

Backstory (Sorcerer)

Day three on the road, and you begin to wonder whether today's the day your sore muscles will finally win the debate against all your life decisions. They're currently recounting the Herculean effort it required to sit up from your bedroll this morning. Your atrophied abs wheeze out a testimony of neglect and mismanagement as your thighs and ankles weep with every step along the River Road. You thank the Gods for the extra skin of water you packed, before quickly redirecting your praise to the deity that truly deserves it: your wife. Turns out she was right that occasionally carrying a toddler and wrestling with a pre-teen don't keep you nearly as fit as you thought. For 65 years you've chuckled or shrugged along with the many cliched jokes levelled at middle-aged elves, but today - tried before a raging jury of your own limbs - you wish you could go back in time and smack some sense into that chuckling dipsh*t.

As you wash down a lembas biscuit with the (figuratively) holy water bestowed upon you by your loving and benevolent lord queen Kathra, from whom all good things flow and yadda yadda for on and on forever amen, the prosecution - momentarily distracted by a fresh wave of nutrition and hydration - finally settles long enough for the defence to get a few words in. And so...

Exhibit A: Darsis Wimbly. Male. 16. Kobold. Adopted son of Molly and Ingvald Wimbly of the good town of Safeton, 2214 Woolly Bay Boulevard, Wild Coast, Apartment above Wimbly's Wondrous Wingnuts & Widgets LLC, now missing (the kobold, not the company). The Northerner's among our jury will recall the all-too-literal headache induced by their first encounter with the young Darsis, and the circumstances by which said encounter led to their recommendation of his being placed in the care of our fine fellow Safetonians the Wimbly's. The court will also recall that though the defendant's stewardship of said Kobold is no doubt responsible for the many pains currently endured by the prosecution, and that said stewardship was undoubtedly and indisputably the defendant's idea to begin with, it was nonetheless firmly supported by, and therefore now leads us to...

Exhibit B: One Kathra-Lynn Melliamne, of the Furyondy-"silent-n"-Melliamne's, aforementioned ever-gracious and loving wife of who-other-than our devious, dubious, dehydrated and altogether dimwitted defendant Thom-short-for-Thomaranth Dratch-short-for-...well...we'll get there. One might think such a font of beauty and grace as she would be loath to spend even the fleetingest of moments with this spare-tired, noticeably (don't deny it!) balding brute before us but like, lo: somehow the eyes below those now-failing follicles managed to capture the attention of our beloved Kathra-Lynn.

But! - and we bid the jury remember this detail - 'twas not the way he looked at *her* that first caught her notice.

It was the way he looked at everyone else.

The way he looked at every person coming through the doors of the few-and-woefully-far-between Horned Society Halfway Homes in the days just after the end of The War. The way his face sent a message of care and compassion where most others would have sent saliva. The way he looked handing a stuffed dragon to the child of the refugee family he'd helped find shelter in the Furyondy Community Center. The way he looks at their children every morning, and at her when he's carrying their toddler Jhessy-short-for-Jhessail, or wrestling their pre-teen Rukh-short-for-Rukh. The way he looks at the countless others he cares for as one of Safeton's most dedicated social workers and community-members.

The defence reminds the jury that the only other look that surpassed the pain of that which followed the news of Darsis's disappearance was the very look that told our beloved Kathra all she ever needed to know about how he would always handle that news and any similar news about any of the many people she and her husband devoted their lives to caring for for every day of the past 35 years. The look she could have never seen coming after jokingly gagging at the sound of the name "Kathra Dratch". It was the way he looked when he finally opened up to her about his past, his family, and the bond he shared with our final argument for the defence, in fact the very defence herself...

Exhibit C: His sister. Netheria Drachedandion. Of the yes-those-Drachedandion's. Of the Dratch-short-but-actually-a-flimsy-cover-for-Drachedandion Drachedandion's. *The* Netheria Drachedandion – present representative of the defence - whose tragic sacrifice to the Limbs of Vecna became a legend from which the very fabric of the age of peace that followed was woven.

And so our defendant told his beloved partner-soon-to-be-wife everything there was to know. He told her what it was like growing up in the High Elven Halls of his familial manor in Enstad; how he and his sister would race through corridors and archways past tapestries and artifacts worth sums higher than either of them could count. He told her of their many adventures through gardens, attics, roofs, kitchens, and cellars, and of the day he first discovered their psychic bond - how the sound of his sister's voice abruptly covered up that of their private tutor's, and caused him to nearly fall out of his chair; how his eyes only continued to bulge when he realized that her lips weren't moving at all.

He told her how he and his sister worked to understand their gifts together, sometimes speaking out loud between themselves, other times wordlessly between their bedrooms when they were supposed to be asleep. He told her of the experiments by which they tested their limits: sending messages over ever-further reaches of the estate, seeing if they could scrape a thought or two off the top of mom, dad, teacher or trainer's heads, or creating mocking impressions of the voices of this or that boring aunt, uncle, cousin, politician, noble, business associate or you-name-it at any one(-would-have-been-far-more-than-enough-thank-you-very-much) of the social functions they were stuffed into formal attire to attend.

Kathra never forgot the smile that accompanied those recollections. Nor did she ever forget how, in the space of a single exhalation, that smile gave way to the slumped shoulders and downcast eyes of a deep, deep melancholy.

Neither Drachedandion child would...or...would *have*...denied that their lives were full of blessings. But as they began to pay closer attention to - and become increasingly involved in - the conversations they once mocked, they began to understand the costs of those blessings. The power and wealth acquired by their family and its associates rarely provided similar gains to the many who worked to create it. Indeed, more often than not it made those many quite a bit worse-off, and though the defence can proudly claim she never hesitated – once made aware of them – to hurl these truths at her parents, she did, she must admit, somewhat shield the defendant from these disputes. And so the defence urges the jury to consider that this, perhaps, is why, when she finally left to do what she knew she must, her brother stayed behind.

And then of course, The War. With the defence half a world away and who-knew-where, our defendant was for the first time without his sister's shield, so that when the scourge of Iuz finally breached the battlements of the Kron, and the very walls of Enstad were bathed in rivers of blood, he could see clearly...terribly...his parents hands...his own hands. Though it was not their hands that held or passed the whip, he could recall the words and writs by which the whips were made. He had spoken them,

seen them, signed them. Though their hands did not close the doors on those seeking refuge, their coin steadied the hands of the guards who would soon follow in the footsteps of those they shut out. And in the moment of what seemed all-but-certain to be his family's final breaths...the end...in an instant.

The unholy host of Iuz seemed all at once to lurch, as if stunned by some unseen force. Some of the besieging army fought on, others froze or collapsed in terror, others hastened to take their own lives. Most simply ran...and our Thomarant joined them. He ran as fast as he could, helping whomever he could, stopping only when he could no longer silence the cries of the very limbs who try him now.

He looked back exactly once. Watching from a crowd of thousands as his parents stepped onto the dais erected for the first annual memorial honouring his sister's sacrifice, the blazing fire of anger he felt at their hypocrisy might have consumed him had it been more than a candle in comparison to the black hole of his grief at her loss. And so he ran faster. He ran straight and without heed into the dangerous and uncertain years following The War. He ran straight into hardship and heartbreak, giving everything he could to anyone who needed it. Using the gifts he and his sister had so thoroughly tried and tested, he sought out the cries of the suffering, soothing those he could, and shielding them from the veiled intentions of those who would seek opportunity in despair.

He ran away from the shame he felt of his family and name - thus "Dratch" - and into the life of one Kathra-Lynne Melliamne, to whom he would eventually reveal this shame, and with whose love and support he would slowly remember how to walk. Together, through the work they shared with countless others, they would continue walking into those first years of stability that eventually led to peace. From there they walked into a life of service and community in the young town of Safeton. where they helped build a port in the socially-somewhat-stormy expanse of the Wild Lands. And for thirty-five years they've continued walking through its growing streets into friendship, family, parenthood, and the many lives that today makes up Sافتeton's vibrant community; a community that warmly welcomes anyone seeking to share in it's modest wealth, or - as in the case of one Darsis Wimby, Male,16, Kobold, now missing - seeking comfort in it's always-open arms.

The defence rests.

And not a moment too soon. As your sister finishes speaking from the memories that are all you have left of her, you wish the pain was back in your muscles. Luckily for you, that wish is quickly granted as you begin the final ascent of your day's journey: a truly torturous path up the stairs to the room you just paid for at the Two Ford Inn. The woman behind the modest lobby desk assured you that no, there was no sum of money that would convince any of the staff to carry your sweaty ass. You lean against the door to your room, and fortunately, your hand and the key manage to find the lock before you fall asleep right then and there. You stumble towards and into the bed, and as your head hits the pillow, your mind begins to weave itself around your sister's closing remarks, and the memories of the past few days. Your breath lengthens, your muscles relax, and your heartbeat slows you steadily into that space between the waking and sleeping worlds you know so well.

And so you float...softly...safely...into the space of your mind...

...and as the waking world recedes...

...the echoes of your sister's voice project your memories...

...into dreams...