



THE WILL OF JOIZE

A STORY BY
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Part the First:
A Wolf's Warning
(WITH NOTES AND INTRODUCTION)



THE LANGDEV PROJECT



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This work implements Classical Sevensi, a production of The LANGDEV Project. For more information, see <https://github.com/literallybenjam/langdev/>.

INTRODUCTION

OUR STORY BEGINS AT AN EMPIRE'S END. After the Great Mother Joize fell in the War of the Spirits which once ravaged this land, humankind found itself in disarray until the First Emperor forged from five states in the North a single Empire. The people rejoiced at this show of strength and unity, as it was proof that humanity had the capacity to lead itself into the future without a Great Spirit to guide it. But such stability did not last. The First Emperor's grandson, greedy and consumed by power, turned his sights to conquest without first ensuring peace within his borders. The Empire fractured, and chaos threatened to engulf humankind once more. It was the Empress Xloi-tei, daughter of an Imperial king, who stepped in to avert this fate, bringing both North and South into clarity, and creating a new Empire for all.

This tale, passed down through the ages in the classic *Manifestation of Clarity*, is recalled and cherished throughout what is now known as the Sevensi diaspora. Overshadowed at times, perhaps, by the illustrious *Romance of New Nation*, *Manifestation* remains a groundbreaking work in its own right—and not only for its notable impact on the former. Here we first see the solidification of what have become dominant tropes of the Sevensi military drama: the youthful leader, determined and filled with righteous energy; the mystic traveler, a bridge between the spirits and humankind; the deft strategist, clever beyond measure despite his reluctance to participate in war. Time and time again, such a trio has captured the public's imagination, and it is here, in Xloi-tei, Saryæ-tei, and Enxu-jǎo that they find their inspirational source.

In Sevensi, the title is *ærodotl teilæ*, a phrase which can also mean *formation of unity* or *consolidation of purity*. This title is fitting: *Manifestation of Clarity* tells the story of the unification of the Sevensi continent under the Deico Empire in 162 BCE. First published in the late twelfth century, its subject matter reflects the interests of the Emperor of its time, who saw himself as continuing Xloi-tei's work and philosophy. However, this hero's tale is embedded with nuance and subtle critique, and when the revolutionary forces overthrew the empire in 1348, it is by no mistake that their *Romance* came to reference it heavily.

In the modern day, *Manifestation of Clarity* remains a popular work of the cultural imagination, with adaptations in film, art, literature, and now interactive media released to much success on a regular basis. This text follows in that long tradition. Taking a more personal approach, it asks us as readers to look beyond the tropes that have come to define these great historic figures and ask ourselves: What were they really like? How is it that these few people—humans, just like the rest of us—were able to change the course of events for so many years to come?

Gentle reader, if such tales of ancient history interest you, READ ON to learn the answer.

NOTES ON THE LANGUAGE

The following story takes place on the Sevensi continent, and consequently the Sevensi language is inextricably tied up with the events to follow. This text employs the Classical variant, the form of the language likely spoken by the people of this time. As with any bilingual text, certain accommodations must be made in order to maintain some level of cohesion within the document, and these are recorded here:

The letter Å

This text inherits from the long tradition of romanizing the rounded *a* sound with the letter *AO*, which is, I believe, the most readable convention. Font support for this ligature, however, is often wanting. Consequently, modern sources will often romanize this character instead with the letter *Å*, which is much more ubiquitous, if less comprehensible to the average reader of English. *Å* is historically and graphically simply a letter *A* with a smaller *O* placed above it, so the reasons behind its choice are apparent.

Regardless of how it is written, the letter *AO* should *never* be mistaken for the letters *A* and *O* appearing together in sequence—generally an impossibility in Classical Sevensi, due to vowel harmonization rules—or as a diphthong: It produces a single sound: /ɒ/. For purposes of alphabetization, the convention is to apply Danish rules, substituting *ø* for *å* if needed. This means that *AO* is alphabetized at the end—after *Æ* (and *Ø*, unused in Classical Sevensi romanization)—and *not* as the sequence *ao*, which would appear in the middle of the section for *A*.

Pronunciation notes

In general, Sevensi consonants are similar to those of English, with the following exceptions: *c*, *s*, and *z* sound more similar to the English *ch*, *sh*, and *zh*, respectively; *x* has the sound of *ch* in *loch* or *Bach*; *r* is similar to *x* but is voiced and less fricative; *l* sounds like a Spanish *r* (or the *tt* in *better*) unless it comes at the end of a word (or is preceded by *t*), in which case it has its normal sound; *q* is used to record the English sound *ng*.

Sevensi vowels are pronounced as follows: *a*, like American *hot* or British *bath*; *ai*, like in *hi*; *ω*, like American *thought* (in accents without the *cot-caught* merger) or British *not*; *œi*, like in *boy*; *æ*, like the *a* in *about*; *i*, like in *ski*; *u*, like in *boot*; *e*, like in *play*, but without the final *y* sound; *ei*, like in *hey*; *o*, like the *eau* in French *réseau*; *oi*, similar to that in *phooey*, spoken quickly.

Rendering of styles

Many characters in this tale take on second names (henceforth, *styles*)—this is a traditional coming-of-age practice in Sevensi culture. When this happens, individuals’ birth names are relegated to a secondary position, similar to middle or family names in other cultures. For example, if a person with the given name *Jo* takes on the style *Vwici-va*, they might later be referred to by the noun phrase ‘cæ jo ri vøici-va’—here the proper article ‘cæ’ identifies the phrase as a name, and the postpositional phrase ‘[cæ] jo ri’ holds the meaning of *born as Jo*.

Because English handles its noun phrases somewhat differently, I have elected for clarity to *not* adopt the Sevensi postposition *ri*, but instead to borrow *né* and *née* from French, with their usual meanings. Thus, our fellow from above would in this text be referred to as *Vwici-va né Jo*. While this introduces a grammatical gendering not present in the original, I believe it will be clearer and more readily comprehensible to the general reader.

Syllable stress

Although some sources (for example, the official LANGDEV Project dictionary) indicate syllable stress using acute accents, I have elected to not record stress in these transcriptions. This eases readability and prevents the confusion of the above *né* and *née* as Sevensi, instead of French. (*Née* is not a valid Sevensi romanization, but I would not expect the average reader to know as much.) As a general rule, syllable stress occurs in Sevensi on the second-to-last syllable, but there are numerous exceptions.

THE WILL OF JOIZE

1 *A Wolf's Warning*

IN THE FINAL DAYS OF THE JOVCO EMPIRE, in a village south of the jeitl Deico, there lived a young girl. She was of a thoughtful and curious sort, always carrying herself with respect and attentive to the signs in the world around her. She stood five and three-quarters feet tall, with large eyes, a soft voice, and hair that reached down to her shoulders. Her name was Minæ, and she was in her seventeenth year.

Minæ's mother, named Arjæ and carrying no style, had been a hunter of great renown in her village—she had a way with the animals, they said, and an eye for the spirits. Her father, Døva-jø né Zacø, had been a skilled negotiator, often mediating conflicts between the village and the imperial officials who attempted to preside over it. When they had both passed away while Minæ was still very young—Arjæ, from an accident in the forest; Døva-jø, from a sickness which had passed through—those in her village cried out at seeing a girl from such talented heritage left alone in the world. The village meri, born Seri (but known to the villagers simply as the Old Woman), took her in as an apprentice, and with her at the House on the Hill she had lived ever since.

In a time still remembered by some, the position of meri had been a great and respected one: a carver of tutelary emblems, a village leader, a spiritual guide. In those days, the Great Animals could still be sighted roaming the lands, and the freewill of humanity was yet considered a newly granted blessing. Now the Empire was in strength and the creatures of the earth were in hiding. Officials and law had come to take the place of once-cherished folkloric wisdom, and while some saw this shift as a mark of strength and unity, Minæ's village, nevertheless, still treated their meri with pride.

'Seri is good for us,' the farmer Daiku-va remarked on one occasion, commiserating over a pint of beer from the previous year's harvest. The beer was of a fine quality, and Daiku-va was in good spirits. 'Not once has she led us wrong.'

'Don't you be getting too reliant on her, Daiku-va,' the weaver Lei said to him. She was a practical sort, not one for ceremony or superstition. She had been a close friend of Minæ's mother. 'You better learn to fend for yourself; the Old Woman won't be around for too much longer.'

'Watch your mouth!' Daiku-va shouted sharply back at her. 'She may not be young, but I'll bet our Old Woman has many years in her yet.'

There came a time, however, when the Old Woman's age could not be mistaken. While the village still turned to her for matters of advice, it was increasingly Minæ's responsibility to act as her hands and eyes as these affairs were put into practice. But times were prosperous, and Minæ was a quick learner. The village flourished under her guidance.

Then, unexpectedly, she made her departure.

The day had been warm, but it was turning into a fine evening as Minæ made her way home along the Imperial Highway. She whistled a few bars of an old tune under her breath—pausing, because she suddenly found herself with the peculiar feeling of being watched. A wolf sat patiently on the other side of the highway, staring in her direction.

‘Well, hello there,’ Minæ said, bowing slightly. She was surprised to see such a creature waiting so calmly amidst human occupation—but then, looking around, she *was* alone. Regardless, she knew better than to question a wolf.

The wolf cocked its head in response, before standing and stretching its body out with a yawn. Slowly, it turned, and, with a flick of its tail, walked on. *Come with me*, it was saying.

Minæ intuitively understood the message. She glanced around once more, then followed along.

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In the distance between Minæ’s village and the jeitl to the north there grew a great forest, and it was here that the wolf’s travels led. Daylight was fading quickly as Minæ stepped beyond the treeline, and the wolf’s pace slowed as the world behind disappeared from view. The forest air felt soft and muted, and the nighttime breeze cool and refreshing. Shafts of moonlight made their way through the branches as the sun hastened its departure. Minæ knew that the Old Woman would be worried about her absence, but it was too late to do anything about it now.

Through the trees on her right and left, Minæ heard a quiet rustling, and caught out of the corner of her eye a brief glimpse of fur. She could feel her pulse quickening as she realized that the wolves had her surrounded. She pressed on with anticipation.

It did not take long for them to reach their destination: a circular clearing perhaps twenty yards across, around which the wolves sat patiently, their heads bowed. Wet noses nudged Minæ forward into its center. In the woods which now lay before her, she heard a rustling, then footsteps, and she felt herself gasping softly at the sight of the beast which emerged through the trees: A giant wolf, legs each the size of a grown man, teeth the circumference of one’s fist. Her silver fur shimmered in the moonlight as she slowly approached, taking Minæ in with her gaze. This could only be Deri, mother of all wolves—Minæ bowed respectfully. The Great Spirit had not been seen in one hundred years. That she should appear now, in person, was of the highest honour. Many years later, the scene would be remembered thusly:

*A great beast walks the forest through;
Her teeth were sharp, but not as her gaze.
So rare a sight to see, ’tis true:
Even the trees did bow their frames!*

The Great Wolf spoke. Her voice came as a low growl, and it rang through the night as though the forest itself was joining her in unison. ‘Minæ. Ward of Seri, daughter of the Arjæ hunter,’ she said. ‘We meet at last.’

Minæ looked up in surprise, startled to be addressed in so personal a manner. ‘You... know of me?’ she asked, quickly realizing the intrusiveness of her question and bowing her head once again. Her transgression went unacknowledged: The Great Spirit didn’t bat an eye.

‘A great many years have passed since I fought alongside your Human-Mother in the war which once consumed this land,’ the Great Wolf said. She was pacing back and forth, her padded footsteps surprisingly silent in the heavy nighttime air. ‘When she fell, I lost a friend, and a great number of my children were taken from me. I swore that day that I would never help you humans again.’ She stopped, and Minæ glanced up to find herself stared in the eye. Her breath caught from the sheer power of the Wolf-Mother’s scrutiny. ‘And yet,’ the Great Wolf continued, ‘here you are. And here am I.’

Minæ felt compelled to apologize. Her mind too frozen to make out why or what for, she instead stood there dumbly in silence.

‘I have no great distaste for humans, despite all you have taken from me.’ The Great Wolf’s speech had resumed—as had her pacing. Minæ’s mind started as she struggled to make the necessary connections. ‘You are foolish and don’t know what is best for you, that is your problem. But so long as you stay in your place it is none of my concern. I am merely here to return a favour.’

Seemingly unbidden, a wolf approached Minæ with a circular wooden amulet in its mouth. Minæ took it, running her fingers along its engravings—in the darkness, she couldn’t make out the pattern. The various tooth-marks didn’t help.

‘Your human empire has been an interesting experiment, but whether its success can be sustained remains yet to be seen. Already, unrest is brewing within its borders.’ The Great Wolf gestured with her nose towards the amulet. ‘We came upon that trinket around an imperial messenger’s neck. His throat had been slit. I am not familiar with your human marks, but I fear it may be important.’

Minæ hung the artefact around her neck and bowed once more. ‘Your generosity is... appreciated,’ she said. She had no idea what a wooden amulet might have to do with the fall of the Empire—or her, for that matter—but given her previous blunder, she needed to proceed with care. ‘Forgive me,’ she continued, ‘as I cannot be said to possess but a fraction of your wisdom, but I am afraid that I do not understand why *I* have been chosen to receive this token? If you could perhaps explain—’

‘My children had a good relationship with your mother, when she was alive.’ The Great Wolf cut her off, speaking briskly. ‘She would always free them when they became caught in your human traps, and feed them delights when they crossed her travels. I thought it a pity she died so young. That is why I give this token to you.’

‘I understand,’ Minæ said, not entirely sure that she did.

The Great Wolf sighed and sat down, perhaps recognizing that her explanation had been less than satisfactory. ‘The truth is,’ she said finally, ‘while I have committed myself from any direct involvement in human affairs, I have sacrificed too much for your kind to remain a neutral party. Your Empire has made you few friends, and there is a war which threatens your people. I am not the only one who has noticed this. Some will take the opportunity to attack.’ She gazed off into the distance, over Minæ’s left shoulder. ‘Fawæ, the Boar-Mother, is moving into action as we speak, and who knows what others will follow. You come from a respectable lineage and know well enough to follow a wolf. I have done what I am able to

assist you; I trust you to do what you can for your people.’ Not giving Minæ a chance to respond, she rose and turned back toward the forest. ‘I will be watching you, Minæ, ward of Seri.’ Her tail disappeared with a swish between the trees.

Minæ stood there in silence for a moment, right hand clasping the amulet at her neck, processing. A furry head nuzzled its way under her left. It was the wolf from before, ready to guide her home.

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Mina slept soundly that night; nevertheless, she awoke at the break of dawn. She had returned to the House on the Hill exhausted, and, as she could tell from the snores emanating from the far room, the Old Woman had long since fallen asleep. It had not taken Minæ long to follow suit.

But now she was awake—surprisingly so, and well-rested—and as she rubbed her eyes the events of the previous night slowly reentered her mind. It seemed almost as if a dream. She picked up the wooden amulet which lay to her left, giving it a fresh look in the morning light.

The reverse was smoothed and polished and the edges rounded, but the front was carved delicately with all manner of intricate designs. Small marks ran along the edge, too regular and absurd to merely be decorative, but with a meaning that as yet escaped her. The large ideograph set in low relief in its center was much easier to identify: It was the mark of Sacwi, the Great Deer. Remembering the Wolf-Mother’s warning, she hung the amulet around her neck and got dressed for the day. She knew then that she would have to leave.

When the Second Emperor constructed the network of jeitl along the Empire’s borders for defense, out of either hubris or respect he assigned to each a Great Animal patron, and for each constructed there a temple in her honour. The Great Deer Sacwi was symbolic of the very jeitl which lay just a day’s travel northward, and Minæ took this as a sign of the amulet’s intended locus of arrival. Its journey, then, was already almost complete: She had only to carry it the remaining distance.

Of course, those in her village were not pleased to hear of the departure of their newest spiritual guide, but fortunately the Old Woman recognized the import of the situation and helped to calm them down. For her part, Minæ reassured herself that the journey would only take but a couple of days. The village would get along fine without her in that time.

And so it was that, with a light pack on her shoulders for her upcoming travel, Minæ departed from The Village Which Skirts The Woods on the following day. Indeed:

*One traveller sets out alone;
She needs no more a proper bed.
The warning of a wolf in mind,
Uncertain roads do lie ahead!*

What would she find at her destination?

READ ON.