

“What is that in your hands?”

“N-nothing,” Sepna stutters.

“Don’t be afraid. Just show me.”

Sepna opens her hand and reveals a white flaky substance.

“High Royal Sir, I don’t know what it is. I just found it and liked the way it tasted.”

“Where did you find it?” he asks her. The woman looks down shamefully.

“Tell me where you got it.”

“High Royal Sir, it was left at the bottom of the First Counselor’s purse. He had me wash it for him yesterday. I only took it so it would not be wasted. Please, do not tell the High Miss.”

Miss Jangre stomps over toward them.

“Are you having trouble with this one?”

“No,” he replies. “I am happy to have Sepna lead me out.”

They leave Miss Jangre and head toward the kitchen gates. When they reach the exit, Allus turns to Sepna and holds out his hand. She woefully pours the rest of the substance into it and licks the residue from her hand.

“High Royal Sir,” she says, “May I ask, what it is? I have never tasted anything like it.”

“Not many have,” he replies. “It is called ‘salt,’ and I would appreciate your silence about this matter.”

Sepna nods fervently and scurries away to her duties.

Allus pauses and eyes the substance. Salt is a recreational spice, eaten only by those with high royal status. However, with the shortage, all salt rations were cut, even to the royal class including the royal advisors. Another troubling fact compounds