

Here is an excerpt from

The Spell of Twelve

The servant whom the Queen had commanded was an odd woman named Sordred. She had served the castle for as long as time, and Egbert became aware that she was not very far from him throughout the day. He tested his theory by taking strange forays into the castle halls and gardens, but wherever he went, Sordred soon appeared. That night in his room, he lay awake in his bed. He heard the oaken door squeal on its hinges, and saw a shadow enter his chamber.

"Sordred," he said. "Sordred, I know it is you. Why do you follow me? Are you after my orange?"

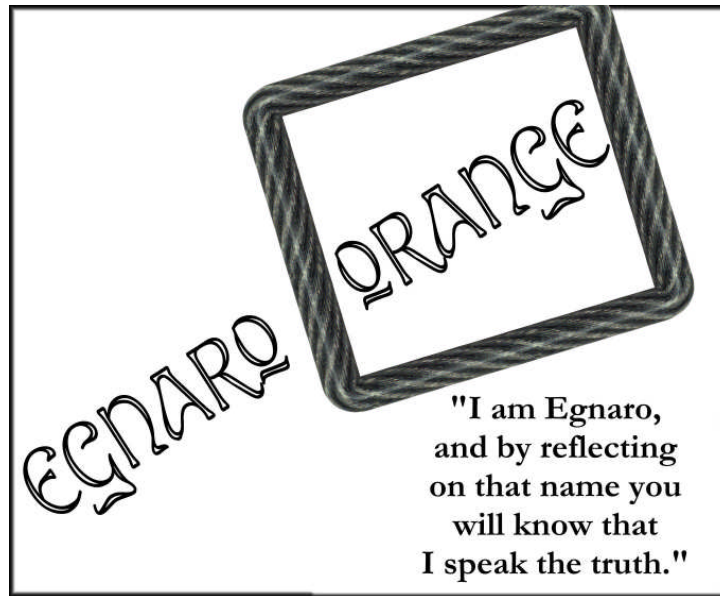
"No, Young Master," came the reply. "I am here to save your life on this night. The orange is a signal long awaited, and now I must act." An icy chill ran up Egbert's back and raised the hair on the nape of his neck.

"What do you mean by 'save my life'?" he asked.

"Long ago, on the eve of your birth, the enemies of your father cast a spell. They did not actually cast it, but they called upon an old hag named Beathag. She has a strong spirit, and they bargained with her that in the twelfth year of the twelfth Egbert, the kingdom would fall to them," she explained.

Egbert was at full attention now, full of curiosity and distrust. "How do you know this, Sordred? And why do you now seek to warn me?"

"My name is not Sordred," she answered in a low tone. "I am Egnaro, and by reflecting on that name, you will know that I speak the truth. Here is the truth: I was sent here by the hag that cast the spell in order to be your guardian. She is a wise witch, and knew that those who would overthrow by powers they do not possess, could not be trusted. She was right. Soon after the spell was cast, your father's enemies caught her unaware and imprisoned her in a darkness that defies her magic. But she had known their hearts. In her spell, she called me to guard you. On seeing the signal of the gift, I am to take you from the castle so that you may solve the riddle of the orange."



"What riddle?" asked Egbert.

"In time, Young Master," came the answer. "You will have until the twelfth day of Christmas to find an answer. You will be on your own, but I will not be far away. You will be permitted to take your orange, but not your name or title. Here in the castle, the servants will find you asleep on the morrow. They will not be able to awaken you, for in truth, you will not be here. If you fail the quest, the kingdom will fall. If you succeed, the plot of your father's enemies will be foiled, and my Mistress, Beathag, will walk in the light again, for she does not serve the powers of darkness. Are you ready?"

"But you have not yet told me the riddle!" protested Egbert.