

## The Council (Old Will Part 3)

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40 Years before the birth of Angus Williamson

William sweated heavily as he hauled yet another log toward the soon-to-be cottage on the mountain. This isolated spot was *just the thing*, the perfect place for him to bring his bride, come spring. He smiled at the thought, then smiled again. Brita. She was now sixteen. William was close to twenty, *a perfect match*, he liked to think. He dropped the log and moved to one end of it. There he lifted the end of the log and dragged it to the corner of the cottage. After laying the end of the log on the prepared corner, he walked to the other end and lifted that to its new post, forming another eight inches of exterior wall. Before laying it on its corner, he felt the presence behind him. The one thing his family warned him of, building so far outside the community was the danger of the unknown of the forest. Now he could feel it behind him. He turned slowly. Then smiling, he said, "Hello Migal."

"I am now called Migalik." The Elf returned William's smile and strode into the clearing. "The have made me King of the Naver Gray Elves. That is why I am Migalik instead of Migal."

"I haven't seen you..."

"Since we stole Brita from Old King Brude," Migalik finished William's sentence, grinned broadly and began chuckling. "How is she?"

"Brita has adjusted well to no longer being the captive princess. She's staying with Steely Albright in Glen Williamson. We're to be married in the spring. Barte was right about that, after all."

“Oh.” Migalik plopped into a sitting position on a stump in front of the cottage-to-be. His expression changed from one of happiness to one of concern. “He is now called Barteel. He leads the armies of the Firthlands against the Dwarfs as Rebeck. His name was changed to honor him for his part in imprisoning the Morrigan. Mishishel was honored in the same way. He is now Rebeck of Wesheshica. He leads the Elf armies there against the Dwarfs.”

William took a seat on the ground near Migalik, crossing his legs. “And what of VelMud and DarMud? Have their names been changed too?”

Migalik now furrowed his brow and lowered his eyes to the ground. “DarMud fell to a Dwarf’s War Hammer defending the City of the Vision. VelMud refused the title of honor and withdrew to live alone in the high mountains.”

“Why did he do that?” *Not much like an Elf. They like their communities.*

Migalik raised his eyes to meet William’s. “I guess you don’t know that I am to be married as well.”

“You don’t look exactly overjoyed about it.” William’s remark was not intended to sound sarcastic.

“Her name is Star Bright.” Migalik smiled at the thought, then his smile faded again. Both VelMud and I love her. She chose me.”

“I’m sorry to hear of that split with our friend and the loss of his brother. Life demands a lot of heart.”

“It does, indeed, William. It does indeed. Our marriage won’t take place for some years. It is our way to move slowly in such things, treasuring our growing

acquaintance while the friendship deepens. By the time we marry we will be one already. Then we will join our households, and our bodies.”

“I’ve heard it said,” William smiled. “Marriage is like a long, dull meal with dessert served first.” Chuckling at his own joke, William leaned back against a pile of logs.

Migalik smiled with understanding. “So it is for many Humans. To them a spouse is a body and a servant. We understand that each mind is a vast macrocosm. Each one has its own nuances, joys and failings, its own prides and shames. We learn to treasure each of those things in our mates before we join our flesh. Ours is a long delightful meal with many apéritifs.” Migalik fidgeted. “I came not to talk of marriages but to ask your help.”

“Anything.” William’s leaned forward with eagerness.

“The Dwarf War is raging. They think there is gold and other precious metals in our mountains. Perhaps it is true. We refuse to allow them to riddle our green hills with mines and holes. We fear that a great many Dwarfs will come here, if they find anything. We want our mountains to remain the domain of Elves. You told me at Castle Urquhart that Manannán MacLyr showed you where there is gold – and diamonds you said. I’m sure that what you told me is true, but let me ask again. Is it true?”

William raised his eyebrows and with a nod of his head, answered, “Yes.”

Migalik rose to his feet. “Then come with me. Tell the Dwarfs where this place is to be found. If we can make them believe you, they will leave and the war will end.”

The trek took days. William's first visit to the City of the Vision lasted only minutes before Migalik rushed onward. Nearby, they entered a cave, carved into a mountainside. The cave was guarded by numerous Elves armed with bows. Quivers of arrows were slung over their backs. Inside stood a row of large cages made of grass weaves, each containing one Dwarf. The Dwarfs were sullen without exception. They stayed to the rear of their confinements and refused to face outward. All calls and salutations were ignored.

Migalik strode within about six feet of the row and announced. "I have brought you a Human who knows where you can find far more gold and even diamonds, than you can ever hope to find in our green hills. You have said you came to us seeking gold. Unless you lied to us, hear this man's words!"

In the third cage from the cave's opening, one Dwarf approached the nearer end of his grass cage. He wore a heavy jerkin of leather, fringed with fur. Under the jerkin he wore a heavy leather shirt decorated with bits of shiny metal. He leggings were wool, adorned with colorful designs. On his head he wore a large leather hat flopping to one side. In the hat stood a long white feather. His girth was remarkable. William wondered that a person of such obvious strength could be confined in a cage of woven grass, but the Dwarf avoided touching the strands of grass as though they were poison to him. The scowl on his face alone, would be enough to frighten many and the thought of facing this fierce, enormously strong warrior armed with a mace or war hammer gave William a chill. The Dwarf's voice was craggy and gruff. But when he spoke, it was softly. "What would a paltry human know of gold or diamonds? You would cheat us with a lie and a

diversion. Our people won't leave this place till we have what we came for. It wasn't our intention to draw so much blood, but gold has its price."

Migalik stepped closer to the cage with a scowl of his own. "I'm sure that by now, you know, VeratNonn, that Elves don't lie. I think you can tell when you touch this soft grass that now imprisons you that we don't need to lie to you. You are in our power. But as you have learned, Elves don't like killing, so you are not dead. Neither have you been injured. We only wish that Dwarfs had such honor."

This accusation of low honor brought a roaring growl from VeratNonn. "How dare you speak to me in this way. When I get out of here I will tear out your heart with me teeth. You should know our people are looking for us and they will find us..."

Migalik interrupted. "And we will bind them behind strands of grass as well. You know that this is true. Behold your own situation."

"The grass burns us or we would tear it aside as nothing."

"I know about the cages," Migalik was trying not to sound glib. "Do you truly seek gold or not? Is this a lie or not? Speak, prisoner."

"You should know by now," VeratNonn growled, "that Dwarfs do not lie, either."

"I understand that." Migalik cut him off again. "But sometimes they exaggerate, Aye?"

"We are here for gold." VeratNonn was using less fierce tones, but still sounded threatening to William. "We are here for no other reason. Have the human tell me where this gold is to be found. Release one of us to carry the message to our kin. If he tells

truly, we will go there and leave your cold forests in peace. If he tells falsely, we will slaughter you and find the gold that is surely here.”

Migalik was growing weary of the brutish manners of this Dwarf, VeratNonn. “We prefer to live in peace with our neighbors. If you live anywhere in the world, then you are a neighbor. We may not share much brotherly love with Dwarfs, but we still prefer to live in peace. We hate none and we hold no value for gold, diamonds or other things so coveted by you and some of the other races. If you wish to find wealth of this kind, listen to the Human.”

VeratNonn’s words came softly but filled with threat. “Speak Human.”

William stepped forward, not too sure of his safety. The other Dwarfs rose from their seats near the backs of their cages, and stepped closer to hear him better. All of them had the appearance of formidable warriors. *How did the Elves capture these Dwarfs? They look like two-legged monsters!* “You will need to go by sea, for it is a very long walk.”

“We are mountain folk,” the Dwarf growled. “But if what you say is true, we will go by sea. What is the route?”

William gathered his thoughts and took one more step closer to the grass cages.

“We, here in Alba, live on a long narrow island.”

“Tell me something I don’t know, Human.”

“To the East of the island lies a huge land mass. Follow the land to the South. After many days you will find a place where the land ends and goes East. Continue South. In less than half a day, you will find another huge landmass. Follow that land South and a little West. Your voyage from there will take two or three weeks. Maybe

even four weeks. When the land ends and goes to the East, follow it. It will soon begin to turn North. Follow the land for another two days, sailing North and little East. Near there is where the gold lies. Near there you will also find diamonds – large diamonds.”

The Dwarfs began speaking among themselves. Finally VeratNonn turned back to William and asked, “Have you been to this place?”

“Yes.” *Well. I was above it...*

“How do you know of this place,” VeratNonn continued.

William cleared his throat. “It was shown to me by Manannán MacLyr.”

“Ha.” The Dwarf was derisive. “How is it that you confer with gods?”

William smiled at his memory of the old man in the small boat. “He required a service of me. I performed it. He promised me friendship and showed this place. He said I would need to know how to get there so I could tell others. I did not know, then, that it would be you.”

Migalik now stepped forward again. “Will you give it a try. Go and look?”

“It’s too far.” VeratNonn turned away. The other Dwarfs remained close, listening.

Migalik was not to be deterred. “So you would rather war and search for your precious gold where there is none, than go where the god points.”

VeratNonn turned back and approached the grass bars. “What assurance can we have that what this Human says is true, other than his word? Humans, unlike Elves and Dwarfs have been known to lie.”

William began again. “There is more.”

All ears turned to listen. “Long ago, there were mines, there, gold mines. The ruins of those mines can still be recognized. The miners left, not because the gold was mined out, but because there was a dreadful flood that drove them away. The sea rose hundreds of feet and when it finished receding, it was far deeper than it had been before the flood. There is still much gold there and it can be found by finding those old mines.”

“What else was told to you by Manannán?” demanded VeratNonn. “What service did you perform for him to get such valuable information?”

William hesitated. “I have told you all you need to know. The service I provided for him will remain between Manannán and me. That information will not help you find the gold.”

The Dwarfs talked among themselves for several minutes, then VeratNonn stepped forward again. “We will go and look there. I will lead the expedition, myself, but you, William Williamson, will accompany me. If what you say is true, you will be returned to any part of Alba you wish, safely, in comfort and well protected by us. If what you say is not true, you will be left dead, at the end of the Earth where you would send us. So. Will you bet your life on the words you have told us you received from Manannán MacLyr?”

William stepped back a step, lowered his eyes for a moment and said, “I am to be married in just a few more months.”

“Delay your wedding,” Migalik and VeratNonn both said at the same time.

Just over a year later, a strange looking craft entered the mouth of the River Naver from the sea. It was long and black. Its hull was round, its stern, flat and its bow nearly square, but rounded on the bottom. It carried one large square sail and lumbered through

the water like a large bear walking against the current. On its deck were squat, stocky figures wearing too many clothes. Seated on the very tip of the bow sat William Williamson, grinning broadly, a gold ring in his pocket for Brita and many stories to share with his children, in time.

Those on shore knew of his absence. They thought he was long dead, lost at sea or killed by some creature of the forest. Only Brita remained hopeful. Word spread like the wind. Before the ship made two hundred yards from the sea, all of Glenn Williamson and most of the people from the Valley of the Naver had come to watch its progress.

After William left with the Dwarfs, the war ended, but the Dwarfs remained until just the last few months. Suddenly they were all gone, leaving only the marks in the forest where they had camped. Migalik knew of his coming and when the Dwarfs disappeared he knew that William's mission had been successful. Migalik was not among the many waiting for William to disembark the Dwarf's vessel. William could see Migalik near the top of a distant hill, watching his approach, but William's eyes were far more interested in watching for the golden hair of his wife, very soon to be. Niamh, named for her gold hair, stood on the river's bank, hands on hips, lips pursed, obviously not sure if she would do better to scold or sing. *Maybe in time, I will tell her of her father.* William smiled more broadly. *Perhaps not.*

The story of the voyage is a long one, fodder for another book, perhaps. The most important part is that William had made new friends, the Dwarfs. On the voyage, about halfway down the West coast of Africa, William spotted a small boat off to the starboard. In the boat, an old man stood, smiling. When William saw him, Manannán simply waved his hand. Then he was gone.