

## Welcome Home

*A Royal Magic Short Story By K. M. Shea*

Benjimir sat—sprawled, really—on a stone bench at the edge of Rosewood Park, facing the path Gwendafyn and her companions would most likely come down.

He was exhausted. He'd been up the entire night deploying army troops to aid a village that had been flooded in the spring rains.

But Gwendafyn was returning from a two-week mission with the Honor Guard. Finally seeing her again would be well worth losing the few snatches of sleep he might catch if he retired for a few hours.

He yawned as he rested in the sunlight, lulled by the warmth of the sun and the trickling sound of a nearby fountain.

Unfortunately, the peace was short lived.

“What-ho, brother!” Arvel said cheerfully as he noisily stomped down a gravel pathway, carrying an armload of books.

“Arvel,” Benjimir acknowledged. “You are aware you could *order* someone to carry your books for you so you didn't run around the palace, more closely resembling an apprentice scholar than a Crown Prince, yes?”

“Perhaps, but I like to do these things myself. Keeps me humble. Also, it lets me slide some fun reading tomes amongst the rest of my research materials without anyone giving me funny looks.” Arvel halted when he reached Benjimir and unceremoniously dumped his books on the bit of bench that Benjimir did not take up. “What brings you to Rosewood Park?”

Benjimir shifted one of his boots farther away from Arvel's precious books. “Waiting for Fyn's return.”

“That's right—she was out on a mission with some of the Honor Guard patrol squads. What were they deployed for again?” Arvel asked.

“A case of human trafficking on our southern border,” Benjimir said. “No one from Calnor had yet been kidnapped, but it was only a matter of time, and an ally requested our joint effort in catching the rogues and destroying the establishment.”

“Ah, yes. I'm sure Gwendafyn put a stop to it—physically and mentally,” Arvel said mildly. “I'd be surprised if anyone who witnesses her taking down the scum running the operation ever commits another transgression in their life.”

Benjimir smiled and thought fondly of her brilliant and terrifying magic. “She is impressive.”

“Did you send her there yourself?” Arvel asked.

“No, the Honor Guard patrol leaders who were sent out requested her aid,” Benjimir said. “They are familiar with her methods of fighting and her magic and have begun working out formations and methods to work with her and use her magic to their advantage.”

“Sounds brilliant,” Arvel said. “I'm dead glad I don't have anything to do with it. I'd much rather read up on the economy in our southern markets.”

“Then congratulations.” Benjimir shut his eyes and leaned against the back of the stone bench. “I'm sure you will be very happy with your books.”

Arvel scoffed.

He likely would have said something insulting, but Benjimir heard the crunch of gravel and lowered voices.

He snapped his eyes open and sprang from the bench.

Gwendafyn rounded the corner. Her clothes were soiled and her hair was a little mussed, but she was unharmed based on her wide smile.

She walked with Wulf and the trio of daftness, chatting pleasantly with them. One of the three patrol leaders, Thad, split off from the group and hurried to an elf maiden who stood in one of the open-air corridors that edged the palace.

Grygg howled at his friend's backside while Gwendafyn wriggled her eyebrows as Thad bowed to the elf—Evlawyn, Tari's handmaiden—and kissed her hand. Wilford was also snickering, but Wulf looked about as expressive as a rock.

"That scamp," Gwendafyn said in Calnoric as she and her remaining posse continued down the path. "He claimed he washed his uniform in the river last night out of respect for what it symbolized. I'm *so* sure."

"It wouldn't do to offend his lady's nose," Wilford said.

"We can't *all* have beautiful and dutiful ladies waiting for us," Grygg said.

Gwendafyn's eyes met Benjimir's and she laughed. "Indeed, some of us have beautiful and dutiful husbands! Ben!" She started jogging towards him, her purple eyes dazzling with her joy.

Benjimir raised his eyebrows at her approach. "Would you like me to wave a white handkerchief in honor of your return? Perhaps cry and swoon a little?"

Gwendafyn laughed as she flung herself at him. He caught her in an embrace and briefly rested his forehead against hers. "Welcome home." He kissed her, making Grygg and Wilford turn to face a palace wall and loudly and enthusiastically admire it.

Benjimir smirked when they finally parted and kissed her cheek. "It seems your mission was successful?"

"Yes!" Gwendafyn beamed. "I know Thad, Wilford, and Grygg will submit an official report, but Wulf wrote up some notes on my behalf as well." She gestured back at her squire, who hadn't stopped to admire the wall with the patrol leaders and was instead still plodding towards them.

Wulf bowed when he reached them. "Your Highness, Your Highness," He murmured first to Benjimir, then Arvel.

"Oh, hello, Arvel!" Gwendafyn leaned around Benjimir to address his brother with a smile.

"Welcome home, bond partner!" Arvel chuckled—likely not from the greeting but more due to knowing how little Benjimir liked to be reminded that Arvel knew her first. "Allow me to congratulate you on your success of ending the human trafficking ring!"

"Thank you, but I really only assisted the Honor Guard," Gwendafyn said.

Unconvinced, Benjimir looked to Wulf.

The gruff man had removed a small packet of papers from his satchel and offered them to Benjimir. "Her Highness caught the leader of the scheme and spoke with him. He wet himself."

"Wulf!" Gwendafyn hissed. "You weren't supposed to mention *that*!"

"Was it an entertaining sight to witness?" Benjimir asked.

Wulf tilted his head in thought, then nodded. "Highly satisfying."

"Good! He deserves worse," Arvel snorted. "I hope he pays for his acts in prison."

Wulf slightly bowed his head. "May it be so."

Benjimir draped an arm over Gwendafyn's shoulders. "How was the new formation Thad designed to make better use of your lightning magic?"

“It worked well. We made a few adjustments—I nearly zapped one of Thad’s men by accident because he stood too close to me. But I think it will be great for stealth-based attacks.” She twisted her head and called back to the patrol leaders, “Wilford! Grygg! You can stop admiring the wall!”

Despite her nonchalance of the matter, Benjimir knew the Honor Guards’ acceptance—and embrace—of her powers meant a lot to Gwendafyn. *It may be true that we have caused changes in our cultures, but the praise belongs to those who join in with us. They blot out the ugliness of those who would hold us back—like Lorius the harpy.*

Benjimir’s smile softened, and he tugged her a little closer. “I am glad it went well.”

She sighed happily as she leaned into him. “As am I.”

Benjimir kissed the corner of her mouth then whispered in her ear. “And welcome home, my love.”

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King Celrin stood on a balcony, watching his daughter and son-in-law with a fond smile.

Gwendafyn laughed as Benjimir towed her farther down the path, her squire and the patrol leaders trailing behind them.

Since the months following her daring rescue of Benjimir, Gwendafyn had become something of the Honor Guard mascot, and was frequently involved in any missions of theirs that took them outside the palace. Politically speaking, it was a good relationship—particularly given that Benjimir was focusing more on Calnor’s armies.

But as her father, Celrin was also personally gladdened for the Honor Guards’ acceptance of his daughter, and her extraordinary powers.

*She is so much happier now.*

“My King Celrin.”

King Celrin shifted so he could view his new guest. “Cousin,” he smiled. “Welcome back to Haven.”

Seer Ringali nodded slightly as he also stepped out onto the balcony. “Thank you.”

“I trust your travels were not too arduous? You have returned sooner from Lessa than I expected.” King Celrin folded his hands in front of him and smiled at the Evening Star.

Seer Ringali nodded. “I have several communications from Our Princess Yvrea, but I made a return trip sooner than expected due to my wish to share an...*observation* with you.”

King Celrin tilted his head. “Oh?”

Seer Ringali patted his closed fan on the balcony railing. “Some of the newest recruits among the Evening Stars have begun to display certain...inclinations.”

“Please, speak frankly, Cousin,” King Celrin said.

“As you wish. Three students show signs of possessing bits of High Elf magic—like your daughter. None of them are as strong as hers...but there is a difference between their magic and the usual magic we Lesser Elves possess.”

King Celrin frowned slightly as he considered the matter. “Do you think it is a sign of some sort? A warning, perhaps, before the High Elves return?”

Seer Ringali flattened his lips. “It is difficult to say, for it may be...or it may simply be that some trainees always had the inclination, it was merely trained out of them through the tempering of their magic in the process of becoming an Evening Star. Or they might have hidden it out of fear.”

“But now with Gwendafyn an open user of High Elf magic, public opinion has begun to change,” King Celrin said.

Seer Ringali nodded. “Exactly. Regardless of the cause, I would like to suggest that in the future we work with the human wizards to seek ways High Elf magic can be used *with* others. Evening Stars use their magic like an assassin’s blade. It is only good for fighting against High Elves. But Gwendafyn’s abilities are more versatile.”

“Yes. Moreover, those she fights with continue to innovate to better incorporate her abilities into their strategy,” King Celrin said. “The times have changed. We can now live *with* Calnor instead of merely standing by them.”

“So it is,” Seer Ringali agreed. “And I, for one, am very interested to see how future generations transform as a result.”

King Celrin smiled. “Indeed.” He glanced down at the gardens, where Gwendafyn, Benjimir, and their companions were still visible.

Benjimir smirked at something Wulf said, and Gwendafyn laughed outright.

“I think it will be beautiful,” King Celrin said.

Seer Ringali raised an eyebrow. “Even if the High Elves return?”

“Even then,” King Celrin said. “How could it be anything but beautiful when these changes to our cultures, our ways of communication, even our *magic* were brought by the love shared between Tari and Arion; and Little Fyn and Benjimir.”

Seer Ringali stared at him. “Sometimes you are overly romantic.” He flicked his razor-sharp fan open for emphasis.

Celrin laughed. “That may be so. But even you must see, Cousin, the exquisiteness in it.”

“I do,” the Evening Star admitted. “But that doesn’t mean I’m going to create poetry over it.”

Celrin laughed, and Seer Ringali cracked a smile.

“Regardless,” Celrin continued, “I have faith in the futures of our people, and the efforts of today.”

Seer Ringali slowly bowed his head. “May it be so.”

“Yes,” Celrin said. “May it be so.”

The End