

[PDF] The Malloreon, Vol. 2 (Books 4 & 5): Sorceress Of Darshiva, The Seeress Of Kell

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Description:

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Melcena

CHAPTER ONE

Her Majesty, Queen Porenn of Drasnia, was in a pensive mood. She stood at the window of her pink-frilled sitting room in the palace at Boktor watching her son Kheva and Unrak, the son of Barak of Trellheim, at play in a garden drenched with morning sunlight. The boys had reached that age where sometimes it seemed almost possible to see them growing, and their voices wavered uncertainly between boyish soprano and manly baritone. Porenn sighed, smoothing the front of her black gown. The Queen of Drasnia had worn black since the death of her husband. "You would be proud of him, my dear Rhodar," she whispered sadly.

There was a light knock at her door.

"Yes?" she replied, not turning.

"There's a Nadrak here to see you, your Majesty," the aged butler at the door reported. "He says you know him."

"Oh?"

"He says his name is Yarblek."

"Oh, yes. Prince Kheldar's associate. Show him in, please."

"There's a woman with him, your Majesty," the butler said with a disapproving expression. "She uses language your Majesty might prefer not to hear."

Porenn smiled warmly. "That must be Vella," she said. "I've heard her swear before. I don't know that she's really all that serious about it. Show them both in, if you would, please."

"At once, your Majesty."

Yarblek was as shabby as ever. At some point, the shoulder seam of his long black overcoat had given way and had been rudimentarily repaired with a piece of rawhide thong. His beard was coarse and black and scraggly, his hair was unkempt, and he looked as if he didn't smell very good. "Your Majesty," he said grandly, attempting a bow which was marred a bit by an unsteady lurch.

"Drunk already, Master Yarblek?" Porenn asked him archly.

"No, not really, Porenn," he replied, unabashed. "It's just a little carry-over from last night."

The queen was not offended by the Nadrak's use of her first name. Yarblek's grip on formality had never been very firm.

The woman who had entered with him was a stunningly beautiful Nadrak with blue-black hair and smoldering eyes. She was dressed in tight-fitting leather trousers and a black leather vest. A silver-hilted dagger protruded from each of her boot tops, and two more were tucked under the wide leather belt about her waist. She bowed with infinite grace. "You're looking tired, Porenn," she observed. "I think you need more sleep."

Porenn laughed. "Tell that to the people who bring me stacks of parchment every hour or so."

"I made myself a rule years ago," Yarblek said, sprawling uninvited in a chair. "Never put anything down in writing. It saves time as well as keeping me out of trouble."

"It seems to me that I've heard Kheldar say the same thing."

Yarblek shrugged. "Silk's got a good grip on reality."

"I haven't seen you two for quite some time," Porenn noted, also sitting.

"We've been in Mallorea," Vella told her, wandering around the room and looking appraisingly at the furnishings.

"Isn't that dangerous? I've heard that there's plague there."

"It's pretty much confined to Mal Zeth," Yarblek replied. "Polgara persuaded the Emperor to seal up the city."

"Polgara?" Porenn exclaimed, coming to her feet. "What's she doing in Mallorea?"

"She was going in the general direction of a place called Ashaba the last time I saw her. She had Belgarath and the others with her."

"How did they get to Mallorea?"

"By boat, I'd imagine. It's a long swim."

"Yarblek, am I going to have to drag every single scrap of information out of you?" Porenn demanded in exasperation.

"I'm getting to it, Porenn," he said, sounding a little injured. "Do you want the story first or the messages? I've got lots of messages for you, and Vella's got a couple more that she won't even talk about—at least not to me."

"Just start at the beginning, Yarblek."

"Any way you want it." He scratched at his beard. "The way I got the story is that Silk and Belgarath and the others were in Cthol Murgos. They got captured by the Malloreans, and 'Zakath took them all to Mal Zeth. The young fellow with the big sword—Belgarion, isn't it? Anyway, he and 'Zakath got to be friends—"

"Garion and 'Zakath?" Porenn asked incredulously. "How?"

"I wouldn't know. I wasn't there when it happened. To make it short, they were friends, but then the plague broke out in Mal Zeth. I managed to sneak Silk and the others out of the city, and we went north. We separated before we got to Venna. They wanted to go to this Ashaba place, and I had a caravan load of goods I wanted to get to Yar Marak. Made a fairly good profit, actually."

"Why were they going to Ashaba?"

"They were after some woman named Zandramas—the one who abducted Belgarion's son."

"A woman? Zandramas is a woman?"

"So they told me. Belgarath gave me a letter for you. It's all in there. I told him that he shouldn't write it down, but he wouldn't listen to me." Yarblek unwound himself from his chair, fished around inside his overcoat, and handed a crumpled and none-too-clean piece of parchment to the queen. Then he strolled to the window and looked out. "Isn't that Trelheim's boy down there?" he asked. "The husky one with the red hair?"

Porenn was reading the parchment. "Yes," she said absently, trying to concentrate on the message.

"Is he here? Trelheim, I mean?"

"Yes. I don't know if he's awake yet, though. He stayed up rather late last night and he was a little tipsy when he went to bed."

Yarblek laughed. "That's Barak, all right. Has he got his wife and daughters with him, too?"

"No," Porenn said. "They stayed in Val Alorn, making the preparations for his oldest daughter's wedding."

"Is she that old already?"

"Chereks marry young. They seem to think it's the best way to keep a girl out of trouble. Barak and his son came here to get away from all the fuss."

Yarblek laughed again. "I think I'll go wake him up and see if he's got anything to drink." He touched his forefinger to the spot between his eyes with a pained look. "I'm feeling a little delicate this morning, and Barak's a good man to get well with. I'll stop back when I'm feeling better. Besides, you've got your mail to read. Oh," he said, "I almost forgot. Here are some others." He started rummaging around inside his shabby coat. "One from Polgara." He tossed it negligently on the table. "One from Belgarion. One from Silk, and one from the blond girl with the dimples—the one they call Velvet. The snake didn't send anything—you know how snakes are. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm really not feeling too good." He lurched to the door and went out.

"That is the most exasperating man in the world," Porenn declared.

"He does it on purpose." Vella shrugged. "He thinks it's funny."

"Yarblek said that you have some messages for me, too," the queen said. "I suppose I should read them all at once—get all the shocks over with at one time."

"I've only got one, Porenn," Vella replied, "and it isn't in writing. Liselle—the one they call Velvet—asked me to tell you something when we were alone."

"All right," Porenn said, putting down Belgarath's letter.

"I'm not sure how they found out about this," Vella said, "but it seems that the King of Cthol Murgos is not the son of Taur Urgas."

"What are you saying, Vella?"

“Urgit isn’t even related to that frothing lunatic. It seems that a number of years ago, a certain Drasnian businessman paid a visit to the palace in Rak Goska. He and Taur Urgas’ second wife became friendly.” She smiled with one eyebrow slightly raised. “Very friendly. I’ve always had that suspicion about Murgo women. Anyway, Urgit was the result of that friendship.”

A terrible suspicion began to dawn on Queen Porenn.

Vella grinned impishly at her. “We all knew that Silk had royal connections,” she said. “We just didn’t know how many royal families he was connected to.”

“No!” Porenn gasped.

Vella laughed. “Oh, yes. Liselle confronted Urgit’s mother with it, and the lady confessed.” The Nadrak girl’s face grew serious. “The whole point of Liselle’s message is that Silk doesn’t want that bony fellow, Javelin, to find out about it. Liselle felt that she had to report it to somebody. That’s why she told me to...

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