

The City of York

Evening was approaching, signalled not only by the fall of the sun towards the top of the western wall but also by the departure of the people back to their homes. The curfew was about to be put into effect and although the garrison had proved largely relaxed it was the one duty that they did complete with vigour.

Thorald was returning to the Great Hall to handover the watch and he was looking forward to another evening of relative ease and luxury. There was food, drink, warmth, and a bed under a roof waiting for him; not to mention the company of other Norwegians. His wound was healing nicely although he found that his sword-arm was still stiff when he tried to raise it above his shoulder. It was feeling better every day now, however, and he did not expect there to be any lasting damage.

What good would a one armed farmer be to his family back in Norway?

“Ah Thorald, you return,” a familiar voice called out to him as he approached the doors to the hall. A figure stepped out of the shadows and into the fading light, revealing a friendly face.

“Arne! How goes it?”

“As quiet as usual, it makes me wonder why you take these frequent walks around the city?” He was a big man and about ten summers Thorald’s senior. He had overall command of the garrison but was very easy to get along with, as long as no one stepped out of line.

“I enjoy the walks and it allows me to check that the Danes aren’t causing trouble.”

“Danes! Humph!” A cloud crossed his features. “You speak prophetic words I fear.”

“Arne?” Thorald stopped in front of the other Viking.

“You are recalled to Riccall,” Arne told him abruptly, “they’ve sent another Dane to take your place.” From his expression and tone of voice it was clear that Arne was not pleased with this development.

“Any word as to why?”

“Oh nothing on your part, I reckon this one is just like the rest, looking for better food and grog, and women, under the roof of this old hall. He managed to brown-nose some jarl into talking old Eystein Orre into sending him here. Why not get something to eat and drink before ye go? There’s a pony in the stable that the Dane travelled

upon; ye may as well ride it back or let it carry your gear if you're in a mind to walk still."

"The world turns and good things come to an end. I will miss this place when back in Riccall I do not doubt; there's no royalty to bow and scrape to here."

"Prophetic words again my brother, there is indeed royalty at Riccall and it is your fate to serve them. Eystein Orre has ordered that you wait on the prince." Arne clapped him on the shoulder. "Come share a beaker of ale with me before you go and keep company with our betters."

"That I will, that I will," Thorald replied with a note of regret that he could not quite keep from his voice.