

The Road Home

Preface

This is a history of the land of Arduunno. More to the point, it is the history of how Theogood, the High King, returned and took possession of his rightful realm. But before I relate the story, I must tell you about the inhabitants of Arduunno.

The people of Arduunno are generally even tempered and good humored, and mostly prefer the simple life. They enjoy companionship, music, the telling of tales by the fireside, and laughter. They are farmers and craftsmen of all sorts. A few are inquisitive and adventurous, becoming great thinkers and explorers. However, contrary to the temperament of most people of Arduunno, there are those who are ambitious and domineering.

It was not always this way. In the beginning, High King Theogood ruled Arduunno, and taught his ways of peace and justice. Then came the day that Theogood returned to his home on Mount Edril in Damhanunn, the Beyond Country, promising he would one day return. He commissioned men to rule in his stead. At first all was well. But when Theogood did not immediately return, some doubted and questioned his existence. Strongmen began to vie for power in their communities. Finally, one of these men emerged as a despot over all the realms of Arduunno, and established his seat at Cur Fracha, or Heather Cairn. Without Theogood's restraint, the rulers became even more oppressive, greedy, and corrupt.

When he saw this, Theogood returned for a short time. He chose messengers to remind the people of Arduunno of his teachings, that he was real, and that he would one day return to personally rule his realm. For a while, many returned to him as their high king. But with the passage of time after he returned to Damhanunn the second time, people again questioned his existence. Doubt spread until hardly anyone spoke of him, especially not publicly.

Most people relegated High King Theogood to the status of myth and fairy tale, and not something to be seriously considered. His teachings were viewed by most people as something for the weak and ignorant, since they contradicted the methods best suited to advance oneself. With sheer brute force and selfish ambition the only requirement for success, violence, greed and corruption spread over the whole land, worse than ever before.

When Theogood saw the sad state of Arduunno, he knew that it was time for him to return a second time. He had been patiently waiting for a change of hearts and minds, but the situation had reached its full miserable extent. Intervention was necessary. He set out to commission messengers to give notice of his imminent return. And now I tell you the story word for word, exactly as it was told to me by one of those who heeded the message.

Chapter 1

The Unexpected Visitor

The dawn broke with a sliver of sunlight behind Dunning Fell. The sleepy farming village of Linden Grove was silent and dark, except for the light in the windows of the little brown thatched cottage at the western edge of the village. Puffs of smoke rose from the chimney as the youngest occupant of the house was already busy at work.

Hobby Baxter, the village baker, was in the covered portico to the side of the house. He rose early every morning to prepare bread for the residents of Linden Grove. He had the large brick oven warming in readiness for the full trough of dough he was mixing. It was already getting warm enough that Hobby had taken off his weskit, and his wavy brown hair was sticking slightly to his head with sweat.

The morning air was beginning to turn warmer and fresher now that it was late May, announcing that summer would soon begin. The sun began to stretch tendrils of light across the sky with the dawn, spreading a warm glow across the landscape.

Several of the neighbors began to walk by Hobby's house in the early light.

"Hey ho, Hobby, are tha not goin' to the fair? Looks to me like tha won't be able to leave with all this here needin' to be tended," offered Bill Overbrook as he passed by with his wife and three noisy little boys in tow.

"No, I'm afraid I must stay behind. Canna have the dough spillin' over while I'm off galavantin'," he replied.

"Aye, and tha would have a mob o' hungry people waitin' here this evenin' all wantin' their bread," chuckled Bill. "Well, let's be off, now, Caroline. We'll see tha later, lad."

"Ta-ra, Hobby," sang out Caroline as they walked away. "Shall we bring thee back anythin'?"

"Nay, just an appetite for me bread," Hobby replied with a smile.

"Aye, that we will," she returned. "Now come along, children. We must be off."

As the group moved off, Hobby saw other families coming out of their houses in a happy, noisy parade, all heading toward the river where the fair of peddlers and minstrels was set up. A group of four young men were stepping out in a lively manner, pushing and joking and guffawing loudly. Hobby cringed inwardly. Toby Thornhill's unruly shock of black hair rose above the heads of his little knot of sycophants. It seemed everyone was either leery of Toby and his vicious ways, or they fell in with him to keep from being on the receiving end of his pleasantries. The sweat breaking out on Hobby's brow was not due to the heat of the oven.

Hobby cowered back into a corner so that he wouldn't be visible to them. He didn't want to hear anything Toby or the others had to say. Although six years of almost daily kneading large troughs of bread dough had added a thick layer of muscle to the young baker's broad shoulders and strength to match Toby's, years of intimidation had left him petrified of his tormentor. Hobby still felt like a helpless little schoolboy.

Just then he heard the yowl of a small cat. He peeped around the corner, and saw Toby and his friends kicking a small kitten between them.

"Hey, mister, leave off wi' me cat! Don't hurt her!" protested a small child's voice. Hobby recognized the speaker as little Emma Fordyce, who was only six years old. He couldn't see her without being seen, so he stayed quiet and listened.

"Oh, be quiet, tha big baby!" retorted one of Toby's friends. "Mebbe we should play wi' thee, instead, eh?"

Toby piped up, "Better yet, we could take thee down to the river with us and sell thee to the peddlers. But that'd be more trouble than tha art worth. Tha aren't worth me spit!"

Hobby heard the child run away, sobbing and calling for her parents. Toby and his friends decided they'd had enough amusement at the poor kitten's expense, and Emma's. Hobby heard them laughing again as they walked away. He breathed a quiet sigh of relief, and after a few moments he looked to see the four young men swaggering their way to the river.

As he stepped out into the open again, he was hit by a pang of guilt. "I'm just a miserable coward. I couldn't even bring meself to stand up for a defenseless child." He hung his head in shame.

Hobby's parents made their way slowly out of the house, ready to join the stream of walkers. They were up in years; Hobby was their only child, born in their old age.

"I wish tha could come with us, lad. Maybe there's a lass there that would catch thine eye," said his mother, Moira. Hobby turned his attention to his work, not wanting his mother to guess that he'd had his eye on Maggie Magowan. He had always been too scared to talk to her, especially when Toby Thornhill was constantly hovering about her.

"Let the lad be, Mother. I'm sure it'll happen soon," said Hobby's father, Hubert. He turned to Hobby and said "Wish I was still able to do the bakin', and not leave thee with all the work to do."

"I'll be fine, Father. I'll just have a nice peaceful day tendin' the bakin'," assured Hobby.

With that, his parents started down the lane. Their next door neighbors, Bert and Clara Muggins and Tim and Annabelle Greenlea, joined them. Like his parents, the Mugginses and the Greenleas were getting along in years.

Soon Hobby noticed that it had become quiet. No more people were on the road. The only sounds were the chirping of birds and the soft slap-slap of the kneading paddle as he worked the dough. He was quite alone.

He lifted the dough from the trough onto the floured table and began to form it into loaves. Soon he had the large table half filled with loaves, ready for the first rise. As he tucked and pinched the last loaf into shape, he heard horse hooves crunching along the path. He turned to look, and nearly fell over in surprise.

It was quite the largest horse Hobby had ever seen, eighteen hands in height. He was white and majestic, with well-developed muscles rippling under his coat. Truly a magnificent specimen. But the man astride the horse far surpassed the beautiful animal he rode, and commanded Hobby's full attention.

The man was tall and regal, with an air of authority about him. It was hard to determine his age, since he had not even one gray hair. His face radiated a deep inner goodness, and made one feel that this man possessed the wisdom of the ages. He exuded joy, confidence, and a presence that could not be missed. Hobby immediately knew that this was someone of great importance.

"Good day, sir," he said, mopping his brow with his shirt sleeve as he bowed. "Welcome to the humble village of Linden Grove. Hobby Baxter, at thy service."

"Yes, Sir Hob, and it just so happens that you are the very person I'm looking for," said the man. He dismounted the horse, and came over to Hobby. Hobby had never seen a man so tall. Hobby's less-than five foot frame was dwarfed by the man's six and a half foot height. This only added to Hobby's amazement.

"But how does tha know me? I've never laid eyes on thee before. I've lived in this village all me life, so I'd know it if tha had ever been here."

The man walked into the portico, pulled up the chair stationed within eyeshot of the oven, and sat down. His knees stuck up at an angle, and very little of him was actually sitting on the seat. It was an odd sight to see such a large man sitting in such a small chair, but it put Hobby and the man closer to eye level.

"Ah, but I knew you before you were ever born, and chose you to be my messenger," replied the man.

"Now how can that be? As I say, we've never met before. And tha says tha wants me to deliver a message? Sir, as tha can see, I'm a baker, as me father before me," replied Hobby, patting his bibbed apron. "I'm no speaker."

"You will no longer be a baker, but you'll feed this and the neighboring towns something even more important than bread. The words that you'll feed them will save their lives," said the man emphatically.

"I don't understand," Hobby protested. "And beggin' thy pardon, sir, but just who art tha?"

"How is it you don't know me?" asked the man. "Did your parents never tell you of Theogood?"

"You mean the High King Theogood?" Hobby was puzzled. "Yes, they did, but everyone around these parts says that's just a tale from long ago. They say he left and went away. And now King Adelic, who rules from Heather Cairn, is liege over us, as were all his sires before him for many a year."

"That is so, but I have only allowed them to be in power for a time. They have forgotten that they owe their position to me. There have been several who were quite prideful and headstrong, but Adelic in particular has become the most arrogant and wicked of all."

"So tha says that tha art High King Theogood? In the flesh, after all this time? Tha looks not much older than I, and I'm yet a youth. I've not even begun seriously courtin' a lass, although me parents tell me it's high time. So how can tha be the High King? That was ages ago!" babbled Hobby in his surprise. "Unless tha lives forever, as it is said."

"Yes, that's true," answered High King Theogood. "At one time, all knew of me. Because I love my people, I desired that they would live in peace, justice, and prosperity. I taught them, and had my words written down. But many decided that they would rather be masters of their own lives than to follow my counsel. They chose to become corrupt and merciless, full of greed. They rejected me and said that I was merely the stuff of legend. So for a time have I allowed them to do as they wished, giving them countless opportunities to reconsider. I have waited for them to return to me and follow my ways, of their own free will, and not because I hold the sword over them. Every day I continue to implore them to come back."

"Yet they choose not to see the misery their willfulness has yielded. Wars, oppression, corruption, and all manner of evil are the result. The cries of my people have reached my ears, and it grieves my heart to see their misery. What fault did they find in me, that they should reject me?" He paused. Theogood's countenance was pained, and tears ran unchecked down his cheeks. Then he continued resolutely. "It is now time for the wrongs of this world to be made right. And that is why I'm asking you to go and speak for me to your people, to anyone who will follow me."

"Me, sir? I'm tellin' thee, I'm just a baker. I can read, and write, and do me ciphers, but I'm the last person tha wants for this job," protested Hobby.

"Be assured that you're the very person I've come looking for, and I say you'll do splendidly. I'll give you the message as well as the courage and the ability to speak," replied Theogood. "I've chosen you for the most

important assignment. I want you to carry this message to Adelic himself, and lead all of my people when you get to Hidden Vale, not just the people from Linden Grove.”

Hobby’s eyes widened, and his face lit with terror.

Thegood continued. “Hobby, would you say your given name for me?”

“Me given name is Harald, but I’ve always been Hobby since I was a wee lad,” he replied. “I used to sit on the hob over there near the oven all the time, watchin’ me father bake bread.”

“Do you know the meaning of your name, Harald?” asked Thegood.

“No sir, I don’t,” answered Hobby.

Thegood looked intently into Hobby’s eyes. “Harald means ‘mighty in battle’. You, my friend, are a warrior, and have a warrior’s heart.”

“Me, a warrior? Why, I’m almost a head shorter than all the other young bucks about, and I’ve never fought. I learned early to hide meself when trouble came lookin’ for me,” said Hobby.

“Yes, I know. You hid from Toby Thornhill many times in the bushes around the linden tree next to the school,” replied Thegood.

“How does tha know that? No one ever found me in me little hidin’ spot,” defended Hobby.

Thegood smiled at Hobby. “I’ve been with you your whole life, my friend. I’ve shared every experience with you. And no, even if I tried to explain how, you wouldn’t really understand.”

“Sir, I really don’t know what to make o’ this. It makes me head fairly swim.”

“I know, Hob, I know. Just please trust me, and trust your own eyes and ears. See, I’m not a figment of your imagination, or an apparition of some kind. I’m here, real,” reassured Thegood. “Here, come shake my hand, and you’ll know for sure.”

Hobby obeyed, and his hand was engulfed in a firm, but friendly hand. He felt warmth, compassion, and great strength flow from the smiling man.

“Now, my friend, may I give you the message I want you to pass along?” asked Thegood.

“Yes, sir, I’m all ears,” said Hobby.

Thegood’s face became solemn. “I want you to tell the people here and in the towns along the East Road that I’m real, and that I’m about to return. I desire goodness, justice and mercy. And because of that, I must judge those who have rejected me and sought to feather their own nests on the backs of others, those who care nothing for others or for what is right. I am about to send my armies to bring these scoffers to justice, and there will be war. Tell those who will to flee to Hidden Vale, as quickly as they can, and wait for me there. Take only what is necessary, and do not burden themselves with trinkets and baubles. That will only weigh them down. Emphasize that they must make haste. Leaving now for Hidden Vale will indicate their loyalty to me.”

“Begg’in’ thy pardon, but why does tha have to send thy armies everywhere? Not all people are evil, sire,” returned Hobby.

Thegood looked at Hobby. “My friend, it’s not just about being good or nice, or following rules – it’s much more than that. Just as I’ll give you the courage and ability to speak, I’m the one who changes peoples’ hearts and makes it possible for them to be good. Those who are loyal to me, depend on me, and spend time with me are changed from the inside out so that they no longer have to work at being good. It happens naturally because they’ve been with me.”

“When will this happen?” asked Hobby. “They’ll all want to know how long they have to make ready and be gone. Summer’s comin’ on, and the crops must be tended and gathered. The wheat will need harvestin’ in about two months.”

Thegood’s face became even more serious. “I can’t make the exact time known. If I did that, there are those who would wait until the very last moment, not willing to truly cast their lot with me. I want people to choose to follow me of their *own free will*, not just as a matter of convenience or to escape the coming storm. They have the freedom to choose, and choose they must. There can be no waffling or indecision. Now, my friend, will you carry my message for me? Or shall I look for another?”

“Sir,” Hobby replied solemnly, “if tha thinks I can do it, I would be honored to do so. At the moment I’m still tryin’ to take all this in, that ye’d be trustin’ the likes o’ me to do such a job. What if I fail? What if no one listens to me?”

“Your only responsibility is to deliver the message. You need not feel burdened for what people decide to do with that message. If they heed you, well and good. If they scoff and reject your words, be comforted that you

have fulfilled your duty,” reassured Theogood.

“When shall I begin?” asked Hobby.

“Today,” said Theogood.

“T-t-t-today? Why, me parents...the whole town...” stuttered Hobby.

“You must tell everyone my message when they return from the fair this evening, and to be ready to leave in the morning. Prepare yourselves to travel tonight, and make first for Waterby tomorrow morning. Follow the East Road, and warn the other three towns along the road, including Heather Cairn. There’s no time to lose,” Theogood insisted.

“As ye say, sir, but I’m not hopeful anyone will be willin’ to leave wi’ me in the mornin’. That’s very soon. And what about me parents? They’re older, and so are the Mugginses and the Greenleas. And then there are people with small children. How will they make such a long journey?” remonstrated Hobby.

“I’ll send horses and wagons to the woods at the foot of Dunning Fell,” promised Theogood. “They’ll be there waiting in the morning, enough for the need. You may assure them of that.”

“I’ll tell ‘em everything tha have said, and hope they’ll listen. I’ll do me best to be worthy of thy trust in me,” replied Hobby.

“I’m sure of that, my friend.”

“What about the rest of Arducco? What’ll happen to them?” asked Hobby.

“I’ve already warned the people of Airidhain. Now, I must be off to spread this message to the coastal villages and to the realms south of the sea. Look for me, for I will visit you on the road from time to time. Farewell until then.” Theogood smiled at Hobby, walked to his horse, mounted, and spurred the beautiful animal into a fast trot west down the lane away from the village.

Hobby watched as horse and rider faded into the distance. He shook himself, and scrubbed his eyes with his hands. “Have I been daydreamin’?” he wondered out loud to himself. But when he looked down in the dirt, he saw the enormous hoofprints that Theogood’s horse had left. They were massive, and couldn’t be missed or mistaken for anything else.

“Nay, lad, ye’ve not been dreamin’,” Hobby said out loud. “Well, back to work till everyone returns.” With that, Hobby loaded up the trough with a second batch of dough. After he shaped it into loaves, he punched the first batch down to rise again.

He began fidgeting, just trying to occupy himself after the morning’s interview.

The day passed slowly as Hobby’s mind kept going back over what had happened. How would he do this? What exactly would he say? Would his courage fail him? Would anyone at all believe him? He quailed at the thought of Toby Thornhill and what he might say and do.

At four o’clock the first of the villagers appeared at the end of the lane. “Here, they’ve started to come back, and I’ll have to do as I said I would,” thought Hobby. His heart came up into his throat, and the butterflies in his stomach wouldn’t go away.

As Hobby watched, the lane filled with people streaming homeward. Everyone from the village was walking toward him. How strange that they had all decided to come back at the same time. In the lead was Miss Rose Weatherill, proud as a peacock in her fine green linen dress and matching shawl. Her father Ned was the town’s most prosperous farmer and de facto governor. Toby and his cronies formed a besotted knot around her, carrying the purchases she had made at the fair. Rose was pretty and enjoyed being the center of attention, clearly believing that she was better than any of the other young ladies. Some even said that she carried a little looking glass with her so she could look at herself whenever she liked. She was a coquette of the first order, and enjoyed toying with the young men’s affections. Toby and Rose’s parents hoped for a match between the two of them; but he was too mean, and she was too vain, for that to happen.

“Hey-ho, Hobby,” called out Bill Overbrook. “Tha missed a great day. Why, they even had the troupe from Heather Cairn with ‘em. Tha would have enjoyed their ‘Punch and Judy.’ But now, how about some fresh bread for our supper, hey lad?”

“It’s all ready, as ye can see,” said Hobby as the crowd drew close to the portico where the bread lay on a cloth covered table.

Hobby knew he might as well begin, so as the last straggler pulled up, he stood on the wooden chair in which King Theogood had sat to speak to the crowd. His heart was pounding and sweat began to pop out on his forehead.

“I have some news for ye all, and I ask ye to listen.” He took a deep breath and continued. “Today, we had

a visitor in our little village. High King Theogood came, and wants me to tell ye that he is real, and that he's ready to set the world right. The thing is, he'll be sendin' his army to do battle, and we must decide whether we'll follow him or not. He's goin' to take this world back, and put those who do evil and don't acknowledge him in their proper places. But we must leave tomorrow morn for Hidden Vale before he sends in his army. He was very firm about that. Take only what ye need for the journey, nothing more. He said not to carry trinkets or baubles. There'll be wagons and horses waiting at the foot o' Dunning Fell for the old and for those with small children. There, now I've said it," he ended with relief, and was surprised that he'd spoken so quickly and clearly. He closed his eyes for a moment, and listened to the low murmur of the crowd.

"Hobby, has tha been into the ale?" laughed Toby Thornhill. He was half a head taller than everyone, with a voice that carried. "Tha must ha' been that bored while we were all away today." A few people laughed.

"Nay, I've had not a drop," replied Hobby calmly. "And if ye'll take a look at the ground over there, ye'll see the hoofprints of the horse Theogood was ridin'. He was white, and must ha' stood 18 hands high. I've never seen such a horse, ever, only heard of 'em."

"When did he say the armies would come?" asked Bill Overbrook, looking worried.

"He didn't say. He wants us to make a firm decision now, just based on his word. He wants us to cast our lot with him of our own choice," answered Hobby.

"Is all this true, lad," asked Willy Cooper. "Tha wouldna just be havin' us on for sport, now would tha?"

"Ye all know I'd not do such as that," said Hobby.

A soft but determined voice spoke. "Hobby is one o' the most truthful people I know. I think we should heed what he says." Hobby looked up to see Maggie Magowan looking at him. Although she was usually a bit shy, she couldn't abide someone being maligned without cause. Her countenance evidenced a kind and gentle heart that made his beat faster. Not for the first time Hobby was mesmerized by her raven hair and piercing blue eyes.

"Aye, we all know Hobby's character, and he's a young man to be proud of," said Bert Muggins. "I'd trust him wi' me life, I would. But leavin' on the morrow - that'll be hard."

"And so, Bert, does tha really think Theogood is real?" called out Alan Thornhill, Toby's father. "If he's real, why hasna he shown himself before now? He's had ample time. That's just the stuff of fairy tales, I say." Alan was just an older version of Toby, with steel gray peppering his black hair and a visage hardened by time and habit.

"Upon my mother's knee I learned o' Theogood," replied Bert, "and I always believed she was tellin' me the truth. I saw it in the way she lived, most of all. There was just somethin' about her, somethin' good and kind and true. And as to why he's not been showin' himself, well, why would anyone come where they're not wanted?"

"Even if we did want to go, what o' the farmin'?" asked Ned Weatherill. "We canna go now with the wheat and barley comin' up. If we leave now, all of it'll be lyin' in the fields, witherin' and rottin'. Nay, even if I wanted to go, I wouldna go till after the harvest. And, tha knows, to go would be as good as treason against King Adelic. I'll not commit treason!"

"He's right," piped up Geoff Crosbie. "Hobby's sayin' we should rebel against King Adelic. He speaks treason! We canna have him stirrin' up trouble with the king, and him sendin' his men here!"

With that, a low murmur began as people mulled over this latest comment.

"Well, I know what I saw, and what I heard," said Hobby, "and I'll be ready to go in the mornin'. As for me, I cast *my* lot with the High King. Ye all will have to decide for thyself, and anyone that wants to join me, just meet me here by nine o'clock and we'll go together. Now come, collect thy bread, and go and think about what ye'll do." As Hobby finished speaking, he was surprised that he could speak with such boldness and confidence. This was a completely new experience for him.

"Oh, aye, Hobby, I'll think about it," said Toby with a mock serious look on his face, then roared with laughter. His three friends joined in, slapping each other on the back.

The ladies of each family came forward to collect their bread, and the low murmur continued among the crowd. Some of the people looked at Hobby with thoughtful expressions, and others looked at him as if he'd lost his mind. Still others looked at him with contempt, as nothing but a troublemaker.

Soon everyone had their bread, and made their way to their homes. Hobby's parents had already gone into the house, so he followed them. His mother was stirring the kettle of stew she'd left cooking over a low fire while they were gone.

"So, tha have seen him, lad," said his father, Hubert, softly.

“Yes, sir,” replied Hobby. “But do tha and mother believe it’s true? And if ye do, I’d like to know why ye never told me that it really was true about Theogood.”

“Yes, son, we both believe, but we’ve been afraid o’ what would happen if people knew we did,” answered his father. “Now I see it’s time to stop fearin’ and make a decision. Mother and I will be goin’ wi’ thee tomorrow. I believe thee, son; and most of all, I believe Theogood.”

“Aye, it’s been fear and doubt for me, too, son,” said Moira. “I’ve never had the confidence to trust meself, wonderin’ if I was just makin’ somethin’ seem real when it wasn’t. Now I know that I was right, and I shouldna ha’ doubted that I’d seen Theogood.”

“Tha saw him?” exclaimed Toby. “When?”

“Come, let’s sit down and have our supper, and I’ll tell thee all about it,” she answered.

Moira set full bowls of stew and a loaf of fresh bread on the table. They all sat down, and Hubert did something he’d never done before in Hobby’s memory. He took their hands, bowed his gray head, and said, “We give thee thanks for every blessing and provision, High King.”

Hobby looked at his father in surprise. “Where did tha learn that, Father?” he asked.

“Me grandsire always did that when we sat down to a meal when I was a lad,” said Hubert. “He told us about Theogood. But me own father always scoffed at him, and told us it was just a story. However, I always suspicioned that me grandsire had the right of it.”

Moira spoke. “To answer thy question, son, I met Theogood when I was a girl, out gathering flowers in the field near Dunning Fell. I remember his kind eyes, his tender voice. I felt the goodness in him. He told me he’d not forgotten us, and was goin’ to come back. But when I told me parents, they laughed and said I’d imagined it all. When I insisted that I’d really seen him, they told me to never mention it again, or everyone would say I was either daft or a liar. I began to doubt that I’d really seen Theogood. Maybe I *had* just imagined it. I never even told a soul about it, except thy father. From time to time, though, I’d wonder if maybe I hadna been right all along. Now I know for sure that I was.”

Hubert said “Ned and Geoff had the right of it, though, when they said that to go like Theogood said was as good as treason. To believe in the High King also means that King Adelric is *under* the High King. What does tha think King Adelric would say if he heard that?”

“He’d be none too pleased,” replied Hobby. “I’m sure he knows nothin’ other than bein’ in power, as his sire and grandsires were.”

“His family’s been first for so long, they don’t even remember how to do any work like the rest of us. Why, everything’s done for ‘em, even turnin’ their bed down of a night,” said Moira disdainfully.

“Well, we’ve got a job to do this eventide to be ready come tomorrow morn. Let’s enjoy our supper, and then gather our things,” said Hubert.

The three ate, making a list of things to take. Clothes, food, a few cooking implements, and blankets for sleeping. Moira added her wooden sewing box, which had been passed on to her by her grandmother. “Every time I look at it, I remember her teachin’ me to sew when I was a girl, and I feel close to her again.”

Hubert added a wooden box of his own, in which he kept a pot of ink and a quill. “Me grandsire made this box, and it’s somethin’ to keep in our family.”

As he put food into an empty flour sack, Hobby wondered, “Will anyone be with us tomorrow, or will we be all alone?”