

“Well, good luck.” Father Ben longed for the olden days, when a patron would support an abbey and no one ever had to run an ad in the local paper offering their potion brewing services. But knowing his luck, Father Ben would have ended up with some smarmy patron who only wanted power and money and didn’t understand the value of turning a slug blue. Father Ben slunk back and closed the heavy wooden door with a thunk.

The deep and resonant boom of the door closing echoed through the abbey and woke Brother Threnody, a young monk with shaggy hair who immediately hopped out of the nest of blankets that passed as his bed to check the progress of his potion.

Rather than stirring all night, as dictated by the ancient scrolls he found translated into English on the internet, Brother Threnody had placed his potion in the center of a turntable. The potion had ridden in a circle all night, its contents gently swirling in the jar.

He plucked the potion from the turntable, spilling a drop over the edge. Where it hit the ground, a tiny daisy sprouted, bloomed, died, and faded back into the carpet.

Brother Threnody dipped his chin in the potion and took a selfie.

He taped a note to the top of the jar. It read, flower potion- thirty dollars/ trade for bicycle repair/ or best offer.

Having fallen asleep in his robes, he didn’t need to change. He ran with the potion through the basement, past the broken organ buried under dusty boxes of books and cracked ceramic urns, ducking under a dusty skull candelabra, up the stairs and into the lawn just in time to get on the van headed to the farmer’s market.

On the village green at the center of town, amid a cold drizzle and the bustle of vendors laying out crafts, flowers, and books, Brother Threnody and Father Ben set up a folding table and two chairs. They put out a varicolored set of jars and opened up a metal box containing ten ones,

Commented [3]: The POV shifts from Father Ben to Brother Threnody here - perhaps an in-chapter section break would indicate that for the reader, especially as there is a location shift as well, from the Abbey's front door to its basement.

Commented [4]: Perfect tone detail here! Also further establishes the current day setting.

Chapter 2

Deep in the Abbey came a jangling sound. It couldn't be the doorbell, **thought Father Ben**, unless Sister Kuolema had cursed it with the voice of an ailing bird.

Commented [11]: establishing FB's POV

The jingle came again, and again, at regular intervals. Father Ben followed the sound into the basement, past the **grandfather clock with sixteen numbers on its face**, past the laundry room, and to the door of Brother Threnody's quarters. The jangling cut off, replaced by Brother Threnody's sleep-heavy voice.

Commented [12]: great detail to refresh the whimsical tone for the reader in this new chapter

"Yes?" There came a long silence. "Uh -huh, umm, well then, I'll tell him."

Brother Threnody erupted from his room, and Father Ben jumped back just in time to avoid getting his glasses broken by the door.

Brother Threnody rushed headlong into his abbot. "Oh good, you're here. I was just coming to look for you. We've gotten a call from Abbess Mary in Tacoma. Brother Hieronymus is coming tonight to stay with us for his sabbatical."

"But didn't he just finish a sabbatical in Paris?"

"I guess. Maybe he misses it and wants to come to the Paris of Puget Sound." Brother Threnody motioned to indicate the catacomb-like basement, including a few skulls on the shelf next to the box of Christmas ornaments.

Father Ben's eyes filled with tears. Should he tell this man the truth? Would it be better to fib and spend the rest of the day praying for forgiveness than let this newcomer in on his failings? The longer he stood wet-eyed and befuddled, the harder it would be to come up with a reasonable excuse for his erratic behavior. The best he could think of was to say that someone was pregnant. But who? And how could he keep up that lie? Now everyone was staring, and Brother Hieronymus had picked up the spatula and was tapping it menacingly against the thick flesh of his palm. The ship of lies had long since sailed. Time to tell the truth. "A financially insolvent one. We've lost our tax-exempt status. We owe money."

Brother Hieronymus softened and reached out a hand to the abbot. "What can we do to help?"

Father Ben let loose a tiny sob. "I don't know."

"I'll call a house meeting," said Sister Kuolema. "And as the welcoming committee, I'll get the place cleaned up for the Satanists."

Commented [25]: This slips into Father Hieronymus's POV, and I don't think it's meant to. If you changed it to "Brother Hieronymus's face softened" or "stance softened" or something else clearly observable by the others in the room, that would avoid any POV confusion right here.

Brother Threnody raised his hand. “Could we get the unofficial mayor to write a letter on our behalf?”

Father Ben snuck a peek at Brother Hieronymus, whose deep and soulful eyes were peering out the window at a deer biting bugs from her haunches. The abbot said, “Our current unofficial mayor is a goat.”

“But we’ll crown a new one at the Strawberry Festival next month,” put in Brother Threnody.

“Let’s keep that idea on the back burner,” said Father Ben. “How about you, Sister Kuolema. Any ideas?”

She shook her head. “Aren’t you going to Olympia on Thursday?”

Father Ben nodded.

Sister Kuolema continued. “Just ask the government what we’d need to do to show we benefit the community, and do whatever they say. Or at least act like we’ve done it.”

Father Ben turned to Brother Hieronymus. “Would that be a violation of the Oath of Good Faith?”

Brother Hieronymus yawned. “It’s not bad faith to meet other people’s expectations.” He stood up from the table. “Productive meeting, Father Ben. Now excuse me while I go make some coffee.”

Commented [44]: Technically in Father Ben's POV bc he's seeing FH's eyes that way bc of the love potion, so this is in FB's subjective experience.

Commented [45]: Another detail that perfectly fits the tone of the abbey and is very true to island life - Orcas has animal "mayors" too.

Clarence said, “Is the Bainbridge Union of Aromatherapists and Acupuncturists a religion?”

“No,” said Gregory.

“Our government just made that same call.”

“But the abbot here is clearly not an aromatherapist. I mean, look at his robe.”

“The aromatherapist also wore a robe. Though hers was decidedly more pungent.”

“But,”

Clarence held up a hand. “You could argue with me all day, but it would do no good. I didn't make the rule. I just enforce it.”

“Then you can unenforce it,” said Gregory.

Clarence peeked at the clock on his computer. His tummy rumbled. “It’s not that simple.

After you file an appeal, a consortium of investigators reviews your information and passes a judgement. And by the look of your paperwork, you wouldn’t pass.”

Father Ben sighed. “If you could see my abbey, you’d understand. It’s got grape vines and chickens. It’s got bells and prayer mats and a meditation room. All the brethren are unemployed. They've devoted their life to the Tenets of Good Faith and the use of magic.”

Gregory pulled a bagel he’d bought at the coffee shop out of the pocket of his goat-emblazoned sweatshirt.

Clarence eyed the bagel.

“Would you do the honors?” asked Gregory.

Father Ben tapped the bagel lightly with the tip of his finger. “Calidum Et Humidum.”

The bagel steamed, and the butter remelted, dripping a bit down Gregory’s arm.

Commented [75]: Most of this chapter has been in Father Ben's POV. Could you have Father Ben notice Clarence checking the time to avoid a POV shift to Clarence?

member of humanity, rather than someone who stood on the outside of personhood and looked in. She must not have had a traumatic childhood.

But then, every time Sister Kuolema met another alchemist, she hated humanity a little bit less. Maybe one day she'd be like Sevimli, excited to be a part of the teeming world.

Meanwhile, on the flat car deck of the boat, Brother Hieronymus sat in the passenger seat of the van, his legs stretched out, bandaged and in pain.

"Do you want me to go up and get you anything from the galley?" asked Father Ben.

"No thanks. I ate at the hospital. I asked Sevimli to get the nurses to bring me extra blankets. I ended up with an extra meal."

Father Ben smiled. "I'm impressed with her dedication to her vow of silence. When I was a neophyte, I was afraid to leave the abbey."

"She'd go stir crazy if we tried to coop her up."

"When I went to the Seminary Convention in Cleveland last year, an abbot gave a talk about doing away with the vow of silence. He thought it deterred young people from joining the order."

Brother Hieronymus ran his hand over his bandages and winced. "He's right, and that's why we should keep it."

"He suggested that everyone pick a day of the week and have a day of silence. You could rotate silence around the abbey."

"Like using a chore wheel to track silence," said Brother Hieronymus.

"I don't think that would work at our abbey, though," said Father Ben. "We'd end up creating an economy of silence. The brethren would trade chits whenever one wanted to talk on his day off."

Commented [101]: Nice use of a section break to shift scene and POV.

This latter part of the chapter is in Father Ben's POV, but the opening sentence sets it up to be Brother Hieronymus's. Could you add Ben to these first lines to situate us in his POV?