

Devereux rebuffed her; and that made her furious, so she set out to ruin him. She started spreading the rumor that his eldest son was a bastard and so could never inherit. She paid a woman in Neukirk Market to swear that she was the mother. She even got a midwife to swear that she'd delivered the child and immediately handed it over to Lord and Lady Devereux and that both mother and midwife had been rewarded handsomely for their silence.

“None of this made much sense, because both of the women were still living in relative poverty. But as with these sorts of things, no one thought it through. The story was rampant all over the kingdom, and it kept getting embellished with each repetition.

“Devereux had no choice but to tell Father exactly what had happened. Isabella denied everything, pretending that it was she who was wronged and being maligned; but Father was having none of it. He gave her a choice. She could immediately take the veil, or she could accept a marriage he would arrange for her in a far-away land and make her home there forever after. Even if she wanted to bring her children to visit their grandparents, she must first secure his permission, and no visit was to last longer than a week. For Isabella, there was only one choice — she could never accept the religious life. So Francis helped Father find a suitable family that would accept her — and I've no doubt a handsome dowry was part of the bargain. We've never spoken of those events since.”

As Rupert finishes, Mother says, “That explains a lot.”

Turning to her, I ask, “What do you mean?”

“When I mentioned Isabella's letter to Emrys, he bristled and then looked very grim. He first tried to dismiss it as nothing. But when I pressed, he finally said, ‘It's better she stays away’ and would say nothing else on the subject.”