

# The Lady's Maid

*Game Master's Commentary: Garoth's player is a long-term friend and a dedicated player in my games. I wanted to create a sub-plot for Garoth's player that would both give him an opportunity to become more directly involved in the larger events of the plot. Also, I wanted to put a cornerstone of my gamemastering philosophy into action: "when in doubt: heap more trouble on the protagonists." This scene allowed me to give both he, and Sir Reinhardt's player, grief. Unfortunately, his schedule did not allow him to continue past this turn.*

*Reinhardt's Commentary: He has a gift for giving out grief to players. I never saw this scene until it was posted later.*

## **1 Helane 719, Caer Gardiren, The Walled Garden**

The banquet was in full swing. After giving a laundry list of vassals audiences and attending vespers in the castle's chapel, the service conducted by her aunt, Dame Sophia, the Knight-Commander of the Order of Saint Claudia, Our Lady of Paladins, the Countess had entered the Great Hall and assumed her place at the head of the table. With Sir Reinhardt seated at her left hand, and so many of her vassals gathered for the feast, few of her armsmen were needed, Garoth and Faranir found themselves released to pursue their own mirth.

Countess Curo, her high spirits evident, had risen from her seat, the room rising with her, and filled a massive ruby-encrusted gold chalice with her favorite wine - an Azeryani red Garoth knew to be both heady and potent. She had lifted the chalice with regnant poise, holding it in both hands, and made the ritual benediction in Old Jarin with a practiced tongue. As the cup was passed amongst those seated around her she had turned and dismissed them with a shooing motion and a wink. Uncommon familiarity, albeit on an uncommon night.

The men had found the enclosed garden between the kitchens and the great hall filled with anticipation. It was a warm, clear evening with the scent of jasmine and foxglove lingering heavily in the air, and Yael blazing full among twinkling stars. The garden was lit by a rainbow hue of alchemists lamps, and filled with the evenings revelers. Here, the servants not attached to the kitchens, the armsmen released from their duties, and those townsmen (and their families) prominent enough to be invited to the castle, but not to sit in the Great Hall, would take their repast.

The meal was to run to ten courses, not including the aperitif and sweetmeats served with each, and was to include delicacies upon delicacies, dishes seasons with spices from the length and breadth of Lythia. And with each would be an exotic wine, most brought by merchants from afar, chosen to bring out the flavor of the food - and the mood of the night. Few gathered here would see one such dish during the year, let alone course after course after course of them. In the fashion of the nobility of the realm, the Countess had spared no expense.

Garoth and Faranir had taken their places and begun the first course with gusto, pouring wine for one another, and finding their merriment loosening as the evening passed. The two armsmen found themselves seated with Bardo, a local master in the Mercantylers guild and a prominent member of Gardiren's Council of the Mangai. He was also Gardiren's moneylender, an infamous pinch-penny of the first order, he was at once despised for his usurious rates and envied for his overflowing coffers. A short, cadaverously thin man with a bony face and a habitually peevish countenance, he wore an austere suit of snuff colored clothes, and a broad-brimmed, cocked hat.

The moneylender ate very little, preferring to muse on the opulence of the Countess's entertainment while savoring his wine. With each new vintage he raised his goblet to the armsmen and, with a wan smile and a low bow from the waist, he remaining seated, said: "A goblet with you, gentlemen." And while Bardo was perhaps too circumspect a table companion for a night pervaded by such a festive mood, his wife - "The Great Fat Corpulent Woman of the North," who it was said no horse could bear, and for whom it was rumored her husband wished to employ a tent maker instead of a tailor - ate with a jolly greed that would have been disgusting were it not for the sheer awe it inspired. Their six sons were squat, beefy young men and, while making merry with considerable satisfaction, did not share their father's head for wine.

"Such opulence," Bardo mused. "I have ne'er elsewhere seen the like. My wife has insisted we employ a Melderyni cook," he seemed momentarily disgruntled as his abacus-like mind calculated the cost not only of the cook, but the food the man served as well, "Master Jerem of Thay. I see nothing not cooked in the southern style: meats served in thick brown gravies, grilled fish on beds of herbs and nuts, roasted game with an array of peppery-hot jellies... and all served with those insipid Melderyni wines the upper class seems to fawn over. What I would not give for a simple meal of peasant's bread, monk's cheese, and cured sausage served with a small beer. It need not be our beloved Haniale. Any alewife's noble brew would do. And yet," he refilled the goblets of all who sat with him with an effervescent wine from Shorkyne, "Our Countess has inherited her father's masterful sense of wine. Such a perfect vintage - and it only bubbles under the new moon!"

It was as the fifth course came to a close, when the tables were abuzz with anticipation of the news that the Countess would take her sixth course in the garden - as was her custom every year - that Garoth sensed he was being watched. Looking, his eyes fell upon a lithesome young woman, richly dressed, wearing an embroidered cloak, standing between the alchemist's lamps - one purple the other orange - to either side of the garden door that led into the keep. There was a feminine fluidity to her, and when she pulled her hood back, he recognized her immediately. It was one of the Countess's ladies-in-waiting, the young woman who had brought him mulled wine at his post by the balcony earlier in the evening. Her eyes sparkled, and in the flickering, colored lights, she seemed somewhat fey. She blew Garoth a sensual kiss, beckoned to him with a narrow hand, and ducked into the keep.

Garoth stood, raised his goblet, and said: "Countess Curo, Star of the North." As those around him rose and repeated the toast, Garoth excused himself, excusing himself saying he was going to check on his comrade, Faranir, who had fallen into one of his distant, ponderous moods a short time before. Leaving the banquet behind, Garoth went through the door the girl had used, and caught a glimpse of her cloak as she turned and raced up the tower stair, her delighted laughter taunting him to follow. He caught her on the landing of the fifth floor, pulling her into a passionate kiss, taking in the clean, fresh smell of her as she pressed against him. Their mouths parted for breath. She slipped free and went through the stairwell door, looking over her shoulder with an inviting smile.

Garoth followed the young woman down the hall to a door. Her hand found his and she drew him through the door and into another kiss. She let go of his hand and crossed the room to a bed, casting her cloak aside as she pulled the hood from the small lamp that provided the room's only light. It was a feminine room, with womanly articles and bits of needlework here and there, and scented with the faint smell of sweet oil. There were two other beds, each with the coverlet pulled back, a vanity, and a large wardrobe. She turned to face him, and with some small slight of hand, her dress fell in a pool around her ankles, revealing a ripe, shapely form. Nude, she stood straight-backed with pride, tossing her hair in challenge, her expression wanton.

Garoth's sword and baldric clunked onto the carpet.

— [David Queenann](#) 2006/02/16 01:37

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