

There was a disturbance in the Immaterial. A mournful lament floated in the air.

Tiara had been feeling this sensation for several days already. It became more intense on the last day of October. The apparent tranquility of the woods, the light rain that fell silently and the simple life of the temple were deceptive, something was brewing in the darkness. Worry ate away at the redhead. She listened to the animals, observed the plants but didn't get the answers she wanted.

She had regained her vigor and power though. The currents of the Immaterial flowed inside her again, yet a weight prevented her from breathing fully. This made a feeling of weakness grow in her guts. She had experienced fear before, many times, and was not ashamed of it. That wasn't it. Something unknown weighed down on the elf. A doe approached and trotted around the druid, as if sensing her troubles. Tiara stroked its white-speckled side. The animal moved away with a light step, leaving the redhead alone on the river bank. She looked up and stared at the frayed clouds.

That was for certain : there was a disturbance in the Immaterial.

Sadora was sitting on the porch. The worried druid had slipped away once again, so she waited for her. For four days, she had tried different approaches, made her drink terrible concoctions and explored the periphery of her mind, without much progress. At least the wolf was quiet and the Huntress couldn't torment her. Tired of waiting, she got up and crossed the courtyard. The ballet of the young priestesses with their shapes elegantly masked by their white dresses only amused her for a moment, Watcher Kynae ensuring that her sisters kept a good distance from her.

Passing through the courtyard door, he gave the watcher a morose look :
— If the witch looks for me, tell her I went out.

Her wounds were healing, mostly thanks to the relic. Despite this, she still struggled to wield her weapon. She cursed as she brought down her scimitar on the log planted between two rocks. The cut was clean but shallow. A few weeks earlier, she would have done better. Frustrated, she readjusted her steps and resumed her sequence of attacks, parries, and precise steps. It was a fearsome dance, a mixture of what she had observed during the gladiator fights, back on the Dry Islands, and the training of the elves. Suddenly, the pain resurfaced and almost made her drop her weapon. She raged, throwing her long black braid down her back. Sweat dotted her tanned face. Yatika sat down heavily on her bag. She looked up abruptly when she heard footsteps on the shore.

— Are you giving up, girl ? Sadora muttered.

- What do you want ?
- Nothing... You ?
- I want to be able to raise my arm higher than that... she squeaked, mimicking the gesture. Unfortunately, your bite prevents it.
- Your right shoulder is the wounded one, right ? the warrior asked, omitting the criticism.
- Well, yes !
- Use your left hand then.
- That is ridiculous. I never learned to fight with my other hand !
- Why ?

Yatika prepared a venomous reply, but despite her efforts, nothing came out. The question made perfect sense. She felt shame choking her and turned towards the river.

- Not much people out there can do it, girl. Don't be upset.
- Can you ?
- Yes.
- Would you teach me ? As payment for your debt ?
- A debt ? Sadora chuckled. If you want something, don't beg for it. Beat me.

The young woman hid her smile and weighed her scimitar. She turned around and tossed her canteen aside. Sadora sneered as she drew her short sword, granted a few days back by the temple. They described a circle without taking their eyes off each other. Suddenly, Yatika jumped forward. Her blade slipped over that of the warrior. They exchanged several blows, testing each other's abilities. Yatika feinted and tried to disarm her opponent. With a deft gesture, Sadora dropped her weapon and caught it with her other hand and ended the fight, putting her blade on the young woman's neck.

- That was easy, growled the tattooed woman.
 - It is not over yet.
- She twirled her saber, pushing Sadora away and attacked again. The pain, however, paralyzed her shoulder, giving the warrior time to win again. Anger rose within the temple's protector but was quickly swept away by despondency.
- How many times did you fight ? Sadora asked.
 - I do not know.
 - It means "never", right ?
- She looked down and clenched her fists on the lush grass. Sadora chuckled as she sheathed back her weapon. She held out a hand to the young woman, helping her to get up.
- You can learn, she continued. If you stop acting like a child, you will be better. Pain will fade away with time. In the meantime, you have to find a different way to move.

Tiara returned to the outskirts of the Temple, accompanied until then by a particularly curious weasel. The elf sang a melancholic song that did not fail to captivate the surrounding fauna. Some flowers also turned as she passed. When she arrived at the courtyard gates, she saw Sadora and Yatika approaching. They were talking and gesturing. In the garden, priestesses worked with grace and coordination. They were laughing.

The druid felt her throat tighten and was unable to step in. She passed the two fighters without looking at them and returned to the bank. With one leap she sank into the icy water and disappeared beneath the surface. She went back up with a long breath and let herself float in the duckweed and white water lilies that thrived in a quiet corner.

The annual ceremony of the Forest's Heirs was about to begin. The little elf with tawny curls was nervous and crumpled the edge of her skirt between her sweaty hands. Her mother had meticulously traced the arabesques on her arms and had given her a silver tiara representing two intertwined salamanders meeting face to face on her freckled forehead.

The musicians finished their performance under the gaze of hundreds of elves. Tiara just glanced at the other children. She was eleven years old, the other aspiring druids were sixteen. The Duchess of Agalkair said that her powers were unique and that she was up to the ceremony. Her mother said the same thing. She, on the other hand, only wanted to wander the woods until dark.

— Let us contemplate your gifts, proclaimed the duchess in front of all the young elves. Our assembly will judge whether you are ready to join the druids to complete your training. Be careful and sincere.

The contenders had to show how they could manipulate nature without harming it. The first boy — with fine features announcing his supernatural beauty to come — introduced himself, confident. His presentation delighted the spectators who applauded warmly. The next one caused a similar cheer, feeding Tiara's anxiety. It was a long day for the last participants. When the sun began to set, it was Tiara's turn to reveal her powers. Her little steps amused the adults gathered in the stands at first, but silence quickly fell. Something was already brewing.

Tiara bowed awkwardly to the ducal couple who returned her greeting. Then, the red-haired elf closed her big emerald eyes and spread her hands. She was shaking. She had to force what usually happened naturally, and she didn't know how to do it. Suddenly, the world around her dissipated. The currents of the Immaterial swirled, releasing their creative energy. In her mind, the action had already taken place, but in the square, silence reigned. The crowd remained still but its enthusiasm had died down. Only the Duchess jumped up, drawing a symbol with her rapid movements. An elf left the assembly to run towards the

motionless child.

- Let her go ! shouted Tiara's mother.
- Araha, step back ! thundered the duchess.

The square rose in a single movement, causing the stands to collapse. Furious howls echoed through the forest. The immense trees leaned over the little girl.

There was no doubt about the roar that traveled across the earth. Horsemen were approaching. Tiara emerged from her restless sleep and sat up. They were coming from the north. The druid returned to the temple to warn Judith and Kynae. A neighing came up from between the trees. When Sadora and Yatika appeared in the courtyard, the riders had already begun the steep descent of the path along the cliff. They quickly reached the bridge which crossed the Chalal and began the path to the building. The tattooed warrior placed a hand on her weapon, Yatika did the same. The watcher stood ready but did not sense any imminent danger. The matriarch, for her part, laughs until she tears.

All the priestesses welcomed Alhuia with bursting enthusiasm. Despite her exhaustion, she greeted them all. The elf then stopped in front of Yatika who hugged her, sobbing. Finally, Alhuia bowed in front of the matriarch.

However, eyes quickly turned towards the strangers accompanying the watcher. They were odd to say the least. The situation was confusing for everyone, and calm only returned when the newcomers were all resting in the infirmary. Those who were not seriously injured were no less tired. The priestesses watched over them without question. The time for words would arrive soon enough, and did not bode well.

Elise, who has been barely conscious during the trip, was very weak and remained bedridden for a long time. She drank a powerful mixture which plunged her into an imperturbable sleep. Priscilla was in fairly good shape. She most desired a bath. Taken to the underground springs, she was left alone in the hot water and fragrant oils. She never thought she would taste this luxury again and savored every second. Alhuia received a lot of care as, not only was her body suffering, but her mind was noticeably weakened. Once out of danger, she returned to her apartments. She made sure to reassure the procession of priestesses who accompanied her to her door.

Oscar and Aelyss remained in the hands of the healers for a long time. The young man suffered from an infected wound and cracked ribs in addition to his other ailments. Magic completed what potions could not. This treatment exhausted him and he was placed in the room he had occupied during his first visit. For the recovery of the Scholar elf, the matriarch intervened in person. The young women did not know what to do against the occult after-effects resulting from the abuse inflicted by the witch. Furthermore, although the injury to her hand was only

physical, it had not been treated in time. Several women helped clean the pale princess. She also needed assistance to move, and to drink the medicines. Despite their efforts, the results were mixed.

— You will live, whispered the dean. Of that I am sure. With patience and perseverance, you should also be able to overcome the effect of the markings.

— That was the good news, I guess...

— Indeed. Your hand will not regain its full capabilities. You will be able to move your fingers but not firmly hold an object.

After remaining isolated from the rest of Mirh for many years, the temple suddenly had six convalescent strangers within its walls. The matriarch however, was delighted as she knew that these particular individuals were not here by chance. She limped to the fireplace carrying a log and placed it in the embers. Back in her chair, she wrapped herself in a thick cloak.

— Does he know everything ? asked the old woman.

— No. He knows that I hide certain things from him, a lot of things in fact. He wants me to reveal them to him, but I am scared. He has been patient. For that, I am grateful to him.

— What are you afraid of ?

— You saw through a part of me, Judith. Though, you do not know everything.

— I will take your word for it, my child. Dear Alhuia, I am with you. The temple will always be your home and you will always be in my heart.

— Thank you very much. Time is running out, I have to prepare for... I have to talk to him.

— You will find the right time.

— Yes. I haven't made many connections in my life. That said, you are a true friend, Matriarch.

The adventurers were summoned around the large table, in the main hall. Yatika as well. Judith and the two watchers were already there. Elise arrived last. Oscar went to meet her and accompanied her to a free seat. Sitting down again, he met Sadora's strong gaze and gave her a simple nod. Tiara, sitting between the dean and Aelyss, seemed isolated. Yatika sat in front of her, still close to Judith. Priscilla smiled at the Scholar, seeing that she didn't know why they were there either.

— First things first, the dean said. Are you hungry ?

The assembly agreed almost in unison. The servants brought dishes and jugs, in sufficient quantities to feed all the inhabitants of the temple.

— You are the White Princess, aren't you? articulated Tiara who could no longer

hold back.

— I am, replied Aëlyss. You seem to want to ask me something.

— Many things are said about colorless individuals. I had never seen one with my own eyes. Besides, it's your mind that interests me. Your perception of the Immaterial.

The Scholar did not respond immediately. She assessed what she could, or wanted, to say. Some things were better kept secret. While thinking, she grabbed her cup, or at least tried to. She noted bitterly that her fingers could not hold it properly. Under the intrigued gaze of the druid, she sighed and changed hands.

— Where to begin ? It is a vast subject.

A servant approached Sadora, a pitcher in her hands. The warrior didn't notice her and grabbed a still warm piece of bread which she dipped into her stew. Embarrassed, the young woman stepped forward a little further and asked :

— Wine, my Lady ?

She held out her cup with a curt gesture, busy cutting a slice of chanterelle pie. Finally, she realized that the servant was not moving and was still standing behind her. She put down her spoon and wiped her chin with the back of her sleeve.

— What do you want ?

— Me ? Nothing, she stammered as if she had just taken her out of her thoughts. I serve wine.

— Right now, you are standing still, behind my back.

— What ?

— Don't do that.

— I am so sorry.

Sadora looked at her for a moment and frowned. The servant blushed as she walked away.

— Since I've been here, she added before the servant got too far, I've never seen anyone offer a drink at the table. Even the old... the dean do it on her own. What do you really want ?

Embarrassed at having been unmasked so easily, the young woman with the black bun returned to the table with small steps. She put down the jug and crossed her hands in a tense gesture.

— I was there to heal you when the druid brought you here.

— I don't remember.

— I do ! Well, I remember your tattoos.

— Right...

— I study ancient texts, I spend a lot of time in the library and when I can, I go to Agalkair's archives to... What a fool I am. You do not care, I understand perfectly.

The warrior motioned for her to stay. The young woman seemed ready to cry, which seemed very strange to her. She finished chewing and continued :

— If you don't tell me what you want, I can't help you, girl.

— I would like to examine your tattoos, as I recognized some of the symbols. I

know that you and the druid are working to find out something about your condition. I want to help you.

— You want to help ?

— Yes.

— Is that it ? Is that why you put yourself in this state? You'll have to see about that with Tiara. Now I would like more wine...

— How do you feel ? Oscar asked.

— Don't worry, I'm tougher than I look. Never forget that I have always been taking care of myself, especially after you left.

— Elise...

— I don't blame you for leaving. Your silence, on the other hand, was particularly painful. Compared to that, falling from the ramparts was just a scratch.

— I am sorry.

— Allow me to doubt about that. I know you don't feel at home anywhere. You could just tell me. Who knows ? Perhaps I would have accompanied you?

— Really ?

— Right, not at that time. Today however, I'm here with you.

— You're here because a mad hag wants to get rid of you. That said, I love knowing that you are close to me.

— Are you trying to seduce me ?

— Do I need to ?

— How about your own wounds ?

— I am recovering pretty well, the priestesses are excellent healers. Why this sudden question?

— To find out if you plan to sleep tonight or...

— I will.

— Oh, great then !

— Never said that I will sleep right after diner.

Elise cooed, sliding her hand over the young man's cheek. They noticed a few priestesses standing back watching them. Surprised, they clumsily slipped away. The lovers laughed heartily.

The meal came to an end and the dishes were taken to the kitchen by the servants. Judith had announced that she wanted to speak with her guests, so they stayed seated without flinching. The hour was late but the discussion was necessary.

— Alhuia, you can sit, the dean said.

The tall elf undid the ribbon from her hair and removed her pendant. Kynae remained still but couldn't hide her surprise. The matriarch said to her :

— As you can see, our long-time friend is no longer a watcher. You are the only one here to take on this role.

- Understood, Matriarch.
- That said, I am here to represent the temple only, it is Alhuia who requires your presence and leads this council.

Yatika was also surprised and glanced at her friend, who was staring at Oscar. The tall elf greeted the assembly.

- Some of you may have already felt it : storm is brewing. The Immaterial suffers from a growing darkness and it has repercussions on our lives. I will make sure to be brief and hope that you choose to listen to me until the end.

The adventurers exchanged a few furtive glances without anyone moving or speaking. Then, Alhuia continued :

- You were not called here, yet here you are gathered before me. I do not expect anything from you but your attention, for what I have to say may be enough to influence the rest of your lives.

- There are forces in this world that have not yet revealed their true nature. Discreet, but above all cautious entities who wait for the right moment. To be honest, the majority of these forces have ill intents. Their desire to remain unseen does not, however, prevent them from acting. They have done so for centuries, weakening and unbalancing the Immaterial.

- Dehest ? Sadora intervened.

- There is a connexion, indeed. However, understand this : the land you call Dehest is not only home to the countless legions of Gray elves that descend on Mirh. Other, much worse entities have taken root there. They are at the origin of the corruption which strikes these forbidden lands. Moreover, the influence of these vigilant and cunning creatures extends far beyond their borders. I cannot be more precise, but I am convinced that you have all witnessed or suffered terrible events that only their incomparable dark magic could have caused.

The guests shuddered one after the other. These last words resonated with the inexplicable events of their past and raised many questions.

- We will face even worse in times to come. These beings will leave their lair, and nothing will be the same again. All of us, residents of Mirh, will face their ignominy. Escaping it is impossible as their influence has expanded over time. We will have to take a stand, make a decisive choice. I consider your presence among us as a sign. The time is approaching when those who are able to act must do so.

- Why are we here ? Tiara questioned.

- The Dark Masters do not fear mortals. Our weapons and spells cannot kill them. Even if we managed to hurt them, it would only be temporary. However, we have something that they don't know about. Oscar, please...

The young man placed the enchanted weapon in the center of the table. Tiara and

Aëlyss both felt a singular sensation growing in their minds. Yatika heard a murmur floating in the air.

— This sword contains power from lands beyond the Immaterial, where no one has ever gone. Our enemies could not have predicted this.

— You want one of us to use it against Dehest ? Priscilla whispered.

— No, I ask you with all my heart to assist the only one here capable of doing so. She nodded towards Oscar and all eyes turned to him. He raised his head, confusion on his face.

— This man was designated for an unprecedented quest. Only his hand can wield the blade that can banish darkness.

— Bullshit, Sadora chuckled.

She leaned down and grabbed the hilt of the sword before anyone could stop her. A deafening whistle filled the hall. The light from the flames in the hearth flickered, as if sucked into a bottomless pit. A searing pain seizes the hand, then the arm of the warrior. A nightmarish moan twisted her mind and for a moment she thought she felt the wolf waking up. She only managed to let go with a terrible effort, leaving Oscar taking the sword back into his own hands.

— This is the fate that awaits anyone who takes the weapon from him. One more second would have been enough to kill you, Alhuia clarified. He must do it, but doing it alone is impossible.

— Why him ? Yatika asked. What is so special about him ?

— A prophecy.

— Oh fuck... sighed Aëlyss.

She observed the human, doubt in her eyes. Tiara was intrigued. The others weren't sure they understood what that entailed.

— Prophecies are generally challenges to the Immaterial itself. They isolate events and beings from the balanced mass of possibilities, forcing certain outcomes rather than others. Concerning Oscar, the prophecy is as follows : "I'm passing this burden to the last branch of our lineage. Let this noble soul brandish my sword and banish Mirh's scourges, for it is the only way for life to survive what is to come". He was not designated in person, only the Immaterial knew who would correspond to these words of unsuspected power when they were pronounced. It created an opportunity of some sort, but it comes with a terrible price.

— Does it always happen like this? Aëlyss asked.

— Everything seems to indicate it.

— Has a designated person ever refused their mission ?

— I do not know. However, the Immaterial cannot ignore a prophecy and always ensures that they come true. If a chosen one tries to escape his quest, he still risks being confronted with it constantly until the end of his life.

— Why is she speaking for you ? Sadora squeaked. This is about you, right ?

— The prophecy might be about me, I do not know much more than you do. I would rather let Alhuia reveal what she knows, Oscar replied. All I can say is that when I laid my hands on this relic, I heard the cry for help of its former wielder. Now it is too late to play deaf.

— You're too stubborn to give up anyway, whispered Elise. It plays tricks on you sometimes. I will be there to get you back on track if necessary. You can count on me.

— Sadora is right on one thing. I can ask you to join me myself. Will you assist my on this quest ? Are you able to confront our worst enemy, undefeated until now ? I know you all understand what it means : we have no guarantee of success. We might never come back from this fight. We will abandon glory, wealth, warmth of a home and a family. We are here to save a world we might never live in.

— Luckily I wasn't counting on your words to motivate me, Priscilla confided, smiling sadly. Your mother counted on me to protect you and I failed in that task years ago. Today you need help again. I will follow you, to the barren plains of Dehest if I have to.

— Mirh's fate seems to depend on such a faint hope, admitted Judith. Yet no one has ever been so close to find a solution. My legs will not carry me to your side, young man, but rest assured that this temple will always be your home.

— I must admit, I have doubts about you, human, declared Aëlyss. You are young and your experience is limited, unlike your arrogance. To tell the truth, I cannot say if you will accept my help given the treatment you have given me so far. But if you can put our differences aside, I will do the same. I agree to accompany you in your quest.

— I have a score to settle with one of those creatures of darkness, Sadora growled. I know I can't do it alone. This is my only chance to set things right and make her pay. I'm in.

— Obviously, Dehest will not stop its invasion on its own, Tiara sighed. I have little to no interest in saving the northern kingdoms of men. But as things unravel, Dehest will spread everywhere. I can not allow the Gray elves to burn my forest to the ground. They have to be stopped.

— I realize how stupid I was to think I was ready to face this world, Yatika stammered. I thought I could honor Yre and Saint Selene without leaving this temple. It is impossible, not for me. I must fight the darkness head on or die trying. I will join this company if you accept me.

Alhuia knelt in front of the tanned young woman and delicately took her hands. She gave her a radiant smile.

— My child, if I had to believe in only one soul to support Oscar, it would be yours. I'm grateful that you accept.

They left the table one by one. Ultimately only Oscar and Alhuia remained.

— Ultimately, I think all had the same question.

— I think so too, Alhuia admitted. How do I know about all these things?

Oscar nodded, looking serious.

— Do you want to know ?

— Not now. I believe...

— There you are... Is it not ?

— I cannot explain it. I wanted you to be honest from the start, and now that things are unraveling, I fear it is not the time.

— I understand.

—Do you ?

—Time will come when we will no longer be able to avoid the truth. At that time,

my child, we will talk.

Right after he entered his room, Oscar heard a noise behind the door. Before he reached it, Elise slipped in, dressed in a white and green night gown.

- It was not easy finding you, why are you sleeping in a storage room ?
- There is a bed though, that is all I ask for.
- A bit more comfort would not hurt, right ?
- I'm used to sleep outside.
- Alright, alright, you are such a tough man, huh ? Wow, is that a steel ingot ? Oh no, it's Oscar's head ! He's so strong and unwavering !
- Are you done ?
- What the ..? You know, sometimes I ask myself why I still think about you...
- Why then ?
- I guess, I like that you get things done. You're not the most talkative or outgoing man I know, but I can trust you to put an end to what you start.
- So you know other men ?
- A few... Travelers, wandering mages. The kind of people interested in my wares. I get that we are not meant to be together. You were pretty clear about that, so don't be jealous now !
- I left because I had to. I needed to find this place, to find something, a clue.
- And here we are...
- For now.
- I'm not leaving.
- I will, you know it. I need to fulfill the prophecy. I have to try.
- Why can someone else do it ?
- Because of the prophecy. In a way, whoever said it reinforced the possibility that this path would lead us to victory, but at the same time, it prevented other solutions from being viable.
- Did you figure it out on your own ?
- Alhuia explained it to me.
- That elf woman, who is she ?
- I think I prefer not knowing more about her.
- She's beautiful, isn't she ?
- Stop it.
- You fucked her, I can not see you miss this opportunity.

Oscar pushed Elise against the wall and grabbed her supple neck. His face went close to hers, enough to feel her fast breath on his lips. She grabbed his shoulders, digging furrows on them with her nails. She tried to move, only making the man's grip tightening.

- I understand I was stupid thinking I could get you for myself. That doesn't mean I can't get you from time to time.
- I hurt you once, I won't do it again.
- Indeed, you cut my heart open. But I healed. Now you can do something for me.

- You are crying...
- Give me at least the same treatment as your mysterious elf.

She reached for his mouth, sticking her lips to his. Their tongues met in a long kiss. Elise exhaled deeply, as if released from a heavy weight. Oscar grabbed her hands and pinned them against the wall. The apothecary shivered as he kissed her neck. She tried to move, only to find herself trapped by his strength. This impression of helplessness delighted her. She let a moan out. At the same time, Oscar reached back up for her cheek, and saw the tears rolling down her face.

— Don't worry, she assured. I don't want to be anywhere else and do anything else. Not now that we are both in safety.

He kissed her again, letting go of her wrists and plunging his hands in her fiery mane. He pulled on her hair, tilting her face toward him. Elise ran her hands on the man's chest, following the muscle definition and scars scattered across his body. She explored his flanks and abdomen while Oscar pressed her even more against the wall. His last kiss turned into a bite, slightly marking the pale skin of her neck. She gasped, almost losing balance. She felt the bulge of his hardening cock against her thigh. Their gazes crossed, then she looked at the bed. Oscar shook his head, denying her that possibility.

— We stay here, he whispered.

With both hands, he pulled Elise in front of the cupboard and lifted her so she could sit on it. She spread her legs, revealing her moist pussy. She untied Oscar's pants with ease, a smile on her blushing face. She spat in her hands before rubbing them on his now straight and pulsing shaft.

— I don't want you to lose any time, she panted. Do not hold back, do what you want.

The man's hands clenched around her shivering thighs as his cock pressed against her swollen labias. She muffled a scream and tried to keep balance on the cupboard.

The air was suffocating. She just had time to remove her dress before Oscar pushed his cock inside her. She clung to his neck as he started to fuck her. Starting slowly with all his length, he soon upped the pace as her moans became louder. She felt him filling her, slamming his balls on her wet crotch. She saw the slight bulge of his tip on her belly. Her eyes rolled up. Pleasure was about to take hold of her mind. She fought against the urge to scream. Oscar plunged his face in her red mane, enjoying the scratch of her nails on his back, the warmth of her breath on his neck, the softness of her velvet walls tightening around his cock.

He pushed back the need to cum as long as possible, leading Elise on the edge of passing out. In a spasm she jumped in his arms, biting his shoulder to silence the powerful orgasm running in her body. A puddle formed on the floor as she squirted on Oscar's shaft. The bliss in her eyes as she then looked at him dragged him behind his limits. Contracting his body, he came deep inside Elise's pussy, filling her with his thick load. It was too much to contain and it quickly started to drip out in long white strands.

— That's it, she panted. That's a good start...

Alhuia guided the group into an underground passage. Yatika, who had lived at the temple for years, was not aware of this place. They had been walking down the cold, damp corridor for several minutes when they stopped in front of a massive door. It was free from any ornament. The black-clad elf slipped a large key into the lock. Metallic sounds echoed, like so many gears and bolts. Finally, the door rotated on its hinges.

— This has nothing to do with the temple, whispered the young protector.

— No, indeed. It dates from a time before its construction, replied Alhuia. I used it to store certain things out of sight, securely. It was in anticipation of this day. Follow me.

They all stood on a platform overlooking the darkness. The former watcher approached a golden basin and dipped her torch into it. The flames roared as they spread along a circular channel. The light lifted the veil that concealed the secret contents of the underground dome. The captivated audience then contemplated the countless tables covered with magical and alchemical objects, the racks of weapons, the chests of parchments and spectacular riches, the cupboards of refined clothing, the shelves of talismans and jars, the trunks of tools and precision utensils, displays of armor of many countries. There were still a number of crates, barrels, boxes and bags piled up. There was enough here to clothe, protect and gear a battalion, enough to equip an order of mages and healers.

— Damn... sighed Sadora.

— How is it possible ? Oscar added. All these treasures didn't end up here in one day.

— You are right, Alhuia continued. It required years of research and transport, exchanges, expeditions and many dedicated people.

— Where are these individuals? Aelyss questioned.

— They left us.

The tall elf in black dress then gave the key to Oscar.

— These treasures have waited here too long, make good use of it. This is all yours, take what you want, you will need it.

- Yre's goodness ! Elise exclaimed. It cannot be !

She had discovered a high shelf covered with ornate boxes, all marked with the same symbol : an empty hourglass around which two coiled snakes. It was the sigil of the Philosopher's Gathering, a legendary guild of elite alchemists, herbalists, and apothecaries.

The young woman even hesitated to place her hand on the boxes, afraid of waking

up from her wonderful dream. Finally, no longer able to hold it, she grabbed a long, thin box with a lid inlaid with mother-of-pearl and onyx. Inside were arranged with infinite meticulousness square vials protected from light by vellum cases. Another contained bouquets of dried plants of prodigious rarity and yet another, exotic incense with incomparable effects. Getting your hands on an ingredient of this kind was a rare thing, having a box was a miracle. She had just discovered several dozen. The apothecary could not hold back her tears.

— I am eternally grateful to you, Priscilla confessed.
— Why that ? replied Alhuia.
— You watched over Oscar and allowed him to fulfill his mother's last wish.
— It was just one step in a much longer journey.
— I am aware of it. Maybe he will never say it, but this quest represents what he has always wanted. From a young age, he played warrior, pushing back the darkness. Today, it is no longer an innocent game.
— I am happy that your paths have crossed again, and knowing you by his side fills me with serenity. It is up to me to thank you for the love you have for him.
Alhuia greeted the noblewoman and took her leave. Priscilla inspected the aisles lined with ageless treasures. Winter was approaching and they were not going to be able to spend it by the fire, thus, she chose a leather vest of excellent quality, tight pants, gloves, thick, sturdy boots and a few utility belts. Finally, she armed herself with duelist weapons : a parrying dagger and a rapier, her weapons of choice. The gray haired lady recognized the mark of a blacksmith from Skorobog, in the ancient Vancilic Principalities.

Tiara had no use for metal, gems and weapons. She discovered some interesting ingredients, but nothing that would shake her knowledge. The elf in black then joined her in front of the steps.

—All this hardly interests you. I'm sorry.
— It does not matter.
— Oh ! Alhuia exclaimed. Come with me.
They stopped in front of a massive ebony cabinet. Gilding ran over the doors and formed atypical arabesques. Tiara shuddered as she recognized this ancestral know-how. The former watcher placed her finger on a chiseled gold plate and uttered a formula. The druid's doubts vanished.
— It is the secret language of the Faeri, she declared.
— I was sure you would recognize it despite my accent. I know little more than the words to unlock this ancient seal.
At that moment, the doors opened without a sound. A smell of lily of the valley spread as their eyes rested on a tunic from another time.
— This is a ceremonial garment of Hiermangërdisnurrityya's people, Alhuia said. It was worn by one of the seven Iertilodreyades.
— It's impressive.

— I agree.

— I was referring to the ease with which you speak this lost tongue.

—Thank you, Druid. Consider this outfit as a gift, I am sure it will fit you like a glove. The faeri would be proud.

Tiara looked at the garb in fall colors for a moment before approaching. This present pleased her, even if the surprise still clouded her mind. Slowly, she removed the elements from the wooden puppet and hid behind the wardrobe to change. Once naked, she put on the body, neck-cover, gloves, belts, heels and all other refined elements. This garb alone bore witness to the refinement of this lost people.

Dressed that way, the red-haired elf hesitated to leave her hiding place. This attractive ensemble would not go unnoticed, which did not suit the druid. Facing the looks and remarks of her companions did not enchant her. So, she went back to another cupboard and retrieved a sumptuous cloak hiding her shoulders, her arms and her thin bust. Ultimately, this addition blended perfectly with the rest.

After careful inspection, Oscar turned away from heavy plate armor. He couldn't afford to put on such a shell. The skillful young man valued speed and dexterity more. So, he opted for a very sober gambeson and long-sleeved chain mail. The young man then put on an indigo blue tunic decorated with discreet embroidery. He finally chooses straight, rigid boots as well as gauntlets lined with mesh with phalanges enhanced with “diamond-point” studs. He put on a chain coif which he kept thrown back, then a steel gorget of elven manufacture and selected a series of bags and pouches which he hung at his waist. He quickly skimmed over the weapons, already possessing an excellent longsword as well as the enchanted blade. Nevertheless, he recovered a dagger which he hung on his belts.

Aëlyss's adventures had deprived her of all her equipment and her precious sword, an inheritance from her mother. The dagger that Elise entrusted to her at Mistcastle had fallen into the tower with the Shadow. The elf didn't know where to start. She opened a large chest with geometric patterns typical of the Dry Islands. Her eyes lit up as she saw dozens of garments, fabrics, belts and other ornaments from Kuradalar.

Despite its very bad reputation due to slavery and the dubious caliphate accused of dealing with pirate fleets, this country was nonetheless a land of wonders and abundant wealth. Textiles, metals, gems, food, plants, landscapes : everything was precious there. The Scholar elf carefully inspected the blouses, dresses and tunics, the boots with curved and pointed tips, the belts set with gems. Her choice made, she put on the beige clothes and engraved armor parts for an elegant, almost mystical appearance. She then attached an elven broadsword at her waist.

— I'm surprised, admitted Alhuia. I thought you would be the most interested. Sadora made a hoarse sound of disappointment. She threw back a mace on a rack, grimacing. Turning to the elf, she replied :

— The last time I transformed, I lost everything. It will happen again.

— I understand. That said, according to Tiara, you will only be forced to change into a wolf during the full moon. The rest of the time, you should be able to control the beast.

— Easier said than done.

— The lunar cycle lasts twenty-eight days. Keep it in mind and you'll never be caught off guard. Furthermore, maintain your composure and you will avoid feeding the fury of the beast. You have already proved your ability to master it without training. With the support of the druid, this will be even easier.

Sadora grumbled. The elf seemed to have full trust in her. She discerned no fear, no distrust, no anger on Alhuia's bewitching features. Shrugging her shoulders, she sighed :

— Twenty-eight days and focus.

The elf laughed, then approached Yatika. Sadora had no use for ornaments. Her skin now offering enhanced protection, she wanted the bare minimum weight to carry, focusing on weapons instead of armor. She found oddly short armor parts, in fact imported from the Dry Islands : gladiators' gear. It gave her a barbaric appearance, something she was used to. She spent more time selecting a huge sword and two axes, knowing that she could come back later to try the rest of the arsenal.

— I have something especially for you, my child. Follow me.

Yatika walked in Alhuia's footsteps. They arrived in front of a large white wooden chest covered with green fittings. With an incantation, the lid was lifted

— Here is my armor, the one I wore before I arrived at the temple.

— Alhuia, it's...

— You will know how to live up to it.

No words were enough to describe this outfit. It was a craft from another time and space. Some details could lead to the south eastern elven countries, birthplace of Saint Selene, though, the whole garb seemed otherworldly. Beside the skin tight resistant cloth suit, there were a breastplate, gorget and shoulder pads as well as heeled boots. She completed her equipment with her scimitar and a sheath specially designed for Brightshine.

The equipment, armament and discovery session was long and diligent. Everyone

collected what seemed most suitable to them. Alhuia smiled, happy to see the troop taking shape. Yatika joined her on the steps, visibly confused by her extravagant outfit.

—Exactly as I imagined you, proclaimed the former watcher. Resplendent and formidable. How do you find it ?

— I don't have the words. I feel like I'm indestructible though only wearing silk. This lightness is not common.

— Orichalcum. It can only be found in Baheida, in mines that go deep into the bowels of the world.

— It's like hearing a tale.

— That's what I thought before going there in person. I hope it serves you well. Take care of it for me.

— I promise, Alhuia.

The young woman turned and noticed the stunned looks of the other members of the group at the foot of the stairs. She bowed slowly, intimidated. The others greeted her in turn.

Alone in his room, Oscar removed his newly acquired armor. He still felt tired and overwhelmed by the journey ahead. So much to face, with so little possibilities. Alhuia never spoke about the details of the prophecy before the meeting. This revelation came with even more questions.

— She has to know more than she said, Oscar whispered. There is way more to it.

The terrible beings she talked about, no one saw them, not in the lands, not on the battlefield. Sadora seemed to have crossed path with one, but what faith could they have in that ? She was a bandit, or something similar at least. Priscilla was different, Tiara was preoccupied by her own motives and Aelyss was... well, Oscar had still to make sure who she was. As for Yatika, she seemed very young and naive. Despite all of it, they all answered the call to action. A group of very unique women, skilled in one way or another. Oscar admitted to himself that a few men in the company would have been a valuable addition.

— He wants to find you...

Oscar jumped on his feet when he heard the spectral voice behind him. He felt the air getting colder. The candle light weaken, the flame started to waver. He felt this pressure once already, when he brandished the enchanted sword. His eyes then turned toward the weapon, resting against the wall.

— They will find you...

He shivered while walking closer to the relic, reaching a hand in front of him. He felt a strong attraction, telling him to release the blade from the sheath. His hand clenched around the grip. A rush of magical energy invade his arm, his chest, his entire body. It felt soothing and heavy at the same time. He wanted more as much

at putting an end to this feeling.

— They are all coming for you...

He stepped back. He could not let go of the sword. Shapes started to form in his mind. He tried to focus on his breaths. Alhuia's face appeared, then the battle in the woods and a dark silhouette.

Someone knocked on his door. He opened his eyes. Oscar was on his bed, he immediately turned to look at the relic which had slipped and fell to the ground. The visitor knocked again. He heard whispers in the hallway and got up to see who needed to see him during the night. He remembered them immediately : Lala and Opal.

— You're back ! Lala said.

Opal looked at her sister and made a few gestures.

— She thought that you would ask to see us. Such an impatient girl she is. And it would have been odd for him to do that, sis !

— I had many things to do. And many more are still to come.

— Of course, and now that you and your allies are here, this place will change not be the same.

Oscar was still thinking about his nightmare, at least, what looked like one. He looked back at the sword again. When he turned toward the sisters, they were smiling. Opal offered him a cup containing a thick and warm beverage.

— It will help you relax, Lala added.

She then walked closer and put her hands on the man's abs, pushing him back inside. He did not resist. The mute sister closed the door.

— Where is your redhead woman ? the priestess asked.

— Elise ? She's not my... She probably fell asleep by the fireplace.

— Oh, alright...

Lala kept gently pushing him to his bed, her big eyes diving into his. Opal joined her as he sat on his blanket. She let her hands run on Oscar's arm.

— She missed you very much, her sister added. You put on quite a show last time, to be honest.

— Last time ?

— Well yes ! You... Oh ! You forgot ? How rude you...

She saw the smirk on his face and felt her cheeks blush under his gaze.

— You are so funny. I would clap, but I'd rather put my hands to better use.

She leaned forward, both her delicate hands grabbing the ridge of his pants while her lips kissed his cheek. Opal was already hoping on the bed and removing her dress. She revealed the white see-through undergarment she was wearing under it and looked at the man, seemingly waiting for something from him.

— Come on, she wants to know what you think ! You can not be that oblivious, right ?

— Well, that's not what I thought priestesses would wear.

— That's it ? Is that all you have to say ?

Opal backed away a little. Oscar reached out and wrapped his arms around her. She gasped as he sat her on his lap. Lala chuckled and removed her own night gown. She only wore lace disks on her nipples and pubis.

— How do you like my surprise ?

— That's even less coverage.

— Are you mad ?

— Stop asking questions.

She bit her lip and jumped behind him, letting her hands explore his chest and neck. They all exchanged kisses and caresses. Both sisters slipped one hand in the man's pants, stroking his already hard dick. One of them reached for his balls while the other untied his belt. Precum was already dripping from his tip, sticking to Opal's fingers. She licked them before laying down beside him. Lala kept running her hands up and down his cock while adding :

— As you can see, she has plans for you.

The mute girl rose her legs to better show her pink mound. With both hands, she spread her tight hole. She wiggled on the sheets, making her sister chuckle.

— That means, come closer.

— I got that, replied Oscar while kneeling in front of the slender girl.

Oscar rubbed his shaft on Opal's clit as Lala slid behind him. She pressed her small breasts against his back, caressing his chest, abs and hips with extreme delicacy. She landed a few kisses on his neck and whispered :

— Make her squeal for me...

Opal spasmed as the man's wide tip pushed its way inside her smooth hole. She felt pain mixed with intense excitement. Crossing Oscar's gaze, she nodded, inviting him to keep going. Tears rolled on the mute girl's cheeks, even though she was already panting heavily. Finally, resistance let go and Oscar's cock slid in, filling Opal's pussy entirely. She shivered and arched her back, hiding her face behind her hands.

— You feel it, right ? Lala giggled.

— W- what ?

— Keep going...

Oscar kept Opal's hips up with both hands, pressing her ass between his fingers. Opal was almost choking at each thrust. Clearly, it was still a bit painful, but her eyes betrayed the lust burning inside her core. She rested her feet on his chest, unable to keep her legs bent any longer. Lala then moved her hands to wrap around the man's shaft and balls, applying some pressure after each slamming in her sister's pussy.

Then, a subtle warmth rushed into Oscar's mind. At first, he thought being about to cum, though he knew it was not yet time. Slowing down to better understand, he heard Lala cheeky sneer behind his ear.

— There you go, you feel it now.

- What is that ?
- A special balm in her hole.

Right away, the effects changed for the better. Oscar let a moan out, as pleasure invaded his whole body. It was like dozens of tongues circling around his cock. He felt pulsations pushing him to the edge. His mind drifted away as he felt that many hands on his sweaty skin. Lala's voice sounded like a distant call. Opal started to gasp and moan too, as she wrapped her arms around her legs. Her cute face turned red as her teary eyes kept staring at the man inside her.

Oscar stood on his feet, knees bent, strongly holding the mute girl by the hips. He rammed her deeper, letting his balls slap against her ass hole in sloshy sounds. He almost jumped when he felt Lala's tongue on his anus, but lust was too intense to make her stop. He kept slamming his hips against Opal's pussy while her sister twirled her tongue on his hole. It was enough to make him cum. Oscar pushed his cock deep inside Opal. Bubbles and foam formed on the brim of her pussy as they spasmed together. Lala's hands played with the man's balls as she crawled under them to lick her sister's clit clean. She stayed under, enjoying both their juices mixed on her lips. Oscar bent over Opal and kissed her while they caught their breath.

They were still feeling the balm's effects, tongues and hands running all over them. This was about to make them pass out in bliss. Thus, Oscar lay down and both girls snuggled against him, their heads resting on his chest. They fell asleep in no time, but the second before Oscar's mind slipped out, he heard a sound :

- He will find you...