

Grandmother Dorcas

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 08 Oct 1998

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Robert Borski — 08 Oct 1998, 15:38

In LEXICON URTHUS, in the entry under Dorcas, it reads: "She dies at the age of sixteen or seventeen while giving birth to her first child, a son named Ouen."

But in SWORD, Dorcas relates the following: "I lived with my husband above a little shop, and took care of our child."

Later, in CITADEL, when Severian recontacts Ouen, he asks of him, "Your father was a shopkeeper. What of your mother?" To which Ouen replies: "I never knew her, sieur. Cas they called her, but she died when I was young. In childbirth, my father said."

To me this implies Ouen was the first-born child and Dorcas survives his delivery, since she remembers taking care of him. When Dorcas becomes pregnant a second time, however, she dies; Ouen not remembering her means he was probably still a toddler--certainly no older than three. But did this second issue survive--which would mean Severian had a paternal aunt or uncle? For all Ouen's father, the old boatman, tells us--i.e., he ran a shop that sold cloisonne and garments; he and Cas were together for four years, less a month and a week--he never mentions having **any** offspring, so it's certainly possible the second child (the existence of which Ouen would be too young to remember) survived. Dorcas' husband being unable to nurse the child, or perhaps grief-stricken because of his wife's death, either rejects or abandons his second-born, and so it is raised by others.

Is there anyone in New Sun who might correspond to this lost aunt or uncle of Severian's? I'm not sure, but the tendency to produce twins is genetic, and so if this person later married and reproduced it's not unreasonable to assume twins might be born, just as Severian and Severa are to Catherine and Ouen. And if these twins were later to enter the same trade as their grandfather, or more sinisterly know of each other carnally in the same fashion as Dorcas and Severian--well, you can probably guess where I'm going.

So I ask you? Is it possible--and please note, this is speculation only--that Agia and Agilus are also the grandchildren of Dorcas and that Severian is their first cousin? Could it be the Claw is summoning Agia as well as Severian to the cathedral tent of the Pelerines?

Robert Borski

m.driussi — 09 Oct 1998, 00:32 · follows Robert Borski

Robert Borski,

Now this is something interesting.

Just to shore up another data point, the estimated age of Dorcas is supplied by Agia when the trio is at the Inn of Lost Loves (I, ch.

26): he guesses age 18 or 19, she guesses 16 or 17.

So if we take the low number, age sixteen, then Dorcas was married at age twelve.

Re: Dorcas's line, "I lived with my husband above a little shop, and took care of our child," is a few pages into ch. 11.

(What I'm actually more interested in is the big mystery Dorcas has been sketching before she makes this remark: that is, what is the thing that keeps a family rooted to a location long after the neighborhood has gone to hell? "A grave, perhaps," says Dorcas. Okay, let's go with that--a grave of whom? Dorcas herself? No--she was in the Lake, relatively far to the north. Someone on Dorcas's side of the family? =What= is she thinking of?

Back up. She has seen a chair, check. The chair reminds her of her past life--it is =from= her past life, check. Presumably the chair is from her home above the shop, though it might be from the house she grew up in [or both--she might have taken it from her childhood house with her to her own home].

[But how can they have recently busted into a locked house and gotten this chair? Boatman seems to say that he doesn't even have a nail left from the old shop--that doesn't sound like a boarded-up treasure hoard waiting for archaeological salvagers from Thrax to find just last month.]

Or is the entire point of this whole "family treasure" thing just this: the rationale for the treasure hunters from Thrax who go looking for antique furniture and anything better that they can find?)

Dorcas's memories are vague and jumbled, so I'm not sure how much weight we can put to her one statement about taking care of the child--that might be true, or it might only be a supposition she makes based upon the images she has dredged up by that point. Her dreams in CLAW (ch. 22) are of buying tiny clothes (i.e., baby clothes) while a woman makes lace like a Fate, and of being in a tiny boat with an old boatman.

The first dream seems drawn from a pre-labor time (the expectant first time mother buying clothes); the second seems drawn from a post-death time. The death imagery in both cases comes from classical mythology, even though we have reason to believe Dorcas was a good Catholic girl (re: the crosses they sold). The odd thing is that the Old Boatman, her husband, has a similarly haunting memory of seeing Dorcas's eyes snap open when her body hit the Lake water.

It seems highly significant to me that both the boatman and the dead woman (yet another dead mother--don't forget SHADOW ch. 1 or NIGHTSIDE ch. 1) have memories of their parting. And since in one reading ghosts are "real" (Miles's early memories; etc.), then it makes perfect sense.

But still, the death of Dorcas seems mighty mysterious to me. The Boatman's memory of her eyes opening comes amid much talk of skullduggery--it seems that the dead walk and have to be put down from time to time, and/or the corollary: maybe live people are slipped in with the dead; the graveyard as a perfect place for murder.

What if Dorcas was murdered, in a "Terminator" style attempt by the Other Lords to halt an unacceptable future from evolving? (Like every time-travelling "stop Hitler in the womb" story.)

On the surface, this quiet assassination would make sense only if Ouen is the one they are trying to snuff out, since with hindsight we know that Ouen is Severian's father, and Severian is the real deal. So trying to eliminate Ouen's hypothetical sibling would be pointless. (Unless in some Ur-timeline it was the sibling who then became the ancestor to some sort of non-Severian New Sun . . .)

Or the murder might be done by the New Sun team, since all the women are under tight (protective?) wraps: Catherine in the tower, then only appearing on feast days; Dorcas in the lake; Valeria in the complex around the Atrium of Time. Three pivotal women who are beyond the reach of the Other Lords.

Anyway, said murder theories are highly speculative and only come into play because they are such cliches in time-travelling tales.

But it is true: Dorcas could have died in the labor of her second child; this hypothetical child may have lived or died; a second child could come within a year after the first (so she could have Ouen at fifteen and baby number two at sixteen--urf!). Text supports that much, at least.

(P.S. I've been wondering if Casdoe's mother, whom she says lives in Thrax, could possibly be anybody we meet in the text. Couldn't be Cyriaca, since she's armigette. How about the woman who runs the Duck's Nest inn, where stayed Hethor, Agia, and Dorcas?)

=mantis=