

Gold of Hapless Fools

Sojourn in Sulheym

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Rulers from the Elfin Kingdom of Gwyllion mull over a pact with the Governor and Company of Chartered Economists, which promises trade and plenty for the kingdom's subjects. The pact's success hinges on Gwyllion's first princess, Caeridwen of Ydalir. She studied under the Company's guidance, and helps negotiate its terms with the kingdom's rulers. But while visiting a local court, chaos erupts and the princess gets caught in the fighting. She finds safety when Dominic Tuazon, dreaded assassin and mercenary leader, joins with some companions to save her. Realizing that her life is at stake, Caeridwen and Dominic hatch a plan to reach the capital's safety. Yet Dominic is not all he seems: he plans to profit from the reforms, he knows too much about the princess, and his ruthless thinking irks her. Meanwhile, Caeridwen's pursuers will keep tracking her no matter what she plans. While all these happen, the World Island braces for greater conflicts to come.

Act I

In a new form of society, sovereignty is localized with counselors. They proclaim the rules, make the law, issue the decrees. The shift from courts and kings to the counselors occurs throughout the World Island. The actual command and rule falls onto new men, a new type of men. It is, specifically, the COUNSELIST type. Those who head the councils, the counselors-in-court, are the same, or nearly the same, in training, functions, skills, habits of thought as the counselors-in-enterprise.

Hamysh Mædewe, *The Counselors and their Dangers*

Sunlight burst into the motor carriage's body, shining through the elf-girl's eyelids. She grunted, darted upright from her bed. She had lain there for half a day, struggling to keep awake as the carriage coursed from the capital to where others needed her.

"Everything alright, princess?"

The carriage driver bowed and greeted her as she stepped out. She had tied her grey hair into a ponytail, had put a coat over her sleepwear. No one would notice, she thought. And everyone would gawk at how presentable she looked.

"I am!" she said in a strained smile while sleepy. "Where to?"

The elfin princess headed through a rubble road, birch and willow shielding her from further sunlight. Houses lay behind her, their timber and straw and soil nested by forest clearings. Some children played with sticks and stones, some elfwifs hung clothes to dry before their homes, some elfmen dozed or ate or finished their work. The road itself led to a stone hall, curved logs holding its roof above.

It had rained the night before, and the princess made careful step to keep from slipping. Earthy smells mixed with afternoon cooking from across town, scents strange to her home in *Caer Rotham*. Homely sights and scents and other senses greeted her as she made way to her duty.

A watchman set down his rifle, bowed to her as she entered the hall. Elfmen across the hundred villages nearby had gathered to answer her as one. They all glanced as the door creaked open, and they went back

to their own workings as the princess went in. A man in green finery waved to her, and he showed the princess a seat.

“Caeridwen!” he said. “You finally made it. The assembly is about to answer our proposal.”

The princess smiled, took her seat. The man had a round face, his eyes smiling with him. “Great to hear, Brian,” Caeridwen said. “The king will be happy to hear it.”

“Your father will. I’ve been talking with his magistrate here. There was some disagreeing here, but they finally made up their minds.”

“Great!” The princess sighed, letting calm soothe her heart. She was there for her father, for the Kingdom. And for old times’ sake. For what everyone had done for her.

Those gathered had sat themselves on benches facing each other, the princess free to take the floor. She looked to her friend, who nodded. She nodded back, and she headed to the hall’s center.

“Freemen, landowners, officers of the court,” she began. “I thank you all for coming today. We at the Governor and Company of Chartered Economists have been excited to show you all the benefits your lands and homes will get from accepting this deal. Truly, I could ask for no better audience than the king’s own people, and my own people. So without further ado—”

“If I may, highness,” the royal magistrate said. “Please cut to the chase.”

“Right, yes, I will.” Caeridwen cleared her throat, nodded. “What does the assembly say of the proposed terms?”

Murmurs sounded through the hall. The princess could see faces twisting, heads shaking, whispers plotting. The magistrate took his staff and pounded it, silencing the hall. Caeridwen gulped. She had never seen ruckus like this.

One of those assembled handed a journal to the magistrate. He breathed in, spoke. "We, the esteemed of the hundred villages of Caer Liwelydd, do hereby reject the terms outlined by the Governor and Company of Chartered Economists."

Caeridwen's eyes widened, the princess now breathless. The magistrate kept reading.

"We reject the Governor and Company's proposal for a central mint under advisement by one of their counselors. We reject the Governor and Company's proposal for new forms of enterprise not beholden to debts by royal consent. Finally, we reject the Governor and Company's request for the Kingdom of Gwyllion to host their enterprises under royal protection. These acts, the esteemed of the hundred villages of Caer Liwelydd do affirm."

"I see." The raven haired elfgirl sighed. "His majesty thanks you all for your deliberation."

The hall went back to murmurs and talking. The green dressed man walked up to the princess, and she followed him to the hall's courtyard. Caeridwen breathed out, held her head.

"Why did they reject it?" she said. "They'll just be worse off."

"I'm surprised, too," the man said. "The magistrate never said anything about their decision. He hinted that they all wanted it."

"Well, it's not your fault, Brian."

"I guess elfin wits have nothing on a mere man like me"

The princess giggled. "Will you be back to Caer Rotham soon?"

"Not soon. Why?"

"Maybe you'd like to have a late lunch before we both have to go."

The man nodded, and they headed back to the village. A travelers' inn served them roast mutton and a cold roasted oat drink. "My re-

gards to his majesty,” the innkeeper said as he headed for other travelers. The two talked of old times in the Company, of happy times studying among friends.

“Later, Damian went to me and handed me a bouquet,” the raven-haired elfgirl said. “He said ‘I know it’s late, but I want to give you these flowers.’ I was just there stuttering!”

The two laughed.

“Do you know what happened to him?” Brian asked.

“I heard that he died while sailing from Arvepia.” The princess sighed. “He had just passed an exam, too. He was very happy about it.”

“He never liked talking. Hope he’s in peace now.” The man finished his share of the drink. “But from indifference curves to bargaining around Gwyllion. You really moved up the world, didn’t you.”

“Stop teasing,” the princess said, rolling her eyes. “I already knew some of what I had to do as princess.”

“We’re all proud of you back in the Company, Caeridwen. This place is just one bump in the road. There will always be better days.”

“Of course.” She smiled, and the two kept talking till they finished their food. Brian waved goodbye, and he headed for a motor carriage that had just come. She saw that two mentors were driving, and she waved to them.

“See you in the capital!” one of them called. “We’re proud of you, Caeridwen!” another cried. The carriage reversed, then headed off out of the village.

The princess dropped a gold piece on the bar, and the innkeeper showed her their best room. A balcony gave her a view of the hall and all forest behind it. She could see roads trailing off to the hundred villages, to Caer Liwelydd itself, to other Caerau and their own hundred

villages, up to the capital itself. Yet the roads here were made of rubble and dirt, a far cry from Caer Rotham's smooth pitch roads. The houses here used timber, straw, and dung, nothing like the capital's marble houses. Their hall even stayed a small one, nothing splendid like the royal court back home.

And they all wasted their best chance for growing past their roots.

Rumbling sounded from a distance, then grew louder. The princess watched as a motor carriage stopped in front of the hall. She recognized Prince Taliesin ap Gwlyget as he stepped out of it. A tall man, gaunt under his bright blonde hair, yet still strong. Her father's friend, whom the king had hoped would listen to her and the Company. Hopes that she had failed.

She looked into a mirror, and she saw her grey eyes red. Her ears followed her frown. She breathed in, and she swallowed the lump in her throat. She wiped her tears, washed her face. Everyone would be alright, she thought. Everything had always ended up alright. She could always expect things to brighten, no matter what she went through.

The hall was empty that day but for the princess. The watchman had taken his leave for the next, and Prince Taliesin still had business. Caeridwen yawned. She had woken early, had bathed and had dressed in blue dress, its silk from the Empire of the Three Seas to the Far West. She also wore a tin circlet for her hair. Bargaining needed one to look as good as the offer, she thought.

She had stopped by the chapel of the Ternary Prior for liturgy. It had taken no more than a half-hour, yet it had all grandeur and majesty as anywhere else. Except Caer Rotham, for liturgies in its large cathedrals and halls seemed stale and lifeless to the humble chapel's own. She had partaken of the Word's sacrifice, had sat in silence before making to the hall. May the Ternion help me, she prayed as she waited for the prince. Her father needed it. Gwyllion needed it.

Knocking sounded from the door, and the man with a gaunt face under white blonde hair came. The prince wore woolen cloak over linen tunic. He had braided his hair with gold balls, as they did in Trocmen to the north. Caeridwen recalled that the prince's mother was Trocmeni, that her father had mocked him for it when they had first met. Taliesin had repaid him by clocking his nose. She fought a smile down from recalling his stories.

"I'm glad to see you, Caeridwen," Taliesin said as he sat on a bench. He waved for the princess to sit next to him. "I hope you have something good for me." Caeridwen took her place by the prince. A late winter breeze flowed through the hall, and the princess shivered.

"I do!" She cleared her throat, steeled herself. "The Company al-

ready studied what will happen. I can explain it all to you!”

“You may. Know that I’ll have to talk to the assembly first even if you convince me. I can’t just rule for them to ratify the deal.”

“Of course, milord. Now.” The princess stood and took the hall’s writing slate. She had placed papers by it. “The Company already studied the deal’s effects. In total, the changes will increase our wealth manifold. Your Princedom especially will see a great boon by—”

“Yes, I’ve read the report. Gwlygetion will see a 20

“Yes?”

“All the report has is positives. Why has it no negatives?”

“We found none.”

“How did you come to that?”

The princess smacked her lips. “We used the records that the Princedom has. We applied our thinking to it, then we used calculations based on what other realms have gone through.”

“You never accounted for the Princedom’s conditions in these calculations?”

“We did. We used the records it had to—”

“That’s not what I meant. This 20

“We have the best in the field, milord.”

“I have been prince here for a hundred years. Some of the fine folk who gathered yesterday have been around for longer. I know nothing of your Company’s thinking, much less whether it is wrong or right. But I know the land and the people. Something tells me that this report needs improvement.”

The princess nodded. She kept the prince’s words in mind, something to report to the Company back in Caer Rotham.

“Thank you for your suggestions, milord. That will be all.”

“Aye. I hope your father and your Company hear my answer. The assembly was worse about it the past weeks.”

The princess sighed, headed for the royal motor carriage. The driver had been chatting with the innkeeper, telling of old memories and ribald tales. His ears perked when the princess came, and he made a quick farewell.

“Back to the capital, highness?”

“Yes. Try to make it quick.”

The engine roared, and the carriage sped off from the village. Another half-day’s journey, enough time for Caeridwen to gather her thoughts. The prince had been a warrior in his youth, leading bands and retinues in fights abroad. He knew nothing about the Company’s thinking, nothing about money or commerce. He would be the last anyone would ask for advice on these things.

Yet he had made good points in their discussion. Caeridwen knew that the Company needed to hear them.

Lunch had been filling, if quick. The raven haired elfgirl burped as she finished her cheese and butter spread toast. She gulped down a flask of water, and she dashed from the dining hall to the courtyard for her father's office. The assembly held no session that day, and the king had only paperwork to finish. He always had time for his daughter, no matter what he did.

Caeridwen rushed past retainers and hired men carrying wreaths, streamers, anything that fit in a festival. Spring would come soon, and the coming feast kept everyone busy. Stalls would fill the streets in front of the palace, citizens and subjects across the Kingdom would glee, and those from abroad would awe. As she made for the royal office, the elfgirl spotted farmers carting in scallions, and turnips, and lettuce, and sugar beets, and other winter produce. She smiled, knowing that what the Company had done years ago still bore sweet fruit.

Door hinges squeaked as Caeridwen entered a cool room. The air was dry, the princess's ears perking up as she felt the change. She remembered that the king had replaced the conditioner. A blacksmith, an electrician, and a stonemason had built the old one. The new one was built from a plan whence other conditioners came. Caeridwen heard its engine buzz. She could make out each gear's stirring, the conditioner condensing then compressing. The last one made less noise. Yet it took longer to make, needed to fit the building's conditions. Some workers just carted in the new one, put it up, plugged it in.

An elder elf with cropped raven hair looked up as Caeridwen entered. His Majesty, Cadwallon ap Ydalir, his breathing slow as he let out

tension from finished work. A smile formed on his gentle face, the princess smiling back and waving.

"I haven't seen you since you left for Gwlygetion." The elder elf yawned, stretching his neck and back. He stood and walked over to his daughter, embracing her. "I trust the journey was none too grave?"

"Nothing happened going to and fro." The princess broke from her father, and she grimaced. "But I've news from the Prince and the assembly."

"We can have talk about it over lunch."

"I had lunch already."

"You can have it again."

The princess nodded, and the father and daughter headed for the door into a hall. Machines and materials lined aisles, elves and men calculating, checking, carrying the kingdom's concerns. Caeridwen had seldom used this way to meet her father, not wishing to disturb clerks hard at work. Yet no one passed a gaze to them as they headed for the dining hall.

"You had a good trip?"

"Yes, papa."

"I never saw you last night."

The elfgirl giggled. "I was so tired from the trip back."

"I got your telegram. Read it twice even." The king sighed as they passed through a hardwood arch. Some servants had begun tidying the elfgirl's plate. The king nodded to them. They nodded back, brought some more toast with a venison stew.

Cadwallon locked his gaze at her. His dark brows crumpled. "You talked with Taliesin, aye?"

The princess nodded. "I did." Her voice quavered, but she held on.

“He didn’t like the proposal.”

“He didn’t, now?”

Caeridwen told him what the prince had said. She held her glass tight, her voice struggling to keep even. Cadwallon nodded as she explained. When she finished, he took a piece of toast, gulped it down with some stew. He turned back to his daughter. “Taliesin wasn’t at the assembly when they gave their answer, but I can see his clawmarks all over. He’s always been antsy about new ideas. It’s nothing to pay much mind to.”

“But papa, what he said could really impact how they’d take the changes.”

“Look around you. Why else did I let you study with the Company? I know what good they did for us here.”

The princess nodded. “We need to show them how much better they could have it.”

“Aye, Carie. ” He poured himself spiced honey water, finished his glass. A cool spring breeze blew from the courtyard. “Taliesin sticks to what he knows instead of seeing how things could be different. He’s ruled for a hundred years, he can spare another hundred to see how things play out.”

“Of course, papa.” The elfgirl nodded, smiling. “He should widen his view and accept that things should change.”

“That he should.” The king looked compose, but his forehead lines deepened. The princess knew he was mulling something over. Yet she could save his thoughts for another day.

Caeridwen finished her bowl of stew, ate another piece of toast. Days had been getting longer since winter’s end. The princess excused herself, headed for the east gate. A road ran through woods, and it brought goods and people from markets to homes, then to Caer Rotham’s out-

skirts. The Aracian legions had built another road there some 700 years ago. A token of friendship between their Old Republic and the elves. It had been cobbled from stones over gravel, an old relic from times past. She remembered how it had made rides bumpy, how she had tripped when chasing friends over it. How the Company had come, had replaced the cobbled stones with tar. She smiled, following it beside motor carriages and other passersby.

The most ancient homes lined the road by the palace. Nothing really remained from the ancients, for their owners had torn down and replaced entire rooms through the times. Even other homes followed their suit. The elfgirl sensed everything she could as she walked. Marble from Darmati, food from Arvepia, fabrics from the Far West, toys from the Imperium, even spices from Haltama. She could see what the World Island had to offer without even leaving her hometown. As she did, large ships decked with rifled barrels filled her mind. She knew whom to thank for all these.

The Company faculty had come ahead of her from Caer Liwelydd. Someone special there would give a speech at the festival's height. She smiled, remembering her days. Staying all night to finish work. Solving equations on writing slates. Crunching numbers to see how places would grow. Hard work, yet needed.

She also remembered those they had lost. Initiates who had moved to greener pastures. Staff who had gone to work with courts and enterprises. A young man who had given her a late gift of flowers for her birthday. Who had sunk with a ship. She never did think much else of him but amusement. A sigh. Only brighter days ahead, she thought. For all painful moments in times past, only brighter days ahead.

“The steps forward don’t just come to us.”

A small greying old man’s voice boomed through Caer Rotham’s square. He wore a banana hemp tunic over black trousers. Hundreds watched as he spoke.

Hundreds more had flocked from across Gwyllion, and even abroad. The raven-haired elfgirl saw many dresses, many faces, all from many places and positions. They were all gathered, different as they were, in one spirit. Caeridwen looked forward to how they’d enjoy their city. How she’d enjoy their delicacies.

“We build our next steps by taking them. Those who take them are us, a powerful realm as you all are gathered here in this festival. We all have the paths for our next steps available, but we need to act in service to the realm. And we do that by collaboration.”

Applause rang as the old man finished. Caeridwen smiled, looked to her father, to faculty from the company. All her hard work had led to this moment. The king cleared his throat and walked to the old man from his seat. He wore a linen robe plain but for the kingdom’s arms. Black antlers on a red field, a white tree on a green. Below them, a gold carbuncle on a blue field.

The king and the small old man held hands as if to shake them, and a flash of light brightened their faces. They shook hands as the photographer made with his film.

“The Kingdom of Gwyllion and its principalities thank the Governor and Company of Chartered Economists for gracing us.”

The crowd hushed as the king made his words heard.

“A new spring dawns on Gwyllion. I had sent my daughter to the Republic of Arvepia to study under your esteemed faculty, knowing that your studies and ideas would help the kingdom. Our people will prosper under your guidance. “

A spring breeze blew in. The princess smelled perfume and spices from stalls setting up, then smoke and soot from outside the city. The clashing scents made her flinch.

“We hope that our cooperation will lead to new heights, both for the kingdom’s citizens and subjects, and for the Company.”

More applause as the king finished. The king headed for his daughter, and the old man followed him. Caeridwen bid them to take their seats, only for a jolt to take her as her father showed her the stage. She smoothed her silken gown, and she climbed up as her heart pounded. She bent her knees and bowed her head, a new trend that had become popular among women.

She spoke in a steady voice despite her nerves. “On behalf of the students who have benefited from the knowledge and wisdom of the Company’s faculty, I thank you.”

The crowd answered with cheers and applause. The old man nodded to her. The princess felt her chest get lighter, seeing them do so.

“Change has now come to the kingdom. We have every reason to thank the Company for helping it come about.”

Approving murmurs, the king’s smile. Company faculty started the next round of applause.

“But the Company merely brought knowledge. The real power for change starts with those who apply it. Those who have the wisdom in embracing it. It is every citizen’s responsibility to harness this change for the realm. Let us forge ahead, building bridges of collaboration,

and stepping forward into a prosperous future.”

The last applause came like thunder. People cheered with faces full of hope and excitement. Caeridwen basked in the crowd’s energy. She, her father, and everyone in front of her would embrace what came next with greatest approval.

The crowd parted as the princess climbed down the stage. Her father came to her and gave her an embrace.

“You did well there, Carie.”

She laughed, a soft sound muffled in her father’s shoulder. “You almost gave me a heart attack, papa!”

Cadwallon gave a hearty laugh at her complaint. “The kingdom needs to see that my daughter has grown into a strong young elfwif.”

“Your father’s right, Caeridwen.” The small old man patted her back. “You make a good face for what we do here.”

“Of course, Doctor Castillo. I’m glad to have done the Company proud.”

Caeridwen could still remember her first meeting with Richard Castillo. She had landed in Arvepia, had made her room in a nearby flat. Even as princess, she had earned a scholarship after talking with him. She was the pride of the Company, whom everyone had praised would do great wherever she would go. Hopes to keep up, dreams to maintain.

The raven haired elfgirl walked through the stalls and sights. She remembered when she had returned from Arvepia three years ago. She had told her father of everything the Company wanted for Gwyl-lion. He had let them travel across the kingdom, collecting records for their use. She had led those who had run the numbers. And she saw how things had changed quickly. These stalls and sights had been plainer and less exciting. Just the usual winter produce, and not in

large numbers as she saw those days. She headed to market stalls, ate curry from Shaisunahaga cooked with rice from Tsukiyumi and breaded cutlets from the Tyskan lands, drank cooled honey jasmine tea from the Empire of the Three Seas, bought a pack of sjeljanka from the Volhynian Republic for her father to taste, bought bananas from Arvepia to remind her of good times. She would have more thanks to the Company.

Yet these were to wait, for she heard a gunshot ring from a distance.

Elfs suddenly stopped in their places, humans asking them if something had gone wrong. The princess headed for a watchman, took him carrying his rifle, and his pistol for her own use. Soldiers from her father's new permanent army also joined.

They made for the railroad, to suburbs straddling farmland and city defenses. They came upon men armed with rifles and pollaxes, a tall one talking to bystanders around them. This one had a familiar look, yet the princess couldn't tell exactly whom.

"Again, thank you for your understanding," he started. "I hope it's now clear that there is no need for any of us to get antsy." He cleared his throat. "And please forgive Rian for what happened earlier, he's not used to this kind of pressure."

An elf looked down, nodding with the tall man. Caeridwen's ears perked up. She showed her hands to those who had joined her, signed them to relax. They nodded as she headed to the clearing where the men were gathered. Someone held a banner of an arm bearing a sword next to what looked like a graph, all over a dark blue field. Its words were "ignorantiam refragor per castigans rigor". The elfgirl walked steadily till heads turned to her.

"May I ask what's happening here?" she asked.

The tall one flinched. He had black hair and brown eyes. The elf who was with him scratched his head.

“My friend just shot in fear. He meant no harm.”

“What scared him?”

The tall one cleared his throat. “These fine gentlemen asked us to help resolve a dispute.”

“A dispute?”

“Aye!” a bystander said. He clutched a hoe and wore a straw hat. “These gwerin y caer weren’t letting us plant or graze.”

“Well it’s tragic that the railroad went through the commons,” another said. “But we took the rest of the commons first.”

The tall one sighed, faced the bystanders. “Please, calm yourselves. We were close to reaching an agreement! Let me talk to the princess first.”

Murmurs of “princess?” started. The tall one signed them to stay put, approached Caeridwen.

“What’s your name?” she asked.

“Dominic Tuazon.” The tall man cleared his throat. “I’m Head Archivist for the Sons of Cauchy.”

“Archivist?” Caeridwen giggled. “You’re a librarian?”

“The Sons could spare no other. I had to conduct business for them here.”

“Well I’m afraid that you can’t do that business.” She hummed. “We already have ways to deal with their problems. The people need to follow them.”

“These humble folk already tried. They were turned away. They sat on the edge of conflict.” Dominic Tuazon sighed. “Had we not come, your festival would have seen more disruption than it has with the two of us talking things out.”

"If they had a problem with things, they should have brought it up with the royal assembly and court. Not invite you here."

"Yet invited we were, and we had good progress fixing things." The tall man suddenly jerked his head side to side. The princess could hear boots marching from a distance.

"Why did your friend shoot?"

"A couple freeholders were agitated by the deliberations. Tried to pounce on the caer's folk. Rian just shot a blank in reflex, he's not used to dealing with crowds outside battle."

"Someone could have been hurt. Your clients should get to the royal court."

"Get to the royal court," he said mockingly. "Do you know what these humble folk had to go through to get to the royal court?" He sighed. "And no one was hurt, so it shouldn't matter."

"They file a petition in a suburban office, then they wait their turn to be heard. Just like everyone else. And no one was hurt, but a dangerous thing still happened."

"Why wait for the assembly's judgment when they could settle things faster themselves?"

"We have other courts for that."

"Where do you think they were turned away from?"

The princess opened her mouth to say something, but she found no words.

"These were people with mouths to feed and bellies to fill. Every day with no answer to their woes means another day with a larger chance of things blowing up." He started pacing. "No one was hurt from a blank shot. Better than this whole mess blowing up I'd say."

"They could have at least waited for their petition to be heard."

“Well now it was. It took our entry for it to happen.” He sighed. “The Economists’ Guild just had to build their railroad on the commons.”

“Economists’ Guild?” the princess asked.

“The Governor and Company of Chartered Economists.”

Was that what others called them? The princess hummed. It was strange that only Dominic Tuazon recognized whom she was, too. She was about to speak when some freeholders walked to the tall man. They said things that Caeridwen could only faintly hear, even with her hearing.

“We’ve sorted things out with your help. We’ll just bring it to the assembly and make it official there.”

“They won’t trouble you?”

“Better, they’ll start a new enterprise with us.”

“The Ternion be with you.”

“Aye, many thanks for the Sons of Cauchy. No need for more trouble here thanks to us.”

The tall man turned back to the princess.

“They’ll go to the assembly then?” she asked.

“Aye, that they will.” Dominic let out a long sigh. “The Sons of Cauchy will be off.” He chuckled. “Another job with no pay. Just our luck.”

A dozen bearing rifles and pollaxes formed a file by Dominic. “This won’t be our last meeting, princess. I can feel it.” They marched through the suburbs, heading past the railway. Before they faded from view, freeholders and craftsmen handed them baskets of crops and wares. Caeridwen could make out a tall figure wiping his eyes, shaking their hands.