

Shadow Over Shandahar
Child of Prophecy
Excerpt

Chapter 1

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Adrianna awoke from a deep sleep. She stretched languorously as her mind emerged from the recesses of her dreams. Once again, she could not remember her dreams, only that they were about a man whose face she could never recall and a voice that was always familiar to her. Those dreams were always good ones, and she was happy when she had them because they would give her reprieve from her other dreams, those borne upon hooves of flame and manes of darkness . . . Nightmares . . . Nyxlarian. Slowly, Adrianna sat up in her bed, rubbing the sleep from her eyes. She rose and placed her feet within the slippers next to her bed. She then went to the washbasin where she splashed the cold water upon her face and neck. She ran a comb through her pale tresses, pausing only at the snarls, and then rapidly plaited the unruly mass into a braid that she then coiled upon the crown of her head. Adrianna donned tunic and trousers. The tunic was simple, embroidered only at the sleeves and hem. It reached down to her knees. The trousers were loose about her thighs and tightened only about her ankles and lower legs. Adrianna wrapped a silken cord about her torso and waist. It was that upon which she hung her pouches of spell components and other such things. She then put a white gold belt about her hips, its adornments tinkling softly.

Adrianna swiftly snatched her cloak from the bedpost on her way to the door. Upon opening it, a piece of folded parchment caught her attention as it glided to the floor. She stooped to pick up the note and unfolded it as she straightened herself. It was from the Master.

Adrianna,

Early this morn, I found that I have pressing business of utmost importance. I will not be home until dusk. Take this day for yourself; you have worked hard for it. Do not wait for me.

Master Tallek

Adrianna frowned slightly as she read her master's fine, precise handwriting. This was quite out of the ordinary. He had never left so suddenly like this before. However, Master Tallek had recently mentioned to her that her that her apprenticeship with him was nearly over and that she was free to leave him in the near future. Was this what Tallek's message implied? Did he intend for her to leave and never come back? She quickly went back into her room to slip on her soft leather boots and then made her way to the spiraling staircase. Within moments she had descended the tower and was striding through the house proper. She went first to the master's rooms. She knocked on the door, and when there was no answer, she cracked open the door and peeked inside.

He was not there. However, it was obvious to her that he had left in haste. Many parchments were strewn about upon his desk, and his cabinets were in disarray. In a quick look throughout the rest of his chambers and the house she found no trace of her master, but Tallek's spellbook continued to rest upon its customary pedestal in the laboratory, ensconced within a magical envelope. His traveling spellbook was gone. Once more Adrianna frowned. It was unlike Master Tallek to up and leave so suddenly. She wondered what type of business it was and if he was safe. A tingle shot up her spine and her flesh broke out into goosepimples. She had a bad feeling.

Adrianna wandered into the kitchens. As usual, Cook had left her breakfast on the countertop . . . cooked grains with sweetened goats-milk, toast, and jam. She took the tray to the dining table and ate. She felt strange, eating alone, especially when she was so accustomed to breaking her fast with Master Tallek every morning. Once again Adrianna felt a disturbance in the pit of her stomach . . . that there was something that just wasn't quite right.

Suddenly there was a ring at the front door. Adrianna jumped involuntarily, and with a hand upon her chest to quiet her rapidly beating heart, she padded over to the door. Upon opening it, she found a small, skinny brown boy upon her steps. He handed her a message. She took the parchment from the boy's hand and upon unfolding it saw that it was from the Temple of Corellian. With trepidation, she read the words written upon the yellowed page.

Mistress,

We regret to inform you that we have in our possession the remains of what appears to be one Magician Master Tallek Alestrande. We ask that you come to verify our opinion upon this matter as promptly as possible. Upon your arrival we will also discuss with you your legal rights and privileges. We are deeply sorry about your loss, but your action at this time is greatly needed. Thank you.

Father Rankin

In a state of shock and disbelief, she looked up from the message. Startled, she saw the small boy still standing before her. Numbly, she dug into her coin pouch and pulled out all that lay within. She dropped the coins into the boy's outstretched hand and turned in the doorway. The boy gave her a look of disgust as he hopped down the steps. "Cheap . . ." he mumbled aloud as he ran off. He kicked up the gravel in the street as he left, reminding himself never to deliver to this house again, no matter what the priests at the temple said about getting money for work well done. Adrianna softly closed the door behind her, clenching the message in nerveless fingers. She then turned and pressed her back into the door, arms at her sides, and slid downward until her behind reached the floor. How long she sat there, she did not know, but it wasn't until the sun was high in the sky that she stirred herself once more.

Adrianna donned her fur-lined cloak, collected her spellbook and a few other belongings, and left the house, which was now, by law, hers since she was the only current apprentice of the deceased owner. For some reasoning that she could not begin to explain, she did not doubt that the priests at the temple were correct about the identity of

the body they had obtained. She wished it could be otherwise, had prayed that it could be, but in her heart she knew that he was gone.

Adrianna slowly walked the city streets, taking no interest in the activity to be found there. It was cold, and she numbly wrapped her dark maroon cloak tightly about her. Mindlessly she walked up to the Temple of Corellian. Unlike many of the other temples, dedicated to other deities, this temple was very utilitarian in its design. Corellian's followers wore simple garments, and the décor of the place was unembellished.

Once inside the temple, the priests lead her down a series of hallways and doors that she would not remember passing through later. Finally they brought her into a room that smelled of medicines and preservatives. Beneath these odors, her faelin nose picked up the scent of death and her throat constricted. She had to force the passage open in order to breathe, but her breath came in ragged gasps thereafter. If the priests heard, they gave no sign. She felt a hand upon her arm, a gentle hand, but she did not realize it until she had recoiled and the hand was gone. She turned her head to see a priest standing beside her, compassion in his brown eyes. She turned once more to look in front of her. It was then that she saw it, the table upon which a body lay beneath a white fabric cover. Slowly she went over to the table, every step as though she bore weights upon the soles of her boots. Beneath the blanket she found the mutilated body of her master. Thankfully, his eyes were closed. To see his blue eyes open as they had been in life, she may have fallen to the floor right there on the spot. But just to see him at all was almost enough to drop her anyway.

The look upon her face must have told the priests what they had already known. They returned the covering to rest upon the body of Master Tallek and handed to her a box containing what remained of his belongings. She took nothing from the box; all of the articles within were now useless. It appeared as though they had been scorched by wizard fire. Adrianna gently inquired upon the proper burial of the body of her master. The clerics did not ask for money for their labor, but she gave them all that she had, twenty gold coins. It was the least she could do for a man whose home now belonged to her, a man that had accepted her when many others had not, and one that had given her the ability to make her own way in the world.

After leaving the temple, Adrianna wandered the streets of Andahye. She wandered aimlessly, without direction or intention. She passed the school and wondered if anyone else knew about Tallek's death. They probably did not, it being her duty to spread the unpleasant news. Not even Tallek's journeyman, Tannin, would know. Adrianna shook her head numbly. She had no desire to seek out the man. He had disliked her right from the start, and would probably think of some way to make her life more difficult now that the Master was gone. But Adrianna knew her rights, and she would abide by them as Tallek would want her to do.

Adrianna returned to her house. She walked through the dark halls, searching. She knew not what she sought, only that she wished that Master Tallek were sitting within his laboratory, at the dinner table, within his reading room, waiting for her to join him in whatever activity they had chosen to undertake. Upon entering the laboratory, she saw the previous day's lesson resting upon the table. She crossed the room to it and was about to pick up the series of parchments when she stopped herself.

She remembered Master Tallek laying the lesson parchments down upon the table the evening before, a smile set upon his mouth, laughter in his eyes, as she had finished telling him a most ridiculous answer to a question she had learned long ago. He had dismissed her from her studies then, as she always gave him answers such as those whenever she was tired of her studies, fatigued from the rigors of the day, or just simply lazy. He had always catered to her desires, and had not pushed her with such things because he knew that she did not abuse his generosity. She had left him then, remembering the tender smile set upon his features as she took the winding staircase to her room. It was the last time she saw him . . .

Adrianna came to, just to see her hand poised above the lesson parchments. She slowly drew her hand away. She would leave them where her master had left them. She did not want to disturb his touch . . . Adrianna crumpled to her knees upon the stone floor, her hands to her face, as the sobs came. She cried there within the laboratory, her mind running through all of the years she and the Master had spent there. He was all around her . . . his spirit, floating through the halls, down the stairs. And then Adrianna remembered seeing him beneath the covering at the temple: his throat ripped out, deep lacerations in his chest, much of his flesh burned from his bones. It was as though he had been mauled by a great creature with claws larger than her torso, and then burned as though to hide what had been done. She shook her head, trying to rid herself of the memory. He was all she had within this city, and now he was gone. She felt so alone, confused and afraid. What would she do with herself? What was this gift that Master Tallek had given her . . . this magic? She could feel the energies about her respond to her desires already, and she had not even begun to concentrate upon them. He had said she had a Talent, a gift from the gods, and that what he gave her was simply the knowledge about how use what had already been bestowed. And she had cared about him. She had cared about that man who had taught her these things, despite what had happened in her past. She would later find that she had loved him, even though she had promised herself she would never care about a man so much, and that he had been to her what no man had ever been before . . . the vision of what a man should be.

Many hours later, Adrianna stumbled from the laboratory and to her bedchamber. She slept a fitful sleep, a sleep that was not quite sleep, but that place between reality and dreams. She rose in the morning, unrefreshed. But she knew what she must do. She must take what Master Tallek had given her, and leave the city of Andahye. He had given her the means with which to survive, and she would use that, as she had always been meant. She would go to a place she had not seen for many years.

Adrianna mechanically went about her morning ritual and then focused her attention upon gathering all that she would need to take with her upon her journey. She would have space in her pack for only two changes of clothing. The rest of the space she needed for her spell book, the ingredients for many of her spell components, and a healing kit containing common medicinal herbs, bandages, and salves. Then Adrianna sat down behind her desk and composed the message she would send to the Vanderlinde Academy. She would at least conduct this formality on behalf of Master Tallek. She would not bother attempting to contact Tannin. He was a massive thorn in her side and she did not wish to aggravate the wound.

On her way out of the chamber, Adrianna turned to take a look around. She saw her oak staff against the wall near her bed. She considered not taking it with her. She

was not good with it, quite clumsy to be truthful. But she knew that she could not just leave it there. It had been a gift from Master Tallek. She walked across the room and took the smooth wood into her hands. She remembered the day he had presented it to her, looking intently at her as she accepted it from him, his eyes giving away the hope that it would please her. And it had. His gifts were always pleasing to her.

Once prepared, she walked through the corridors of her home one last time. She looked all about her, setting the place into her memory forever; she knew not when she would return and she would miss it. She took in the beautifully patterned rugs set upon a polished stone floor, lush tapestries upon the walls, chandeliers from the ceilings, carved wooden furnishings. She went to the little desk in the hall leading from the foyer and removed from it the deed to the house. She would take it with her. She had not a copper to her name, but she always had a home to which she may return. At the doorway, she turned around one last time. Then she closed the door and shut away the past. She turned the key in the lock, making sure the past was safe within. Adrianna then walked down the street towards the city proper. She would find a means with which to travel and go to the city of Sangrilak. She would go home.

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Once out of the city, the shroud that had sheltered her fell away. Perhaps her Master had placed it there, to save her from the cruelty of her dreams, to give her the reprieve that she needed from them in order to succeed. But spells only last for so long, and for only so far, if it had indeed been a spell at all. And so it slipped away from her as she slumbered in the wagon, laying bare her mind once more. The dreams came back to her ten-fold . . .

Adrianna sat bolt upright, the shout at the tip of her tongue. Her tunic was plastered to her sweat-soaked body and she could smell her fear. She pulled her legs up to her chest and began to rock back and forth, her face on her knees. She had forgotten how vivid they could be, as though she was there again, reliving her child-hood. It had all come rushing back to her so fast, cutting her like a knife. The memories came to her in chronological order, starting from when she could first remember the pain of her father's hatred.

She remembered it all so well, like it had been just yesterday that she had experienced it. He had been unable to stand the sight of her, the creature who had killed his beloved Gemma. And, in a way, she had. Adrianna's birth had ended her mother's life. The labor had been so difficult; it was as though Gemma had given her own life so that her daughter could live. The pain had been more than he could bear, and so he had cast his infant daughter from him, while keeping the first-born twin at his side. Thus had been created a sister of light and one of dark. While Sheridana was all sunshine and happiness, garrulous and inquisitive, Adrianna was dull and lackluster, shy and withdrawn.

So the girls had been raised by Mairi, she who had been Gemma's good friend. Mairi had loved Adrianna and Sheri deeply, and had given them all that they could ever want. But Mairi could not give Adrianna what she truly needed: acceptance by her father. While Sheri spent the days after school with him, Adrianna came home to Mairi. It was not such a bad thing in and of itself. But Mairi's husband, Hafgan, embittered by

the fact that he had been unable to sire any living children upon his wife, was a harsh man with which to live. Luckily for Adrianna, Mairi withstood the brunt of his ire, constantly reminding both herself and Adrianna that he had once been a good man, before an accident had taken one of his legs. Inasmuch, Hafgan did not hit Adrianna often, despite knowing that he wanted . . . needed to take his anger out on someone. Although, the mental abuse was much worse . . .

Adrianna breathed deeply, calming herself. Why was it that she was returning to Sangrilak? What could that place possibly hold for her? All that she could remember was heartsickness, and an all-encompassing loss. But then she remembered Sheridanana, remembered the reason why she wished to return to the city of her birth. In her early childhood, her sister had been her only ray of sunshine. Despite the extenuating circumstances, they had been everything to one another, forging a bond that could never be broken, even after eight years.

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Sirion sauntered slowly into the city of Sangrilak. Travel-weary and tired, he made his way towards the Inn of the Hapless Cenloryan, Dramati bumping against his side as he walked. Irritably, Sirion brushed a lock of copper brown hair out of his eyes and then buried his fingers into the thick ruff about the corubis' neck. It was almost evening. Anya would catch up with him in a few moments and the rest of the group followed about an hour behind her. He turned up his nose in distaste. His hair was greasy and he was sure that he stank of his travels, he who rarely bathed while on the run. His grooming habits had made a precipitous drop in recent years, not feeling the desire, or the need, to make himself presentable in any way. Yet, upon entering the world of civilization, he realized how he must seem to the people he passed, a dirty bum from the wilds.

Their travels had been difficult. After being accused of committing a crime they did not perpetrate, the Wildrunners had gone after those who had, seeking to clear their good name. However, the Wildrunners had done just what the others had known they would do. After the ambush, all they could do was seek shelter and tend to their wounds. Everyone was downtrodden and dispirited, but at least the others had not gotten away unscathed. Sorn had nearly killed his double before the rest of the other group had been able to intervene and take him from harm's way.

And that is what the other group was made up of . . . their duplicates. There was one for every member of the Wildrunners except for Dinim, who had joined them after the doubles had been created. And that had been Gaknar's doing. When the Wildrunners had stepped through that mirror in the temple in Nampoor, the group had been re-created. Before them had stood their counterparts, evil in every way that they themselves were good.

Sirion sighed heavily. That was one advantage that Gaknar had over the group. He could not have created a better weapon against them . . . their own selves. For the men and women that had been created not only looked like the Wildrunners, but they possessed all of the physical and mental attributes of them as well. The ambush had been the second skirmish they had had since their creation. Sirion knew, when next they met, that only one group or the other would prevail.

Sirion looked up. He found himself standing before the Inn of the Hapless Cenloryan. It would be good to rest within this safe haven. The gods knew that he needed a break. He began to walk up the steps that led to the veranda. In Hinterlic, he uttered a command to Dramati, and pointed behind the establishment. Without complaint, the large canine went to his place in the back of the inn, where Volstagg would be sure to give him the scraps from the meals that were being prepared that day. Sirion opened the door that led into the building.

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Adrianna slowly walked through the city gates. Her journey had been a featureless one, much different from the journey that which had brought her to Andahye in the first place. But she struck that thought from her mind as she looked all about her. Many things were as she remembered, but many more things were not. The city of Sangrilak had definitely grown. She continued to look about herself as she walked. Before she knew it, she was at the entrance to the Inn of the Hapless Cenloryan. She smiled to herself. It would be good to see her old friend Volstagg again. Adrianna pushed open the doors to the Inn and stepped through the opening. The place was much as she had remembered it. Some things never changed. She smiled once more. She was glad of that. She made her way up to the bar, past tables seating all kinds of people, humans, faelin, and halfen alike. She even saw a few individuals who could have even been those like herself . . . half-faelin. Sangrilak was one of the few places that allowed such diversity. She was glad that that at least had not changed. As she made her way through, some people cast a few glances her way. She was one who did not quite fit the ordinary, and deserving of such glances, but she paid them no notice. Adrianna had all of her attention focused upon the bar. Upon reaching it, she seated herself there, waiting for her friend to take notice of her after . . . eight years! Momentarily, her eyes grew wide. It had been quite some time since she had been home. She hadn't even sent a letter. Mairi would be surprised to see her as well. Adrianna could hardly wait to see the woman who had raised her.

Volstagg emerged from the kitchens. He was an interesting creature, the only one of his kind Adrianna had ever seen. He had the head, torso and arms of a human man, and the rest of him was the form of a large lloryk. He carried a large pitcher of ale in one hand and a platter of steaming stew in another. He handed the food and drink off to a serving girl and then began to head in Adrianna's direction, his massive cloven hooves thudding against the stone floors as he moved over them. It was then that he saw her. Volstagg stopped. He stared at her for a few moments, knowing it was she, but not knowing . . . And then he was rushing towards her, and she was standing up from her seat. Just as she had done as a child, she climbed over the counter-top to the other side. Then the cenloryan was upon her. He picked her up, the muscles in his forearms flexing as he held her above his head. He smiled hugely and then brought her to him, holding her body close to him in a massive hug of the type that only Volstagg could give. She wrapped her arms about his neck, remembering that she had done so as a child. Finally he set her down.

Volstagg was breathless. "My dear Adrianna! How have you been all of these years? It is so good to set these old eyes upon a good friend after so long! Come and

break your fast. By the look of you, you have been traveling for quite a long while. Rest and I will bring you good food and drink.”

Without allowing her to reply, Volstagg lifted her and set her upon her seat on the other side of the bar. He looked at her once more, as if to make sure she was really there, and then went back into the kitchens. After watching him trot through the swinging oak doors leading to the kitchens, she heard him roar to his staff to hurry the preparation of a plate of fresh vegetables, grains, and fruits for a special guest. A few moments later he emerged to bring her a tall glass of honeyed mead. He then leaned his elbows upon the counter and assessed her. She regarded him in return, smiling. He was the same as she had always remembered, with only a few exceptions. The aging process had not left him behind; his chestnut colored hair and coat were peppered with gray, and the lines about his eyes were more pronounced. But his smile was the same. His body had lost none of its tone, and he had lifted her with ease over the counter. His gray eyes were just as bright and mischievous as they had always been, since that first day she had met him more than a score ago.

“So, my dear friend, what has been happening here since my departure eight years hence?” Unnerved by Volstagg’s ponderous gaze, Adrianna felt compelled to ask what had been upon her mind since she had made the decision to come home.

“Ah, now that is quite a bit to tell, but I will try to make some short work of it.” And he did. He told her of the expansion of the city and the rise of the merchant class at the expense of farmers, who were beginning to live only at the city outskirts. He told her of the influx of peoples from other cities, hoping to make their fortune in Sangrilak, and of the increase of traveling folk who made their way through on their way to other destinations. He also told her of the most recent set of appalling events, that the advisor to the Prince of Ristran had been murdered, and that a well-known party of individuals, the Wildrunners, had been pinned with the crime. They were currently within the city, working to clear their good name of the false accusation. However, he did not mention her sister.

Suddenly, a serving girl carrying a plate of food rushed up to Volstagg. He very quickly excused himself as he set the plate down in front of Adrianna, telling her he would return shortly. She watched him go back into the kitchens to mend whatever mishap had occurred in his absence, and then went deep into thought. She was dispirited that he had not mentioned her sister. It meant that she had not returned. But despite the disappointment her mind was drawn to something else Volstagg had said. The Wildrunners! She had heard a lot about them during her childhood and years of study in Andahye. It was said that they traveled in the company of a half-orog and a faelin woman whose skill with the bow was unsurpassed. She took a few bites of her meal. The food was delicious.

Finally, Volstagg returned to her, moaning about the trials and tribulations of innkeeping. It was then that a very unappealing odor wafted through the air. Volstagg got a huge grin upon his face and he looked past Adrianna. Adrianna was about to turn about to see what had caught Volstagg’s attention, when she saw a deeply tanned faelin man that stood just a little taller than herself approaching the bar. The thick, tangled mass of his brownish-red hair was long and tied back with a piece of leather. He was dirty and disheveled, and appeared to be very tired. It was obvious that he had traveled from afar, for it was to he that the stench clung. He seated himself to her left at the bar,

speaking to Volstagg in Hinterlic, a language which she had learned long ago as the young girl who had wanted to know how to speak virtually every known faelinish language. As he spoke, she quickly turned to look at him, surprised. The Hinterlean rarely emerged from their forest kingdom. Volstagg responded to the faelin in the same tongue, smiling at him all the while. They were obviously friends.

Sirion sat stiffly in his seat. He couldn't believe that she was here. He had not seen her about the city in nearly a decade. At first he had not realized that she was gone. But when he did, it took him nearly a year to ask Volstagg about her, knowing that the two had been friends. He had tried to ask him as though in passing, that her absence was just a little thing that he had noticed. But Volstagg knew better. He always knew better, knew Sirion better than he knew himself sometimes. Sirion had wondered about her for all of those years, even those before she had left Sangrilak. He had never met her, not really. They had just passed a few times in the street, and she had never noticed him. However, despite what he had shared with Joselyn, he had definitely noticed *her*, saw how much people liked her, how much Volstagg had come to love her. And he had not been able to keep himself from being attracted to her ethereal beauty, her quiet strength, and the way she made the people around her happy.

But here she was, sitting next to him in Volstagg's inn. His superior sense of smell had not picked up her scent. He must be more tired than he thought, although her scent was muted and she did not use the same bath oils as she did all of those years ago. And that was not the only thing about her that had changed. Out of the corner of his eye, while he continued his conversation with Volstagg, he had seen that she was even more beautiful than she had been almost a decade ago. He also saw that she was watching him. Volstagg trotted away to get him a tankard of ale. Sirion slowly inhaled and turned to her. He caught her gaze and held it, her dark brown eyes widening. Her features were striking, hair the color of moonlight, and eyes so dark they could engulf a man's soul. He raised an eyebrow as he speculated about her, wondered what she saw when she looked at him. He was more than just a few years her senior. Perhaps she saw a dirty old man who stank of the road, himself, and the dried blood of his double, whom he had fought about a week ago.

Affronted, Sirion took his eyes from her face and allowed his gaze to take in the rest of her. He had never viewed her quite this close before. Her maroon winter cloak spilled behind, and he saw that she wore finely made tunic, vest, and trousers, the stitching at the shoulders, sleeves and hem of excellent quality. The clothes were not form-fitting, but he could see the shape of her beneath them. Her breasts and hips were small, similar to that of most faelin women, but he could also see that she was partly human, her woman's curves were just the slightest bit more rounded, her face not as angular, and her ears not as long and pointed at the upper tips. Sirion began to notice the rise and fall of her chest; that her breathing had accelerated slightly. Anger rose within him, anger towards himself. He treated her badly, she undeserving of his censure when it was he that chose not to make himself more presentable. He looked back up into her face, saw the slight flush to her cheeks, and abruptly turned away from her.

Before she could turn away, in fear that she was being rude, the faelin man had caught Adrianna's gaze. His amber eyes captured hers and she felt her heart skip a beat. He raised an eyebrow at her and allowed his gaze to slide over her for a moment before returning to her face. Then he abruptly turned away. Adrianna also turned away,

discomfited. Her body was tense and her mind whirled with confusion. Volstagg had left to get something for the Hinterlean, but had returned within a few moments. Adrianna watched the faelin out of the corner of her eye as he received his tankard of drink from Volstagg, handed the cenloryan a large sack, and left.

For a few moments, Adrianna sat there and said nothing. Volstagg placed the sack beneath the bar and busied himself wiping off the countertop near her. When he set it down, Adrianna heard the unmistakable tinkle of coins moving against one another. The bag obviously contained a lot of money. She then turned back to the cenloryan and asked, "Volstagg, who is that man? How do you know him so well?"

"Well now, my Lady, that is a story all in itself, and not easily told within a mere sentence or two. But he is Sirion Timberlyn, a member of the Wildrunners, the group of individuals I was telling you about earlier. I met him long ago, when he was but a boy trying to make a path for himself in the world. And what a road did he cut for himself!" The last Volstagg said with pride in his voice, his eyes alight with his happiness for the man Sirion. "There was a time when I wanted the two of you to meet, but that was when you had begun to study with old Nahum, and, well, you never came by as often, and Sirion was working a lot. At the time, he was a hired tracker." Volstagg looked up from his countertop and smiled at her. She smiled back at him, remembering the time he spoke about . . . and Nahum . . . Once more, Volstagg was called away, and Adrianna pondered his words.

As she sat and continued to eat her meal, another faelin seated himself next to her. She saw that he was rather tall for a Terralean faelin, standing almost six feet. He had shoulder-length raven black hair, and canted startling green eyes, an unusual combination. Adrianna surmised that he must be a faelin half-blood, possibly a mixture of Terralean and Savanlean faelin lines. He wore dark tunic and trousers, as well as two long swords, one at each hip. He glanced momentarily at her before he spied Volstagg and gestured him over. The man asked the cenloryan about opportunities for employment in and about the city, anyone who was looking for a sword to hire. Volstagg thought upon it for a moment and then trotted over to the other end of the bar and spoke to a serving girl who then took herself to the faelin Adrianna now knew as Sirion. Within moments Volstagg returned and told the tall young faelin next to her that if he wanted some work, he needed to meet Sirion in the back of the tavern.

Volstagg abruptly turned to Adrianna. "You, too, should go to Sirion, my friend. He can tell you more about the goings-on around here than I can." Adrianna raised an eyebrow, and was about to ask Volstagg what Sirion would know that he did not, when she suddenly felt something hit her hard across her backside. She grunted, quickly turned on her barstool, and met the gaze of the faelin with black hair and green eyes.

"Sorry. They sometimes have a mind of their own." He spoke to her in Common, his eyes sparkling as she glared up at him. He winked at her and indicated the swords at his hips. That he was flirting with her escaped her notice, but Volstagg was quick to realize the ploy and grinned as he shook his head and went back into the kitchens. Adrianna rose from her seat and began to step towards the back of the tavern where Sirion waited. Just maybe Volstagg was right, and he would be able to inform her about the state of the kingdom.