblings, my father sent me, his only daughter, off to Cassex. My aging aunt Mildrede was the Abbess, and my father felt that I needed a motherly figure in my life. I was quite selfishly rambunctious, neglecting my duties in the house, always looking for an opportunity to make noise. I was anything but comforting for my family during that time of grief. If grief ever touch your life, do not let it turn into anger as I did.

At first, the walls of Cassex seemed like a prison to me, restraining me from my friends at home, the giggling, the petty gossip, and the frivolous fantasies we concocted about our future husbands and ceremonies. As time progressed, Mildrede accepted me like a child of her own. She taught me the ways of the written word. I

slowly developed meaningful and enduring friendships. What was once a prison to me, became a place of unimaginable freedom. I look back so fondly upon the days I spent roaming the grasslands surrounding Cassex, singing, swimming, leaping, laughing, running, and reading. Agnes, I cannot stress the importance of the written word. A world unfolds for those who are learned in this skill.

Cassex did not exist on this earth for long. I wonder if any still remember the story of its birth. I know that there are few left with the memory of its demise. I'm sure that you are all-too-familiar with the foolish, juvenile feuds of our family and the Billingsleys. Do not allow yourself to be sucked into that childishness. Antagonism will too often become bloodshed. When Mildrede's brother and father were killed by a Billingsley, *wergild* was paid to her. It was a substantial sum that she received. She used this money, and her deceased brother's land, to establish the monastery.

Mildrede was a most impressive woman. Her warmth was infectious, and her quiet tenacity admired by all. Make sure you are not too loud, Agnes; this will not be admired. Over the first few years, as word spread of its establishment, the population at Cassex grew quickly. It was a place where widows found community, quietly biding their remaining days. This is not a pleasant fate, but I am sure that the loneliness and anguish of these poor women was lessened there. If this ever be your fate, know that monastic life is always an alternative to solitude. Cassex was also a place of education for the daughters of Noble families, such as ours. Many young girls would have otherwise needed to travel to very distant lands to be educated as they were by Mildrede. This was a much more manageable journey and it made education much more accessible.

Aside from teaching, Mildrede also cared deeply about arts. She commissioned many paintings and used them to adorn the walls with color, bringing a certain vibrancy to the building which I was unaccustomed to. She hung her favorite work in the main hall above the hearth. It was a truly beautiful painting of saint Mary the Virgin. In this painting, she was cradling a book. She had a wide stance and was holding her arm up and out, as if she were silencing a crowd. There was light shining all around her body, as if she were on fire, but the light was soft and yellow. There was nothing violent about her. She was gentle but giant. I would often find Mildrede standing before it, still and silent, with arms crossed, and with a wide stance.

The royal house often looked to Mildrede for advice. Her deep knowledge of scripture, her otherwise impressive literary abilities, her prudence, her foresight, and her modesty in speech and action, were highly sought after. These, Agnes, are valuable traits. Mildrede, however, did not bother with enforcing the modesty of others. We kept our jewelry and our elegant garments. We gossiped and even befriended nearby field-workers. She did not condone, nor did she prevent these relationships. I befriended a man named Edgar. He was a dear companion for me, from such a different walk of life than myself, but we were, for a time, inseparable. I think of him very frequently these days, as I reflect.

As you have surely gathered, I held and hold Cassex very dear for many reasons. I owe so much to that place and to Mildrede, of course. One day in early Autumn, a group of three monks arrived from the far south. They had traveled across land and sea to visit Cassex. Their arrival was a joyous occasion, as we realized how far and fast Mildrede's name and influence had spread. This sentiment was short lived. It a matter of months, it was all taken away from us. The cold stone walls were left bare and empty.

These men were horrified by the subtle black powder that we put on our eyelids and the dyed garments that we would wear. "God did not create purple sheep!" they would say in disgust as they stripped us of some of the items we held most dear. Mildred remained outwardly calm and steady. She assured us that this would be short lived, that making noise and protesting would only make things worse, and that these men would surely return home soon.

A month after the arrival of the first three men, seven more appeared. Paintings were taken down. The painting was taken down. The monks declared that nuns should not hold up their hands as depicted. Mildred protested for the first time. She made more noise than I had ever seen her make after the space above the hearth was left bare. Nothing came of this. We were prevented from hearing confessions and prescribing penance. Our literary abilities and educations were no longer required or respected as the monks began engaging with the royal house. We became irrelevant.

A month after the arrival of the second group of monks, they told us that they had received a decree from the archbishop. All women at Cassex were to be moved to the double monastery in Mercia, or they were to return home. The choice was ours. It was as if we were given permission to let our vows go and return to our old lives and ways. We were not forced to go to Mercia. Ultimately, we were given permission to marry. It all seemed very strange.

The timing could not have been worse for me. The rivalry between our family and the Billingsleys had reached a peak after a series of livestock kidnappings. My father needed me to marry Gordich of Billingsley in an attempt to prevent any further violence or loss of property. I really did not have a choice in the matter. I could sense my father's utter desperation, and after Cassex closed, it seemed all but inevitable that I become a wife... and mother, but that much was already certain.

Agnes, there are many things that I have kept to myself throughout the years. I am sure that you will come to know this burden one day. However, seeing as how I am nearing my end, I see no point in taking these stories with me into eternity, or into the ground. The biggest reason marrying Gordrich brought me so much agony was your mother. I missed Edgar unbearably, and I knew I was carrying his child. The guilt was drowning me. During your mother's fifth winter, Gordrich became increasingly suspicious. I could so clearly see Edgar's face in your mother's. During her sixth winter, I left for Mercia. I have been here at the double monastery ever since, only visiting home twice. It is nothing like Cassex but I felt it was my only choice.

Please do not think of me as a terrible mother. I am not a monster, I assure you. You may not be able to see this now, but I know you will be able to. Life with Gordich became impossible for me to bear as your mother grew from infancy to girlhood, and I could not have survived there any longer. I knew that if I left, his mother would take on the responsibilities of my daughter's care. You would have never met her, but the mother of Gordich was a kindly woman, glad to take on the role I left behind. You will be faced with many decisions, Agnes, and you must sometimes do what benefits yourself. Unwavering selflessness will breed desperation.

I look back on my life with much delight, amusement, and with much sorrow, but without regret. I hope that you will feel similarly one day. I wish I could have known you. I wish that I could have known your mother, not just in her early years. I wish that I could meet your husband and hold the children that you will call your own. But, if nothing else, Agnes, I wish for you to have my story, and of course, I do truly wish you much happiness in your years to come.

All the Love,

Edith

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### **The Scribe's Tale**

The irises are gone; the river took them. I watch them float downstream and feel the grass stains seep through my robes just a little more than before. I had tripped, that was all. I had stumbled over a rock and put my hand down to catch myself—

Brother Alwin will have my head in a basket for this. As the blue-purple of the flowers swirls through the blue-gray of the water, I consider my options. Without the iris sap, my Spanish green will be useless to Alwin. I can hear his voice rumbling through my head now: “One cannot create light without shadows,” and other such nonsense. Spanish green is a perfectly respectable color all on its own. No need to gum it up with sap just to give the illusion of depth. The depth should come from the writing itself, it should lift off the page and soar through the air around the reader, the letters singing on their own. No picture can do that. Only words.

A deep-toned glint catches my eye, and I bend down to see a single iris trapped between two rocks, struggling desperately to escape. I free it from its prison, lift it from the water, and hold it to the light, admiring for a moment that *wyrd* could craft such an intimate moment for me to face my complete and utter failure as an inkmaker. If I were more inclined to an optimistic perspective, I might be grateful, for my day is usually far busier. And though my real work escapes me, the work I do for the abbey never seems to be done.

Alwin can't take all the blame for my misery, though. When I first arrived, it was only because of him that I survived at all. He woke me for prayers every morning after I slept through the bells and taught me how to adjust to only eating once a day. I wanted to be just like him: literate, a talented artist, a master of pigment and ink. One day I saw him illuminate the first letter of a new manuscript, drawing each line as if it were the last he'd ever see. That night I dreamed only of creating something even greater, and since that day I've dreamed of nothing else.

It is because of Brother Alwin that I realized I am fated to become an illuminator. But it is because of Brother Alwin that I have been stopped short of achieving this fate.

“He’s just a boy, Abbot,” the scribe protested. “He can’t be blamed for this. Everyone makes mistakes!”

“He may be a boy, Brother,” the Abbot said, staring me down as I sat in his chair with my knees to my chest, “but he’s a boy who spits in the face of the Almighty. Mistakes, the Lord teaches, are meant to be forgiven. But an altar to Woden is no *mistake*.” He lurched towards me with the last word, flinging it from his mouth as he stooped over me like a vulture examining its next meal.

Alwin crossed his arms and stepped between us. “The lad’s been raised by heathens—we truly fault him for falling back on old habits? Is it not the way of our Lord to teach, to spread the good word to those less fortunate?” As he spoke, his eyes met mine, and I found them filled with the strangest mixture of pity and grief. “And is Apprentice Hamma not, to be put bluntly, truly unfortunate?”

The Abbot remained silent for a long time, hunched over his desk, his palms flat against the oak, eyes closed, lips taught. Alwin stood beside my chair and gripped its back, behind my shoulder. Slowly, tentatively, one of my feet ventured outwards towards the ground. My other followed suit shortly after. The room remained quiet, pregnant with pause.

“He may stay,” the Abbot said, and Alwin and I let out a collectively held breath, “but he may not be a monk. Perhaps one day he will prove himself worthy of vows, but my trust in him has been broken.” The leader of the abbey turned towards me, and I got the unshakeable impression that he was envisioning my face gripped in his hand as if it were held in a vice. “You will be no scribe, Apprentice Hamma. My faith, it appears, was misplaced in you.”

My heart dropped through my chest and into my feet. Alwin moved his hand from the chair to my shoulder, but all I could feel was my blood hammering through my temples. “I don’t understand,” I stammered.

“I think you understand perfectly well,” the Abbot said. “If you want to revisit this discussion in three years, I will be willing to hear your counter-arguments at that time. Until then, you will make do serving the abbey however Brother Alwin sees fit.”

Brother Alwin, it turns out, saw fit to put me on errand duty. At first I was excited: the first month, he taught me to make ink, to grind pigment, to create color from nothing. It reminded me of the charms my mother taught me as a child, but I had learnt my lesson already, and wouldn’t make the same mistake twice. I kept my mouth shut and nodded along.

The next month, I was tasked with creating the inks and pigments myself. The month after that the job of bartering for the materials in the market was added to my docket. The following month I was told to go into the forest to forage for the



ingredients I couldn't find in the keep. More and more tasks were piled on and I had nothing, I realized, to show for it. I was no closer to literacy. I was no closer to becoming a scribe. I was certainly no closer to becoming an illuminator.

I began to teach myself to read and write behind closed doors, stealing snippets of advice from passing monks as they went about their day. When Alwin climbed the spiral stairs to the top of the scriptorium to do his work, I was always right behind him, carrying his inks. He thought that he kept me busy enough that I wouldn't be a bother, but I managed to observe his technique and copy it down in my room later, using pieces of chalk and sheets of slate that I imagined were quill and parchment. With time, I learned how to steal ink and paper when Alwin wasn't looking and hide it under my mattress to practice with later.

My path towards illumination was sealed off the day my third year of apprenticeship came to a close. I tried to meet with the Abbot, but he told me he had heard enough from Brother Alwin already, and that I would remain his apprentice indefinitely. It seems the scribe found my help too invaluable to give me away to monkhood.

I crumple up the iris in my hand and let it fall back into the river, watching as the water ripples outwards, each circle pushing in perfect sequence towards the bank. The iris is snatched up by a current and pulled downstream, vanishing around a bend. Its path is clear. It has only one direction to follow. Like the currents of fate, the river carries the iris without care or worry, free of obstruction.

And all of a sudden, I see my path ahead of me, and here is what I do: scramble across the rocks in the river. I slip again, fall, soak the hem of my robe, and stumble to the bank. I find myself sprinting back towards the keep, tearing a sleeve on a hawthorn bush and nearly blinding myself with a tree branch.

I jump over the shepherd's fence, push a sheep out of the way, ignore the shouting from Eadwald's hut, and hope it's not directed towards me. Any other day I would stop to talk with the companionable shepherd—no longer as jovial since his older brother Saewine's accidental fall when driving their sheep to the cliffside pasture.

But today, I've decided, is different. I sprint through the village and past the keep's walls, watching the market stalls I've come to know so well fade into a blur. As I reach the abbey, I hear the bells above me proclaim a time for prayer, and I feel a grin spread across my lips. The scriptorium will be empty. I see my fate align as I take the back hallway towards my room. I lift up my mattress and grab the cache of parchment I hid there.

I leave my room and reach the spiral staircase I've climbed so many times, always in the rear, never on my own. Today, I've decided, is different. The scriptorium is mine and mine alone.

I shut the heavy door behind me and lock it from the inside, dragging a chair across the floor and propping it up underneath the door handle. Then I sit down, spread out my parchment, grab a handful of bottles off the shelf, and begin to bring light to the page.

The candles in the room fade into the background as I work, and even the sunlight streaming in from the window pales in comparison to the splendor I work upon the manuscript. I have been training myself for this day for years. When *wyrd* itself guides my hand, nothing can stop me.

Within the hour, the parchment laid out before me is wrought in ceruse and carmine, cinnabar and cerulean. But the colors are not what matter most. It is the words that ring out in my mind so clearly, and the tale I tell that moves my heart even as I write it. A man, lost at sea, separate from his people, never to return, stranded from all he knew. He can still picture in his mind's eye what he seeks, but knows in his heart of hearts it will never be his. Before today, I would have said that Seafarer was myself. Now I know that if I am indeed at sea, I am there of my own accord, an explorer seeking new land and light.

A bang on the door interrupts my reverie, but I redouble my efforts even as I hear the Abbot and Brother Alwin shouting outside. They strike the door again, and again, and again. I keep writing, desperate to finish my poem. The hinges crack before I can cross my last thorn, and the Abbot surges into the room, flanked by faceless monks on either side, Alwin in tow.

I stand and turn to meet them halfway, trying to protect my work, fists raised. I feel myself lifted up, arms around my waist, and they drag me towards the open door. The Abbot glares, his eyes all fire and no thought.

And then, with the silence and grace of a barrow-white ghost, Brother Alwin slips behind the Abbot and reaches the writing desk. I see him pick up my manuscript and smile, turning upon me one last look of radiant pity. The paper slips among his robes, and I am carried around the bend and out of sight, snatched up and away by the currents of fate.

## CHAPTER NINE

### **The Eorl's Tale**

Behold before you, the beauty of God's grace. There can be no other as holy as I, lifted from Leprosy, arthritis, anemia, by naught but the blessing of our good Lord. In the lines writ on my teeth, the rotting pus of my visage, my stature, one can see the true beauty of holy life, the beauty of suffering erased—of duty to God and king sustained even through terrible illness. As head of this keep, I lead my people. The walls around you, our fine abbey, I have built all these selflessly in the name of God, and in honor of the noble bloodlines which my only son is heir to.

It was noontime when I heard the cries. The fear I felt I cannot tell. There are noble fears, which I may try to call my own; the fear of a thegn for his peoples when raiders come pillaging. The fear of a father and husband when murderers pound at the gates which hide his family. The fear of a warrior, conquered in battle but felt all the same. I felt these, but a depth behind them betrayed some other terror. The terror felt not for the near end of any life but for the end of a lie. Of a story well spun but woven of yarns which, met with the shears of real cutting truth, cannot hold.

Two thralls entered with my war gear as Alba hurried to bandage the letting hole at my elbow, wipe away the seepings of my abscess. She dabbed at my mottled palm with a poultice of wollwartberries, but there was no time. I hurried to don my chainmail but as I stood up my vision darkened, I staggered into the arms of a thrall. A pungent whiff of mustard brought back my senses. Someone fastened the mail at my back as another placed the helmet upon my head. It sat heavy on my stiff neck, biting at my sores.

The hilt of a sword brings no dread to a warrior, but as my thrall knelt, extending the gleaming wrought handle that I had not touched in nigh a year, what humors were left in me pulsed behind my eyes. I reached out a clawed hand toward the hilt. This blade was forged by Spileman the Smith, master of Weland's work. It

burned my palm to heft the sword. The hand that formerly grasped weapons far heavier than this one could only desperately clutch.

I accepted its weight but as I hefted it with a grunt flesh failed, skin sloughed, weak stubs of fingers could not hold it. To the floor the gilded blade clattered as I raised my hand, shameful and bleeding.

Strangely enough, no panic came. A sword I could not hold, but deception, this was a battle I had fought for years. I set to work, gathered my allies around me: Alba and a few thralls, a worthy group I knew for their close tongues. The thralls are bound by pain of punishment, the healer Alba by a close debt of trust. We drew our arms and began the fight of lies with resolve anew.

After the pillagers had left, the fires reduced to a smolder, there were many who saw the corpses of sea-wolves dragged up toward my great hall, damp with blood. There were many who saw me call my slave to clean the gore from my blade. Only a scant few know that the blood was that of a coward, not of a wolf. Only a few know that my boasts that night were empty as the bleeding-bowl lying in my chamber.

Eorl Godwin was a brave man of good blood. His fathers served loyally before him, earned the right to pass Thegnhood to their sons. Eorl before me, he served well in battle, paid due tribute to our king, who loved him and repaid him well with rings. But as a proud heathen, he was too loud with his disbelief in God. Our Abbot took notice, he was most displeased. He complained to the bishop, but Godwin was too valuable to be disposed of in life; the Abbot made our punishment come about in another way.

My father was the most lowly of thegns. His five hides produced enough for tribute, little more. He served passably but proved little in battle. When the Abbot came to me with a proposition, an escape from a life of managing my father's miserable scrap of land and tired thralls, I accepted.

The magic he worked inspired me. Here was the story. Godwin shared blood with his wife—nothing but one great-grandfather, yet that was enough. The Abbot called incest, claimed I was the nearest unsullied relative, placed the inheritance in my hands. Suddenly my life was a thegn's. I moved to a great hall, grand in scale, with more hides booked to my name than I'd ever dreamt of seeing. I was strong then, fully grown at twenty-five, having survived the sicknesses that killed my mother and the better portion of my siblings. I wielded war gear for my king, killed with honor; he took notice; bravery is easy in a youth with everything to prove. Not so much when everything stands only to be lost.

Basking in the gleam of rings, the good favor of my lord, I cared not that a certain debt came with the privileges of the charter which made me Eorl. Compared with the hard toils of combat, it felt easy to denounce the blaspheming of my predecessor and to invoke holy blessings on my life and soul. Marriage to a woman of Christian family, my late wife Agnes, gave public view to this resolve.

I doubled the Church's share from my shire and built the handsome abbey which stands in my keep, bringing all within Grenceaster closer to God. My new retainers questioned these lavish gestures, my serfs resented their added burden. I cared not. I had faith in God, I assured myself, but more importantly I knew what must be done to keep what I had. How much my good fortune derived from the charts of lineage written down in the Abbot's records.

Sickness started to suck away my faith. Then Agnes died giving birth to our son. I felt inclined to reject this new God who began already to take all He had given me. But of course, I spoke not of it. My earthly obligation to the Abbot was stronger than any metaphysical doubts I might have raised.

Even when the lesions multiplied, when my joints started to ache and swell, my ability to complete the service I owed my king could not afford to shrink, to appear tenuous. Of course the Abbot, ever vigilant, noticed. Platitudes would no longer suffice, results were required. He blessed me often; I redoubled my time in prayer.

The cure thus having been administered, it was up to me to demonstrate the power of faith, to show myself as healed. Through crippling rheum, I stood up straight. With a sunken, scabbing face, I smiled and praised the Lord. I knelt in the chapel built on the backs of my people, trembling twisted hands pressed together before a God I eventually hated, faking health so that I might continue to pay what was due.

Out of fear for my life, in secret I sought another cure—from one I had known since childhood, daughter of the renowned physician Oxa. She had followed in her father's ways of knowledge; her salves already provided relief to many in the village. Yes, I took this step: I asked of Alba, Oxa's daughter, that which the Abbot had forbidden. And well she understood my needs: After the sun had set, or before the village had awakened to begin its day, Alba was there to bind my stricken limbs with amulets, to crumble dried herbs, to speak the old charms over me. Performing magic unspoken of by the men of God. I felt scant relief, but it was just enough; now I could hold on to some shred of hope.

The incursion of raiders stole that hope from me. Neither God nor the Old Ones will deter what *Wyrd* has in store; prolonging this wretched life only ensures that it end in shame. This mask of lies in life is too much to bear. If I will wear it still, it will be in death. I've spoken to retainers of my burial. There are ruins nearby here, built by Giants. I will lie beneath them soon, in a grandeur that befits the blood I claim. That I may rest in death, pretending no more, my honor displayed for eternity, is what I seek.

Only fate can decree whether this account will ever find a reader. On the eve of demise, I expected my secrets to be grave goods. It was an odd turn of fate that leads them to be recorded. The Abbot came to me today with a wayward boy named Hamma, one of his own, brought to be chained in my cellars awaiting punishment. On questioning the boy, I learned that he can write, that he toiled in the scriptorium under the same pious devil who controls my own life. I know not what drives me to tell this

boy my story—spite against my nemesis, a moment of courage, or a challenge thrown in the face of eternal silence.

The decision to betray myself in ink-marks on calfskin, to leave truth visible long after the earth has absorbed my lies forever, feels in a sense unfathomable. Yet once the idea appeared, I seized upon it. I have brought supplies to the young captive scribe, that he may put down my words before fear can hide them. Knowing so much of the world only through a mask, perhaps I seek someone simply to know me. I want my fears laid bare; I want my truth recorded. Wise choice or not, I want the dream I have of an end to all of this to be heard.

HWÆT! Hear it with me; the same cries quicken my pulse. I am afraid, but not as I was. I have planned for this. My loyal servants walk in once more, with war gear to be worn one last time. They help me into it. The pain of heavy gold on fragile skin is lifted as I gaze on my town alight. Armed men make widows, steal this winter's bread. My people will suffer, but I will not share in their hunger. Once again there are raiders close by, near enough in the panic and din. I close my eyes as a thrall raises my sword. The lie lives on.

## CHAPTER TEN

### **The Beekeeper's Tale**

I woke to the early morning sun shining through the cracks around my door. I lay there for a moment, surprised to find myself in my family's hut instead of the abbey, as memory flooded in like sunlight to remind me that my dear brother Bede was now in Heaven. Some people in Grenceaster still hold fast to pagan beliefs, but the Christian promise of a heavenly home for my older brother truly helped to lighten the blow when the news of his sudden death reached me at the abbey and I was released to claim my inheritance.

To be honest, I must confess that I do worry about an unholy force being at play. I was told that my poor brother was attacked by his own bees, that he began to turn red and suffocate after being driven out of the woods by a frenzied swarm. I saw the state of his body after I returned, and I shudder to think of it. I do not remember my father ever being attacked with the viciousness the witness was describing. Yet naturally I am reluctant to connect the bee attack with those disturbing rumors around the abbey about that woman who attends the Eorl.

I forbear to think that a well-respected village healer might be practicing unholy magic. Yet no one knows better than I how our local bees safely and reliably served our community for all those decades under my father's care. I sincerely hope that the abbey's source of wax and the honey for the community's mead is not corrupted, yet never will I shrink from rooting out a source of harm. So I remain vigilant and watch for any signs of evil, whether in connection with Alba the healer or with these small flying creatures of which I have found myself the caretaker.

Steeling my resolve, I stood and donned a thick shirt and gloves. I then exited my hut to face the creatures after which I was named. There was a thriving hive which I had watched over in the previous few days which stood at the edge of the woods, and I planned to collect from it today now that I had finished building a suitable structure for when the bees moved.

Unfortunately, as it involved an ancient spell that pre-dated our community's conversion, I knew this disturbance might also bring out any demonic corruption that could be tainting the bees. But it was important to deliver the honey to the market and the wax to the abbey. Even if I could not expose the corruption that I suspected, it was the least I could do for the good Abbot to provide wax for our Lord's candles. Now *there* was a truly honorable man. I would not disappoint him, especially not after he had been so good to me during my brief time at the abbey.

As I neared the tree with the hive, I stopped walking to briefly inspect the bees. They appeared normal, crawling in and out with the occasional bee flying to or from the tree. Nothing appeared to be amiss, but I still had to push anxiety to the side as I began to approach again. Seeing a long branch on the ground, I picked it up. Holding my breath, I began to prod carefully into the widened hole in the trunk to avoid damaging any of the honeycombs as I stirred up the bees.

As soon as I began disturbing the hive, the creatures proceeded to swarm out to fight their attacker, striking me with a jolt of fear. However, I threw the stick to the side and pulled out my chisel, which I used to begin scraping out the honeycombs from the hive. My heart began to beat faster as bees buzzed angrily against my protective clothing, but I continued until I had finished clearing out the hive's contents into the large clay pot left at the base of the tree.

Just as I had seen my father do since I was young, I picked up a pile of dirt in my hand and threw it up into the air, stepping on it when it landed even as the bees swarmed around me. I quickly pulled out a slip of parchment I recorded the bee charm on after I learned to read and write at the abbey, and began to recite:

"For this charm take earth, throw it upwards with your right hand, step on it with your right foot, and say..." My heart skipped a beat in panic as I realized I hadn't been supposed to say this part, but then I continued: "I take it under foot, I have found it! Lo, earth has power against every kind of being and against mischief and against envy and against the great tongue of a man. And then throw dirt over them..." I stopped to bend down and pick up more dirt as I skipped to what I actually needed to say again, then I threw clods of dirt upon the great swarm: "Sit still, victory-women, sink to the earth! Never away to the wild woods fly. Be thou as mindful of what's good for me as is every man of food and home."

I sighed in relief as I watched the distracted bees frantically trying to settle down and moving toward the structure I had prepared. Oddly, I felt somewhat disappointed that my venture ended thus, without any sort of visibly unholy magic interfering.

I bent down to pick up the pot with the honeycombs, but then I froze as I noticed some leaves with jagged edges lying on the ground in a trail passing the tree. I was no expert, but they looked like the type of thing only a healer would pick, and they just seemed to *exude* an aura of evil. They also happened to lie right next to the tree where my brother was killed by the bees.



At once I knew that I didn't need any other evidence. These signs left no doubt; my brother Bede must have been killed next to the beehive by the Eorl's healer, the only person in the village who knew the secrets of unholy magic from those abominable leaves.

I ran back to my hut to grab another pair of gloves that I could get rid of, and I also took off the heavy shirt I had worn for protection. I needed to bring this momentous news to the Abbot at once. How pleasing it would be to him that my brother's death could be avenged!

I made sure the clay pot was secure in my right arm before I picked up three of the leaves gingerly with my left glove. I frowned. Were the leaves *really* picked and left in a trail? I considered for a moment whether I was jumping to conclusions, but then I dismissed the thought. *Wyrd* had led me to this evidence, and from what I had heard about the weak-minded Eorl from the reputable Abbot, I wouldn't trust the leper's judgment in healers very far. I jumped up and ran towards the abbey as fast as I could.

When I finally arrived at the great stone entrance, I stopped the first monk I saw.

"Do you know where the Abbot is?" I asked urgently. "I have a mission of the utmost importance." I waved my left hand to show him my prize.

"He should be heading to prayer by now," the monk said, wrinkling his nose at the sight of my fistful of muddy leaves. "It really can't be that essential, can—"

"Thank you, brother," I said, interrupting and rushing past him. I ran through the hall towards the chapel, and I managed to catch the tall Abbot as he was about to enter.

"Ah, Beo!" his voiced boomed out. "It is good to see you visiting again so soon! I see you have brought a fresh supply of your excellent candle wax." It was this sort of reception that always told me I was one of his favorites, and I had to force myself to refocus on the task at hand.

"I have a pressing matter to bring to your attention." I showed him the leaves from my left hand. "I found these lying in a trail next to the tree where my brother Bede suffered his most cruel death." I held the leaves out in my open palm, letting him look.

"Yes, yes." The Abbot's face turned solemn. "I remember very well the tragedy that took you away from us. Percival's death was most unfortunate. What is the business about these leaves?" I paused for a second, slightly confused why he was confusing my brother's name with that of a different monk who had died recently, but I decided to put the thought aside.

“I believe they were used for unholy magic by the Eorl’s healer to kill my brother *Bede*,” I said in a rush, attempting to emphasize the correct name without detracting from my point. Surely the Abbot cared enough to remember my family?

“My child,” the Abbot frowned, “these leaves have a medicinal...” He broke off, and his eyes widened slowly in full consideration of what I was saying. I felt elated, knowing that he was now recognizing the special bond between us. “Beo, you have raised a serious claim. This plant can indeed be used for dark purposes. I must go deliberate upon how best to approach the removal of this *witch* who has infiltrated our midst and corrupted the Eorl. I am sorry that we did not uncover her meddling in time to save Percival. Go now, take your honey and wax to Brother Frederick. We will buy them from you even without them prepared yet, because your rush is completely understandable in this dire circumstance.”

I winced at the fresh misuse of my brother’s name, but quickly forgave it after hearing that I would be able to sell both the honey and the wax at once to the abbey without going through the cumbersome task of their separation that I had neglected in my haste. The Abbot started to walk off briskly.

“But what of the leaves? What are they called?” I shouted after him.

“That does not matter,” the Abbot turned back and spoke sharply, surprising me with his curt tone. “All that matters is that you dispose of those vile leaves immediately. Thank you for your time, but I must go. This is very grave news, very grave.” He continued walking off briskly. Once he was out of sight, for just a moment I thought I heard him whistling cheerfully to himself, but I quickly shrugged off the notion. The Abbot had been in visible distress, and he was an honorable man, so obviously he wouldn’t lie or try to hide anything from me. The healer had to be culpable, as these leaves were certainly unholy.

I hurried to where I knew Brother Frederick would be by the stores and stumbled up to him with my clay pot. The elderly monk turned and raised an eyebrow at me upon seeing the unrefined honeycombs.

“You’re here early in the day. Your father never arrived until late morning. However, I would say that I would rather have you later with the wax and honey already separated beforehand. We don’t mind taking the honey, but it might be more convenient for you to sell that outside of the abbey sometimes as well.”

I opened my mouth to respond, but stopped myself upon realizing he was just well-intentioned and trying to help me get used to beekeeping on my own, as my father had to do for a long time. “I’m sorry about *Bede*, you know,” he added. I was glad that he remembered my brother’s name, at least.

“Thank you,” I said in awe as he put a hefty bag of coins on a table for me. Frederick motioned for me to hand him the pot, and I tried to do so with just my one arm that wasn’t holding the leaves.

At that point, events happened in a blur. I remember a bee flying out of the pot as it was jostled around. Brother Frederick saved the honeycomb pot, but I panicked and swatted at the buzzing bee. I tripped and my face fell onto the leaves I had just dropped, and the bee stung me on my arm. I was sure I was going to die like my brother, suffocating and turning red, but I just ended up hitting my head somehow and briefly lost consciousness.

Looking back after a few days, perfectly healthy, I have started to wonder if I overreacted a little too much to some of that day's events. It wounds my pride to consider it, but perhaps I should go and warn the Abbot that he may have taken me too seriously with my talk of evil and patterns detected in fallen leaves.

My skull is sore, but my mind is buzzing with worry for any undue anxiety I may have caused the Abbot in my flurry of zeal. However, I am naught but a humble beekeeper, and I suppose not too much harm could have been done in these few days. The Abbot is pious, and surely will recognize right from wrong.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### **The Eorl's Son's Tale**

Up on rocky mount I see the great joy and calamity of my searching heart. The sun meekly immured in a mass of grey, a light of hazy, strange significance rests upon the spiraling crags. I stand in green field, where the barrows of old were placed and ancestors laid their heads in rest. I think of youth and elder days: palsied by the faint joy these thoughts seem to bring, vague halls real only in fantasy.

I spent all my childhood in the abbey, playing among the cold walls. My father the Eorl sent me there for my education after the death of my mother Agnes. I have learned humility from saints and humanity from skeletons. The Abbot, with early and close connections to my father, is a figure of harsh countenance, unshaken in faith. My childhood was spent grieving the continued sickness of my father, mourning my fate, until...I found God in the abbey, unexpectedly, my true Father. For this life must be spent in the cold, I realized, must be spent in dark rooms and dusty cells; joy truly comes in the morning, when life is done.

My eye is caught by a fallen tree sheening dully. Today I am sent to gather firewood, simple work I accept gladly. Reminding me of my kin, the Abbot would have it otherwise, would have me act to my "station," as though by birth I was marked. Steeply below, the village acts. The noiseless, ceaseless river holds the same relationship with the shore and harbor as little blots of boats are continuously let go, as though sacrificed to fate.

In the center of the village, like a pulsing heart, lies the market: I descry a man with a bird perched on his arm, and turn my head. The shapes loom still behind me, I'm struck by the gradations in their grey masks, slightly unnerved by their presence, indomitable. The pale abbey, then, on its high mount seems to sternly remonstrate me. I look down.

My very eldest kin live in these hills, regal and indolent. I picture the mountainous halls of lineage. I see my father's hall. Vast under a curved roof, and

earthy brown in hue, a fine hall. And man, what kind of house is he? The well-guarded man, is he still found by fate? Are his embellishments a mere design? And the deep brown of the earth, is it the trapping of an antechamber or the covering of a great tree or hall? The man who flings his gates wide open, does he look out through a window or into a mirror? The Church defies all questions, permits no doubt: it is austere and resolute.

I look lower again, and see the mausoleum attached, ornate, wherein skeletons reside, restless and cold. I think, now, of skeletons still, of death cloaked over life, given agency, the body a tomb. I wonder, in the abbey above, how much passion and goodwill is slain on the pallid altar of the self. How much of living imitates the dead?

One must, I realize, dismiss these foolish fancies, dregs of our heathen heritage. I look at the bright sky and consider the colorful and wonderful books in the scriptorium, tantalizing, with the admirable saints. I think of the little revelations these figures inspire, virtue through emulation. The good must be in the mind, and these figures, like watchtowers glowing above the town, produce it.

I am going downhill, the burden of firewood secure, directing my steps, soundly, to the tallest point of view. The clusters of houses, grey, are dolorous in the light. My accustomed feet tread and tread the well-worn but secondary path, while the market din is slightly suffused but shut out. The wood, choppy and imperfect, grates my hands. Smoke distracts me, somewhere burning: I look down, to my right is a warmth. A court greets my searching sight, there. Sequestered yet plain, enclosed by trees and a house.

I walk. An altar of sorts nestled therein; I drop the mess of twigs. Burning faintly, not a Christian light. A moment of forceful revulsion binds me and then it's insignificant. A rosy mass of bristles, lain over light grey stone, a crown of wood lit above. I see, now, the scene of desperate revelry in the furtive theatre of my mind. The faith. The connection, loyalty. They're like warriors, sinking in unanimity and stolid terror. I think, then, of warriors, foreign men, incursions, the threat.

The news is grim, every day more dark, truly so. The limbs of life fear the axe, the separation, the pain. And then I see also the warmth, warmth in this darkness. I see a faith in darkness. The community as a sea.

I turn. Head down, rooted. I walk, moderate, and glide. Twigs, wood, in hand, I'm out and among the threatening huts. Drawn, angling toward the mount. Before me stands the hill, I try to focus on its center, eyes seeming to tread in infinite view. I'm conscious of the river murmuring as I am directed to the second of two paths carved into the jutting rock.

The mausoleum, full of elite bodies, stands at the end of the path, simply pious. How different this humility, the muted colors and somber curtains: there's nothing of decadence here. Removed from the ground of the Earth, it's prostrate only to Heaven. And I am to light this hollow space: a fire shining on the bones of the dead. How different, surely, from the rampant light of feasting. I pass through the morning and

insinuate my body through the reaching yellow curtain. Clandestine voices strike my ear as fire quickly consumes the bough.

The stuffy space is partitioned by a stoic wall, whereon fading figures painted in plaster age to dust. I recognize instantly the shadow of the Abbot, speaking to an unknown voice in the dark. Whom is he speaking to, down here in hidden spaces? His tone of voice, intense, persuasive, justifying. Among the dead, he begins to speak new things. His hardness I knew always, the whetstone of my religious conviction, but not this urging, scheming self.

He speaks of my father, speech pacing the rocky slopes of his anger, with cold introspection always as he travels these wanted paths. He speaks of power and authority, using words like “abuse” and “impious.” My father, he claims, is a God-cursed and ineffectual ruler, one who has turned away his face from the true Faith ever since losing the steady hand of his Christian bride.

The Abbot now lowers his tone and speaks with intent, shadow diminishing as he draws closer to his listener. Closer to the truth, closer to his secret meaning, closer to his own soul he speaks. To follow this heathen trajectory is to condemn the town to ruin and evil--the Eorl’s professed Christian faith has dwindled to mere pretense, the Abbot insists in a whisper: his sympathies are clear to his idolatrous people.

He tells this hidden man fervently his frustration, and I wonder where his morning walk has led him. The village houses a fell demon, the Abbot now murmurs, as though this disclosure follows inevitably from the subject of my father.

She corrupts the Eorl with heathen practices, his voice goes on, poisonous spells and potent charms. She has lived among us all her life. But this healer is not loved by all, as her father was; some speak already against her—an honest beekeeper, the most pious monks—these rumors of witchcraft can be fed. If those dark forces are driven out . . . if her presence was removed . . . then buoyed by consistent prayer and devotion our sickly lord may finally regain his strength—or, if such be God’s will, at least may perish in the light of holiness.

I start to see them in their youth, scenes from a past buried, before my time. I see my father, the Eorl, as a boy eldest and with kindness blest—the way he surely shone above the Abbot, even while depending on him for his rise. How the Abbot then became steeled, pious and silent, taken to brooding in malignant religious ascendancy. I can see the cold scales of the Abbot’s mind, the weight of his asceticism balancing a threat of evil, justifying his deeds.

The peal of the prayer bell, both sordid and unattainable, startles a raven to hurried flight, arching above the world. Quietly leaving the space, I march up the hill to the complex. Intricacies of blocky design stand rooted on the hill, while reaching white spire yearns for sky, on earth as it is in heaven. Our daily nourishment awaits, the word and song of the lord: temptation bids me go as usual. I take little notice of the surroundings so familiar. We will sing and recite until we are delivered to our tasks. The lector stands, reads psalms. We wait. We chant antiphons. Lector sings again.

The Abbot enters soundlessly. The chants continue, the song unchanged, not waxing but indistinguishable. His coldness no longer fills me with penitence but reproaches me, fills me with a strange grief, shackling my mind. The pain of my father's infirmity pours forth into my awareness, casting a burden into my mind. In this rocky stronghold I feel defenseless.

My mother passed at the time of my birth, while my father, already taken ill and now doubly sorrowful, was left to decay. She was the daughter of a family of converts, Agnes; it was she who brought my father to Christ. Yet she departed so young. He spoke to me of her always with reverence, he who might have commanded scores with a word. So he sent me here for my education, hoping that I might grow close to his beloved Agnes, the woman I've never known.

The chanting syncopates, catches my attention. I move my head. Stopping now, bodies file out, absolved for another day. The figure of the Abbot draws near, and I fight an impulse to kneel, to ask forgiveness, although I know not what for. In his look is a humble condescension, always as the noble am I treated by him.

He implores me, as is his wont, to adopt a restful activity this day: to devote myself to leisurely contemplation and leave the toils of labor to others. The implication stirs me less today, I feel no desire now to strive in pain, and I accept this offer of difference. I am moved to a cell adjoining the body of the hall, relegated to a pale-walled room. The humility of the room angers me, its unassuming plainness.

My father's patronage has bought me this cloistered existence; instead of feasting in the great hall I starve here in isolation. The narrow view from this high window affords me a glance of the walls encircling the keep, stark and confining. I think beyond them and am swept away by a current of thought. I think of the Abbot, building towers in the garish light of his mind, and of the poor healer in the village below, who will be dragged off to a violent fate as a result of the Abbot's bitterness. His hate, enthroned, rules a vast empire of blocky walls.

What am I to do with this knowledge? By intent alone it is condemning. To reveal what I heard to my father and his army might prevent the deed and hold the Abbot accountable. But to reveal the Abbot's intention to my father would weaken the Church, perhaps even wholly destroy it, turning the eyes of the public toward a new light—or an old one.

Springing from my stupor, I stride from the room, leaving the abbey and exiting the walls of the complex. I gaze across the expanse of land, feeling the warmth of the day, and imagine myself, for a moment, as one of those ancient heroes. I move away from the slope and enter the woods east of the abbey. I envision my father's band of warriors, bolstered by the news of this treachery, swarming the magnificent hills: resplendent with gold and finery in the morning air.

With the Abbot driven into exile, the abbey crumbles into memory. Here is my father the Eorl, looking hale and proud, with hand on jeweled hilt. The sounds of feasting and laughter echo through the hall of my mind.

And yet, I look down at a tiny noise to see the shattered fragments of a small egg under my heel, what would have been a bird now bound in death. The hall in my mind explodes in mirth. Drink is served, and overflows. Seeing the fear in the hall-guests' eyes, I know my father's fate: I know what befell the weak leaders of old. Like idols they were, and they were torn down, sacrificed, slaughtered in the name of Woden. Inventing an enemy to assuage their unease, they created monsters of themselves. Fear, I realize, is illogical: it follows not the boundaries of possibility.

A witch in the public eye, a witch in their hearts, is a witch in all but deed. And what right have I to steal their hope? The abbey shields them, tells them how to recognize good and attack evil. Do I seek to define it otherwise? What would my mother have had me do? Couched among the wood, I see the abbey stand proud above the mere house of men, my father's dwelling.

Who am I to imagine I could be a hero, wield a battle-sword? I tread back up the hill to the gates above. The sun gleams dully through the trees as I move to join the penitent once more.



## CHAPTER TWELVE

### **The Hand of Fate**

Shovels scrape against my gravel roof; I hear faint voices from above. I have been alone for so long I have almost forgotten how beautiful the spoken word can be. My last memories were harsher, louder; these new, young-looking people seem more gentle. They're coming closer: closer to uncovering my home, closer to uncovering my story. The world above me is lifted; I see the sunlight and feel its warmth deep within my bones. It's nicer than I remember. A man's face appears and for a moment I panic, but the face belongs to someone else, not the enemy I learned to fear.

My name is Alba, daughter of Oxa. My bones have lain under this earth for centuries and you are the first living souls I have encountered since that fateful day. I lived a good life. I did my duties well. My fate was cruel.

It was a day that started like any other. I woke before the sun as I had many a time before, ready to face the trials of the new light. I stoked the fire in the hearth and gathered all the herbs and treatments I might need throughout the day. The son of the carpenter Eadmund was born the night before: feet first... a shame. It was a rough delivery, and mother and baby barely made it through. I made my way to that house first. If he survived the night he would be a tough lad, but fate was not kind to the child. I heard the wailing before I even entered, saw the mother Lora covered in furs, weak from grief and lack of blood. I gave her some henbane for under the tongue; it should help her rest; it'd be a shame if she died too.

That's the third child she's lost: one was a mere tot when a wolf carried it off outside the walls, the other killed by raiders many years ago. He lived for three horrid nights, his leg cut to the long bone, a door open to the devils. I tried to save him, but it wasn't enough. It was winter and I only had so much stored, only had so much to spend on one person. Infection took hold in spite of me. That's the way it was then. I hoped her next child would have greater fortune.

After watching Lora nod off, I walked through the middle of town on my way outside the walls. The moon would be full tonight; collecting herbs then meant their powers would be strongest. It was a clear day and the market was full with women weaving in the center. I stopped to talk awhile; I remembered when I was young playing with them outside the keep. I always thought I'd grow up and work alongside them, but our fates were not aligned. When my father Oxa died, he had no sons so it was my fate to continue treating the people of Grenceaster. That's why I lived alone in my father's hut. I used to long for more, but given my fate, I'm grateful I was not granted a family.

One of the women's sons had developed a bone-rattle overnight; I promised to tend to him. As I entered the dimly lit home I could hear the rasping air as the boy took each breath. He must have spent too many day-hours surrounded by the dampness of these earthen floors. I instructed a passing child to build up the hearthfire and to send for the shepherd. Soon the smell of boiling milk filled the air. I stirred a handful of bitter moss into the mixture and made the sickly lad drink deeply. I made a note to collect some honey from young Beo at market in case the rattle persisted past the next day's sleeping sun.

Commotion near the abbey drew my attention. I forced my way through a gathering crowd. A young man, strong and healthy mere hours before, now laid nearly lifeless on an inner bench. I heard a bone-rattle within him too, but different than the boy before. That was a rattle of dampness, this was a rattle of the buzzing air. Without breath one cannot live and I watched as his face turned from pale to bruised. My father's voice echoed in my ears: *Force open the jaws! Open the throat!* His life candle extinguished even as I tried to help him draw air. His fate seemed sealed, but I, Alba, had challenged death before! His eyes didn't even flicker with the strong scent of wild mustard held under his nose. A parcel of bitter herbs under the tongue failed to awaken him. The young man's battle spirit had been destroyed. My fist came down in frustration, hit his bone cage, forcing a final breath from his mouth. I heard gasps around the room but no more exited through the man's lips. I couldn't save him.

As I slowly gathered up my remedies, at the edge of the crowd I saw the Abbot standing among a group of wide-eyed monks. His head was bent as he spoke quietly to the man beside him. Straightening himself, he looked briefly in my direction as if he didn't see me, then left without a word. His face seemed twisted in thought and his eyes gleamed, though I could see no tears to mourn that recent death. I didn't ponder the meaning of his odd expression. Not long afterward I would come to know that by that time, the Abbot's mind was working against my life.

The sun was heading downward as I hurried through the rest of the keep, passed through the walls, moved through the open grasses, and entered the cover of the forest. And the moon rose high, watching as I gathered mosses and leaves. I even found brooklime near a small bog. The supply would help prevent the sickness of the stomach that claims so many weaning children each year. My fortune seemed great, my spirit calm and well... it did not last.

That night I was awoken suddenly while the stars were still bright. Torches burned my tired eyes and angry shouts attacked my ears, though I could not make out right away the words they chanted. My eyes met with the Abbot's for the second time within a span of hours. His expressionless face glowed in the flickering light of the flames as the mob surged around me. *Witch, kill the witch:* It had sounded at first a mere whisper, no more than buzzing murmur, until more voices joined, and the volume grew into a roar.

Neighbors turned to strangers, and I felt my body forced onward, farther from my home. My shoulder bumped past my fence into the open space beyond. I heard the dried wood and grasses of my hut ignite. The smell of burning sage failed to banish the evil surrounding me. My wails and pleas of "No!" and "Stop!" blended with the noise of the crowd, smoke veiling any pinpoints of light in the night sky.

Fear-filled accusations dragged my bone-house to the banks of a surging river. Among the roar I heard isolated words and fragments—*robbed Ælfgar of life's breath, the whole town saw it!—spells, evil darkness live in her!—Eadmund's son, too, the third they've lost—unleashed a curse of bees—even the Eorl, poisoned by heathen charms—yes, plotting to betray the Eorl himself!—*

Now the Abbot came forward to address the seething crowd of townspeople I've known since I was young. In deference to his height and rank, they paused and listened.

Twisting in their grasp to see his face, I still hoped he could talk sense into these people, could make them see the good I do. The Abbot knew better than anyone that my care alone had kept the Eorl alive, years beyond the span expected for his malady. But as the tall man spoke, I felt my fate drop out of me as if he had let fall a heavy stone. I heard his voice, oddly high in pitch, weaving together the very threads of evil they all, that all of them were trying to make out in me, or to force into me, under the shadows that covered the full moon:

*My people! Look upon this woman. Just this night her hands forced a cooling corpse to breathe! My own eyes saw the forsaken act. Witchcraft! This woman has been corrupting us since her father Oxa was buried ten winters ago. How many of us have trusted this witch with our children? How many of our children's lives have been stolen by the practices of this she-devil? How many unknowingly damned by her hand? You are right! We need to cleanse this land of this evil! Cast this witch into the rapids! Watch her filth-filled body float out to sea!*

As he rallied them the crowd surged to drag me forward once again, more deaf than ever to my desperate cries. I was no witch! No magic in my herbs and salves! That man he spoke of was already dead! His last breath had been trapped beneath his swollen throat and my hand simply released it from his still lips!

My hands were forced behind me and tied with rough ropes. I saw Lora, wife of Eadmund watching nearby, supported by a neighbor, pale with shock; even she seemed convinced by the Abbot's words. I wanted to yell out to her, so someone

besides myself could see the lies, the wrongness of it all, but the world closed in around me. The stars spun. The swarm of angry voices faded, replaced by the shock of bone-chilling roaring waters. Air turned to liquid; I couldn't breathe.

My body sank below the surface before being battered against the rocks below. Fingers of water pulled me deeper. I longed for air. I started to rise. The weight of the water was lessening. I could see a rippling image of the full moon through the dark waves. Just before the river released me to the open air, a hidden log grasped my skirts. My head was pulled downward and away from the precious night sky. My own bone-cage threatened to burst, to release my final breath from my body. My tied hands could not free myself. I never did taste the star-filled air again.

I have remained tied to that tree for ages. In the times after my worldly life I watched the keep burn, the people killed, the territory traded and conquered, and the landscape altered. I have watched empires rise and fall, cultures develop and then fade into obscurity. My soul has been tormented, unable to practice healing as I watch generations live and suffer and die over and over. The river has long dried and my bones have long lain buried beneath layers of dirt and ruin.

But now I am freed. You have uncovered my grave, have seen who I am, and released me from my suffering. A thousand years after my death... I can rest.

## AFTERWORD

### **The Professor's Tale**

This book has a history of its own. Twelve first-year students and I spent the semester of fall 2019 reading modern translations of Old English poetry: *Beowulf*, *Judith*, the Exeter Book riddles, “The Battle of Maldon,” dream-visions, gnomic verses, and moody elegies. We puzzled over facing-page translations, pondered the contending worldviews of Christianity and Paganism, and studied what archaeologists have learned about daily life in England from 650-1000 CE.

When I distributed guidelines for the final assignment, there was no expectation that these projects would become anything more than a personal learning experience for each student and another stack of papers for me to grade.

Half-research project, half fiction-writing exercise, the final assignment for Tutorial consisted of a “creative Anglo-Saxon story” to be narrated from the first-person viewpoint of a character in England prior to the Norman Conquest of 1066.

I said to the students, “You will develop a character who could have lived during the time-period and places where Old English poetry was [originally] written and performed. Your story will recount a significant event in that character’s life.”

Before composing their story, students were assigned to conduct library research into their chosen character’s daily life, routines, and likely predicaments: “Your story should show the character confronting a problem, and end with the resolution of that problem. A resolution is not necessarily a clever trick or a ‘happy ending,’ although these prospects are not ruled out. Any set of events that bring an outcome to the problem will do.”

Several times in class, I asked how their projects were going. Students revealed the emerging identities of their protagonists—a renegade girl discovering paradoxical freedom in convent life, a maimed warrior disillusioned by battle, a naïve beekeeper, a traditional healer viewed with suspicions of witchcraft by the converted Christians in her community, a forest-born shipbuilder, a pagan boy who yearns to create

illuminated manuscripts, a dissolute falconer, a disfigured Eorl chained by the dark secret behind his power.

As conversation circled the room, my students spontaneously began to identify possible connections among the characters they were creating. The sick Eorl could be treated by the medicinal healer; the ship-maker in need of a brawny apprentice might approach the battle-scarred warrior. These people would learn each other's secrets, cross paths while going about their business, call in old debts and obligations, even plot against one another. So in our minds the fictional village of Grenceaster took shape, with its imposing abbey, the mead hall as a gathering place for community, the smoke-filled huts, the walled keep with a bustling marketplace at its center.

By the time we gathered in December to hear everyone's stories, an arc of narrative had emerged as well. Not everyone's story fit into the central plot, so a few of the stories intersect with the rest only in glancing ways. But—inspired in part by the creation of *The Grinnell Beowulf* several years earlier—we resolved to see this collection come together as a book, with everyone's work included. As tutorial professor, once the class ended I took up the task of setting the stories in order and working through the compiled manuscript with some light editing to reinforce connections and echoes among the stories.

*The Fortunes of Grenceaster* is a work of historical fiction. While informed and inspired by historical sources—many of which can be found in the bibliography section at the end—the village of Grenceaster (whose name, ending in the suffix “-ceaster” or town, was chosen by the class for its echoes of “Grendel” and “Grinnell”) never existed outside our imaginations. Historical anomalies and inaccuracies abound, yet the texture and flavor of this world is meant to evoke the emotional, physical, and spiritual experiences of those not unlike us: “people who lived during the time-period and places where Old English poetry was written and performed.”

Paula V. Smith  
Grinnell, Iowa  
July 2021

## INDEX OF AUTHORS

**Grinnell College Fall 2019**

**Tutorial: Old English Re-Imagined**

Noah Joseph, “The Smith’s Tale”

Chris Dickinson, “The Warrior’s Tale”

William Sweek, “The Shipbuilder’s Tale”

Nadia Langley, “Recollections of an Abbess”

Anonymous, “The Falconer’s Tale”

Aaron Yost, “The Shepherd’s Tale”

Harper Crosson, “A Long-Kept Letter”

David Gales, “The Scribe’s Tale”

Max Pochan, “The Eorl’s Tale”

David Rothfusz, “The Beekeeper’s Tale”

Keegan Donovan, “The Eorl’s Son’s Tale”

Mary Powers, “The Hand of Fate”

## WORKS CITED

### **Annotated Bibliographies for Each Story**

#### **Chapter One: The Smith's Tale (N. Joseph)**

Davidson, H. R. Ellis. *The Sword In Anglo-Saxon England*. Boydell Press, 1962.

Davidson's work is a compilation of information on the details which had been found on the manufacturing techniques and usage of swords in Anglo-Saxon England and nearby lands of the period, as well as their significance in Anglo-Saxon literature and society. The book contains detailed information on metallurgical techniques which were used by early Medieval Northern European blacksmiths. It also elaborates upon the usage of kennings for swords and weapons in epics of the period such as "Beowulf," which was especially pertinent for my project.

Hyer, Maren Clegg et al. *The Material Culture Of Daily Living In The Anglo-Saxon World*. University Of Exeter Press, 2011, pp. 185-230.

This book provides helpful information on the economics of metalsmiths in the Anglo-Saxon world, in particular their materials, customers, and the location and construction of their forges. It examines primarily archeological evidence to draw its conclusions, although it references some Anglo-Saxon poetry and historical accounts to strengthen its conclusions.

Karkov, Catherine E. *The Archaeology Of Anglo-Saxon England: Basic Readings*. 7th ed., Garland Publishing Inc., 1999.

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#### **Chapter Two: The Warrior's Tale (C. Dickinson)**

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“Conclusion: Anglo-Saxons at the Table.” *Food, Eating and Identity in Early Medieval England*, by Allen J. Frantzen, NED - New edition ed., Boydell and Brewer, 2014, pp. 246–258. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt4cq73v.17](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt4cq73v.17).

Härke, Heinrich. “‘Warrior Graves’? The Background of the Anglo-Saxon Weapon Burial Rite.” *Past & Present*, no. 126, 1990, pp. 22–43. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/650808](http://www.jstor.org/stable/650808).

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Williams, Thomas J. T. “The Place of Slaughter: Exploring the West Saxon Battlescape.” *Danes in Wessex: The Scandinavian Impact on Southern England, c. 800–c. 1100*, edited by Ryan Lavelle and Simon Roffey, Oxbow Books, Oxford; Philadelphia, 2016, pp. 35–55. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvhldprb.10](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvhldprb.10).

This source provided useful information regarding the environment in which battles would have taken place. It also taught me about the Anglo-Saxon mentality surrounding battling and war as well.

Williams, Thomas J. T., and Michael D. J. Bintley, editors. “‘For the Sake of Bravado in the Wilderness’: Confronting the Bestial in Anglo-Saxon Warfare.” *Representing Beasts in Early Medieval England and Scandinavia*, NED - New edition ed., Boydell and Brewer, 2015, pp. 176–204. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt13wzt8f.15](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt13wzt8f.15).

This source was incredibly useful and provided a lot of information surrounding how exactly a battle would have played out and what it would look like. Also, it helped me picture the warriors themselves and better describe their attire and style of fighting.

### **Chapter Three: The Shipbuilder’s Tale (W. Sweek)**

Gorski, Richard, *Roles of the Sea in Medieval England*, Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK; Rochester, NY, USA: Boydell and Brewer, 15 March 2012

This source provided me with a great deal of information on the role the sea played in medieval England. It helped me to build a picture of the way ships were used and intended to be used, which then gave me a much, much better sense of what a shipbuilder’s existence might revolve around. While it covers a period just ahead of ours in English history, this book helped me build a general knowledge base and point me to the kinds of things it might make sense to look further into during my research, as well as what might not be as pertinent to my topic.

Steane, John, *The Archaeology of Medieval England and Wales*, Florence: Routledge, 2014

This source was a great place to start in terms of visualizing the places and the ways that the people of old England lived. It had a great deal of information on the tells used today to identify Anglo-Saxon archaeology, and most importantly for me, a great number of diagrams and

schematics of archaeological digs. When writing the parts of the story about the keep, the village, the surrounding buildings, and the hovel in which the shipbuilder actually lives, I drew a great deal upon my findings in this source, as it painted a beautiful picture of the physical landscape I was turning into a virtual one in my story.

Balard, Michel and Buchet, Christian, *The Sea in History -- The Medieval World*, Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK; Rochester, NY, USA, Boydell and Brewer, 17 February 2017

This source, similar to the first source I looked at, was a good way of providing me with less targeted, more general information about the role of the sea and the purpose of ships and shipbuilders. This source talked a great deal about the political and diplomatic importance of the sea, and the way that ships and proto-navies were used to leverage politics and international disputes. However, while this was useful in building a picture of the formation of navies, it focused much more heavily on the big picture, and I used it more to develop a general sense of the purpose of ships than the details of the ships themselves.

Keynes, Simon, Love, Rosalind, *Anglo-Saxon England*, Cambridge, Cambridge, UK, (volume 38), December 2009

This source was one of several volumes of the Anglo-Saxon England encyclopedia I read, and two that I ended up using and citing, and they proved extremely useful and specific in the kind of information they provided. This first entry, in volume 38, contains an incredibly detailed analysis of an incomplete poem about a ship given to King Edward the Confessor by Earl Godwine of Wessex as a gift. The poem gives us a great deal of useful information, such as the size and number of oars on the ship, and the number of men needed to crew and maintain it at sea. This source gave me a much better visual idea of an Anglo-Saxon ship, something much more like the Sutton Hoo burial than a cliched Viking longship. It also told me of a scenario in which a ship was given as a gift by one nobleman to another, giving me the crucial piece of evidence for the idea I had come up with for my story and prompting me to think more about the shipbuilder who must have been contracted to build such a ship for Earl Godwine.

Hewett, C. (1978). Anglo-Saxon carpentry. *Anglo-Saxon England*, 7, 205-229. doi:10.1017/S0263675100002945

This source provided a wealth of information about what we know now about Anglo-Saxon woodworking and stoneworking. The focus of the entry was the discussion of how much the Anglo-Saxons built out of wood and how much they built out of stone. The general conclusion was that while the Anglo-Saxons built a great deal out of stone, they focused mostly on building important buildings such as churches and the fortified dwellings of noblemen out of stone, leaving the majority of people of lesser means to build out of wood (or whatever was available). This source proved incredibly useful in developing a sense of the way people lived in Anglo-Saxon England, and worked especially well when situated alongside the book on Anglo-Saxon archaeology. I used these to try to understand what the world these people lived in looked like and how they were able to make it livable. Additionally, the information this entry provided me about carpentry helped me paint a picture of what it would have been like to actually go through the process of shipbuilding, working with wood and treating it and the kinds of tools that would have been used to put a ship together, which would have been a significant engineering endeavour, one that was of course made quite often but was also no small feat.

## Chapter Four: Recollections of an Abbess (N. Langley)

Cavell, Megan. "Formulaic Friþuwebban : Reexamining Peace-Weaving in the Light of Old English Poetics." *JEGP. Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, University of Illinois Press, July 2015, pp. 355–72, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1706229354/>.

Foot, Sarah. *Veiled Women*. Vol. 1, Ashgate, 2000.

The current Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History at the University of Oxford, Foot holds a special interest in the place of monasteries in the Anglo-Saxon Church. Following the Anglo-Saxon religious woman through five centuries, Foot breaks down the shifts in power throughout England and the church as they relate to Anglo-Saxon women. The chapter titled, "Religious women in England before the First Viking Age" provided in depth descriptions of double monasteries and the powerful role women played in establishing, sponsoring, and leading these institutions. A large portion of this section is dedicated to describing the situations women were in which would prompt them to join a double monastery.

Klein, Stacy S. *Ruling Women: Queenship and Gender in Anglo-Saxon Literature*. University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.

Klein, an associate professor at Rutgers University, focuses her research on the intersection of gender and sexuality studies and Anglo-Saxon literature and culture. By bringing the works of Bede, *Beowulf*, and other Old English texts together, she constructs an Anglo-Saxon female narrative which delves into the politics of the time, social hierarchies, and religious conversion. The section titled, "Crossing Queens, Pleasing Hierarchies" focuses specifically on the role noble women played in connecting warring families and forming significant bonds with the church.

McFadden, Brian. "Sleeping After the Feast: Deathbeds, Marriage Beds, and the Power Structure of Heorot." *Neophilologus*, vol. 84, no. 4, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Oct. 2000, pp. 631–48, doi:10.1023/A:1004720608178.

Ranft, Patricia. *Women and the Religious Life in Premodern Europe*. St. Martin's Press, 1998.

## Chapter Five: The Falconer's Tale

Abbot, Jacob. *King Alfred of England: Makers of History*. Harper & Brothers, 2005, *Project Gutenberg*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16545/16545-h/16545-h.htm> . Accessed 16 December 2019.

Hicks, Carola. "The Birds on the Sutton Hoo Purse." *Anglo-Saxon England*, vol. 15, 1986, pp. 153–165. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/44510812](http://www.jstor.org/stable/44510812) .

Oggins, Robin S. *The Kings and Their Hawks: Falconry in Medieval England*. Yale University Press, 2004. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1nq2wm](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1nq2wm) .

Oggins describes in great detail the origin of falconry in Anglo-Saxon society and what birds would be used. Oggins also describes the differences in how each type of falcon or hawk would have been used by Anglo-Saxons and also the common aspects between them. A couple of manuscripts of laws regarding falconry are also discussed, and also the value of various birds.

Owen-Crocker, Gale R.. "Squawk Talk: Commentary by Birds in the Bayeux Tapestry?" *Anglo-Saxon England*, vol. 34, 2005, pp. 237–254. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/44512364](http://www.jstor.org/stable/44512364).

Wallis, Robert J. "'As the Falcon Her Bells' at Sutton Hoo? Falconry in Early Anglo-Saxon England." *Archaeological Journal*, vol. 174, no. 2, Routledge, July 2017, pp. 409–36, doi:10.1080/00665983.2017.1297153.

Wallis describes the value of many types of falconry birds and laws regarding falconry and considers archeological and artistic evidence for what kinds of birds and equipment would have been used in Anglo-Saxon times for falconry.

## Chapter Six: The Shepherd's Tale (A. Yost)

Chardonens, László Sándor. "Do Anglo-Saxons Dream of Exotic Sheep?" *Representing Beasts in Early Medieval England and Scandinavia*, edited by Michael D. J. Bintley and Thomas J. T. Williams, NED - New edition ed., Boydell and Brewer, 2015, pp. 131–150. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt13wzt8f.13](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt13wzt8f.13).

Crabtree, Pam J. "Sheep, Horses, Swine, and Kine: A Zooarchaeological Perspective on the Anglo-Saxon Settlement of England." *Journal of Field Archaeology*, vol. 16, no. 2, 1989, pp. 205–213. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/529891](http://www.jstor.org/stable/529891).

"Early Anglo-Saxon Finds." *Living with the Flood: Mesolithic to Post-Medieval Archaeological Remains at Mill Lane, Sawston, Cambridgeshire – a Wetland/Dryland Interface*, by Samantha Paul et al., Oxbow Books, Oxford; Philadelphia, 2016, pp. 49–58. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvh1dvf7.13](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvh1dvf7.13).

Ennen, Edith. *The Medieval Woman*. E-book, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.01188>. Accessed 14 Dec 2019.

Exploring Anglo-Saxon Landscapes." *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, by John Blair, Princeton University Press, Princeton; Oxford, 2018, pp. 3–21. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1wq8zg5.7](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1wq8zg5.7).

In the book *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, John Blair attempts to reconstruct Anglo-Saxon landscapes. He examines both the landscape of the world and the landscape of the mind, but of particular importance for my research were chapters one and two which solely focus on the physical world. Blair writes that despite popular belief, "at no stage....did the Anglo-Saxons have to contend with large areas of continuous tree cover" and that the Anglo-Saxon landscape was characterized by "extensive areas of....pasture. (22)" He also explains that an important element of the Anglo-Saxon world was "change over time (9)" with smaller farming communities slowly transforming into nucleated villages.

Blair's book was particularly important for the worldbuilding of my story. The description of the open pastures and moors within the story are based on Blair's explanations of the geography of Anglo-Saxon England. Saewine's village is designed to be a small, relatively isolated farming community that Blair says were common in early Anglo-Saxon England. Saewine's mention of the farming jobs that his father and "others did" was influenced by Blair's statements about the prevalence of these roles. Additionally, Blair makes a brief mention of Anglo-Saxon contact with wolves in one of their settlements which, while relatively unimportant for his argument, informed Saewine's encounter with the wolf within my story.

Lapidge, Michael. "Marriage and Divorce." *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, Oxford; Malden, Mass. Blackwell, 1999.

Korfmann, Manfred. "The Sling as a Weapon." *Scientific American*, vol. 229, no. 4, 1973, pp. 34–46. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/24923218](http://www.jstor.org/stable/24923218).

"Love Poetry." *Anglo-Saxon Verse*, by Graham Holderness, Liverpool University Press, 2000, pp. 82–91. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv5rf3jr.10](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv5rf3jr.10).

Shippey, T. A. *Poems of Wisdom and Learning in Old English*. D.S. Brewer, 1977.

"Wyrð." *Imagining the Anglo-Saxon Past: The Search for Anglo-Saxon Paganism and Anglo-Saxon Trial by Jury*, by Eric Gerald Stanley, Boydell and Brewer, 2000, pp. 85–109. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt81h08.15](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt81h08.15).

In the chapter Wyrð, from the book *Imagining the Anglo-Saxon Past The Search for Anglo-Saxon Paganism and Anglo-Saxon Trial by Jury* Eric Stanley walks readers through the historiography of Anglo-Saxon conceptions of wyrð. He argues that this field has been dominated by one central question: to what extent is wyrð a pagan value? Stanley outlines a scholarly shift from the traditional assumption that wyrð was an intrinsic pagan belief—and that its prevalence in Anglo-Saxon texts is a holdover from Paganism—to the modern view that the importance of wyrð in Pagan belief is overstated and that it is unlikely to be a holdover from earlier Anglo-Saxon worldviews.

Of particular significance for my story, however, was a trend of scholarship that Stanley outlines from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century that drew a connection between this fatalistic mindset and the "remarkable tenderness (96)" often found in Anglo-Saxon works. Known as "the sad light of fatalism," this vein of scholarship suggests that the "pessimistic belief in immutable fate (96)" led to a feeling of life being out of one's control and, by extension, a widespread sense of melancholy. Saewine's view of fate within this story is greatly influenced by this scholarship as he possesses a fatalistic worldview and intentionally struggles with many of the questions that "sad light of fatalism" scholars argue would have weighed heavily on the Anglo-Saxons.

## **Chapter Seven: A Long-Kept Letter (H. Crosson)**

Lucas, Angela M. *Women in the Middle Ages: Religion, Marriage and Letters*. Harvester Press, 1988.

This book discusses the role of Anglo-Saxon women in the Middle Ages. Through the study of laws and codes, language and word development, and personal accounts from nobles and clergy, this source clearly shows how the proliferation of Christianity decreased the autonomy of women. Throughout the seventh and eighth centuries, marriage became much more set-in-stone, as illustrated by changing laws and codes. Additionally, virginity became much more emphasized, as illustrated by personal accounts and the language used in them. A word for "dirty" or "sinful" sex developed, whereas before the eighth century, no record of this word exists. This source explains how the increased emphasis on virginity coupled with women's decreased ability to end a marriage, led to the formation of female monasteries across England. It describes many instances of women who left their husbands for monastic life. This source also describes how the land on which these monasteries were built was acquired. Through description of the foundation of many monasteries, it becomes clear that women acquired this land through one of three ways: inheritance from her father, as wergild paid to her for the murder of a male family member, or through the generosity of her husband. This is, however, specific to the early Middle Ages. This book also includes accounts from monks who traveled to visit these female monasteries and were horrified at the lifestyles of these women. A quote from one of these monks is incorporated into the story. Women continued to wear dyed clothing and jewelry which was unacceptable to these monks. These accounts offer insight into the lives of these noble women, who do not seem to have forfeited any luxuries when they

transitioned from being nobility to being nuns. Overall, this source illustrates how in an era of dwindling opportunities for women's advancement, monastic life offered an escape as well as opportunity to attain what was otherwise impossible: power.

Yorke, Barbara. *Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses*. Continuum, 2003.

This book is a collection of records of a select few Anglo-Saxon noble women. This book uses the records of these women to investigate the development of what it calls the "conversion period" of England, which spanned the seventh century. Additionally, this book investigates the later suppression of female monasteries. In the end, female monasteries almost completely ceased to exist, and the remaining double monasteries were ruled by an abbot not an abbess. This source gives many clear examples of how monastic women's power diminished. Women were prevented from listening to confession and prescribing penance. Their political activity was limited if not completely prevented. Their literary abilities became less respected and ultimately, no longer required, in the setting of a double monastery. The most valuable aspects of this source are the descriptions of monastic reform and its discussion of the subsequent consequences.

Leyser, Henrietta. *Medieval Women: A Social History of Women in England, 450-1500*. St. Martin's, 1995.

Like many of these other sources, this book describes the onset of Christianity and its effect on cultural ideals, laws and codes, and women's autonomy. The only thing that is drawn specifically from this source is a description of a painting of the Virgin Mary. The painting is from a monastery in Mercia from the early Middle Ages. It is worth mentioning because of the significance this painting has as a symbol in the story. This source analyzes the painting as demonstrating the relative liberalism of religion during this time period.

Watt, Diane. "The Earliest Womens Writing? Anglo-Saxon Literary Cultures and Communities." *Women's Writing*, vol. 20, no. 4, 5 Mar. 2013, pp. 537-554., doi:10.1080/09699082.2013.773761.

## **Chapter Eight: The Scribe's Tale (D. Gales)**

Dobney, Keith, et al. *Farmers, Monks, and Aristocrats: The Environmental Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon Flixborough*. Vol. 3, Oxbow Books, 2007. *Jstor*, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1cfr765](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1cfr765).

Green, Judith A. *Forging the Kingdom: Power in English Society, 973-1189*. Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Lawrence, C. H. *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages*. Longman Group Limited, 1984.

Nees, Lawrence. "Ultan the Scribe." *Anglo-Saxon England*, vo.. 22, 1993, pp. 127-148, *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/44510907](http://www.jstor.org/stable/44510907).

This article discusses and specific and extraordinary scribe by the name of Ultan who was contemporarily lauded as one of the most brilliant illuminators of Anglo-Saxon England. The article talks about the potential life Ultan may have led, the types of works he may have produced, and how he was talked about by his peers.

Theophilus, Presbyter. *An essay upon various arts...: forming an encyclopaedia of Christian art of the eleventh century, called also Rugerus; translated, with notes, by Robert Hendrie*. London, 1847. *The Making of the Modern World*. Web. 12 Nov, 2019.

What a fantastic find! A priest wrote an entire, all-encompassing how-to for the arts and the last several chapters of book 1 are exclusively about pigments and inks for manuscripts. It talks in great detail about how to make them, how to use them, and just about anything else one might need to know about medieval scribery.

## **Chapter Nine: The Eorl's Tale (M. Pochan)**

Fleming, Robin. *Britain After Rome*. Penguin, 2010.

Fleming provided the original inspiration for the role of a high-status leper from analysis of archeology done on gravesites. Fleming synthesizes scholarly work to analyze how power was built, used, and displayed in Anglo-Saxon England. Fleming's perspective on how elites performed their roles of power and sought to display it were the inspiration behind the Eorl as someone seeking to show off with his gravesite, buildings, etc. Specifically, Fleming cited wealthy elites seeking burial in Roman ruins, and as building churches for the appearance of piety. Especially in the era of the rise of towns, wealth was concentrated enough to be used to buy the accoutrements of power, status became as much about display as about performing duties.

John, Eric. *Reassessing Anglo-Saxon England*. Manchester University Press, 1996.

John provides a detailed account of the social and political structures of the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy, including the details I used about how earldom was granted and paid for and the service that was due. John also included useful pieces about clerical involvement in succession and politics, which I used when looking for some debt the Eorl of Grenceaster may owe the Abbot. John's depiction of the actual function of earls almost totally changed my idea of what the character's struggle was going to be, as it became obvious that being in the advanced stages of leprosy would be almost completely incompatible with the role. Earls, or Ealdormen, owed military service to the king along with their duties as administrators of sections of land, called shires.

Cameron, M. L. *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*. Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Meaney, Audrey L. "Extra-Medical Elements in Anglo-Saxon Medicine." *Social History of Medicine*, Vol. 24, no. 1, 2011, pp. 41-56.

"Hansen's Disease (Leprosy)." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, U.S. Department for Health and Human Services, 2017, [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).

## **Chapter Ten: The Beekeeper's Tale (D. Rothfusz)**

Crane, Eva. *The Archaeology of Beekeeping*. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1983. Print.

This source included a lot of general European background regarding beekeeping. English beekeeping was not as well documented as the rest of Europe, but there were laws recorded that reference honey hunting in the time period before the 11<sup>th</sup> Century. However, around that time people began to use shelters they specifically prepared for the bees. These earlier

structures or trees were often good for a single use, and bees were forced to find a new home elsewhere whenever an old hive was destroyed, creating an incentive for Anglo-Saxons to stop bees from swarming and flying away from their new, desired shelters.

“Crops and Robbers: A Case Study of the Vitellius Psalter.” *Charms, Liturgies, and Secret Rites in Early Medieval England*, by Ciaran Arthur, NED - New edition ed., Boydell and Brewer, Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK; Rochester, NY, USA, 2018, pp. 134–166. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt2111dng.10](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt2111dng.10).

Elsackers, Marianne. "The Beekeeper's Magic: Taking a Closer Look at the Old Germanic Bee Charms." *Mankind Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 4, 1987, pp. 447. *ProQuest*, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1306223217?accountid=7379>.

“INDEX.” *The Anglo-Saxon World*, by NICHOLAS J. HIGHAM and MARTIN J. RYAN, Yale University Press, NEW HAVEN; LONDON, 2013, pp. 459–477. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt32bt51.15](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt32bt51.15).

Lacey, Robert., and Danziger, Danny. *The Year 1000 : What Life Was Like at the Turn of the First Millennium : an Englishman's World . First Back Bay paperback edition.*, Back Bay Books/Little, Brown, 2000.

Osborn, Marijane. “ANGLO-SAXON TAME BEES: SOME EVIDENCE FOR BEEKEEPING FROM RIDDLES AND CHARMS.” *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, vol. 107, no. 3, 2006, pp. 271–283. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/43344232](http://www.jstor.org/stable/43344232).

This source focuses on the products from beekeeping and their importance. Honey was important for mead, a foundational Anglo-Saxon drink, or it could serve as a sort of preservative. Beeswax was the preferred material for candles, as it smelled pleasant and worked better than the lard that was otherwise used for these candles, so it was highly treasured by monasteries. The extreme value of these products—and the use of charms to ward off thieves who would steal this valuable income—is highlighted within references to Old English poetry and other historical writings.

Rust, Martha D. "The Art of Beekeeping Meets the Arts of Grammar: A Gloss of "Columcille's Circle"." *Philological Quarterly*, vol. 78, no. 4, 1999, pp. 359-387. *ProQuest*, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/211225560?accountid=7379>.

## **Chapter Eleven: The Eorl's Son's Tale (K. Donovan)**

Blair, John. “Monastic Towns? Minsters as Central Places, c. 650-850.” *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. 246-87. Print

Chaney, William A. *The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970. 43-174. Print

William Chaney, longtime Professor at Lawrence University, was an esteemed historian of Anglo-Saxon England. This book, the culmination of years of research, concerns the Christianization of the Anglo-Saxon people, viz. the reconciliation of existing Pagan social and political beliefs with the nascent religious presence. This book was invaluable in its clear portrayal of the complex and changing nature of the eclectic Anglo-Saxon society. It was particularly helpful in making clear the large extent to which mass-conversions were achieved through “top-down” conversions (i.e, the conversion first of a royal figure). Its detailed



commentary and constant historical references allowed me to grasp how highly political the religious system was in Anglo-Saxon England both prior to and after the spread of Christianity.

Foot, Sarah. "Within the Walls." *Monastic Life in Anglo-Saxon England, c. 600-900*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 138-247. Print

Sarah Foot, currently the Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History at the University of Oxford, is an English early medieval historian. This book explores monastic life in the period before the Benedictine Reforms and provides crucial insights into the workings of the monastic community. She makes it clear that Monastic life was highly connected to contemporary social and aristocratic presences and thoroughly explains the impacts of this interrelation. This book was effective in making clear to me what daily life in the monastic setting consisted of and the jobs and routines that were expected of religious figures.

Pestell, Tim. "Monasticism in Middle Anglo-Saxon East Anglia." *Landscapes of Monastic Foundation the Establishment of Religious Houses in East Anglia c. 650-1200*. Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2004. 18-64. JSTOR. 20 Nov. 2019.

Thomas, Gabor. "Life before the Minster: The Social Dynamics of Monastic Foundation at Anglo-Saxon Lyminge, Kent." *The Antiquaries Journal*, vol. 93, Cambridge University Press, Sept. 2013, pp. 109-45, doi:10.1017/S0003581513000206.

## **Chapter Twelve: The Hand of Fate (M. Powell)**

Bartlett, Robert. *Trial by Fire and Water: The Medieval Judicial Ordeal*. Oxford Oxfordshire: Clarendon Press, 1986.

Robert Bartlett examines various historical societies in which trial by ordeal, particularly using fire and water, was practiced. His work attempts to understand the social structure surrounding the trial by ordeal as well as the changes which societies underwent in order to abolish the ordeals. Before analyzing the structures behind the practice, Bartlett details the various forms of trial by ordeal and how they were utilized in the context of enacting what was perceived as justice.

Britton, Edward. *The Community of the Vill: A Study in the History of the Family and Village Life in Fourteenth-Century England*. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1977.

Cameron, M. L. *Anglo-Saxon Medicine*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1993.

Malcolm Laurence Cameron, retired professor of Biology at Dalhousie University, evaluates a wide variety of Anglo-Saxon medical texts through the lens of modern medicine. He attempts to uncover the rational aspects of the ancient practices that have been overshadowed in previous literature which tends to primarily focus on the magical components. Cameron's work is divided into seventeen chapters, each of which examines a specific aspect of Anglo-Saxon medicine including: living conditions, materials, bloodletting, and surgery.

Cameron, M. L. "Anglo-Saxon Medicine and Magic." *Anglo-Saxon England*, vol. 17, 1988, pp. 191-215.

Ehrenreich, Barbara, and Deirdre English. *Witches, Midwives & Nurses A History of Women Healers*. 2nd ed. New York City: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2010.

- Ellis, Sian. "Journey into Anglo-Saxon England." *British Heritage*, vol. 33, no. 2, 2012: pp. 39-43.  
Gale in Context: Biography,  
<https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A286718124/BIC?u=grin67026&sid=BIC&xid=e5b5f2c3>.  
Accessed 10 December 2019.
- Fell, Christine E., Cecily Clark, and Elizabeth Williams. *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*.  
Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.
- Fleming, Robin. "Living and Dying in Early Medieval Britain: The Fifth to Eleventh Century." *Britain  
After Rome: The Fall and Rise, 400-1070*, Penguin UK, 2010, pp. 345-366.
- Jewell, Helen M. *Women in Medieval England*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996.
- "Life in the Age of Beowulf." *Artsmagic*, 2009, <https://www.amazon.com/Life-Age-Beowulf-Artsmagic/dp/B0797Z2D9W>.
- Peters, Edward. *The Magician, the Witch, and the Law*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania  
Press, 1978.