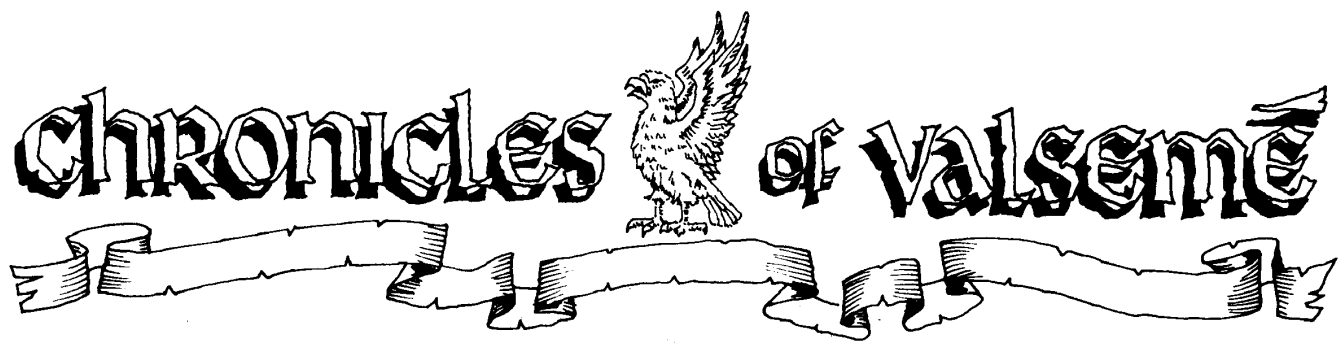


Chronicles of Valsemē



Good tidings, gentlefolk,

The months have been long and many since last I set my hand to parchment and recorded for your interest the most recent accounts of the barony. My humblest apologies. I do hope this missive finds you in good health and good cheer.

'Tis now mid-February in the year of our Lord, 915 A.D.. Last I wrote, Lady Brienne had just presented her husband, Lord Rurik, with two fine sons, Richard and Kylan. No longer in swaddling cloths, the mites are now toddling about on sturdy little legs, fit and hale, and getting into all manner of mischief (with ample assistance from young Elsie and Waite and that rascally pup, Patch!).

This summer past saw the completion of the new outer defense wall, begun spring of the year prior at the baron's direction. The new wall encloses the old bailey wall and a generous tract of land. Now that the parcel is secure, much time has been spent in transferring seedling fruit trees for the new orchard there. The exercise yard for the men-at-arms has also been moved into this section and hedged off from the baronne's new herb and flower gardens.

'Twas in the gardens, that Lady Brienne and the children could most often be found this summer. While our lady tended her herbs, she gave over to Elsie's care the flower garden (with some overseeing from Lady Aleth, Ketil's wife). I can tell you that Elsie is delighted to be assigned this task and takes her new duties most seriously, as well she should. Flowers are in continuous demand for the altar and manorhouse, supplying every order of liturgical and social celebration of the year. When the garden cannot furnish the needed garlands, wildflowers are gathered and whatever is available such as hawthorn and woodbine.

Had you been able to visit our summer garden, you would have found rose petals steeping in water beneath the warm sun. This we use to flavor dishes. On many a pleasant day, the baronne ordered for long tables to be assembled in the garden and there Valsemē's folk dined and supped and later sat over games of draughts. On fête days, there was even dancing in which Lord Rurik and Lady Brienne joined.

When fall arrived, the cider and perry making began in earnest. At that time, the baron's brother, Lyting, departed for St. Wandrille's Abbey where he helped the Benedictines repair their refectory. While there, he both benefited and was greatly moved by the sermons of the sagacious Brother Willibrod, a visiting monk from the Monastery of Corbie. As one might expect, Lyting is much impressed with monasteries as centers of learning, for his is a sharp and keen mind.

Now, while Brother Bernard is greatly pleased with Lyting's spiritual progress, Ketil is not so heartened, believing Lyting should seek a more earthly course and look to take a maid to wife. Many a time, have I

heard Brother Bernard's and Ketil's voices raised in disagreement in the brew house while they oversee the ale making (which they are wont to do, having an undeniable appetite for it!) 'Tis obvious to all here that Brother Bernard hopes Lyting will choose the cowl and embrace the cross, while Ketil earnestly hopes he will embrace something more shapely and fleshly.

By our calendar, winter arrived Dec 12 and will not depart until March 11. 'Tis a time of salt meat, spare bounty and shortened days. It gladdened Lord Rurik that Lyting returned to the barony at Christmastide, which we celebrated for a full twelve days. 'Tis a time of respite for the villeins, a time when our agrarian year is halted. The church and hall were decorated with greens — ivy, holly, bay, and mistletoe — to remind of the spring, and fires burned brightly in the manorhouse. Lord Rurik led his men in a boar hunt to supply the table for the great feast. And a feast it proved to be! The tables were laden with boar and venison basted in spiced wine, cheese, apples, nuts, and various subtleties and breads. At the baron's request, a pudding-like dish of the North named *skyr* was also served. After everyone partook of the bounty, Eyvind the Skald and a visiting tumbler entertained in the hall. Such a merry occasion it proved to be, that I was even able to persuade Ealdryth to share one of her choice recipes, served at the baron's table during the feasting days.

Now those joyous days are behind us, having ended with Epiphany, January 6. Our tillage officially began at Candlemas, February 2, marked by ceremonies including plow races, an old custom when plows are drawn around bonfires to assure a productive season. Spring still lies far ahead and 'tis a time for tightening belts and bracing for the rough weather yet to come. Many of our days are spent indoors and Lent is already upon us. While the women spin their flax into linen thread and weave rushes into baskets, and the men repair their tools and harnesses, (and I hover with quill and ink over this parchment by candlelight), we here at the barony look forward to the sweet warming airs of spring and the return of cheery birdsong.

Godspeed and may the days smile upon you.

Anita of Gordon
Chronicler

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EALDRYTH'S BEEF WITH PEPPER SAUCE:

Ingredients: Green peppercorns, Cream, Dry Mustard, Tarragon,
and Pan juices

- * Fry the meat slabs in olive oil, remove from pan and keep warm.
- * Mix in sauce ingredients and boil over the fire until shiny bubbles appear.
- * Pour over meat.

