



**The Third Lost Tale of Mercia: Aydith the Aetheling**  
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The Third Lost Tale of Mercia:  
**Aydith the Aetheling**

Written by  
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LUNDENBURG  
1001 A.D.

*“This year there was great commotion in England in consequence of an invasion by the Danes, who spread terror and devastation wheresoever they went, plundering and burning and desolating the country with such rapidity, that they advanced in one march as far as the town of Alton ... ”*

—*Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, Entry for Year 1001 A.D.

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Aydith’s heart seemed to throb in her throat, so completely did her rage and sorrow fill her. Breathing became difficult as she waited for her father to exit the hall, but she stood firm, swallowing down what fear she could. She watched as the various nobles and clergymen exited the room first, their faces cheerful, though she did not see anything to be cheerful about. Some of the faces comforted her, such as Bishop Alphege’s, who wore his usual expression of stoic calm. Others infuriated her, such as the smirk of the man named Lord Alfric, who had betrayed her father once before but now strolled about the palace as if he still ruled Mercia as ealdorman.

Even more troubling, she realized, was the number of faces missing. Recently the Danes had pillaged all the way to Alton and met with a

Saxon army, but so many great men died that day, no one could consider the battle a victory. Among the dead was the kind and scholarly Athelward, as well as Lord Leofric of Whitchurch, and Wulfhere the thegn, and high-steward Lord Leofwin, and Bishop Elfy's son Godwin ... and many more which she could not name. Her arms trembled as she clenched her fists at her sides. Despite the deaths of those brave men, Sweyn Forkbeard pillaged on with his army of Vikings. From Alton the pagans had marched on to Devonshire, where another one of her father's lords betrayed the Anglo-Saxons. His name was Pallig, and he had been a Dane living amongst the English; perhaps King Ethelred should have seen it coming.

Her fury only raged hotter the longer she waited, as did her determination to speak her mind. And though the men passed by her and she knew almost all of them by name, as they knew hers, they did not bother to look at her or address her, for she was only an eleven-year-old female aetheling standing in the middle of the palace. Even the fact she was an aetheling hardly seemed to matter; after all, Ethelred had ten children in all.

At last, the king himself exited the hall. Her stomach turned a somersault. King Ethelred looked rather pleased with himself: his cheeks were rosy above his fair beard, his blue eyes were crisp and bright, and his crown looked freshly polished. Normally, Aydith would be proud of him, for of course a king should always appear confident, no matter the circumstances. What enraged her was the real reason why he felt victorious, which had nothing to do with the Vikings.

When he saw her, his smile fell. "Aydith?" He scratched at his beard and glanced nervously about, as if hoping to see one of her retainers come fetch her away. "Something wrong?"

"I ... I heard you," she gasped. "I heard everything. How *could* you?"

King Ethelred's cheeks turned deep red. She was not sure if the cause was embarrassment or fury—or perhaps both. "You should not have heard anything," he snapped. Of course, he did not even address her question. He probably never would. "So forget you heard it at all!"

Despite herself, Aydith felt tears filling her eyes, blurring her vision. She knew it was bad for an aetheling to be seen crying, especially with so many important men watching, but she couldn't help herself. "Mother has not even been dead a year."

He straightened himself, which was no small feat under the heaviness of his thickly woven garments. "A king must have a queen."

“But Emma of Normandy! She’s one of them!” Aydith was getting carried away with herself, practically screaming. “Norman filth! The Normans are friends to the Danes! Have you forgotten, Father?!”

“Of course not, you foolish child! These are matters you cannot understand.” Ethelred’s eyes darted desperately around the room, seizing the first available hearth companion he could find. “You, Hastings! Take her to her room, and don’t let her leave your sight, for God’s sake!”

For the first time, Aydith understood the extent of her own embarrassment. She looked around her, glimpsing the smug faces leering and laughing at her, and she realized how she must look to them. She was small and thin, any sturdiness of her frame covered by the loose folds of her dress. She was eleven years old, presuming to yell at her father, the king; and even worse than that, she was a girl. To them she was nothing more than a spoiled, childish *girl*.

Her humiliation filled her up and petrified her. The sobs still wanted to come out, but she restricted them, her body shaking violently as a result. All the while, a man walked forward to take her away. She recognized him vaguely as he came closer, but it was hard to see anything clearly through the deluge of her sorrow. His hands on her shoulders were large but gentle, gripping her and guiding her away from the crowd. His touch was surprisingly relaxing.

“There, there,” he said, though a bit awkwardly, and patted her back.

She bowed her head and sagged under his touch. What had she accomplished by making such a scene? Nothing. What had she lost? A great deal. Her father would be more strict from now on. The nobles would likely laugh at anything she said, aetheling or not.

Despite the gravity of these defeats, the words of the witenagemot resumed echoing in her head, again and again and again. Her anger trickled back into her veins, granting her new strength. She remembered the way the wise men had spoken to her father, especially that treacherous man Alfric, and how from the start of the gathering to the finish they had all managed to turn the truth on its head. At the beginning of the meeting, King Ethelred had still been filled with resolve to launch yet another attack on the Vikings, despite his many failures. By the end, everyone had convinced him that he should try a more friendly approach instead.

When at last they reached her room, she broke away from Hastings, storming in of her own will. She grabbed the door and made to slam it, but he put his hand against it. Her fierce brown gaze met his, blazing.

As she stared at him, however, she found she could not remain angry for long. He seemed a strong and noble man, his face kind and devoid of the selfishness and deceitfulness of almost everyone she met in the king's court. In truth, she had known Hastings for some time now, who had served the royal family as a retainer ever since becoming a man at the age of twelve, she suspected. Though she had always seen him about, she had never thought of him much, beyond pondering his somewhat large chin on an otherwise box-shaped face. His eyes were so soft and unassuming, his demeanor so quiet and graceful, that his presence was easy to take for granted. He had shiny brown hair that barely fell below his ears, and a close-cut beard that helped cover the largeness of his chin. This close, she thought the beard looked very soft to the touch.

"My lady," he said, looking somewhat abashed, then cleared his throat. "I'm to watch over you."

She lifted her chin high, but removed her hand from the door, and went inside.

Two of her ladies already loitered within her chamber, having abandoned their weaving work to whisper to each other and giggle next to the brazier. At the sight of Aydith entering with a red, swollen face and a soldierly companion, they hushed immediately and straightened their postures.

Aydith glared at them. She already disliked the maids, but now she disliked them even more, for they had been talking about her older brother Aethelstan and blushing like tavern wenches. Aydith did not know exactly what they were whispering to each other, but she knew it must be sinful, and even if it was not, it was disrespectful to speak of an aetheling in such a manner. Not sure what to say, she harrumphed and crossed her arms over her chest, then went to sit at her table and chair.

This table was probably her favorite place on earth to sit. It squatted in a cold corner of the stone room, from which point the rest of the world seemed to grow quiet around her. At the table, she did not have to focus on anything but her wooden toys, and the precious manuscripts from which they were inspired. No matter how bright the outdoors, the table always seemed to collect a gentle glow around its corners, whether from the nearby candles, the lit brazier, or the sunlight forcing its way through the thick tapestry over the window. She sat in her table and took a deep breath, feeling the way a breeze always seemed to flutter here, making everything move and come alive, from the fabric of her dress to the delicate parchment of her books.

Her fingers reached out and found the smooth wooden piece tucked behind the books. She owned a few different carvings: one of a horse, and a church, and a wooden palisade. But most precious to her was the carving of a woman, crafted for Aydith per her request to the royal carpenter. The woman wore a dress, but leather armor was also carved onto her form, as well as a helm over her bound hair. A sword hung from her hip. Aydith traced the rim of the toy sword with her fingertip while staring longingly towards the glowing window.

For a moment she began to feel peaceful and alone once more. Then she realized Hastings stood only a few feet away from her. She had not even heard him approach.

She started, then quickly put the carved woman away. She looked at Hastings with a wary expression. "Don't worry," she said. "I don't think I can escape through the window from here."

"I am not so sure." He attempted a smile. "You look very fast."

"Hmph!" She wanted to be mad at him, but she could not resist smiling, herself. She turned away to hide her expression and a heavy silence resumed. She wished she could return to that quiet place in her mind, but she could not, and it was not entirely Hastings's fault.

"What was that you were holding?" asked the hearth companion.

"It was nothing," she said quickly. "A silly trinket. But I've grown out of such things."

She heard the maids across the room start whispering again, and it reminded her of the much louder, but no less shameful, whisperings that took place among the king's witenagemot, or gathering of wise men. Much against her will, she felt her tears and sobs returning.

"My lady?" Hastings watched her face uncertainly. "Can I ... do anything?"

"I don't know." She sniffled and looked at him directly. "Can you? Can anyone?" She shook her head so forcefully that some dark strands of her hair fell over her small face. "My father tried. God knows he tried. He even went across the sea and tried to fight the Danes in their homeland, and I was so proud of him. But he failed. Then he went to Normandy!" She smiled sadly, even as her chin quivered. "He said he would capture Duke Richard and take him back to Engla-lond with his hands tied behind his back, for all that he had done to help the Danes! What changed, Hastings? Is there something I do not understand? What makes my father go back and forth between being a proud and brave king to a cowering fool? Whatever in heaven or hell made him decide to marry

Duke Richard's daughter? Please tell me that my father was right after all, and that I am simply too young and foolish to understand!"

Hastings had a strange look on his face: one of awe, and bewilderment, and a small degree of discomfort. "I ... I wish I knew, my lady. But in truth, I am as puzzled as you."

She looked at him with fresh eyes, wondering if at last she had found someone who did not think she was foolish. But perhaps he was only being polite, because she was an aetheling and he was a hearth companion, and perhaps she should not be sharing her thoughts with him at all. Before she could make up her mind whether or not to keep speaking, the door flung open, and in strode her oldest brother.

He was only a few years older than Aydith, and yet he was treated with a great deal more respect and given many more responsibilities than she, for of course he was in line to be king. His name was Aethelstan, and he was one of the fairest of the royal children, taking more from their father than their deceased mother. He still could not grow a beard, she noticed, and had shaved off his last attempt. Nonetheless his face was twisted into such a disapproving expression that her heart sank within her, and if she could have she might have melted to the floor.

"Aydith," he said, his purple cloak still settling about him from his sudden stop, his fists planting firmly on his hips. Aydith noticed with disgust that her maids were watching him with huge, batting eyes. He was not even a particularly good-looking man, for all that Aydith could judge. But he was a prince. "What's this Father tells me about your behavior?"

She clutched her table for support, staring at him with a mixture of guilt and pleading. "I am just ... I am just so confused, brother. Aren't you?"

"I ... " He looked away in thought, lowering his arms. "I understand that Father will be marrying—" He looked uncertainly at the maids, then at Hastings. Aydith thought it foolish he felt inclined to keep it a secret. The decision had been made; the people would hear of it soon enough. Perhaps the king wanted to put off telling everyone so that it would not enrage them, as Aydith thought it should. "He'll be taking a new bride," he said hoarsely. "For the good of the country."

"Do you really believe that?"

"I ... I ... " Aethelstan shook his head helplessly. "I trust Father!"

Aydith sighed. Aethelstan was always so dignified and practical; perhaps he was right. Why couldn't she simply accept the king's decisions like so many other people seemed to do? She remembered the way

Mother used to act submissive and accepting of all Ethelred's actions in public, but as soon as she was alone with Aydith, she would curse and swear and insult her own husband. Aydith never wanted to be like that, and she wondered how many other people might be the same way, acting out their lives as they felt they ought to, yet nearly bursting with anger inside. If only people would come together and speak their true minds, perhaps real progress could be made. But would anyone?

She stared at her brother for a long time, marveling at him. He did not seem to be filled with secrets and bitterness like so many other people. He simply did what he thought he was supposed to do. Surely God must love him dearly. And so did their father.

This thought sparked a new idea in her head. "Perhaps ... " She swallowed thickly. "Perhaps you could talk to him. Tell him to reconsider."

"Why? Because you miss your mother?" He guffawed, and she felt as if her heart melted. Aethelstan rarely expressed such disdain. "Do you know how childish you sound?"

Aydith set her mouth in a firm line, glaring. "It's not just about Mother. It's about our father appearing *weak*." The word made her blood burn with nervousness. It was a word her own mother had used to describe Ethelred often, but she had never dared repeat it until now. Aethelstan blinked with surprise. "First the Danegald. He took the people's money and gave it to the Danes to buy peace; but the Danes only come back for more. Now this: marrying a Norman! When the only solution is to keep fighting!"

Suddenly Aydith became all too aware that she and Aethelstan were not alone. She saw the looks of shock on the maids' faces, and the abashed expression of Hastings, who seemed embarrassed just to hear such things. Meanwhile Aethelstan's face turned bright red. He was not the sort to get angry, but even he had his limits.

"What—what I mean is ... " Aydith drooped in her chair, her voice slurring to something of a mumble. "What I mean is that these things make him *look* weak. Not that he is."

Aethelstan lifted his chin, which seemed to require a great deal of effort, for his body seemed as stiff as clay, heated to the shattering point. Despite this, he managed to keep his voice at a low, but grating, pitch. "Everyone ... please leave the room."

Their eyes wide, the maids got up and scurried out. Aydith was relieved, though she shuddered to think how they would gossip about the scene they'd already witnessed. Hastings, however, stood still.

"The king commanded me to watch her, my lord," he said.



Aethelstan did not seem to care, nor even notice that Hastings remained, for all of his concentration was focused on Aydith. When the maids were gone, he stormed up to her table and grabbed one of the books.

"Hey—!" shouted Aydith.

He pulled it out of her reach. "You've been reading too many of these stories!"

"They're not stories!" cried Aydith. "They are *history*! They chronicle the past of all Engla-lond, and even some other parts of the world, Aethelstan!"

But because he had picked up the book, his eyes found yet something else: the wooden woman. He seized this next, and Aydith cried out with dismay.

"If those are history, then what is this?" Her brother turned it in his hands, trying to figure it out for himself. "Is this the Lady Aethelfleda you always talk about?"

She clutched for it, but he stepped back so far that she almost stumbled to the floor. "Give it back!" The pitch of her voice rose nearly to a scream.

"I grow weary of hearing you speak of her," said Aethelstan. "Lady of the Mercians.' Her story may be history, but it is still ridiculous! The Archbishop was right: reading has filled your head with nonsense."

Aydith clutched her face, nails digging into her cheeks. "He ... he said that?"

Aethelstan lowered the figurine somewhat, taking her sorrow for submission. "Aydith, women should not lead armies, nor rule in the place of an ealdorman." He said it so calmly, so matter-of-factly. "Your nature is to be peaceful and supportive. It is the role God chose for you. I thought you knew that?"

She shuddered. "But ... she took Derby ... and built burgs ... and—"

"Her husband was dead," said Aethelstan. "That was different. There was no one else to do it. Do you remember what happened after she died, and Mercia fell to the spindle side? Her daughter failed to rule, and had to give it up to her brother, and ... oh I forget the rest." He looked frustrated. "What does it matter? It's not even your concern!"

"Please, Aethelstan, I'm ... I'm trying to be good." She felt cold inside out, and trembled uncontrollably. "I'm trying to do what's right. Tell me what to do."

He thought about this long and hard. Then his eyes fixed on the figurine. "First, you have to forget about her." He walked towards the brazier.

“... What?” Aydith scrambled to her feet. “What are you doing?”

Without any ceremony, he opened the brazier and tossed the figurine into the flames. Aydith put her hands over her mouth to cover her squeal.

Aethelstan stared into the brazier with deep concentration, the bright orange light glinting in his eyes. Despite all this, he seemed unsatisfied. He picked up a poker and jabbed angrily at the embers, little sparks and pieces of burning ash spraying up in a gruesome fountain.

“I will do that, my lord,” said Hastings.

Aethelstan blinked with surprise, having forgotten Hastings’s presence. He passed off the poker. “Er, thank you,” he said.

Hastings took up the job of stoking the fire with a grim, firmly-set expression. For some reason, Aydith felt even more betrayed now than when Aethelstan had done it, for she had thought maybe Hastings understood her mind. But of course, that was foolish, and in both instances Hastings was only doing his duty, serving the lord and lady according to their respective ranks.

She crumpled in on herself, feeling her tears return. Her eyes had nearly run dry, she thought. Perhaps that was for the best.

Aethelstan walked up and stood over her. His voice was soft. “Come now, sister. It’s for your own good.”

“I know. Th-thank you, brother.” She could not bring herself to look at him. “Now ... please leave.”

He remained there a moment, unmoving. She did not bother to glance at his expression; she did not care. At last he turned, and she listened to the heavy thuds of his boots as he walked out, and shut the door softly behind him.

Aydith did not budge for a long while. She tried to find some peace and quietude within her mind, not thinking about anything else. She forgot Hastings was even in the room until she heard him shutting the lid of the brazier, and she shuddered. She had managed to forget the destruction of her figurine until she heard that terrible sound.

“My lady,” said the hearth companion softly.

“Don’t speak to me,” snapped Aydith. She wished she could order him to leave, but she knew she could not. He would follow the king’s will over hers, as he should.

He walked closer to her, his feet treading much more quietly than Aethelstan’s, even though he was a bigger man. She smelled the ash and smoke that must have blown on him from the fire he encouraged, and it made her sick to her stomach.

She she heard a loud *thunk*, and turned to see that he had dropped something on the floor. She gasped aloud. It was blackened with soot, but it did not look very damaged. It was the Lady Aethelfleda.

She reached to grab it, then dropped it very quickly, for it was still hot. Even so, she grinned from ear to ear as she looked up at Hastings. "What ... how ... ?"

"It simply would not burn, my lady." But his eyes twinkled with mischief as he smiled.

"Oh—oh—oh thank you, Hastings!" Before she could restrain herself, she got up, opened her arms wide, and flung herself against the hearth companion. She hugged him tight, her face smashed against his tunic just beneath his chest, the musky scent of his wools and sweat and leather filling her nose.

She realized after a moment how still he was, and quickly pulled away. This must be very unseemly. She turned around and felt her cheeks burning with a blush. Surely it was not normal for a male hearth companion to be alone with a woman in her chamber, but then again, many of today's circumstances were not normal. She was only eleven years old, of course; but if she remembered correctly, so was the Lady Emma of Normandy, who would soon be marrying her father. If not even, Emma was only a year or two older. Officially, Aydith was of a marrying age, herself. She had already begun her monthly cycle.

Feeling a bit shy and confused, she picked up the wooden figure from the floor—it was cool enough now to touch—and clutched it close to her. She cleared some of the soot from the wood, and as she revealed the woman underneath, she felt as if Aethelfleda looked different to her now than she had before.

"I ... I know little of history," said Hastings from the shadows. "Would you tell me about the Lady Aethelfleda?"

Aydith took a deep breath, her heart fluttering. It took no effort to tell the story of Aethelfleda; she did not even have to search her memory. "She was born over a hundred years ago, the daughter of the great King Alfred," she began. "Her husband was named Aethelred, like my father. Their marriage helped bring the Angles and Saxons of Engla-lond together, and united the kingdom against the Vikings. But he died. After his death she ruled in his place, and the people called her the Lady of Mercia, serving her almost like a queen. She built burgs and walls all around the cities and boundaries of Mercia. She was a brilliant strategist. She led armies against the Danes, and took back the cities of Leicester

and Derby. She even fought and recruited the Welsh. She ruled for almost eight years before she died."

She looked down at the toy in her hands. Suddenly, it had gone from being scorching hot to numbingly cold, and it looked ugly under its mask of black soot.

"And then her daughter, Aelfwynn, tried to rule in her mother's place. But Aethelstan was right. She was weak."

She walked back to the brazier and opened the lid.

"My lady?" Hastings took a step towards her, then stopped. "What are you doing?"

"Aethelstan's right. I shouldn't keep such toys."

Her hand trembled as she lifted the figurine over the fire's glow. She realized the fire was burning even higher than she had anticipated. How had the figurine not burned before? Had Hastings removed it from the fire right away? He must have, so she tried to get mad at him for it, seeking anger to give her strength. He had deceived his own lord, an aetheling! Perhaps he was not trustworthy at all.

She felt a twinge of pain in her heart, then she dropped the figurine into the flames. Before she could change her mind, she threw down the lid.

She looked at Hastings, and he was scowling. His normally kind eyes were narrowed, stinging her like alcohol splashed on an open wound.

"Oh," she cried suddenly. "I wish you would go away!"

He bowed his head, though his fists were clenched at his sides. Ethelred had told him not to let Aydith leave his sight, and he stayed true to this as he backed away, ever so slowly, moving further and further from the aetheling. Eventually he was covered with shadows, and stood on the far side of the room, and such a quiet fell over them that it seemed as if he truly was gone, after all.

Aydith got up and dragged her feet toward her bed. So much crying and fussing had exhausted her. She collapsed on her knees before even climbing onto her soft sheets, and folded her hands below her forehead. She closed her eyes and whispered, so softly that she hoped Hastings could not hear her.

"Dear Lord, Father in Heaven, show me what to do. Teach me humility and give me understanding. Drive the terrible pagans from Englund. Smite down our enemies with your Holy power, or show me what I can do in your stead. Amen."

It was a prayer she had muttered a few times before, a prayer she had devised and felt very proud of, but it seemed even more significant now than it had in the past.

Feeling somewhat better, she climbed onto her sheets and drifted promptly to sleep.

\*

Nightmares prevented her from resting that night.

She dreamt of the Vikings making their way through Engla-lond, burning homes and stabbing children, stealing food and pissing on what they didn't want, taking slaves and killing monks.

She relived the horrendous scene she had witnessed when she was four years old. She hid in a church in Lundenburg when Sweyn Forkbeard and his army attacked the old Roman city. They burned whatever they could, and even in the big stone church the smoke stung Aydith's eyes and filled her chest with a terrible cough. Then some of them broke in, and one of them stabbed a monk until his sword came out the other side, and he didn't even stop there. His blade opened the monk wide, and even though Aydith's maid tried to put a hand over the little girl's eyes, she still saw everything, spilling onto the church floor.

Then something strange happened in her dream. She grew up suddenly and became Aethelfleda. She married the ealdorman of Mercia and bore him children. But at the same time, she was already ensuring her role as the Lady of Mercia. She did this by advising her husband and signing his documents. People began to call her the Lady of Mercia long before her husband died and she led armies against the pagans.

Next she led a fyrd against Sweyn Forkbeard, even though he had not yet been born in the time of Aethelfleda. He had fought the men of Hampshire, and killed so many noble men, and his Viking warriors ran all about burning and destroying. But she, this new version of Aydith, knew exactly where they were headed next, and knew how to gather an army there that could stop them. But she could not gather the fyrd herself. She would have to tell her husband to do it.

She woke up trembling and covered with sweat, but even as she clutched her sticky blankets, a smile stretched her face.

"Hastings? Hastings!"

She sat up, searching for him in the darkness. Only a few candles remained lit, and the brazier had faded to the dull red glow of its embers. A shadow moved and she turned hopefully, but she only saw one of her dim-witted maids, peering at her with a weary face.

"He was relieved of duty, my lady."

Aydith plopped back down on her sheets, strangely disappointed, even though Hastings was not the man to which her dream, and thus God, had directed her.

She had no husband, of course, and her father would not listen to her; but she had two older brothers who were in line to take the throne and could make important decisions. She knew without a doubt that God wanted her to keep talking to Aethelstan, just as Aethelfleda had signed her husband's documents. She would do so more humbly, next time. Just like Aethelfleda, she would provide support to those in power, and they would not even notice what power she obtained for herself, in the meantime. Besides, power was not the point. The point was to save Engla-lond from the pagans.

Her eyes peered heavenward, glittering as if with holy light, even as her eyelids drifted shut once more. "Yes, Lord," she whispered. "I understand. It is Aethelstan who must gather the armies, and I must help him. I must ... "

Her body slipped from her consciousness, and her mind returned happily to her dreams, which were much more pleasant now than before.

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## RELEASE DATES

*One Lost Tale of Mercia will release every other Tuesday until October 5, the release of the full story of Eadric Streona and his greatest opponent, the Golden Cross. For more news and updates, visit [www.jaydenwoods.com](http://www.jaydenwoods.com).*

The First Lost Tale: **Golde the Mother** (released May 18)

The Second Lost Tale: **Ethelred the King** (*released June 1*)

The Third Lost Tale: **Aydith the Aetheling** (*released June 15*)

The Fourth Lost Tale: **Athelward the Historian** (*released June 29*)

The Fifth Lost Tale: **Algifu the Orphan** (*released July 13*)

The Sixth Lost Tale: **Hastings the Hearth Companion** (July 27)

The Seventh Lost Tale: **Hildred the Maid** (August 10)

The Eighth Lost Tale: **Canute the Viking** (August 24)

The Ninth Lost Tale: **Runa the Wife** (September 7)

The Tenth Lost Tale: **Edmund the Aetheling** (September 21)

**\*\*OCTOBER 5th:** The novel, Eadric the Grasper, releases at Amazon.com\*\*

#### AUTHOR'S NOTE

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, as compiled by various monks until the year 1140, are my primary sources of information. So, too, were the Chronicles of Florence of Worcester and the Chronicles of the Kings of England as written by William of Malmesbury. Without the devotion of these men to chronicle the chaotic events of their time, so little of the Dark Ages would be known. Other important sources are listed below. A full list of consulted sources is posted on <http://talesofmercia.wordpress.com>.

## From the same author on *Feedbooks*

The First Lost Tale of Mercia: *Golde the Mother (2010)*

“The Lost Tales of Mercia” are ten short stories set in England near the end of the Viking Age, releasing every other Tuesday. Though fictional, they are heavily researched and feature many real historical figures as described in the ancient texts of the “Anglo-Saxon Chronicles.” They are intended to portray what might have and could have happened. These quick reads will entertain and educate at the same time. Read the stories in any order; though interconnected, they do not follow each other chronologically, and each tale stands alone.

The First Lost Tale, “Golde the Mother,” is about the mother of Eadric Streona. It sheds light on Eadric’s strange childhood, and raises the question of who fathered the boy who would become notorious as one of the most treacherous men in England.

The Sixth Lost Tale of Mercia: *Hastings the Hearth Companion (2010)*

A royal hearth companion named Hastings fights on the front lines of battle for duty and the Golden Cross, but he entertains unrealistic notions of how his mistress, Aetheling Aydith, might reward him.

“The Lost Tales of Mercia” are ten short stories set in England near the end of the Viking Age. They can be read in any order. Though fictional, they are heavily researched and feature many real historical figures as described in the ancient texts of the “Anglo-Saxon Chronicles.” They are intended as a creative interpretation of what might have and could have happened.

The Fourth Lost Tale of Mercia: *Athelward the Historian (2010)*

Lord Athelward, an ealdorman who also wants to write history, finds his peace of mind disturbed when a strange woman named Golde and her young son Eadric show up on his doorstep with a ridiculous proposal.

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Chronicles." They are intended as a creative interpretation of what might have and could have happened.

*The Seventh Lost Tale of Mercia: Hildred the Maid (2010)*

In 1005 A.D., a terrible famine strikes Engla-lond. When a poor young woman named Hildred grows desperate enough to break the law for her survival, a rising thegn named Eadric takes her fate in his hands.

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*The Second Lost Tale of Mercia: Ethelred the King (2010)*

This haunting short story illustrates the scandalous circumstances surrounding King Ethelred's rise to power at the age of eleven, and reveals why the entire reign of so-called "Ethelred the Unready" seems to have been cursed.

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*The Tenth Lost Tale of Mercia: Edmund the Aetheling (2010)*

In the tenth and final Lost Tale, young prince Edmund suspects a plot against his father's life. He turns to his siblings, Aydith and Aethelstan, for help, but King Ethelred heeds none of them. Will they ever find someone they can trust?

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*The Fifth Lost Tale of Mercia: Algifu the Orphan (2010)*

In the wildest Lost Tale yet, we jump to the year 1014. Algifu of Northampton joins forces with Canute, the new and young king of the Vikings. Algifu believes that her father was murdered in cold blood by Ealdorman Eadric Streona. How far will she go to obtain her revenge?

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*The Ninth Lost Tale of Mercia: Runa the Wife (2010)*

Runa expects to live her entire life isolated in the woods until she meets Thorkell the Tall. She tries to conform to society through a traditional marriage, but at a very high cost to them both.

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*The Eighth Lost Tale of Mercia: Canute the Viking (2010)*

As a teenager, Canute struggles to find his place among a fortress of Jomsvikings and the differing religions surrounding them. An unexpected relationship with another Jomsviking, forbidden by the Christians, may force him to choose a side.

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*Ashes of Dearen: Book 1 (2011)*

A red-eyed assassin, an unready princess, a sadistic politician, and an adulterous queen all desire the secret behind a magical dust known as safra. Saffra is said to bring happiness, but these

characters' desperate attempts to obtain it will cost them all dearly. Their salacious and violent deeds bring three great nations to the brink of warfare. And little do they know, their scrambling efforts are being carefully watched by a much greater power: the gods behind the beguiling drug that ensnares them all.

#### Last Tales of Mercia 3: Elwyna the Exile (2012)

In the late 1040's, the first group of Norman lords arrives in Engla-lond. King Edward believes they are allies. But as Lord Richard FitzScrob begins to construct the first Norman castle in Engla-lond, the conflict between Normans and Anglo-Saxons builds slowly to one of the greatest wars in English history.

In Last Tale 3, Elwyna--the exiled wife of Lord Godric--lives quietly in the woods with her lover, Dumbun, until a group of Norman soldiers come to the woods to obtain timber for Richard's castle. The Norman knights treat everything in Elwyna's home as their own--even Elwyna herself. Not sure what to do, Elywna realizes she must go crawling back to Godric for help or somehow take matters into her own hands.

Set in the Dark Ages of Engla-lond, the "Last Tales of Mercia" are ten short stories featuring real historical figures and characters from the "Sons of Mercia" series. Though strongly connected to the series and each other, they can be read independently.

#### Last Tales of Mercia 5: Osgifu the Sister (2012)

Osgifu finds out that her sister, Elwyna, may soon be hanged for murder. She faces a hard decision of whether to leave matters to fate or oppose the Normans herself.

Set in the Dark Ages of Engla-lond, the "Last Tales of Mercia" are ten short stories featuring real historical figures and characters from the "Sons of Mercia" series. Though strongly connected to the series, they can be read independently.

#### Last Tales of Mercia 2: Richard the Norman (2012)

In 1051, King Edward calls upon the lords of Engla-lond to protect him from the rebellious earl of Wessex, Lord Goodwin. Richard FitzScrob is a Norman lord who has only been in Engla-lond for a few years and struggles to provide military support. Eager to teach his son the pride and culture of their Norman heritage, he

determines to strengthen his stance in Engla-lond, no matter what the cost to the Saxons beneath him.

Set in the Dark Ages of Engla-lond, the "Last Tales of Mercia" are ten short stories featuring real historical figures and characters from the "Sons of Mercia" series. Though strongly connected to the series and each other, they can be read independently.

#### Lost Tales of Mercia (2012)

All ten Lost Tales of Mercia set in Anglo-Saxon England can now be read in a single ebook.

A mother defies an ealdorman for the sake of her son. A boy becomes king at eleven years of age through the scandalous death of his brother. A young girl takes desperate measures to manipulate the king's court. An eccentric noble gives a young swineherd a priceless gift in the form of education. An orphaned woman joins the Viking prince to pursue her revenge...

These are only the first five stories of the ten Lost Tales of Mercia. They introduce the characters who will fight, love, and betray each other until the rightful king takes the throne of Engla-lond. These stories serve as a complement to the novel, "Eadric the Grasper."

#### Last Tales of Mercia 1: Emma the Queen (2012)

Queen Emma's own son, King Edward, has been turned against her by Goodwin of Wessex and Archbishop Robert from Normandy. Edward accuses his mother of treachery and adultery with an English bishop. To prove her innocence, Emma must walk barefoot over nine scalding ploughshares and come out unscathed.

Set in the Dark Ages of Engla-lond, the "Last Tales of Mercia" are ten short stories featuring real historical figures and characters from the "Sons of Mercia" series. Though strongly connected to the series, they can be read independently.

#### Last Tales of Mercia 4: Ralph the Knight (2012)

When a fight between a Norman and a Saxon gets out of hand, Sir Ralph must employ the help of a knight named Geoffrey to cover up the unfortunate incident. Set in the Dark Ages of Engla-lond, the "Last Tales of Mercia" are ten short stories featuring real historical figures and characters from the "Sons of Mercia" series.

Though strongly connected to the series, they can be read independently.

*Last Tales of Mercia 6: Hereward the Wake (2012)*

Young Hereward ("the Wake") finds out that a Norman castle is being built in Shropshire and rides with a group of rowdy boys to cause trouble. Set in the Dark Ages of Engla-lond, the "Last Tales of Mercia" are ten short stories featuring real historical figures and characters from the "Sons of Mercia" series. Though strongly connected to the series, they can be read independently.

*The Key to Castle Krondolee (2013)*

A foreigner surprises everyone in Castle Krondolee when she claims to possess the key to a room that has remained closed for centuries, its contents unknown. Arken Jeridar, descended from the god of greed, schemes to win the key for himself and the queen's love all at once. But success may come at a far greater cost than he ever expected.



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