

A Matter of Economics
An Elves of Lessa Short Story
By K. M. Shea

“I still can’t believe you figured out *any* of the runes and words of High Elf magic. Myth, you’re a national treasure!”

Myth sipped her tea and watched Blaise with raised eyebrows. “While I appreciate the compliment, the exaggeration is unnecessary.”

Blaise peeled her gaze from the High Elf book Myth had borrowed from the library and pushed her russet-colored hair out of her face. “It’s not an exaggeration. With what you can read, I might be able to finally *get* somewhere on my research!”

“I don’t want to falsely raise your hopes.”

Blaise wasn’t listening, she’d gone back to the book, reverently brushing her fingers across the faded runes recorded in the pages.

Myth shrugged and leaned back in her chair. She’d made arrangements for them to meet in the gardens today. Not because she didn’t wish to visit Blaise in the Wizard Tower—it still was one of her favorite places to go—but because Myth was fairly certain that seeing Blaise with a book on High Elf magic would give most of the wizards heart palpitations. It was better to limit the possible victims and meet elsewhere.

A fat bee industriously flew past her, barely missing Myth’s nose as it zoomed to the lilac bush directly behind her.

“Everything all right, Your Royal Highness?”

I don’t think I’ll ever get used to that title. Especially because it is unnecessarily long.

Myth glanced at the squad leader of her guards. “I believe I told you to call me Myth, Elysabeth.”

The squad leader bowed slightly. “And I told you then, Your Royal Highness, that it wouldn’t be proper. You are the crown princess and my employer.”

Myth set her teacup down. “That can’t be right. Arvel once told me that the employees he is friends with got to call him Arvel.”

“His Royal Highness was likely banking on the fact that you would be unaware no such custom exists,” Elysabeth supplied.

Myth flattened her lips and prepared to lay out her case, when she stopped long enough to think. *Rollo calls him Arvel, and Sir Arion does occasionally, but besides his family and the royal family of Lessa, does anyone else? And now that I think of it... Grygg, Wilford, and Thad started calling me Lady Mythlan and dropped the nickname before Arvel and I were even official, and we are still close friends.*

He lied to me, that conniving flirt!

Myth rubbed the curved handle of her teacup. “I’m going to start billing Arvel for all the hours I spend overseeing Lessa and Calnor trade.”

Several of the guards coughed suspiciously, and Elysabeth visibly struggled to keep the corners of her lips flat. “It would be your right, Your Royal Highness,” she finally said.

Myth smiled at Elysabeth.

The squad leader faintly returned the smile—which was a grand gesture for her.

Although Myth suspected Elysabeth had a delightful sense of humor, it seemed to be hidden deep beneath her work demeanor, and further obscured by her perfectly pressed uniform, tidily braided hair, and generally blank expression.

But the hints Myth had seen of it were enough for her to think Elysabeth was a fun person to befriend.

And she is single...perhaps I ought to introduce her to Grygg or Wilford?

The thought made her glance guiltily at Blaise—who was now scrawling out copies of a few of the runes and magic circles from the book into her tattered and slightly singed journal.

Myth had tried introducing Blaise to the two Honor Guard Captains.

It had been a...traumatic experience for Grygg and Wilford.

After that Grygg said quite clearly that he was no longer interested in meeting any of my single friends. But Wilford made no such utterances—even though he was the one who lost his eyebrows for a few weeks. Perhaps Wilford would be interested in Elysabeth?

Myth sipped her tea and studied Elysabeth some more.

The squad leader was aware of the scrutiny—she fidgeted twice before settling into a guarded stance—but she diligently cast her eyes across the garden, watching for possible threats.

Would Elysabeth do well with Wilford?

Relationships were a great deal trickier than predicting the demand curve of goods. But couldn't the same principals be applied?

According to Grygg and Wilford, single females are high in demand. Elysabeth is very pretty, which will only increase the demand, and she's kind and has always been a diligent guard. Based on the evidence I believe there would be a very high degree of interest in her.

But perhaps there wouldn't be a demand for romance from her viewpoint? Even if she does indeed have a high demand of single males, given that she is a part of the Honor Guard, which is still predominantly male, the supply is incredibly high as well.

Still, Myth was inclined to think more favorably of her friends than of those she hadn't met, so by the time the replacement squad arrived, she'd made up her mind.

“Squad Leader Elysabeth, you are finished with your patrols for the day, are you not?” Myth asked.

Elysabeth bowed. “I am, Your Royal Highness.”

“Splendid. I insist you join Blaise and me for tea.”

Elysabeth looked from Myth to Blaise—who hadn't even stirred at the mention of her name. “That wouldn't be proper...”

“What is proper is of no concern to me in this instance,” Myth said. “You may choose to call me by my title, but that is your decision. This is my personal invitation—it is *my* decision.”

Myth could see the war Elysabeth was having with her thoughts in the furrow of her brow and the tightening of her lips.

Although Myth didn't much care for her position of crown princess, she was aware it meant something to others. And proper or not, Elysabeth would be a fool to reject Myth's personal invitation.

Elysabeth took a deep breath and glanced at the Honor Guards. Her squad had already trooped out, and the replacement squad—one under Captain Thad, like Elysabeth's—was in position.

“Very well. Thank you for the invitation, Your Royal Highness.” Elysabeth gingerly sat down on one of the unoccupied wrought-iron chairs gathered around the matching table Myth and Blaise had taken over.

“It is my pleasure. Blaise is going to be a horrid conversationalist, anyway. Once she's on the scent of information she becomes oblivious to the world around her.” Myth smiled fondly at her friend.

“Wizard Blaise does seem very...studious.”

“She’s still an apprentice—for now. I imagine by this time next year she’ll be a true wizard.” Myth poured a cup of tea for her clueless guest and prepared to bide her time. “But I’d like to know more about you, Elysabeth.”

The squad leader stammered through a few questions before she settled down, sipping her tea and discussing her passions—which chiefly seemed to be weapons practice and baking.

Myth didn’t know much about either topic, but she was always open to learning more, so she was able to keep up a steady line of questions and enjoyable conversation until Captain Wilford dropped in for his daily visit.

“Princess Mythlan! How are you—” Wilford jerked to a halt when he passed through an opening in the lilac bush and saw Elysabeth.

“Captain Wilford, how pleasant it is to see you today.” Myth casually gestured from Wilford to Elysabeth. “I don’t believe you’ve met Elysabeth. She’s one of the squad leaders assigned to me.”

Wilford gaped at Elysabeth as he wordlessly wandered closer. He finally managed to shut his mouth, but all of Myth’s etiquette books said his staring was quite rude, so she shifted in her chair and managed to kick back, smacking his shins.

“Elysabeth, this is Wilford. Captain Wilford. He shares your passion for weapons practice. What little I know of the topic he taught me when I was given the chance to observe My Princess Gwendafyn in some practice matches.”

Elysabeth stood, her dark eyebrows slightly drawn together. “Sir.” She started to salute, but Wilford had finally recovered his wits.

“That’s not necessary.” His smile was friendly and warm as he waved her off. “Everyone Crown Princess Mythlan invites to tea is a friend.”

Elysabeth relaxed slightly and nodded. “Thank you. In that case, please let me express that I have also greatly enjoyed the times I am able to watch you and Captain Thad and Captain Grygg practice with Her Highness Princess Gwendafyn.”

Wilford chuckled. “You mean you enjoy watching us get our tails whipped.”

“Not at all—”

“Allow me to assure you that I’m a reasonable person. So we might as well call it as it is. The princess nearly murders Thad, Grygg and I.”

“Well...perhaps...but you last longer than any others I’ve seen her fight against.”

Myth took a sip of tea with great satisfaction.

Yes. I got the demand curve correct on Wilford’s part. And it seems Elysabeth isn’t opposed to entering the supply chain.

Blaise finally looked up from her book browsing and leaned close enough to Myth that their shoulders touched. “I never thought I’d see you attempting to arrange marriage vows,” she said in careful Elvish.

“It’s more like observing the curves of economics,” Myth replied in Elvish.

“Economics?” Blaise asked.

“Economics,” Myth said in Calnoric.

“Oh.” Blaise jutted her lower lip out in thought. “I wouldn’t have thought e-economics?” she said, continuing to speak in Elvish.

Myth nodded in encouragement.

“Had much to do with love.”

“The principals of economics can be applied to most everything,” Myth said. “But just because you can determine the demand curve and supply rate doesn’t mean it will work out.”

Blaise glanced speculatively at Wilford, who was smiling widely, and Elysabeth—who looked marginally more relaxed than usual. “I guess we’ll find out.”

“Your Royal Highness, I am *hurt!*” Grygg planted a hand over his heart and staggered backwards, as if Myth had stabbed him.

Myth looked up from the trade log she was inspecting. “You’ve said as much about five times in the past hour.”

“Because you still haven’t said why you introduced *Wilford* to a lovely lady, and not me!” Grygg gave Myth a wounded look.

“You said you didn’t want me to introduce you to any of my single friends after you met Blaise.”

“Because she started a fire with those magic studies of hers and nearly burnt us to a crisp!”

In hindsight, Myth had to admit it perhaps had not been prudent to present the captains when Blaise was in the middle of testing a magic rune. “Regardless, you said you were no longer interested. I took your word as truth. Wilford, however, made no such request, thus I considered him still a potential market, so to speak.”

Arvel, having given up his desk for Myth’s use, leaned against the window of their now joint study. “You consider Wilford a *market?*”

“He had a demand,” Myth pointed out.

Grygg made a noise of frustration and turned on his heels. “And *you!*” He smacked Thad on the shoulder.

“I’m staying out of this,” Thad said. “I had nothing to do with it.”

“That’s *why* I’m mad at you,” Grygg said. “This woman is under *your* command! She reports directly to you! How! Could! You! Miss! That!” He enunciated each word with a smack to Thad’s shoulder.

Thad straightened his uniform. “I beg your pardon, but I’m a married man. I have no care if a squad leader is male or female—I only have eyes for my wife.”

“But you could have told *me!*” Grygg complained.

“Hah!” Thad scoffed. “As if I’d ever introduce one of my people to *you*. You’d be a terrible influence.”

“Then what about Wilford?” Grygg demanded.

Thad tilted his head. “Not ideal, but he’ll do, I suppose.”

Grygg paused his dramatics long enough to frown at Thad. “Considering we’re your friends, that is rather harsh of you.”

“It’s exactly because you’re my friends,” Thad said. “I know what you’re capable of. And while I value it in you and Wilford, I don’t want any of my underlings to suddenly start hatching money-making plans.”

“I object!”

Myth finished her page, then pushed her chair back from the desk. She stretched her arms over her head and shed her jacket—even though she couldn’t wear her translator uniform anymore, she hadn’t lost her appreciation of jackets and fitted breeches with her career—and joined Arvel at the window.

He grinned at her and held out his hand, entwining his fingers with hers once she placed her palm on his. “Do you think we should interrupt them to tell Grygg to enjoy the view?” He nodded out at the green expanse of Rosewood Park, where Wilford—wearing a bright orange shirt that Myth suspected was his only non-regulation piece of clothing—was strolling with Elysabeth.

“It seems mean, when one knows Wilford will intentionally rub his nose in it for the rest of the day,” Myth said.

“Ahhh, yes. He does have the tendency to recite of his time with Elysabeth as if it is an elven love sonnet. Do you think she likes him?”

“Wilford? I believe so. She is not so demonstrative as he is, and I think she’s a little cautious. But I think he’ll continue to win her over.”

Arvel tugged Myth closer, then pulled his hand from hers so he could slide his arm around her waist. “I am surprised, though. I never pegged you as a romance stirrer. I thought it would be Tari who’d find Grygg and Wilford love matches.”

Myth shrugged a little. “It was a matter of economics.”

“Oh. In that case, it makes sense.” He kissed her ear, inspiring a blush to heat Myth’s cheeks.

Somewhere behind them, Thad announced in a tight voice, “It’s time we leave.”

“But—”

“They’re doing it again,” Thad added.

“Your Royal Highnesses!” Grygg barely said before his rushed footsteps carried him from the room.

“Crown Prince Arvel, Crown Princess Mythlan. Please excuse us.” Thad backed out of the room, leaving the pair alone.

“You know...” Arvel’s voice dropped an octave as he drew Myth flush against his chest, his eyes smoldering. “You can talk *economics* with me whenever you like.”

“Arvel! That’s not what I—”

Arvel chuckled in his throat as he leaned forward and gently kissed Myth, cutting her thoughts—of economics or otherwise—off.

There was a high demand, after all.

The End