

My beginnings were humble. On Sunstrider Isle, much work was needed to clear out the Mana Wyrms who were feeding off of the Burning Crystals. Then Magistrix Erona set us new recruits to cull out the small springpaw lynxes who, due to unforeseen emanations from the crystals, had gone rabid. My heart was heavy at having to kill these small cubs; but better a quick death than a slow decline. Or so I told myself. Others in the area also had tasks to assign to us. Working together, we made a dent in clearing out the area around the Falthrien Academy and took down the thug Felendren who had taken over the grounds, forcing the Academy to be shut down. I once dreamed of attending the Academy; of studying the arcane there, guided and mentored by the magisters who taught students at Falthrien. Perhaps future generations will be educated and initiated into their magical inheritance there again, now that the way has been cleared.

Once our tasks on Sunstrider Isle were complete, we retired to the inn at Falconwing Square. On the way there, we stopped to see if Outrunner Alarion needed any assistance. We were able to find the body of one of her recent recruits who had been sent to deliver a package. Examining the corpse, we quickly determined that she had been brutally murdered by the Wretched. After seeing the package delivered, several of us took rooms in the inn. Over a scanty supper, I began planning a stealth assault against the Wretched who were holding out across the bridge from the inn.

A brief aside about the Wretched: they are sin'dorei -- blood elves -- who have succumbed to their addiction to magic. Unable to draw on the pure arcane energies of the Sunwell since its destruction, scholars posit that the Wretched feed off of wild, impure energies, causing them to devolve, to waste away, and finally, to go mad.

How are we blood elves any different? Well, sin'dorei have managed to control their addiction enough to wait and draw power from a purer source. As a warlock, I draw energies directly from the Twisting Nether and channel them, using sheer will, into forms useful to me. It is not always easily done; indeed, keeping my small imp under domination still takes a lot of concentration. However, it is better than the alternatives.

Enough digression. The next morning, several of us worked to clear out the Wretched who were devastating the area of Falconwing Square across from the inn. We managed to take down the local Wretched leader, one Thaelis 'the Hungerer.' We were also able to recover several unstable mana crystals and arcane cores which can be used to provide energies for new arcane sanctums. Once we had cleared out Falconwing Square, our group split into several different parts with some of us going on to Silvermoon City and the rest of us planning to scour the countryside, looking for ways to assist our people. Myself and two others journeyed on to the North Sanctum. We stopped within sight of the Sanctum, overcome by surprise to see a dwarf standing there. All of us had been told during our initiation that we were no longer part of the Alliance. So, the three of us were somewhat startled to see a representative of the Alliance standing there, calm as could be, discussing architecture with a Ley-Keeper. Hastily swallowing our shock, we handed over a letter of introduction from Magister Jaronis and asked if there was anything we could do. Ley-Keeper CaiDanas, guardian of the North Sanctum, sent us on to the West Sanctum which had been overrun by manawraiths and stalkers. We cleared out the infestation on the orders of Ley-Keeper Velania, guardian of the West Sanctum. As we were finishing off the last of the mana stalkers, though, we heard a rustling in the brush nearby. A quick look passed between the three of us. Berlon, a hunter, motioned for me and Zerith, a priest, to step back while he investigated. Just as Berlon was about to part the brush, a night elf sprang out from it, hell-bent on killing all of us for discovering his hiding place. Working together, the three of us managed to make short work of this spy.

"He must be working with that dwarf we saw at the North Sanctum," Zerith said after the skirmish as he bound Berlon's wounds.

"I agree," I replied, "but we'll need more proof than just our suspicions. I'll search the body to see if there are any kinds of communications on him." Suiting words to action, I thrust my hands into the night elf's pockets and dug through his packs until I came across something that looked like an official communication. I was unable to confirm this, though, as I do not read the language they were written in. "This looks like it might contain some useful information," I said, hefting the documents up so that Zerith and Berlon could see them. "Do you know if any of the Farstriders is a linguist?"

"Let's take it to Aeldon Sunbrand," Berlon suggested. He's the captain of the guard. If he can't read it, he should know who could."

Thus, the three of us set out to return to Falconwing Square and Captain Aeldon Sunbrand. Once we found him, I handed over the documents and explained the circumstances under which we found them. "Hmph, Dwarvish," Captain Sunbrand muttered as he perused the documents. "Blast that Anvilbeard! We were fools to let him come here."

"Captain?" I asked after Sunbrand reached the end of the documents.

"Listen, Alayne," the captain said with a sigh. "This is a very delicate situation; even though we've identified the spy, we cannot kill him out in the open. We cannot try to capture him either as the risk of him escaping is too great. I want you to go find Prospector Anvilward at the North Sanctum and kill him. Do this in a quiet manner, we don't want word to spread that we allowed a spy into our city. Bring me his head as proof. Ironforge will learn not to meddle with the sin'dorei."

I nodded, accepting this delicate mission, and turned to see if Berlon and Zerith would be joining me. Their eyes answered me; anger flashed in them. I understood exactly how they felt. The Alliance had betrayed us; left us to die on the blades of their foul prince Arthas. We graciously offer to forgive them; to let the past go and reforge the bonds of friendship and they stab us in the back? And any would dare to call us monsters! Drawing a deep, calming breath, I motioned for the others to go on ahead a little bit while I summoned forth an assistant from the nether. Focusing my rage, I reached through the Twisting Nether and wrenched out the imp I had enslaved, Azyal. "Follow me," I ordered him, my voice chill as winter with anger. Taking swift strides, I caught up to my companions quickly and we headed for the North Sanctum. Once we drew within eyeshot of it, I called a halt.

"We need a plan. As the captain said, this is a delicate situation. How can we isolate the dwarf and kill him in secret so that we're not branded by his death?" I asked.

"Good point," Berlon said. "My plan was to get him from a distance."

"Discretion is vital," Zerith muttered, mostly talking to himself. "Let's see if we can lure him inside the Sanctum, away from prying eyes."

"That sounds like a great idea," I replied. "Perhaps we can make up some rigmarole about wanting to show him some architectural feature near the top of the Sanctum. Let's go and try it. At worst, we clap have Berlon clap a hand over the dwarf's mouth and drag him, kicking and screaming, into the Sanctum." With a chuckle over the image, we hurried on to mete out justice to the traitorous dwarf.

"Good afternoon," I said, smiling sweetly at Anvilbeard. "My friends and I were just discussing some of the features found in these Sanctums. I wonder if you've had the chance to see the vaulting on the ceiling clearly?"

Anvilbeard looked at me suspiciously. I feared that I had overplayed my hand. Simple-minded sugary sweetness came less easily to me now than it did when I was a child. "Sure, lassie. I'd love to look at this feature you're talkin' about," he said, stepping in to the Sanctum. I motioned for Berlon and Zerith to stay near the bottom of the ramp while I hurried on towards the top, Azyal in tow.

"It's right up here!" I shouted down, false excitement tingeing my tone. The dwarf began mounting the ramp, heading up towards where I stood waiting. Mentally, I ordered

Azyal to prepare to hurl a fireball at the traitor once he cleared the landing.

“What kind of trickery is this?” the dwarf demanded once he reached me and saw Azyal preparing to let loose his spell. Balling up his fists, the dwarf lunged at me. I focused my concentration on casting a bolt of shadow at him, trying to ignore his pummeling. Berlon quickly mounted the ramp, his dagger drawn, and planted his blade in the dwarf’s back. Behind him stood Zerith, calling forth the powers of the Light to heal me and to strike down Anvilbeard. Almost before it had begun, the fight was over. Anvilbeard lay dead at our feet.

“So much for that,” Berlon said dryly as he bent down to remove the dwarf’s head. “Hand me a sack, Zerith. We’ll carry the traitor’s head back to Captain Sunbrand in as discreet a manner as is possible.”

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Once our grisly business was finished, the three of us headed our separate ways. Berlon had heard rumors of disturbances in Fairbreeze Village that he wished to investigate further. Also, he planned to spend some time observing the wildlife in the area, hoping to tame one of the local creatures to aid him in his adventuring. Zerith and I continued on together, parting at the Dead Scar.

The Dead Scar. It is a horrible place. The very ground and air are tainted with the vileness of undeath. This blackened, burning scar marks the path that the traitor prince Arthas took when he sacked Silvermoon City and destroyed the Sunwell to bring Kel’Thuzad back from whatever hell he had been sent to. Skeletal warriors, horrific ghouls, and foul shades haunt the Dead Scar, picking off unwary travelers who attempt to cross it. Our forces stand at the end of the Scar, preventing the Scourge from entering Silvermoon. The Scourge are currently disorganized, though, periodically, small forces of ghouls attempt to break through our defenses. Zerith and I lent our energies to aiding the forces under Ranger Jaela in repelling the Scourge. After that, we parted ways. Zerith headed on to Silvermoon City. I had thought to go with him but could not force myself to step off the Dead Scar and onto the road.

“What’s the matter, Alayne?” he asked me as he stepped onto the road to Silvermoon.

“I...can’t...” I replied, forcing the words past the lump in my throat. Sudden tears began raining from my eyes, misting my vision. In the mists, I could see my father, my friends, my teachers...

“I understand,” Zerith said kindly, putting his hands on my shoulders and drawing me into a companionable embrace. “Don’t face it until you’re ready. It’s been the same for all of us. Why else do you think Berlon went on to Fairbreeze Village? Go on there and see what you can do to help our people. Take time to steel yourself to face coming home. There’s no shame in it.”

“Y-y-you s-sound like my f-f-father!” I sobbed, throwing my arms around him and weeping bitterly.

“Ssh,” Zerith said soothingly, though I could hear tears in his voice. “Calm down. Be brave, Alayne.” Lifting my head, I looked into his tear-filled eyes. “You remind me so much of my little sister...” he sighed.

“S-sister? W-where is she?”

A chill froze the tears in his eyes. “She died.” With an effort, he stepped back, extricating himself from the embrace. “Go on to Fairbreeze, Alayne. Light willing, our paths will cross again,” he said with a smile that did not reach his cold, iron eyes.

I turned to leave, making my way back across the part of the Dead Scar we had cleared. Once across, I glanced over my shoulder to see Zerith staring after me. He lifted his hand, waved farewell, and headed on to the city we had both once known as home. Turning

back on my path, I headed on to Fairbreeze Village to see of what use I could be while girding myself up for the coming confrontation with my past.

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I arrived in Fairbreeze Village just after the sun began to descend from its mid-day zenith. While I did many things to aid the people of Fairbreeze Village and the surrounding area, I will not recount them here in detail. Suffice it to say, I was accompanied only by Azyal on what anyone would consider menial tasks. I know that while these were not great deeds of daring and might, they did in their small way go about towards restoring order and peace to the lives of my people. However, if you ever find yourself invited to one of Lord Salthiril's parties, my advice would be to decline. Gracefully. Otherwise you might end up running errands for him and his "honored" guests.

After I completed the tasks set for me by the inhabitants of Fairbreeze, I set out for Silvermoon City. Night was falling and I was leaden with dread and fatigue as I crossed the Dead Scar. Steeling myself, I forced my unwilling feet to carry me on to my former home. I needed to find a place to rest, as well as a master warlock to advise me. My powers had grown through use and I needed to study in order to advance in a rank of a level with my strength. Losing myself in thought about my studies, I managed to reach the gates of Silvermoon almost before I realized it. An involuntary gasp escaped my lips and I felt my eyes widen as I gazed upon the gate and the enormous statue of Prince Kael'Thas who looked out, gazing a warning upon any who would enter his domain. Home looked almost nothing like what I remembered from my childhood. Taking a deep breath, I walked through the gate and onto the Walk of Elders. The silver stonework of the walkway glittered purest argent as the rays of the setting sun sparkled down from the dusky sky. Looking around, I could see merchants taking down their wares for the night, preparing to return to their homes and count their gains from the day's sales. I walked through the city, searching for the famed Wayfarer's Rest. Losing myself several times, I finally broke down and asked a guard for directions. As I was re-orienting myself to find the bazaar, I heard footsteps approaching me. Thinking it might be Zerith, I turned to greet them. Seeing an orc female, an upright cow, and a troll, I grabbed for my dagger, intending to defend myself.

"Calm yourself, young one," came a deep voice from the other side of the group. One of my own people walked up to me. "I am Ambassador Kelemar. These honored emissaries are visiting our fair city. They are our guests. Do you understand?"

Shame heated my face. I lowered my gaze to the ground. "My apologies, honored emissaries," I said to the group. "I am new-come to Silvermoon. I had heard that we were negotiating with the Horde but I did not realize..."

"Quite understandable, young one," the orc said to me. "The hour is late, Kelemar. When may we retire for the night?"

The ambassador led the group away. I stood, bowing politely, until they were out of eyeshot. Then, eager to get away from the scene of my shame, I hurried on to the Wayfarer's Rest. Once there, I took a room for the night and requested a late supper be sent to it. Then, I left once again. Following the signs, I found Murder Row. Descending the stairs of the building that had been described to me, I found Alamma, the master warlock of Silvermoon.

"Ah, Alayne is it?" he said, gesturing for me to come to him. "Jez'ral told me about you. He said you showed promise."

"Thank you," I said, feeling modest. I've never been one to brag about my accomplishments. My father always said that the best compliment is to do a thing well. "I believe I am ready to advance in my studies, Alamma." I handed my grimoire over to him.

“Indeed you are,” he said, scribing a few new spells in its pages. “You are also ready to begin summoning greater creatures from the Twisting Nether. However, unlike the imp, you’ll need to prove yourself to this creature. Travel south to the border of Eversong Woods and Ghostlands. There, in the Dead Scar along the Elrendar River you’ll find small blue stones scattered about the ground. These are voidstones. Take one to Goldenmist Village and use it in the summoning circle there. Only then will you be able to prove your worthiness to the powerful Voidwalkers and gain the ability to summon one.”

Taking back my grimoire, I nodded my thanks and returned to my room to rest.

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“Alayne,” he said, his voice soft and sibilant. “Alayne.”

“Who’s there?” I asked, frightened by the chill darkness surrounding me. I stood in a frozen wasteland, a place that never knew summer. In front of me stood a man who no longer knew warmth of any kind.

“He’s mine, you know,” the dread man said, mocking.

“Who are you?”

“He’s mine and you will be mine too, *little Alayne*,” the stranger sneered. “Look, and see your own doom!”

Glancing beyond him, I saw...

“Alayne! Wake up!”

I jerked out of sleep, nearly jumping out of my skin at the same time. “Who’s there?” I demanded.

“It’s me, Zerith,” came the reply from the other side of the bed. “I’m sorry to startle you like this, but you were screaming loud enough to be heard on the other side of the inn.”

“Zerith?” I said, coming back to myself. I grabbed the coverlet of the bed and threw it around myself. I could feel embarrassment flushing my face.

“Bad dream?” he asked awkwardly.

“I can’t really remember,” I replied, rubbing my aching head. “It was definitely a strange one, though.”

“I can believe that.”

“Was I really that loud?”

“Oh, yes indeed you were!” he laughed. “Here, you get back into bed and get comfortable. I’ll go let the others know that you’re not being murdered. If you want, I’ll come back and bring you a tea for your head.”

After he’d left the room, I remade the bed into a semblance of order and crawled beneath the sheets. My head throbbed by the time I lay back down. Every movement sent waves of pain shooting through my temples and across my forehead. Raising a hand, I tried to ease the flow of blood through my head.

“Here, drink this,” came Zerith’s soft voice. “Valara often had headaches after she woke up from a nightmare.”

“Valara?” I asked, taking the cup from his hand.

“My sister.”

“Oh.” I drank down the warm, bitter liquid from the cup and returned it to him.

“Will you be all right?” he asked, his concern shining through his emerald eyes.

“I will. I just wish my father were here. When I was a little girl, if I had a nightmare, he’d stay in the room with me after I fell back to sleep, protecting me. I know it’s silly, but I really wish he were here to protect me from bugbears again.”

“Well, I’m not him,” Zerith said with a smile, “but I’ll stand guard in the hall.”

Tears of gratitude shone in my eyes. I opened my mouth to thank him but he forestalled me by saying, "Alayne, we're sin'dorei. We have to look out for each other because no one else will look after us."

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I passed the rest of the night in quiet, peaceful slumber. Zerith must have returned to his sleep once he was certain mine would not be disturbed since I did not see him this morning as I left to set out on my journey to Ghostlands. I shivered as I stepped out into the early morning sunlight, the final vestiges of my nightmare melting away with the warmth. Firmly, I put the dream out of my mind and set out.

I followed the Dead Scar south, taking care to avoid some of the stronger undead haunting the southernmost part. Even with my new spells, I was not yet ready to face them. Azyal was little help against stronger foes; they shrugged off his fireballs with ease. To take them down, I would need the assistance of a stronger demon.

"Ah, there," I said to myself when I reached the banks of the Elrendar. Darkly shining blue stones lay scattered about. I reached down and took one from the ground, gasping at its chill. The voidstone was cold as a wintry grave. No amount of sunlight or fire would ever warm it. Eager to rid myself of the cold, I shoved the voidstone into my pouch and followed the river east to the road leading into Ghostlands. Taking the road south, I shuddered as I entered the dark, twisted landscape. A haze hung over the land, hiding the sun's rays. Deep shadows shrouded everything and a noxious odor pervaded. Once, before the Scourge came, this land had been little different than Eversong Woods. Now it shone only in memory.

"They will pay for this," I muttered to myself, feeling my disgust and hatred of the Scourge warm me in the un-natural chill of the forest.

"Indeed, they will," Zerith replied from behind me.

"Zerith!" I cried out happily. "I looked for you this morning but..."

"Oh, I left the inn early. I'd heard rumors about what is going on down in Tranquillien and wanted to come see it with my own eyes. Are you feeling better?"

"I am. What rumors did you hear?"

"Just that the Scourge are generally making life miserable for everyone in the area, as usual. There are two big brutes, ghastly ghouls of some kind, who roam the land, killing any who cross their paths. I've seen one of them from a distance. The leaders of Tranquillien have a bounty out on both of them. I'd also heard that there is something strange about the ziggurats south of the town. Then there's Deatholme."

"Yes, I heard about Deatholme. Dar'khan's there, causing problems for all and sundry with his insanity. If you'll wait for me in Tranquillien, I'll be finished with my business shortly and will give you a hand in helping to clear the Scourge out of this area."

"Where are you bound for, Alayne?"

"Goldenmist Village."

"I'll accompany you."

"Thank you but..."

"Please, Alayne," he said, pleading, "out of all the recruits, only a few of us are still here. Others left, finding the work too hard. More succumbed to their arcane addiction. Those of us who have overcome the obstacles in our paths should stick together."

"Very well," I said, impressed with his concern. "Let's get going."

Finding the road west, we soon came to Goldenmist Village.

"By the light of the sun!" I swore as we crossed the bridge into the village. Zerith just stared, appalled. Wandering throughout the village and its buildings were the ghosts of our people.

“Do you think they can see us?” I asked nervously.

“Very likely they can,” Zerith said breathlessly. “I had no idea...”

“I must enter the building right there,” I said, pointing out the tallest structure in the village. Swiftly, we walked up to the building, only to be set upon by the ghostly denizens nearby. Calling forth power from the Nether and the Light, Zerith and I managed to send the poor souls on to their rest.

“Well,” I said, bandaging Zerith’s arm, “now we know for certain that they can see us.”

Zerith smiled at my attempt at levity. With caution, we climbed the spiraling ramps up the building, clearing out the ghosts as we ascended. Very shortly, we reached the uppermost room. A rune of summoning was cast on the floor. Taking a deep breath, I glanced at Zerith to see if he was ready. “I am going to use a voidstone to summon forth a voidwalker from the Twisting Nether,” I explained. “I will need to overpower it to prove I am worthy of being its master. I must do this alone. But,” I said with a smile, “please pray for me.” After he nodded, I withdrew the voidstone from my pouch and concentrated on it. Channeling its energies, I used it to open a portal through which a huge creature of shadow came. With a fierce roar, it lunged at me, pummeling me with its mighty fists. Focusing my power, I cast bolts of shadow and flame at the creature, cast curses on it until, finally, its power was drained.

“Master,” it said in its demonic language, bowing.

“Your name, demon?”

“Jhaztast,” the creature replied.

Over my shoulder, I shot a triumphant grin at Zerith. “Let’s go to Tranquillien,” I said, “and see what help we can be to our people here in Ghostlands.”

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Zerith and I spent many weeks in Ghostlands helping the Farstriders clear out the demons and Scourge that pollute the land. At times, I despaired, thinking that this would be a hopeless task. There were so many of them and whenever we struck one down; three more rose to take its place. However, when the darkness pervading Ghostlands seemed to seep into my soul, Zerith was always there with a remark to brighten my mood. Soon, just seeing him nearby was enough of a balm to heal the hurts this land was inflicting on my spirit.

Near the end of our travels in Ghostlands, Zerith and I found ourselves clearing out the spirits and acolytes haunting Windrunner Village. Both of us were forced to swallow bitter tears as we went about this unpleasant task. Every sin’dorei child had grown up idolizing the Windrunner sisters, Sylvanas and Alleria. Seeing the ruin that was once the home of our idols was one of the most difficult duties any of us faced.

“Look here, Alayne,” Zerith said as he stood over the fallen ashes of a ghostly ranger. In his hand, he held a small pendant. “It has an inscription. ‘To Sylvanas. Love always, Alleria.’”

“Let me see that!” I exclaimed, rushing over to him. Taking the pendant in my shaking hands, I read the inscription myself. Tears that I had held back now flooded down my cheeks. “How could any of the undead come in possession of this?” I wondered aloud.

“They probably found it here in the ruins and took it, damn thieves,” Zerith muttered. “The Scourge really are a scourge. As if befouling the land weren’t enough.”

“Perhaps we can take it back to her,” I suggested, handing the pendant back to Zerith. “If I had any brothers or sisters, I would treasure any gifts from them beyond all the wealth in Lordaeron.”

“Perhaps. Though, from what I’ve heard, the Lady is much changed.”

“Of course she is,” I said bluntly. “You’d be ‘much changed’ too if you were dragged back to life from death and forced to serve your murderer!”

“True enough,” he said, smiling ruefully. Pocketing the pendant, he sighed, “I think we’re about done here. We’ve sent Light alone knows how many restless spirits on to the next leg of their journey. Let’s return to Tranquillien and find out the latest on the effort to cleanse Deatholme from the map.”

“We’ll head back, at least,” I said, eyeing the sky. “It’s later than I realized. I don’t know about you, but I am exhausted.”

“I could sleep,” he laughed. Grinning at him in return, I signaled my voidwalker to remain a space behind us while we took the road back into town. We walked in a companionable silence, letting ourselves feel the tired burn in our muscles that told the tale of a productive day’s work.

“You’re right, you know,” Zerith said, stopping in the middle of the road suddenly.

“About what?”

“About treasuring things from family. I wish that I could find some remnant of my family’s belongings.”

“As do I.”

“But they’re all gone, aren’t they?” he said, sadness clouding his shining green eyes.

“Our families’ belongings?”

“And our families. We really are alone in this world now,” he sighed.

“You said it yourself, though,” I tried to comfort him, “all we have is each other.”

“Yes, I said that,” he replied absently.

My heart ached for him. And, I must admit, for myself. The world suddenly seemed a much bigger, emptier, and colder place.

“Wait,” I said, reaching for my small dagger. “Families, when you get down to it, are nothing more than bonds of blood and oaths.” Dragging the blade across my palm with a wince, I held the dagger out to him. Confused, he repeated my action. Grabbing his bleeding hand with my own, I smiled and looked him in the face. “By my heart’s blood and my soul’s will, I vow that you, Zerith, are my brother in blood, from this day forward until eternity ends.”

He gripped my hand tightly in his own as I finished my oath. A sudden smile lit his face. “And I swear by my heart’s blood, my soul’s will, and before the Light that you, Alayne, are my sister by blood, from this day until time itself dies. And now, little sister,” he said, the joy in his eyes taking a more mocking glint, “let me bandage your hand before it gets infected!”

Laughing, I held it out for him to bandage and then bandaged his. Suddenly, the Ghostlands seemed to be a bright and shining place. It was as if all the years had been rolled back and it stood, lush and verdant, timeless. With some reluctance we left the place of our oath-taking to return to Tranquillien.

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A note added by a later hand can be found attached to this entry:

Apparently unnoticed by either of the two, a rose began to sprout from the ground where their mingled blood had mixed with the soil. No taint of the Scourge carries the power to blight this plant. Our society has declared the plant itself sacred to the spirits of the land.

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Zerith and I reached Tranquillien in time to help the guards repel an attempted invasion from the Scourge. Though we were both mentally and physically drained from the day's work, we leant our energies to the fight with Jhaztast using his fists while Zerith and I cast our spells.

"They just keep coming. More and more of them all the time," one of the guards grumbled as we dragged the carcasses away to be burnt.

"They do," Zerith agreed. "And they'll keep coming until a group of us gets together enough strength to take down Deatholme and Dar'khan."

"Just as well to say 'until the Dark Titan repents,' as to say that," muttered the guard.

"Don't talk that way!" I shouted. "Dar'khan will be brought to justice; Deatholme will fall. It's not a question of 'if,' merely one of 'when.'"

"Sure, lady. Whatever you say."

I opened my mouth to give the guard a rather large piece of my mind. A look from Zerith stopped me short, though, and I swallowed the words I had been about to say. Abashed, I followed Zerith to the inn.

"Don't worry about arguing with anyone, Alayne," Zerith said once we were settled in for the night. "The humans say that actions speak louder than words. They're right about that. One day, we'll bring Dar'khan's head back here. On that day, the guard will have to swallow his words, and what a bitter taste that will be!" he laughed. I smiled, looking forward to that day.

"Perhaps we could infiltrate his base, pretending to be defectors?" I suggested, wanting very much to bring him down.

"I doubt that would work. I have a feeling it's been tried before. Besides, Alayne," Zerith pointed out, "a traitor fears betrayal above anything else. Infiltrating his ranks would not be easy nor would it be something done in a short time frame. Also, probably at the first sign that we were doing anything he could consider reconnaissance, we'd be executed."

"True."

"Our best bet would be to try to find out what the layout of the base is. That shouldn't be hard to guess either by scouting it ourselves or finding someone who has. Then, we just put together a strike force and we hit them head on. It would be a long, brutal slog with no guarantee of success, but," Zerith said, "it's the only plan with the best shot of working that I can see."

"That settles it," I said. "We'll go to Silvermoon tomorrow and try to get this information. We'll also try to find more people to help us in this assault. Let me think on this," I sighed, "I'm sure that we could persuade some of those in Silvermoon to help out. I just need to think of the best way to frame the argument."

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It took several days, but finally, Zerith and I were able to find enough people and gather enough information to storm Dar'khan's stronghold of Deatholme. The first sight of this dread cathedral took my breath away. Only Zerith's hand on my shoulder helped to steady me and keep me from lashing out at random in anger. That anyone should blight what had once been such a beautiful land...there are no words to describe such a person! Our group quickly divided into teams of three or so people, each group scouting ahead and clearing out different areas of Deatholme. I took to this task with relish; nothing pleased me more than to send the vile filth polluting Deatholme on to the next stage of their misbegotten lives.

Near dusk, we stormed the main compound, fighting our way through the layers of guards Dar'khan had posted. Our anger was enough to easily overwhelm these wretched traitors. All I can recall of the confrontation with Dar'khan himself is a red-tinged rage and

cutting, but hauntingly familiar, laughter. Before I was aware, the fight was over and our small strike force was on its way back to Silvermoon with Dar'khan's head as our prize. As we passed through Tranquillien, the guards saluted us. Some accompanied us to Silvermoon, parading us through the streets of the city. We were cheered on by the newer recruits and by the inhabitants of the area as we made our way to Sunfury Spire to present our prize to Lor'themar Theron, the Regent Lord of Silvermoon and Quel'Thalas.

Sunfury Spire stood before us, rising up out of the Court of the Sun like a beacon tower, its light a signal for our people to find their way home. The guards motioned for Zerith and me to enter. I looked back, summoning the rest of our force to follow.

"No, Alayne," Ger'alín, one of the warriors who had led the assault against the stronghold, said. "This honor belongs to you and Zerith. It was the two of you who worked so hard to bring us together and focus us on ridding the Ghostlands of Dar'khan. Without your leadership and tenacity, that traitor would still be fouling the world with his presence."

Tears of gratitude shone in my eyes as I bowed humbly before the gathering. I looked over to see my expression and sentiments mirrored on Zerith's face. Together, we picked up the bag containing Dar'khan's head and entered the Spire.

"You seek an audience with me? I do not recall hearing of an appointment," Lord Lor'themar said, his annoyance plain, as Zerith and I made our obeisance.

"Forgive us for disturbing you, my Lord," Zerith said, "but we bring news from the Ghostlands."

"News of Dar'khan," I quickly interjected, seeing that Lord Lor'themar was about to order us out. Intrigue replaced irritation in his visage. Hastily, I pulled the traitor's head from the bag, holding it up for Lord Lor'themar to see clearly.

"Now that's one face I was not expecting to see so soon. This is quite good news, in more ways than you can imagine. Did the two of you manage this on your own?"

"No, my Lord," Zerith explained. "We led a group of our people into Deatholme and together we all helped bring Dar'khan to justice. Alayne and I merely come on behalf of our forces."

"I see. Modest as well as daring. Please wait here a moment. I will have some business for you to attend to as the leaders of the expedition that killed Dar'khan," Lor'themar said as he entered a side room. Several minutes later, he emerged with a sealed letter. "There were doubts about our capabilities among our potential new allies. Of what use could we be to them when perceived as unable to deal with our problems at home? This," he said, pointing to Dar'khan's head which now lay atop the bag it had been in, "changes everything. No longer will our power be questioned. We'll be able to join the Horde as equals. Take this letter," he indicated the letter in his hand, "to Sylvanas, ruler of the Forsaken. She's already on our side but the news of Dar'khan's death will be music to her ears. Prepare for a long trip, Alayne and Zerith. If all goes well, she will send you to Orgrimmar. Guards!" he barked, "Take this head and hang it from the gates of our city as a warning to anyone else who might think to side with the Scourge against us."

Tucking Lord Lor'themar's letter into one of my pouches, Zerith and I bowed our way out of his presence. We detoured briefly to tell our forces of our new errand and to encourage them to remain in Ghostlands, doing whatever they could to cleanse the land of the Scourge. My heart was gladdened mightily by their cheers as Zerith and I re-entered the Spire and sought the Orb of Translocation that would speed us on our way to the Undercity, the domain of the Forsaken.

As we touched the Orb, thoughts of Sylvanas filled my heart with dread. "You can never go home again," the humans often say. You can also never go back to see a childhood hero again. This, I know for myself.

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It is evening now. The trip to Undercity was instantaneous. Winding our way down the twisting corridors, Zerith and I sought an audience with Sylvanas. We were told to take rooms in the inn and await our summons there. After a light repast, I turned to Zerith.

“Do you still have the pendant we found?” I asked.

“Yes. It’s here, in my pocket,” he responded, reaching in his pouch and pulling it out.

“Good. Keep it. We’ll give it to her when we present Lord Lor’themar’s letter to her.”

“That sounds like a good idea,” Zerith said, a yawn cracking his jaws. I quickly followed suit and soon we were both laughing as we passed the yawn back and forth.

“It’s been a long day,” Zerith said finally, “and I, for one, am going to get some sleep. What’s that?” he asked me, pointing to a small book I had pulled out of my pouch.

“A journal. I’m thinking of keeping one that chronicles our beginnings and our journeys. So much was lost when the Scourge overran our lands. More than just lives and things; memories were lost. But, with this,” I said, slapping the book, “memories will last.”

“Try not to make me sound too silly,” Zerith laughed as he left my room.

And, with that, we have now arrived back at the beginning of my tale. I believe I will take some rest this night. Surely it is too late in the evening for the Lady Sylvanas to summon us for an audience.