

The six broke away from the larger gathering as they turned their mounts east. The Disorder of Azeroth continued on to the rebuilt city of Shattrath, Davril and Tau're promising to keep the rest of the band out of trouble. The tauren clapped Ger'alın on the back in farewell, before shouting for the rest of the group to follow after him. Ger'alın and Alayne smiled at each other, riding so close their knees touched. Jez'ral cleared his throat. Alayne blushed and Ger'alın chuckled. Behind them, Zerith and Dar'ja grinned at each other, recalling the early days of their marriage. Riding down the hill, the golden peaks and walls of Shattrath vanishing behind them, Alayne tried to clear her mind and focus on the task at hand.

The dark forest, sprinkled liberally with shards of crystal from the crystalline trees looming overhead, gave way to a clearing. A druidic archway stood over the path branching off the main road and a tauren druid sat nearby, pacing and sniffing the air. He brightened when he saw the six travelers draw rein and dismount. "Greetings, travelers. I am Earthbinder Tavgren. Have the druids from Cenarion Refuge sent you? The druids of the thicket here," he said, gesturing to the broken buildings atop the hill before him, "have been slain! Only myself and one other have survived, and he's insane. I don't know what happened, but I intend to get to the bottom of it. Whatever it was, it happened quickly and feels unnatural. Will you help me?"

"We will be glad to be of whatever assistance we may," Jez'ral answered smoothly. "We have come from Cenarion Refuge but were not sent by the druids, though. Last night, in the late hours of the evening, we felt a disturbance and a small earthquake. Do you know if what happened here would be linked with that?"

"What could have killed all the people in the thicket?" Alayne asked, staring up and mentally calculating how many people the buildings could have held.

"I have no idea what killed all of the druids here. I've been away for a couple of days on a survey of the Bone Wastes to the south. Please, you must help me to uncover what's behind this horrible tragedy. Go into the thicket and look for a clue that might reveal something to us. When I was in there briefly, I could have sworn I saw a dead Broken and a strange object next to him. And don't worry about Treelos - he might have been driven insane by what happened, but I think he's mostly harmless."

"Zerith, Dar'ja, why don't you and Callie wait here?" Ger'alın asked, feeling uneasy about the glimmers of energy that even he could feel in the air. "In case something happens. I'll look after them," he added. The three nodded and took up position around the druid, watching. Alayne and Jez'ral were already climbing the path into the thicket, looking around and shivering as they tried to ignore the tingles crawling up their spines.

"Some powerful arcane force was at work here," Jez'ral whispered, his mouth feeling dry as cotton.

"Alayne, are you all right?" Ger'alın asked as he jogged up to the pair. She trembled like a tightly drawn bowstring.

"I'll be fine," she said tightly, trying to ignore the currents swirling around her. "Ugh, it gets worse the deeper into the thicket we go," she said, her breath coming in short gasps. Sweat beaded on her forehead and her eyes were glazed. Jez'ral's face grew pinker and pinker as he moved closer to the inn. Even Ger'alın began to feel the affects of the arcane energy that had been loosed in the thicket, his head swimming. He shook his head to clear it. It felt positively indecent.

"There, that must be what the druid was talking about," Jez'ral groaned, leaning against the entryway to the inn, his legs wobbling on the verge of dropping him on the ground. "Could one of you..." he said, falling to his knees and shivering. "It's highly unstable."

Alayne staggered drunkenly into the inn, Ger'alın following after her, sweat pouring down his face. Next to the body of a devolved draenei lay a broken orb, banded with gold

graven with sin'dorei markings. Alayne stared at it. Using her dagger, she tried to roll it out of the inn, shuddering as waves of arcane energy poured out from it whenever she disturbed it. "I've never seen..." she gasped, "anything like it." Jez'ral crawled closer, studying it as well.

"Who would... this is... I can't believe..." he said as he crawled backwards out of the inn, a horrified expression on his face. Ger'alın stared at the man, wondering what could make him blanch like that. Alayne reached out, placing a hand on Ger'alın's chest to steady herself as she lurched and wobbled out of the inn, Ger'alın following her closely, his hands hovering near her to catch her if she tripped. He maintained a steady tread by effort of will, reaching down to pull Jez'ral to his feet. The three began to walk back towards the road, stopping when a cougar walked in front of them, staggering and swaying as drunkenly as they were.

"Poor thing," Alayne said softly, her voice filled with pity as she knelt down to try to pet the animal. She jerked back, landing on her seat when the creature shifted into a night elven man. Ger'alın stared at the man in horror; his face was drawn, his smile too bright, and his eyes... his eyes shone as Alayne's had when she was at her most ill.

"Quick, hide! The eyes of Naphthal'ar are upon you... upon us all!" the night elf said, panic-stricken. His demeanor suddenly changed when the other three began looking around uncomfortably. "I dare not go to the top of the tower to speak with it, but you... you look as if you might know the right words to say. Just be careful, it doesn't like jokes and will not suffer fools easily. If you can, convince it to come down for tea. But, by all means, get it to stop staring at me!" he pleaded, giggling and moaning by turns.

"He's mad," Jez'ral said, shocked. Alayne nodded in agreement and let Ger'alın help her back to her feet. All three kept cautious eyes on the insane druid as they backed slowly out of the thicket, running to the road when the druid shifted forms again and began wandering the ruins, growling to himself.

"Are you three all right?" Zerith asked, looking confused when the trio ran pell-mell down the hill, staggering to a halt in front of the others.

"Did I... look and act like that?" Alayne asked Ger'alın.

"Somewhat," he replied. Zerith looked confused, wondering what they were talking about. Alayne just looked up at Ger'alın, her eyes filled with pity, and rubbed his cheek with her hand. The man smiled at her, his eyes filled with tenderness and love. Zerith looked away, giving them some privacy. He'd never seen an expression like that on the fighter's face.

"We found it," Jez'ral cut in, turning to Tavgren. "Next to the body of a devolved draenei, one of those Broken was – Light, who would have made such a thing! – a mana bomb." Alayne opened her mouth in shock but a gesture from Jez'ral cut her off. Ger'alın and the others looked confused but kept quiet.

"Is it was caused all of this death?" Tavgren asked gravely.

"Yes. And it's the cause of what we felt in Zangarmarsh last night. Tell me, are there any sin'dorei settlements near here?"

"Yes. Your people have built a settlement down beyond Tuurem. Follow the road west. You should see the spires before you would enter Shadowmoon Valley. They call it Firewing Point."

"Thank you, Earthbinder," Jez'ral said, climbing aboard his fel steed. "I would advise you to warn others away from this area. If I can, I will arrange for those skilled in dealing with such contamination to come and help clear away what they can. Until such a time as the unstable arcane energies can be dispersed, I would strongly suggest that you keep this area under strict quarantine."

"Are we in any danger?" Ger'alın asked after they had ridden away a pace.

"No," Alayne answered, patting his knee. "We would be if we tried to stay there very long, though. So much energy in the air... it can overwhelm if you're not careful."

“Enough, you two,” Jez’ral said firmly but not unkindly. “Let’s head on over to this ‘Firewing Point.’”

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Ger’alin’s eyes bulged as they rode into the sin’dorei settlement. Blood Knights, mages, and warlocks hurried about, their activities focused on a large crystalline orb in the central courtyard. It looked like a larger version of the orb he’d seen in the druid’s inn. “What are they doing?” he whispered to Alayne. She shook her head, looking as if she had just seen death coming for her. Several sin’dorei sat around the orb, gazing at it intently. Jez’ral looked as if he might throw up.

“Welcome to Firewing Point. Are you loyal to Kael’Thas?” one of the Blood Knights demanded, staring at the travelers as if they smelled bad.

“We are,” Jez’ral said breathlessly, staring at the orb in horror.

“You admire our work?” the Knight said coldly.

“Indeed. It is very...large,” Jez’ral continued in that same, airless tone. “May we inquire as to who has ordered such a thing built?”

“You may,” the Blood Knight said, offering no further information. Jez’ral stared at him; the man returned his gaze evenly, coldly.

“What are you...?” Ger’alin demanded as he saw other Blood Knights move around, surrounding them.

“You may ask,” the first Knight said as if to continue his reply, “but only those disloyal would care to know. You are spies! Voren’thal has sent you! No doubt you’re those who attacked Lady Vashj and disrupted our supply-lines!”

“Wait, we’re not spies. We can explain,” Zerith tried to cut in, edging back as their would-be captors drew swords. Ger’alin glanced around in desperation, his fingers twitching as he fought against drawing his own sword. Dar’ja looked aghast and Callie confused. Jez’ral was preparing to cast a spell, knowing it would be his last. Alayne just looked stunned, as if she had seen this all before.

“Arthas...,” she whispered. Her face darkened and her eyes blazed in anger as she glared at the sin’dorei surrounding them. Some of the Blood Knights took a step backwards, seeing her gaze fall on them and flinching. Shoving to the front of the others, Alayne kept a firm hand on Ger’alin and Zerith. Jez’ral, seeing the set of her shoulders, reached out and grabbed Callie and Dar’ja, mentally preparing himself for what was about to come. The sin’dorei surrounding them parted, running and gasping in sheer terror as Alayne seemed to grow where she stood, the shadows around her darkening, thickening, and a sense of impending doom wafting from her. Taking a deep breath to calm herself, she glanced back at the others and nodded, heeling her fel steed to a gallop and leading them out of the settlement, west, towards Shattrath.

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“Yes, it’s a mana bomb,” Khadgar sighed. “They launched one against the Cenarion druids last night. Chances are they are targeting either Allerian Stronghold or Stonebreaker Hold. Maybe both. I’ll have runners sent to both locations to warn them. If only we could get in there and deactivate that misbegotten horror...”

“Why don’t we?” Ger’alin asked insistently.

“Do you want to die young, sin’dorei?” Khadgar asked, quirking an eyebrow. “I doubt even A’dal could save you from that were you fool enough to try it. Kael’s elves would cut you to ribbons. Besides, you’d need the code and I doubt it’s up just for the asking. Put it out

of your mind. Be welcome to our city. You lead the second army to come here and not attack,” the wizened human laughed. “Your Disorder of Azeroth; they arrived earlier. Most of them are on Scryer’s Tier. The rest are down in Lower City.”

“What are you talking about?” Zerith asked. The other four stood silent, wincing, still not quite over meeting and talking to Khadgar, Medivh’s apprentice, in person. Jez’ral had fainted when the human met them on the bridge to the city and introduced himself. Only having Callie and Dar’ja close to him kept the sin’dorei warlock from cracking his head open on the stone ground. Even then, he’d nearly pulled the women out of their saddles.

“It is not my story to tell. Go up to Scryer’s Tier. I imagine that Voren’tal will want to speak with you. You’ll find it by taking the elevator up to the tier with the sin’dorei architecture. For now, I have work to be about with A’dal,” Khadgar said as he turned and left. Ger’alin clenched his fists, frustrated. Alayne put a gentle hand on his back, calming him as she stared ahead, the look on her face saying that she’d seen this all before, somewhere. He put an arm around her shoulders, hugging her for a brief second as if to say “I’m fine, don’t worry about me,” before releasing her and, taking her hand, walked down the bridge into the city.

The city of Shattrath rose up out of the valley in the mountains between Nagrand and Terokkar, its golden walls high and sturdy. Draenei soldiers, natives to the planet who had survived its destruction intact, walked about, groups of them practicing formation and drilling. Ger’alin watched with half a mind, noting differences in their preferred tactics and those he had been taught. The group walked into the central structure of the city, a glimmering building, its vaunting, golden walls rising to a spire topped with blue crystalline pylons. A beam of light shone from it, a beacon for those who sought sanctuary. As they entered the building, Ger’alin felt more than heard crystalline chimes in his mind. Glancing away from where he’d been watching the draenei soldiers drilled, his jaw dropped and he stopped in his tracks, nearly tripping Alayne and causing Zerith, who had been walking just behind him, to run right into his back. Dar’ja had stopped as well, her face horror-stricken as she gazed at the sight that had brought Ger’alin to a halt.

Floating in the middle of the open room was a shining white being. It looked as if it were made of pure crystal, parts of its body rotating and dancing as it bobbed in the air, a bright aura exuding peace, tranquility, and acceptance of that which comes flowing from it. Around the room other beings, in shades of blue and purple, floated about, the inhabitants of the city stopping to speak with them respectfully.

“What is that?” Zerith asked. Alayne shook her head. Dar’ja and Ger’alin fell to their knees as the being’s crystalline chimes bid them welcome. “Dar’ja?” he asked, kneeling beside his wife.

“I..I...oh Light forgive me!” she moaned, tears trickling down her face. “I didn’t know!” Ger’alin forced himself to look away from the being, shame darkening his face as he thought about the creature’s twin being held prisoner by the Blood Knights in Silvermoon. Alayne and Zerith stared at each other in confusion, not knowing what had the two paladins so upset. Callie and Jez’ral were agog at the floating beings and the way that the different races mixed and mingled freely, no weapons being drawn.

“Do not be troubled, young mortals,” the being sang softly in the Blood Knights’ minds. “For a grander scheme than your prince’s is at work with M’uru. He gives you his powers in service of a greater good than even he realizes. You have no cause for fear or shame. We sent of our own to aid you; what your prince intended for evil will bring about a greater good. Therefore, be welcome to the City of Light.” Dar’ja’s sobs changed, the note of shame turning to one of gratitude. She flung her arms around Zerith, nearly pulling him to the ground as she wept in relief and thankfulness. Ger’alin just kept hold of Alayne’s hand,

reaching over to pat it with his other as he released a deep breath and, wiping his eyes with his free arm, stood up.

“What’s wrong, Ger’alin?” Alayne asked softly. He shook his head and placed a gentle finger over her lips when she started to ask again.

“I’ll explain it later,” he whispered. “For now, let’s go see this Voren’thal. A’dal suggests that we speak with him before we make any other decisions.”

The six made their way through the building, climbing the ramp to the second level and taking the bridge that led up to the sin’dorei-dominated area called Scryer’s Tier. Alayne bit her lip and stroked Ger’alin’s back worriedly. Zerith carried Dar’ja in his arms; she was still too overcome to walk. Taking the elevator, Alayne closed her eyes, telling herself she’d be back on solid ground in a moment. She sighed with relief when the platform stopped and let Ger’alin led her off, keeping her hand in his. He turned around and chuckled when he saw her walking with her eyes closed. “We’re off the elevator, Alayne,” he whispered, smiling when she opened her eyes.

Scryer’s Tier spread out before them. Golden flames and red jewels topped spires and blue and crimson drapes hung everywhere, giving privacy without closing the doors to open buildings. Callie muttered that she was going to check the stables before hurrying off towards the inn. The other sin’dorei gazed at the five newcomers warily, as if uncertain what to make of them. Ger’alin and Zerith exchanged glances. Would all sin’dorei in Outland regard them as spies of some sort or another? Dar’ja shifted as if she wanted to be set back on her own feet but Zerith ignored her, tightening his grip a bit, preparing to bolt and carry her with him if need be. Finally, a Magister approached the five, bowing at the waist formally. “Voren’thal will speak with you, now,” the man said calmly, gesturing for them to follow after him. They did, Ger’alin glancing at Alayne over his shoulder and wondering why her face had suddenly become blank.

The Magister led them into one of many large buildings. The other blood elves in the building barely spared them a glance, absorbed in their reading. “In there,” the Magister said, opening the door to a side room. An elder sin’dorei sat on cushions at the far end of the room, his long white hair held back out of his face with a crown marking his station as one of the most powerful of the Magisters. He was the oldest blood elf any of them, other than Jez’ral, could remember seeing since their childhoods.

“Be seated,” the man said, his voice deep and filled with the calm assurance of obedience. “This will not be a short tale.” The others seated themselves on the dark blue and blood red cushioned floor seats scattered about the room, their eyes focused on the man. “I am Voren’thal,” he began simply, “the leader of the Scryers. Tell me, young ones, have you run across the sin’dorei loyal to Kael’Thas in your travels?”

“We have,” Zerith said. “They accused of us being your spies.”

The elder closed his eyes and nodded. “I expect as much. Kael will never forgive us for defecting, but it is the only way to save our people from the destruction he is leading them towards. Hold your questions, young warlock,” Voren’thal sighed, seeing Jez’ral preparing to interrupt. “Hear me out. I know, you all think Kael everything wonderful and wise; think him no less than a savior. Perhaps, in a way, he is, but now he cares nothing for the elves. All that matters to him is vengeance and he will kill all of us to have it. My story begins when Kael ordered me to lead forces against this city. Our mission was to take control of Shattrath and to capture the naaru – those floating beings like A’dal,” he explained. “They are beings of great power and wisdom. Kael wanted more of them to study. His true master wanted them destroyed. Let me finish!” he said wearily, seeing the questions in their eyes. “Kael first swore fealty to Illidan, the Betrayer. Illidan, after losing to Arthas at the foot of Icecrown glacier, returned to the Black Temple in Shadowmoon Valley where he has been brooding, driving himself mad, replaying that fight again and again in his mind, trying to convince

himself he really won and that Kil'jaeden won't tear him to shreds. Kael, seeing that his first master was insane, has changed masters accordingly. Forsaking Illidan, Kael has allied himself with the Burning Legion, lusting after a chance to kill Arthas and the fate of the rest of us be damned! At any rate, Kael ordered me to take this city, but, the night before the battle, I had a vision. In this vision, I saw the fate that awaited us if we continued to follow Kael blindly. I was given to know that our people's only true salvation lay in turning our backs on our prince and allying with the naaru. I told those who followed me of my vision and, the next day, we marched on Shattrath, laid down our weapons, and swore our service to A'dal. Now, the same choice lies before all of you: continue to serve a prince whose followers will never believe your loyalty, whose followers mix with demons freely, summoning them and letting them roam at will; or join with the rest of us and serve A'dal and the naaru, fighting against the Legion."

"What proof do you have of your claims?" Zerith demanded.

"Proof? If you want proof," Voren'thal muttered, "go to the Netherstorm. There, where the Twisting Nether lies like a fog on the land, Kael has constructed great mana forges to harvest the energy. He once claimed to do this in hopes of finding a way to revitalize the Sunwell. Now, he plans to use the energy gathered to summon Kil'jaeden into Azeroth; to allow the Legion access to our world in return for the Lich King's destruction."

"We must speak of this amongst ourselves," Zerith said firmly. "It is no light thing to turn your back on your prince. We'd never be able to return to our homes again."

"I understand," the elder said, giving them a gesture of dismissal. "Take all the time you need. However, remember this: unlike Kael's followers, we will only turn against you if you attack us openly. We do not kill our own lightly. Kael's elves do, as you no doubt have learned," he said, sighing sadly.

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"What do you make of him?" Zerith asked once they were outside. The five clustered around closely, speaking in low tones as they tried to reach a decision.

"Voren'thal would not lie," Jez'ral muttered. "As impossible to believe as what he said is, he wouldn't stoop to lying. Especially not to those who could band together and kill him without breaking a sweat. Looking around, I've seen no less than two dozen of the strongest, smartest, and cleverest of the Magisters. Their defection must have really hurt."

"I don't know what to think, myself," Ger'alín sighed, rubbing a hand over his face. "First we're accused of being spies and nearly killed by our own people. Then, we come here to find out that we've walk right into the middle of a civil war that no one in Silvermoon seems to know about."

"Civil war," Alayne said softly in an inaudible undertone, her gaze turned inward. "How much did that bastard know? How did he know? Is this all part of his own plot?" Ger'alín reached over and placed a comforting hand on Alayne's back, eyeing her with concern.

"Maybe we should head to the Netherstorm, to see if he's really telling the truth about sin'dorei mingling with demons freely," Dar'ja suggested.

"Yes, maybe we should go see for ourselves," Ger'alín agreed. "For now, we should figure out what to do about that mana bomb we saw. I can't believe that Khadgar is taking this so calmly," he said as they began to head back towards the inn.

"Well, he was right," Jez'ral muttered. "None of us have the skill to disarm it. If we tried, we might set it off ourselves. That's ignoring, of course, the fact that it's pretty heavily guarded."

"Still, I..."

“Ger’alin, what are you doing? That’s not how you string a bow!” a man shouted, laughing and running towards them to grab Ger’alin’s shoulders and get a good look at his face. “Light, I didn’t know if you’d made it out of Quel’Thalas,” he laughed. “When I heard that Forsaken over there mention your name, I nearly had a heart attack.”

“Havandar, you rascal! What are you doing here?” Ger’alin said, recognizing the man. “Getting everyone into trouble like you used to do me, I bet.”

“I always got you right back out of it, too,” he grinned. “What are you doing out here? Are you with that small army that showed up earlier today?”

“He’s one of that ‘small army’s’ leaders,” Zerith said wryly. “I’m Zerith, by the way.”

“I’m sorry,” Ger’alin said ruefully. “Everyone, this is Havandar. Havandar, this is Zerith, Dar’ja, Jez’ral, and Alayne. This guy used to get me in the *worst* trouble.”

“I never made you do anything,” Havandar laughed. “Never had to; you were always up to something yourself. You know, you look very familiar,” he said, turning to Alayne.

“I remember you. You stayed with us for a few days after you fled Lordaeron,” Alayne grinned. “Mother said you were crazy to have stayed as long as you did looking for...oh, Light, was *he* the one you were looking for?” she asked, pointing to Ger’alin.

“Yes, but I never found him. Looks like he got out alright to me, though. Or did you find him, little miss ‘I’m going out to save the world?’ How did you get away from them, Ger’alin?” he asked, turning serious. “I saw what they did to your mother and...”

“I really don’t want to talk about that. No! Don’t tell me anything more!” the Blood Knight muttered. “Bad times, those.” Now it was Alayne’s turn to place a comforting hand on his back. He smiled at her as if to communicate, without words, his gratitude.

“Where did you wind up? I looked all over for you.”

“I was passed around a good bit by the humans until I finally wound up at the orphanage in Stormwind. When I turned eighteen, I went over to Theramore and joined the guard force there until word came that Silvermoon was being rebuilt. What happened to you?”

“I wound up staying in Ironforge for a few years before joining up with the Argent Dawn. I returned to Silvermoon, briefly, and then joined Kael’s forces out here in Outland. I left when Voren’tal and the rest defected. I still can’t believe I ever went along with Kael’s mad plans!”

“Is it really true, then? That he and his followers consort freely with demons?” Jez’ral cut in.

“Oh, yes, it’s true. I almost left on my own when they started tainting the orcs again. I stayed, much to my regret, because I was too afraid to desert on my own. Desertion means death, for Kael and the Sunfury.”

“I see,” Jez’ral muttered. “Why don’t the two of you go and catch up? Alayne, stay here a bit. Don’t worry, Ger’alin, I’m not going to send her out after Kil’jaeden’s toenail.”

“Well, that answers your question,” Alayne sighed after Havandar and Ger’alin had moved off a bit. “Looks like our prince is behind the tainted orcs of Outland.”

“Yes, but to what purpose? Demon-tainted orcs aren’t easily controlled or trusted. They’re as likely to turn on themselves as they are to attack the enemy you send them after.”

“Maybe he could tell us more,” Zerith sighed, glancing at the hunter with Ger’alin. “But, it looks like we’re staying with the Scryers. Light, I just hope we don’t get pulled into a battle against our own people. Jez’ral, why don’t you come with me and Dar’ja? I want to talk to you about a way to get rid of that mana bomb without getting everyone killed. Alayne, you go keep Ger’alin out of trouble,” he teased. She paused for a second before nodding and smiling, walking over to the other two.

“Zerith,” she said, stopping and glancing over her shoulder. “Are you going to be busy this afternoon?”

“Probably not,” he said, wondering what she was asking for. She nodded to herself and then walked over to Ger’alin, wrapping her arms around his waist and leaning her head against his shoulder while he put an arm around her. Havandar quirked his eyebrows at the pair and said something that made Ger’alin throw his head back and laugh. Zerith shook his head and walked into the inn with the others, wondering what Alayne wanted him this afternoon about.

“So, what’s going on?” Callie asked, springing up from the cushion she’d been sitting on.

“That’s a long story,” Dar’ja sighed. “Let’s get our rooms. We’ll tell you about it in a more private setting.”

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“You’re sure about this?” Ger’alin asked when Alayne pulled him into the room they were to share at the inn. “I wasn’t joking about being perfectly willing to wait.”

“I’m sure,” she sighed. “Are you?”

“I told you,” he laughed. “I’ve *been* ready. You run and go tell your brother. I’ll go ask around about good places to make camp. Jez’ral’s not going to need you for anything for a few days, is he?”

“I doubt it. He’ll probably be spending time with the Magisters around here, seeing what kind of research they’ve been up to and running his theories past them. He won’t miss me for a few days, I think. I wonder,” she said, tapping a finger against her cheek, “if he realizes that he’ll probably never get to see...”

“Get to see who?”

“Get to see someone he really cares about who is still back in Silvermoon, waiting for the pair of us to return. Light, we can’t ever go home, can we?”

“We’ll find a way to get word to her for him.”

“Him, you mean.”

“And thus much is explained,” Ger’alin laughed. “We’ll find a way to get word to whomever, then. I’ll be back shortly; just send Callie or Havandar after me if I take too long,” he said, kissing her lightly and hurrying off. Alayne sat back down in the chair for a few minutes, her chin on her fist, thinking. She had figured out a way to disarm that bomb but she couldn’t risk letting anyone know about it. Zerith and Ger’alin would insist on following her and while she thought she could get herself out safely, she wasn’t certain at all that she’d be able to help them resist the currents that would be unleashed. She didn’t think she could bear to see either of them wandering, their minds gone as surely as that druid’s had been. No, it would be better if neither of them suspected until after she’d returned. At least now both would be so distracted by the wedding that neither would stop to think that she had other things on her mind as well.

“I hope he won’t suspect, at least,” she prayed, recalling how, ever since that first kiss in Zangarmarsh, Ger’alin had been able to track her thoughts so closely it seemed he was reading her mind. That she seemed to be able to tell what he was feeling and what he needed was only a slight redressing of the balance. “I wonder if it’s like this with everyone who falls in love?” she wondered aloud. With a sigh, she stood up and walked down to Zerith’s room to let him know he had a wedding to perform.

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“Why are you two going off camping?” Callie asked when she saw Ger’alin and Alayne saddling Lucky and tying the tent down behind the saddle. “Zerith and Dar’ja didn’t have a problem with keeping everyone awake when they...”

“Because we’re not Zerith and Dar’ja,” Ger’alin said lightly, still feeling as if he were walking on clouds. “And no following us, Callie.”

“I wouldn’t,” the Forsaken protested. “I’ve got plans tonight myself.”

“Oh, what’s his name?” Alayne teased. Callie stuck her tongue out at the woman and laughed.

“Remember when you told Dar’ja about what Zerith said the day you two had your picnic? Well, she mentioned it to me and we both think you had a great idea. I promise, I’ll tell you what the expression on his face looked like when you come back.”

“I think I want to hear this one,” Ger’alin said.

“I’ll tell you about it,” Alayne gasped, doubled over with laughter. “Try not to scare him too much.”

“But that’s the best fun!”

“Now I’m really glad we’re sleeping far away tonight,” Alayne giggled. “He’s going to kill me!”

“Just consider it payback for that whole making-you-search-the-naga-corpses-until-you-were-half-frozen-so-he-could-stick-you-in-bed-with-Gerry thing,” the Forsaken grinned.

“We still have to get you back for tricking me into climbing into her bed the first time. Since you got both of us with the itchweed, that one doesn’t count as proper revenge,” Ger’alin chuckled.

“I’m looking forward to that one myself,” Callie said. “Make it a good one.”

“We will,” Ger’alin promised, climbing up into the saddle and pulling Alayne up in front of him. Callie grinned and looked away when she saw the way they gazed at each other and laughed when she heard Ger’alin heel Lucky to a gallop. The pair rode south, turning west once they reached the Bone Wastes, searching along the border for the area that Havandar had described. “There it is,” Ger’alin whispered. “Just north of the ogres.”

“It’s beautiful,” Alayne sighed. Beyond the shady forests of Terokkar, just past a gap in the mountains, lay Nagrand with its bright sun, emerald grass, and gentle breezes. “Seeing this, I can see why they said that Outland was a promised land.”

“I’m glad you like it,” he smiled as they rode through the pass and into Nagrand. Moving off the path, he was careful to skirt around Kil’sorrow Fortress while looking for a congenial spot to make camp. Alayne leaned against his chest, closing her eyes and savoring the scent of spring on the breeze. After a few more minutes of riding, Ger’alin spotted a place and pulled Lucky to a halt. Alayne opened her eyes and smiled.

“This is perfect,” she said as the pair of them climbed down and began making camp.

“It is. Nice and out of the way, near water, plenty of game around, and no one to worry about disturbing,” he grinned. “You get the fire started; I’ll go see if I can bring back something for dinner.”

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Alayne lay quietly, listening to Ger’alin talk in his sleep. Part of her was tempted to wake him, to stay in his arms the rest of the night. Now she understood why Dar’ja and Zerith had kept everyone up their first night together. With a sigh, she slowly pushed his arm away and quietly snuck out of the tent, thankful it was far enough away that she could dress outside without worrying about anyone seeing her. She blushed when she thought that she was also glad it was far away so that no one would have heard them. Walking far enough away from the camp that the sound of her summoning wouldn’t spook Lucky or wake Ger’alin, she

summoned her fel steed and climbed on its back, heeling it to a gallop as she hurried back to Terokkar Forest. “Hopefully, it will all go well and I’ll be back before he wakes up,” she sighed. She stopped, dismounting only long enough to enslave a few of the skeletons wandering near the mausoleum of Auchindoun. She’d decided to risk adding them to her plan when she noticed them as she and Ger’alin rode past. Riding at a walk to let them stay with her, she skirted around the inhabited areas of the desert. Once or twice she looked over her shoulder, shivering when she thought someone was following her. Swimming across the small stream north of Stonebreaker Hold, she gasped when she saw a familiar sight galloping out of the orcish stronghold and down the road. Ger’alin wheeled his horse to a halt when he saw Alayne sitting atop her fel steed next to the road, her head hanging and her shoulders slumped.

“And just where do you think you’re going?” he asked, sounding irritated.

“To disarm that bomb,” she sighed.

“Oh, so I’m such a horrible husband you want to kill yourself already?” he said angrily.

“No,” she shot back in the same tone. “I can do this on my own. I see a way, at any rate.”

“So why go off alone?” he asked, softening. “Why sneak off without telling me? Did I not just swear to protect and shield you a few hours ago? Do you have any idea what it does to me to wake up and have no clue where you are?”

“I’m sorry about that. I have to do this alone because it’s dangerous and while I can protect myself, I don’t think I could protect you as well.”

“I’m quite capable of protecting myself, dearest,” he said tenderly, climbing from his saddle to take her in his arms.

“Not against this,” she shuddered. “When I set that thing to implode, arcane currents will pour out. Anyone who doesn’t know how to resist them could be killed or have their mind destroyed like that druid we saw,” she whispered. “I don’t think I could bear to have you look at me and not see me; I don’t know how you were able to deal with it when I...”

“It just about killed me, I’ll admit,” he said, “but then, there were times when it would lift and you would see me. I lived for those times. Now, I’m not letting you walk in there alone.”

“Ger’alin...”

“You’re not going in there alone and that’s that. It’s bad enough that you’re still feeling as if this entire mess is somehow your fault. I’m going to kill that bastard Arthas for ever sending you the first vision of what has come to pass,” he said firmly but gently. “Once you’re ready to start doing whatever it is, I’ll move off a bit. You do whatever it is and I’ll have Lucky ready to carry us both out of there. I may not know as much as you about arcane currents, but I do know enough about my own addiction to be able to resist it long enough to get you out of there.”

“Just promise me that, if I signal for you to run for it, you’ll go. I’ll only do that if it looks like the whole thing is going to backfire on me.”

“I’ll promise no such thing. If it’s going to backfire on you, it will backfire on me too or else we head back to Nagrand right now. You know, Zerith would probably kill me for even considering letting you do this.”

“You can be really stubborn, you know,” she said, smiling.

“So can you. Now, do we stay out here all night arguing or...?”

“Let’s go,” she sighed, climbing aboard her fel steed. “Oh, and just for future reference,” she said, jerking a thumb over her shoulder, “the skeletons are on our team.”

Ger'alin and Alayne tethered Lucky just out of sight of Firewing Point. Alayne dismissed her fel steed and began giving orders to the skeletons she'd enslaved. Then, the pair of sin'dorei began sneaking into the settlement, relieved to see that most of the others were abed and only a few token guards kept watch over the mana bomb.

"Magi must sleep. Especially magisters working on something like that," Alayne mouthed when Ger'alin looked surprised. "I'll explain later." Sending a mental summons to the skeletons, she quickly overcame the few guards stationed around, killing them before they could raise the alarm. Once she and Ger'alin were certain that the way was clear, they snuck out into the courtyard, and, taking a moment to gather the bodies, propped them up sitting, so that it would look as if they still stood guard. Standing in front of the control panel, Ger'alin kept watch while Alayne fiddled with it. "Got it," she said. "Oh, this is going to be painful for them. Ger'alin, go get Lucky and have him waiting. Once I set this thing off, the timer will start counting down and then, it's going to make a very, very big 'boom.'"

"Can you get out fast enough?"

"If you'll catch me when I come flying out, yes."

"Then I'll go. Don't start until you see me, though." Alayne nodded impatiently and began the sequence to start the timer. She kept watch for Ger'alin and for any of Kael's followers who might take it into their heads to check on the mana bomb. A few did peek out from the buildings, obviously satisfied that the guards still kept watch. Alayne sighed in relief when she saw Ger'alin wave from the forest. Hitting the timer, she quickly began channeling energy into the bomb's matrix, destabilizing it and setting off a reaction that would make a very pretty explosion, if anyone were crazy enough to try to stick around and watch. Hiking her skirts, she began running to Ger'alin. He held his hands out, ready to grab and pull her over his saddle. As she ran, one of Kael's Blood Knights spotted her and, with a shout, gave chase. "Go, get out of here!" she screamed to Ger'alin.

"Not without you!" he shouted back, unsheathing his sword and turning towards her.

"Stay there and cover your ears!" she called, turning and letting loose a howl of sheer terror and rage that sent her chasers running back away from her. It would only hold them for a few seconds, but that was all she needed. Turning back, she ran and leapt up over the horse's back, her legs dangling down one side. "Just ride!" she snarled, counting down the seconds mentally before the bomb went off. Ger'alin kicked Lucky to a gallop as he grabbed Alayne with one hand, pulling her onto the horse the rest of the way.

"Four...three...two...one..." she said between gritted teeth. "I'm sorry!"

The explosion rocked the forest, sending out a shockwave of arcane energy that pushed her and Ger'alin off the horse, sending them flying through the air to land in the stream a good distance away. Lucky rolled on his side, lying on the ground, stunned, while the shock wave passed over. When Alayne and Ger'alin managed to pull themselves onto the bank of the stream, they could see the white stone edifices of Firewing Point crumbling and collapsing in upon themselves. The gleaming spire was shattered, its remnants laying scattered about the area behind the settlement.

"Think they felt that in Shattrath?" Ger'alin asked loudly, his ears ringing from the roaring sound.

"Probably," Alayne replied, only able to figure out what he said by reading his lips.

"I hope we didn't just lame my horse," Ger'alin muttered, helping Alayne to her feet and putting an arm around her waist as they limped back to where Lucky lay. Ger'alin knelt before his mount, putting his hands on the horse's head and smiling. After a few more moments of gathering himself, Lucky managed to stagger to his hooves, nickering and whinnying. "We'll walk him back part of the way," Ger'alin said.

“If he’ll promise not to tell on us, I’ll give him a whole orchard of apples,” Alayne grinned. Patting her husband’s mount on the nose, she looped her arm through Ger’alin’s and the trio began to walk, somewhat unsteadily, back to Nagrand.

“I hope Zerith and the others don’t suspect that was us,” Ger’alin whispered when they made it past the golden city. “Because you’re not leaving the tent again for a good long while and I would really hate for us to be interrupted by your brother coming to kill us both for being hot-headed fools. I can just see him lecturing us both now while we’re catching our breath.”

“We’ll put up a sign,” Alayne suggested, grinning wickedly. “If the tent’s a-rockin’, don’t come a-knockin’.”

Ger’alin had to stop his attempt to climb back into the saddle, leaning his face into Lucky’s front shoulder as he laughed. Alayne just blushed and grinned wider. When Ger’alin finally managed to stop laughing, he climbed up, pulling Alayne up in front of him, and set Lucky to a walk. “Have I told you lately how much fun being married to you is? Daring sneak attacks on our wedding night and sarcasm that Callie would envy,” he whispered in her ear with a sly grin of his own.

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“I like it out here,” Alayne sighed contentedly on the day before she and Ger’alin were to return to Shattrath. “It’s so pretty.” The pair sat in the shade of a tree, north of Garadar, fishing. Talbuk grazed peacefully nearby, stopping to sniff Lucky as if they had never seen such an oddly-shaped deer before. Alayne and Ger’alin had even pulled up some grass and fed them, reminiscing about the days when nearly tame deer wandered through their homeland’s forests.

“We could stay out here, after it’s all said and done,” he answered. “It would be difficult to return to Silvermoon and stay silent about what we’ve learned. Not that opening our mouths would do much good. I also couldn’t go back to draining that poor naaru, M’uru.”

“What is the story behind that? Dar’ja’s been closed-mouthed about it. Jez’ral and the others suspect that the Blood Knights have access to some kind of potent magical power that they’re hoarding for themselves. Not that I think that at all,” she added quickly. “I know you would never be part of hiding something that could help free us from tapping into fel energies.”

“We were originally told that the thing was just a focus-point for Light-energy. In the beginning, I wasn’t much interested in learning to tap from it,” he sighed, putting an arm around Alayne and keeping half an eye on the fishing line. “I didn’t gain any interest in wresting the power of the Light until you took ill. As I advanced in my studies, I learned that it was actually a living creature that Kael had captured and sent back to Silvermoon for us to drain. I disliked drawing on it after I learned that. I would only do it to try to help you. Slavery is an ugly word, and so is torture, which is what we were doing to that poor thing.”

“We should go back and free it,” Alayne said. “I hate slavery. Only demons merit that fate.”

“A’dal says that M’uru – that’s the creature’s name – is playing a role he chose for himself. That what Kael intended for evil will be used for good. I’ve been thinking about that out here with you. I think I’m beginning to see what he meant.”

“And that is?”

“Well, it’s complicated and doesn’t make a lot of sense so bear with me,” Ger’alin said, stretching out on his back. Alayne turned and scooted near his shoulder, reaching out to begin plaiting his hair into a braid. “You really like doing that,” he laughed.

“Go on with your theory,” she smiled. “I’d like to hear it.”

“Just remember that I don’t know all the things you do about history and the like. Be merciful.” Alayne quirked an eyebrow at him, grinning when he smiled. “Alright, woman, you’ve dragged it out of me. No fair pulling my hair out if you don’t like the beginning bit.”

“Ger’alin, if you don’t stop with the delaying tactic, I’ll tickle your nose with this braid,” she said, shaking a fistful of his own hair at him in mock threat.

“Right, right. Alayne, you’re a warlock,” he said.

“Yes.”

“Warlocks are bad, right?”

“Historically speaking, they have been.”

“And paladins are good, right?”

“Again, historically speaking, yes, though Arthas was a paladin and he’s not what I consider ‘good’ by any stretch of the word. What does this have to do with what A’dal said?”

“Just that, here you are, a warlock, a demonologist, a person who consorts with some of the vilest creatures in existence...and you were using all of that to do *good* things. I’d been raised on stories of power-hungry magi and warlocks selling their souls to try to destroy those they hated. Then, I met you. You didn’t try to destroy anyone unless they deserved it, like Dar’khan and Arugal. You never seemed interested in gaining more power for yourself. Then, remember, I’d also been raised on stories of Uther the Lightbringer and the Silver Hand. Noble, self-sacrificing paladins, blessed by the Light. Only, in Silvermoon, I see paladins who are only interested in gaining power for themselves and using it to tyrannize those who spoke out against them. From what should have been evil – you – I saw great goodness. From what should have been good – the Blood Knights – I saw evil. I’m getting to the point, Alayne,” he laughed when she sighed in frustration. “A’dal says M’uru came to us and that good will come from the evil Kael intended. What I think is that the naaru knew all along that we’d lost our way with the destruction of the Sunwell and the invasion of the Scourge. And, that just like a warlock could reach into darkness to bring forth light, we can find our path out of the darkness by the willing sacrifice of a being of Light. The more I think about it, the more I come to believe that the naaru have been trying to reach out to us, to help us find something to replace the Sunwell. That the Light didn’t abandon us as so many of my fellows say. It sent us M’uru. So, what do you think?”

Alayne sat quietly for a few minutes, her gaze turned inward as she considered what Ger’alin had said. He let her mull over it in silence, turning his gaze to the clouds. “I think,” she said, causing him to turn back and look at her. Her expression was concentrated. “I think that if you ever call yourself an oaf again, I will hit you over the head,” she grinned. “And, I think I know what you’re getting at. Yes, Ger’alin, you have my full support to study under the naaru and work with the Aldor, if that’s what you want.”

“Okay, that’s not fair. How did you read my mind?” he laughed, sitting up and propping his arms on his knees. “Though, I will not abandon the Scryers. I just want to learn from the Aldor and the naaru as much as I can and bring their teachings to our people. It’s like I tell my students back in Silvermoon...”

“You can’t learn anything if you’re convinced you know everything, you Light-blasted fools!” Alayne quoted, pitching her voice low and gruff. Ger’alin threw his head back, laughing.

“I still want to know how you read my mind,” he teased.

“Honestly? I don’t know. Ever since that morning in Zangarmarsh...well,” she blushed, “I’ve felt this connection to you, as if some part of you had become part of me and vice versa.” Ger’alin nodded and Alayne smiled, knowing he felt the same thing. “You read my mind all the time, now,” she laughed. “How else would you have known that I was planning to set off that mana bomb? Can you tell what I’m thinking now?” she grinned.

“Yes, and I say we build it right over there,” he laughed, pointing to the clearing where they’d pitched the tent. “Hmph,” he snorted, adopting a tone of mock exasperation, “I should not have drawn your attention to the tent. I suppose the fish will still be biting in a few hours,” he grinned when she leaned over and kissed him.

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“What did you two do?” Zerith asked mildly when Alayne and Ger’alin rode back into Shattrath a few days later.

“What do you think we did, Zerith? Light, you’re married, too,” Ger’alin replied flippantly as he helped Alayne down out of the saddle.

“You know what I mean,” the priest said, pointing to the west. “Firewing Point has been destroyed. That mana bomb was set off the night the two of you went to Nagrand.”

“Well, mana bombs are highly unstable,” Alayne said quickly. “Maybe they just lost control of it?”

“And maybe sheep will grow wings and fly,” Zerith retorted. “What did you two do?”

“Why are you so certain we had anything to do with that?” Alayne asked, trying to look innocent. “We’re a staid old married couple now, not a couple of hot-headed fools who decide to make things go ‘boom’ for fun.”

“‘Staid?’” Zerith quoted as if tasting the word. “I don’t think ‘staid’ applies to either of you. What did you do?”

“Nothing you need to know about but about half of what was in Arelion’s journal,” Ger’alin replied. “There, you dragged it out of us.”

“You two little brats,” Zerith laughed. “Fine, don’t tell me. A’dal, however, says it was the pair of you and I think I’ll believe him.”

“As you like it,” Alayne grinned. “So, did anything interesting happen while we were gone?” Zerith blushed and started laughing so hard that tears streamed down his face. “Callie and Dar’ja switch places?” she asked, eliciting a nod from him. “We’ve got a great plan to get back at her.”

“I’d like to hear it,” he said when he managed to get his laughter under control. “For now, we’re hoping you two did more than just find a congenial camping spot and stay there the entire time. Jez’ral, Callie, Dar’ja, and I have spent the past few days establishing our reputations with the Sha’tar here in Terokkar. Jez’ral’s impatient to be heading over to Nagrand himself. He wants to finish his research there and then head to Shadowmoon Valley. It seems that he’s learned more about how, exactly, Kael and Illidan tainted the Outland orcs and he wants to try to cleanse them. I think we should tag along with the two of you,” he said, pointing to Alayne, “because if we can free them from their demonic taint, they might be powerful allies out here. Perhaps it would even help us convince Thrall to start negotiations between the Scryers and the Silvermoon government so we can return home, one day.”

“We actually talked about that ourselves,” Ger’alin said.

“I’ll bet you did. Was this before or after you did nothing to that mana bomb?”

“No, really, we did,” Alayne protested. “Show him what we came up with, Ger’alin.” Ger’alin grinned and pulled a parchment out of his pack. Unrolling it with a flourish, he held it up for Zerith to see.

“That’s not a house,” Zerith muttered. “That’s an establishment.”

“Well, we need plenty of room. There’s you and Dar’ja,” Ger’alin said, “Alayne and I, Callie, Jez’ral and Mir’el. Not to mention that we need some place for the kids.”

“And just when are you two planning to start building this edifice?”

“We could swing back by Garadar and have the foundation started today.”

“You two...,” Zerith chuckled. “You never let grass grow on an idea, do you? Well, I’ll be happy to contribute to this project and I’m certain Dar’ja and Callie will as well. You might want to make sure Jez’ral is fine with it...”

“He will be,” Alayne interrupted.”

“...before you commit to this. Go ask him, Alayne.”

“I will. Now, are we going to just be sitting around Shattrath or...?”

“That’s up to you and Jez’ral, Alayne. Like I said, he wants to visit Nagrand himself but he also wants to head over to Shadowmoon Valley. Go speak with him and then come back to me. If we’re heading to Shadowmoon Valley first, then we’ll bring all of the others along. Word is that the Horde is short-handed there and could use every volunteer they can find. If we’re going to Nagrand, then we’ll leave the others here for a while to see what they can do to assist the Sha’tar and the Scryers.”

Alayne nodded and hurried off to the library where Jez’ral and the other magi would most likely be found. Zerith clapped a hand on Ger’alin’s shoulder and smiled. “So,” he said again, “what did you two do?”

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“Look who’s back!” Jez’ral laughed when Alayne ducked into the library. “I was beginning to wonder if I would have to send out a search party to find you. Did you enjoy yourself?”

“Yes,” she said simply. “Zerith says you haven’t quite decided between Nagrand and Shadowmoon Valley. Perhaps I can help you reach a decision so we can get on with our work?”

“I’ve decided already, actually,” Jez’ral sighed, patting the cushion next to him. Alayne sat down and stared up at him. Her former teacher’s face was haggard and drawn, his former happy expression just a memory. He looked as if he were staring at a possibility he loathed considering. “We’ll be going to Shadowmoon Valley, next,” he sighed. “Nagrand can wait. I’ll have the rest of my life to wander around out there, alone. Mir’el is going to kill me.”

“We’ll figure out some way to get word to him. Maybe Callie could sneak in to Silvermoon? Or maybe we could have a message sent to him?”

“It wouldn’t work. If he came out here, he’d be devastated to learn that I’ve decided to go against Kael. Mir’el has looked up to Kael his whole life long. He’d never forgive me for turning against him, no matter the reason.”

“Mir’el also would be horrified to learn that Kael’s helped to taint the Outland orcs. He’d be sickened to find out what we’ve learned. Don’t beat yourself up, Jez’ral. He will understand and he’ll come out here, if for no other reason than that Ger’alin and I are going to build an absolutely enormous house and we want to pay him back for letting us have his family’s home.”

“You’re building a house?”

“In Nagrand. We’ve got a room planned for you.”

“We’ll talk about that later,” he said, smiling and patting her on the knee. “For now, we need to read up on the demons of Shadowmoon Valley and try to figure out which is most likely the kind Illidan is using to taint the orcs. None of Voren’tal’s followers knows exactly which demon was used.”

“It would have to be powerful,” Alayne muttered. “Otherwise the bloodlust would wear off and he’d have to keep re-tainting them.”

“I suspect that Illidan probably keeps the demon close to him. From what I can learn, he’s holed up in the Black Temple in Shadowmoon Valley. We may have to go in there and rout him out.”

“Just like that?” Alayne laughed. “Waltz right up to one of the most powerful sorcerers in history and punch him in the face? And people say *I’m* hot-headed.”

“Your brother has a plan.”

“He always does. I hope he’s got a funeral in this plan because we’re going to need several if we’re going up against Illidan Stormrage.”

“Listen to you. When did you become so pessimistic? We all know you and Ger’alin set off that mana bomb.”

“Sneaking into a sin’dorei settlement at night and making a bomb go off is one thing,” Alayne huffed. “Walking up to one of the most powerful mortal beings in all of creation is another thing altogether. Tell me, Jez’ral, are you so convinced that you’ll never see Mir’el again that you want to get yourself killed?”

“No but I’d much rather go up against the Betrayer than have to face...have to face what Kael is doing! Perhaps if we take out Illidan, perhaps if we show Kael that there is a power he’s discounting...maybe he’ll stop his mad plot and welcome us back so we can go home!”

“Jez’ral...”

“Enough, Alayne. Go and gather whatever information you can on night elven sorcery. Surely with your obsession with history, you should be able to find something that would help us counter Illidan’s magics.”

Alayne nodded and stood up. Walking along the bookstands, she pulled out any tome that had anything to do with night elven magic, sorcery, the Well of Eternity, or Illidan’s personal history. By the time she was finished, she had a stack of books she couldn’t see over, as well as two more stacks being carried by sin’dorei students. Jez’ral stifled a laugh as he watched the three mince-step out of the library and wondered if Alayne would sleep at all tonight between being newly-wed and her overenthusiastic work-ethic, especially when it came to something that truly interested her. Putting his assistant out of his mind, he pulled up his lap desk and the letter he’d been writing before she’d entered. Chewing on the tip of his pen, smiling ruefully when he recalled how Mir’el used to berate him for doing that, he crumbled up the parchment, tossed it aside, and began again.

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“That’s it,” Ger’alin muttered when he entered his and Alayne’s room. “No one is ever allowed to call either one of us ‘hot-headed’ ‘short-tempered’ ‘impetuous’ or ‘foolish’ again.”

“I take it Zerith told you what Jez’ral has him planning,” she replied absently, still absorbed in her reading, scribbling notes on a parchment she’d set on top of one of the discarded tomes next to her on the bed. “Don’t tip over the ink jar,” she warned when Ger’alin sat down at the foot of the bed. He grinned and lowered himself carefully to lie down next to her, reading over her shoulder and glancing at the notes she was taking.

“I didn’t know there were so many ways to say ‘this is hopeless,’” he teased, reading the notes she’d scribbled in the margin.

“I’ve thought of at least another half-dozen,” she grinned. “This is going to be tough but I’m actually becoming cautiously optimistic that it can be done. Not by us, certainly, but by someone.”

“Such as?”

“Well, if we could just go back in time a few millennia and one,” she said, lifting her hand and jutting out an ink-stained thumb, “ask the night elves under Azshara to pretty-

please-with-honey-on-top not summon Sargeras and cause the implosion of the Well of Eternity, two,” she added, ticking off another blue-stained finger, “convince at least fifty of the most skilled magi to come forward in time with us, and then three, convince them to side with us and not Illidan, provided, of course, that our earlier tampering hadn’t rendered this whole exercise a moot point, then maybe we could do it. Frankly, I think a better plan would be to figure out exactly what demon is being used to taint the Outland orcs, find and kill it, free them from the taint, hope they accept us as their saviors, and lead the whole lot of them against Illidan. What we lack in skill, experience, expertise, and sheer raw talent, we could make up for in overwhelming numbers.”

“So, suggest that to Zerith.”

“I did. He’s selling Jez’ral on the idea. The problem is, the demon Illidan’s using might be sitting right next to him for all we know.”

“There has to be a way to figure out which demon is being used and where it is,” he sighed, “what do you know about it?”

“That it’s powerful, that the taint doesn’t wear off the way it would were the demon a lesser entity such as fel guard or doom guard.”

“Powerful demon...in Outland...would Illidan summon one for that purpose?”

“I doubt it. You don’t just summon demons that powerful. It’s not as if they’re easily controlled, even by Illidan.”

“So, it probably would have been one that was already here in Outland before Illidan ran out here.”

“You may be right...”

“Let’s see, that would make it either that monster Kazzak or Magtheridon.”

“I doubt very much it’s Kazzak. He still roams free. But wasn’t Magtheridon killed?”

“Rumors say that Illidan defeated Magtheridon and claimed the Black Temple for his own. Defeat doesn’t have to mean death; not if someone as powerful as Illidan is after you. Death would be something of a relief, then.”

“Ger’alin,” Alayne said, slamming her book shut and grinning at him, “You’re a genius. I’ve got to go tell Jez’ral about this! If it’s Magtheridon, we just find out where he is and go after him! We might not even have to face Illidan at all.”

“You run and go tell Jez’ral, then, and see if he can figure out where old Maggy’s being held. I’ll just straighten up in here, make it look a little less like a library exploded. Oh,” he said, feigning casualness, “bring back something to eat when you return. We’ve been apart a whole *three hours* and I intend to do my best to get them back.”

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“That still doesn’t erase the fact that we don’t know where Magtheridon is,” Zerith sighed the next morning as the six sat in his and Dar’ja’s room, discussing various strategies and plans.

“Maybe one of the Scryers knows?” Ger’alin suggested.

“I doubt it. None of them have said anything about it. Not that we’ve really been asking,” the priest admitted ruefully. “We were so focused on Illidan.”

“So, we’ll ask around. Admit it, Zerith,” Alayne smiled, “this is a much better idea than trying to storm the Black Temple.”

“It is, but it all hinges on the orcs deciding to join us,” he said, drawing a deep breath. “We’re still not sure they weren’t loyal to Illidan in the first place and he’s just tainted them to make them stronger.”

“I have to admit, it’s unlikely that they follow Illidan willingly. At least, not all of them. Some of their leaders might follow him for reasons of their own but most orcs hate and

abhor demons as much as everyone else,” Jez’ral mused, rubbing his chin thoughtfully. A sudden rapping at the door pulled him out of his reverie and made the others jump at the unexpected noise. Dar’ja reached over and pulled open the door, her eyes widening in shock when one of the Aldor Vindicators entered.

“A’dal has requested that you speak with him when your duties permit,” the draenei said. The sin’dorei and Forsaken stared at him while they puzzled out his strange accent.

“We’re on our way,” Zerith said quickly, rising and striding out of the room. The others followed on his heels, stopping when they saw a group of Magisters helping Voren’tal out of the library.

“A’dal called for you?” the elder asked, beckoning them over.

“Yes,” Zerith answered for the group.

“He’s called for all of us, then. Perhaps it has something to do with your mad plan.”

“Perhaps,” Zerith grinned.

“It’s suicide, you know, going up against Illidan. He’s mad, but he’s lost none of his power.”

“Actually, we’re working on a variation on that plan,” Alayne cut in. “But we need some information about powerful demons who were already in Outland before Illidan fled out here.”

“Then it’s Magtheridon you’re after now,” Voren’tal said, shaking his head. “Are all young sin’dorei this eager to rush off into battle and get themselves killed?”

“We are,” Ger’alin said simply. “It beats sitting around and waiting for someone to summon the whole Legion into Silvermoon and finish what Arthas started.”

“You have a point, young Blood Knight,” Voren’tal laughed. “You wield it with the grace of an axe-thrower, but you have a point. Very well, we will lend you what assistance we can. Illidan, Kael, Vashj, and Akama defeated Magtheridon and his lieutenants, casting them out of the Black Temple. However, I know he is not in the Temple any longer. Illidan feared that, should Magtheridon ever break free of his or Kael’s control, keeping him in the Black Temple would make it too easy for the demon to take his revenge against his captors. I don’t know where Illidan banished the monster off to. It could be anywhere; Hellfire Peninsula, guarded by the Outland orcs; Vashj’s cavern in the waters beneath Serpent Lake; with Kael in the remnants of Tempest Keep; or even beneath Auchindoun, the catacombs of Terokkar.”

“You’re certain the demon is not with Illidan?” Zerith asked. Jez’ral shot him a look filled with daggers which the priest ignored.

“Having been in the Black Temple myself, having walked its halls, I can say with certainty that Magtheridon is not there. That’s not much help to you, I know, but perhaps one of the naaru knows.”

Ger’alin nodded. The naaru knew many things. Perhaps the location of Magtheridon and the means by which he could be defeated were among them. He reached out and put an arm around Alayne when he heard her breath catch as they reached the elevator, he and the others descended. “It’s safe now,” he whispered. Zerith chuckled. Together, the group walked into the golden building where A’dal and the other naaru hovered about. Ger’alin closed his eyes and let the presence of the beings wash over him. Now Alayne led him. Zerith sighed and picked Dar’ja up in his arms. Brother and sister grinned at each other; while they could feel the calming presence and hear the chiming tones of the naaru in their spirits, neither priest nor warlock was as overwhelmed by the nearness as the two paladins.

“You are here,” A’dal said warmly as the group reached him.

“As you have asked, so have we come,” Voren’tal replied formally, going down on one knee and pressing a fist to the floor. The others mimicked his posture, save for Ger’alin who remained on his feet, staring up at the being of Light.

“Word of your plans has reached me, young ones,” the naaru chimed, singling out the Disorder of Azeroth. “Illidan is but a distraction; the Legion is the true threat. You must face it and leave the brooding ‘Lord of Outland’ to his dark thoughts. None of you could stand against his might, his madness.”

“We’ve made a small change in our plans,” Zerith began, trailing off as the naaru’s full attention fell on him, nearly sweeping him off his feet.

“Instead of going after Illidan, we wish to free the Outland orcs from their demonic taint,” Ger’alin said. “To do that, we will hunt down and destroy Magtheridon, the demon Illidan has used to taint the orcs. Any information you could give us concerning his whereabouts would be most useful.”

“The demon Magtheridon is held captive beneath the orcish stronghold of Hellfire Citadel,” A’dal responded. “I see the shape of the plan in your mind, young sin’dorei. It is a good one. The orcs of Outland may yet be redeemed to serve the Light instead of the Legion.”

“That is my goal,” Ger’alin said simply. “As you have worked to redeem us, so I would work to redeem others.” Zerith and Dar’ja stared at the man, their jaws dropping in shock. Alayne grinned, her pride in her husband soaring over the crystal spires of the city. Callie just shook her head knowingly. She caught Alayne’s eye, laughing silently when the woman winked at her and rolled her eyes in mock exasperation at Dar’ja and Zerith. “Thank you for your assistance, A’dal,” he continued, bowing formally. “Might I...,” he started, a bit uncertainly. “Might I return to you later – at your convenience, of course – for instruction?”

“With our blessing, young seeker,” A’dal chimed, sounding amused. Ger’alin blushed and bowed again. The others rose to their feet, pausing to help Voren’tal up, made their courtesies, and then left the leader of the Scryers to converse with A’dal. Once outside, Zerith sighed and chuckled, reaching over to give Ger’alin a nudge on the shoulder.

“What was that all about?” the priest asked, sounding amused and somewhat surprised. “Redemption, instruction?”

“Ger’alin’s found a cause to believe in,” Callie responded. “Don’t give me that disbelieving look; I spent almost a year with him. Gerry’s more than just a sword-slinging hot-head who can out-drink, out-fight, and just generally out-last any taker. He got the same way after running into Ber’lon.”

“Alayne, he’s your husband,” Zerith laughed. “Does this surprise you at all?”

“Not a bit,” she replied. “You forget, even before I took ill, he and I spent a lot of time together. I’ve always known this side of him existed. It’s just a matter of his deciding to let it show through his normal ‘hi, here I am, can I bash something for you’ demeanor. He’s a good listener, a clear thinker, and frequently able to get right to the heart of the problem. I remember how dedicated he was to looking after me while I was looking after you in Tarren Mill, Zerith.”

“Thank you for speaking as if I’m not here,” Ger’alin grinned. Alayne wagged her head, laughing silently. Callie shrugged.

“Where are you two going now?” Zerith asked when his sister and Ger’alin peeled off and began walking towards the other tier.

“The Aldor,” they said in unison. “The draenei priests and vindicators hold information that could help our people truly turn their backs on Kael’s dark path,” Alayne explained.

“And, in addition to that, they may have information on Hellfire Citadel and Magtheridon. The draenei are native to Draenor, after all. The more information we can gather, the more likely we are to have a plan that involves most of us surviving. Besides, rumor has it they are a long-lived race. There is much they know that could be of use to us,” Ger’alin continued.

“Lastly,” they both said together, “while our primary loyalties are to the Scryers and our people, it never hurts to have allies.” Waving, they continued on their way, leaving Zerith and the others staring after them.

“Am I the only one who is getting a little concerned about how closely they echo each other?” Jez’ral wondered aloud. “I’ve heard of couples who can complete each other’s sentences but they’ve barely been married a week!”

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“What’s this?” Zerith asked when Alayne and Ger’alin dropped a set of maps in front of him that afternoon.

“The layout of Hellfire Citadel. There are several wings though, the part we’re interested in is here,” Alayne said, pointing to one of the subterranean areas. “If we post a few guards along this path, we should be able to push through to where Magtheridon is being held without having to worry about an attack from the rear.”

“How are they holding him?” Zerith wondered aloud.

“Some of the more powerful warlocks from the tainted orcs keep him in a state of semi-banishment; holding him captive between this plane and the Nether,” Alayne explained. “The Aldor spies were able to penetrate that far using their contacts among the Broken,” she added when Zerith stared at her.

“Why haven’t they told the Scryers? Aren’t we all on the same side here?” he muttered.

“They don’t trust us yet,” Ger’alin sighed. “It took quite a bit of convincing to get them to even talk to us. They nearly threw us off their tier. Only A’dal telling them to get over it stayed their hands.”

“At any rate, we should be able to sneak in here,” Alayne said, indicating a path from Falcon Watch to Hellfire Citadel. “If we break up into small groups, we’ll probably escape the notice of any watchers along the walls. We send in the first group of fighters to secure the entryway and, once that’s done, we push through with the rest of the groups until we reach the inner lair.”

“Sounds like you two have this all worked out already,” Zerith said, sounding bemused. “Is there anything left you need me to work on?”

“Assigning the groups,” Ger’alin grinned. “We had a small disagreement about that.”

“Disagreement?” Alayne snorted. “Try our first real argument.”

“Tried to put her in reserve?” her brother observed mildly. Ger’alin nodded. “She make you change your mind?”

“She and those claws she calls ‘fingernails’ were quite convincing. I wish I’d never taught her how to fight dirty,” he sighed, laughing. “Still, it’s...”

“...your own fault for thinking that just because I love you I’ll perch on your wrist,” she grinned. He shook his head, smiling ruefully, and shrugged. “It was worth a try,” she added, speaking his thoughts.

“I won’t promise not to try it again, woman,” he laughed, responding to her unspoken thoughts. “Women and children first and all that.”

“You should...,” she started to say.

“I fully intend to. I need to run a few things past Zerith here before...”

“Yes, he would know more about that than I would,” she murmured. “I’ll just go...”

“Don’t stay with him too long. We’ll probably finish up here and...”

“Could the two of you stop doing that?” Zerith laughed. “Light, it’s like listening in to *half* a conversation. Now, what is it you want to talk to me about?” he asked, turning to Ger’alin. Alayne ruffled her husband’s hair fondly before leaving to go speak with the other

casters about the plans she and Ger'alın had made. She paused just outside the doorway, glad that she'd managed to keep her hands from shaking since the Aldor handed them the map and Ger'alın had begun making his plans. She feared something was coming...something that she should be able to see and stop...if only she knew what.

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Callie hung back that evening, keeping to the shadows, a ledger perched on her knee and an ink jar on the table in front of her. She shook her head, grinning and laughing, as she observed her subjects at dinner, noting possibilities for future pranks.

"What are you doing over here in the dark?" Jez'ral asked, sitting down next to her. "I've been watching you watch them for a solid half-hour. Feeling like a fifth wheel, my dear Forsaken?"

"Nope," she grinned, jotting down another observation. "Just working on my treatise."

"Hm. Dinner: the priest and the female paladin manage to pass courses and side items around without the need for verbal communication. The other paladin and the warlock (the odd couple) carry on a conversation consisting of gestures and glances. Conjecture: marriage among sin'dorei grants telepathic powers?" he read over her shoulder. "Further observation needed to confirm findings. Possible avenues for exploitation: joining in with further non-verbal communication and then announcing that parties have agreed to...they'd never agree to that one!" Jez'ral laughed.

"No, but standing up and announcing that they have agreed to accept me as their Imperial Majesty would be highly amusing," the undead laughed. "So, have you heard about the plan?"

"Which plan?"

"The one Mir'el is going to give you fits over. Alayne doesn't understand why you won't send for him. Neither do I. He's got the knowledge, the experience, the skill, and the talent that we could use to gain an edge in the coming fight," she said pointedly, putting her notes away.

"We are not dragging Mir'el out here into a battle. We are going to leave him in peace, in Silvermoon, blissfully unaware of anything going on out here."

"And if one of us has to deal with the unfortunate task of sending word to him of your demise?" Callie asked, raising her eyebrows. "Light, you're as bad as Alayne."

"No, I'm not. I have entrusted a letter explaining everything to one of the Magisters. In the unfortunate circumstance that I get killed, Mir'el will know what he needs to know. Now, we are not going to send for him or otherwise disturb him. I know enough from him to be able to help Alayne keep Magtheridon from running amuck."

"Yes, but neither of you is really that good at controlling larger demons," Callie argued. "Fel guards are about as large as you go. Ger'alın told me about the problems you had controlling that one demon at the Pools of Aggonar. The pair of you had to team up to do it and even then, he slipped out of your control pretty quickly. Send for Mir'el. Alayne's told me about how he managed to make Varimathras dance! The Dark Lady's right-hand-demon, waltzing and trotting about as if he were at a ball. I'd give one of my internal organs to have seen that."

"We're not sending for him and that's the end of it," Jez'ral muttered as he stood up and turned to leave.

"You know, you're a strange one," Callie sighed. "At first, I thought you were a real jerk because you dragged Alayne into Desolace, let her go off and get into trouble, gave me lip about it when I came to get you, acted all snooty about working with us to rescue her, and

then just generally annoyed me with your refusal to answer any questions when she fell ill. I know, I know,” the Forsaken said, waving his mouth shut, “you were a Master Warlock. Those of us who had not risen to your exalted status were not to question you; especially not about one of your students. Mir’el managed to make you see reason on that, it seems. You come out here with her as your assistant. You let the rest of us tag along. You go along with our pranks. You join in our battles without a complaint. Now, all of a sudden, you’re trying to pull rank again and tell us we can’t go and collect a man whose whole family has spent thousands of years and tens of generations studying powerful demons and methods of taming or controlling them. Why not?”

“Because Mir’el has only ever faced battle once and he did not handle it well,” Jez’ral sighed, sitting back down. “He’s my senior by twenty years. During the last war, he and I were together with the humans under Jaina Proudmoore at the Battle of Mount Hyjal. Mir’el had been sent specifically because of his family’s tradition of studying demons. He was able to offer advice on how to fight them, how to hold them off while Malfurion prepared to launch his counterattack. I went with him to that battle as his assistant, much as Alayne now is mine. Oh, we were more than that, yes,” he said, blushing. “Had been for many years. But during that battle...he saw and did things that haunted him for years. Sometimes he still wakes up screaming, seeing Archimonde march on our position and remembering how, when faced with fulfilling his family’s dream, he looked up, saw that monstrous being, and fainted. I will not have a hand in putting him through that again. I would die first.”

“He will probably kill you when he finds out you let Alayne do it, though,” Callie said gently. “Why does he dote on her so much? Even to the point of calling himself her long-lost uncle.”

“Oh, that?” Jez’ral said, blinking away the memories. Smiling, he stifled a laugh. “Because he was to have married Alayne’s mother.”

“Say that again?”

“It’s a long story, Forsaken,” he grinned, remembering. “And, if Alayne doesn’t know it, I’d rather she heard it first before I tell you and you run and blab it all over creation.”

“I wouldn’t do that,” Callie protested. “So, if he was going to marry her mother, won’t he be even angrier at you for letting Alayne go up against Magtheridon?”

“We’re not bringing him out here,” Jez’ral said firmly. “Now, I’ll let you return to chronicling the habits of newlywed sin’dorei. I have my own studies to be about,” he muttered, returning to his room. “Forgive me, Mir’el,” he whispered, “but I will not let you suffer all those sleepless nights, all those years of nightmares and waking terrors again. Not even for Miris’s daughter,” he sighed as he began poring over texts, some written by Mir’el himself, concerning control of higher demonic entities. “I will risk anything to save you that suffering again.”

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The sun had long since set when the group gathered at Falcon Watch set out for Hellfire Citadel. They had ridden from Terokkar Forest that morning, practically taking over the sin’dorei settlement. The blood elves from the Disorder of Azeroth were careful to keep their mouths shut and their reactions to hearing Kael’Thas praised muted. The pilgrims would learn in their own time.

Zerith eyed the path leading down into the lower regions of the fortress warily. Glancing back over the rest of the Disorder of Azeroth, he shook his head and grinned. All were covered from head to foot in swathes of cloth that blended into the color of the night shadows. He’d been surprised when Ger’alin had mentioned that part of the plan. He’d been surprised that Ger’alin didn’t want to have a hand in fighting more than he had to. The priest

resolved to spend more time with the Blood Knight; he seemed to be the only one constantly surprised by Ger'alın's seemingly new demeanor. Letting his gaze pass along the rest of the line, he came to Jez'ral and Alayne, their heads together as they and the few other warlocks discussed how to keep Magtheridon from running amuck. He'd been surprised when Alayne mentioned Mir'el being an expert in demonic control – surprised when she had vetoed his sending for the man in Silvermoon. "Jez'ral would kill you," was all she said whenever Zerith mentioned it. The tightness in her voice said she had already tried to convince the senior warlock to send for the other man and had been shot down.

Watching, counting beneath his breath, he saw the first group of fighters sneak through the shadows, glancing up and over their shoulders as they entered the door leading to the subterranean lair. Even at this distance, Zerith could make out the determined set of Ger'alın's shoulders, could see the man clench his fists in frustration as the warlocks began trickling into the keep, close on the heels of the first group. Now the man seemed to understand some of the frustration Zerith felt at Alayne's stubborn insistence on being in the fore of a fight. "It's no place for a woman!" he'd tried to protest, only to earn himself another chase up a tree when all of the women in the Disorder of Azeroth decided to prove that they were just as valiant as the men. The priest chuckled at the memory; a year of marriage under his own belt had taught him, oftentimes the hard way, that silence was frequently the better part of valor when it came to arguing with your wife. Ger'alın glared hard at Jez'ral as he passed; only Alayne and Callie seemed to accept the warlock's insistence that Mir'el be left alone entirely.

"They're in," Dar'ja whispered as the warlocks and fighters disappeared into the doorway. Waiting for a silent count of twenty, Zerith watched as the next two groups snuck in. Waiting for another count of twenty, he led the main healer groups in, motioning for the reserve to wait and take up position once they were well on their way. Ducking into the entrance, his breath caught as he heard the muffled sounds of fighting from further down the ramp. Signaling for his group to hurry on, he sighed with relief when he reached the bottom of the descending corridor. Only a few orc guards and warlocks had been in the room. They had been quickly overwhelmed by the numbers of the Disorder of Azeroth.

"Ready?" Alayne asked, looking over the gathering. Zerith nodded and she and Jez'ral led the warlocks further down the corridor, treading as silently as rogues would. Ger'alın led his group of fighters alongside them, leaving Zerith to hold the others back, giving the group of warlocks and fighters a chance to get into position without distractions.

"Now!" the priest shouted, signaling the rest to run down the corridor as the first sounds of conflict drifted up. Seconds later, he stood in the doorway to the large circular room, watching as the warlocks channeled into the hulking pit lord, keeping him in his state of semi-banishment while the fighters and magi took down the orcish channelers. The orc warlocks put up a good fight, summoning lesser demons to their aid. However, the Disorder of Azeroth had planned for this and was not surprised. Once the orcs were down and Magtheridon alone remained, the Forsaken and sin'dorei warlocks gathered around Jez'ral began focusing their concentration, letting the demon draw nearer to this plane slowly, giving the others a chance to get in position to keep the pit lord from being able to do anything other than defend.

As the demon materialized and the fighters bore in, the warlocks, lending their energies to Jez'ral, struggled to force the pit lord into docility. The effort of trying to force their combined wills on the demon showed in the way Jez'ral's eyes bulged and sweat rolled down his face. Only Alayne standing next to him, letting him bear down on her shoulder as she concentrated on helping him maintain control, kept him from toppling to the floor. With every bite of the blade or spark of the spell, the group trying to control Magtheridon shuddered as if they had been struck.

“It’s working,” Callie sighed in relief as the battle roared on. The pit lord could not deflect their blows; the warlocks had him completely cowed. She bit her lip, wishing she’d said nothing, when she heard Jez’ral begin screaming, clutching his head and collapsing on the floor. Alayne attempted to maintain control but was quickly repelled as the demon lord regained control of his mind and body and began flailing about with his claws and tails, sweeping the Disorder of Azeroth’s fighters off their feet.

Alayne and another warlock grabbed Jez’ral’s shoulders, dragging the now unconscious man out of the fight and back to the healers. “This just got ugly,” she heard Dar’ja mutter as the sounds of fighting began drifting down the corridor. “Looks like we’ve got company coming.”

The warlock nodded and raced back to the battle against the pit lord. Rallying those with her, she began launching spells as quickly as she could, not stopping to let herself realize how exhausted she was from the effort of keeping the demon docile. The fighters had regrouped as well, keeping Magtheridon busy as they attacked from multiple angles, never giving him a moment’s peace to recover his energy or regain the initiative. Alayne winced and bit her tongue to keep from screaming out when she saw Ger’alin move in, flinging his shield aside, and grab for the pit lord’s armor. He and several other fighters, including Tau’re, began clambering up, their blades stabbing deep into the demon’s hide. Magtheridon reached for them, grabbing at them with his claws and throwing them across the room. Still, there were too many for him to fend off and, before long, one of them, a Forsaken fighter, had managed to get up onto the pit lord’s shoulder and bury his blade in the creature’s throat.

The room lurched and shook as the enormous demon collapsed, his death throes threatening to bring others with him as the fighters began scrambling to get out of the way. Redoubling their efforts, the casters threw their spells, desperately keeping to their feet and leaping away to avoid the debris raining down on them from above. Finally, after long moments, the demon shuddered and lay still. Alayne waited, making a swift count of ten, before running to where she’d seen Ger’alin fall. She drew a deep breath of relief when he opened his eyes and rubbed the back of his head. “Stay still, woman,” he laughed shakily. “There are three of you. If my head wasn’t ringing, I’d be thankful for that.”

“Oh hush,” she whispered worriedly.

“Check on the others,” he said, rubbing his eyes and waiting for the room to stop spinning. “I’ll be fine. I just took a good slam on the back of the head when I hit the wall.” Alayne didn’t move. “I’m fine, woman,” he moaned.

“No, you’re not,” Dar’ja said, startling them both. “But, you will be in a few minutes.” Reaching down to cup the man’s head in her hands, she let the Light flow through her, easing his pain and clearing his head. Ger’alin shook his head, thankful that it no longer rang, and whispered his gratitude. Letting the pair pull him to his feet, he glanced around the room.

Groans and moans wafted through the room as the healers pulled the injured out from under piles of rocks and worked to set broken bones or mend mortal hurts. A few of their number lay still, cloaks covering them. Even more surprising, orcs, their dusky skin proclaiming their Outland origin, sat quietly, some under close guard, some being tended by the priests and shamans under Zerith’s command. Ger’alin nodded to himself, looking for their commander. Seeing the orc who fit the bill, the sin’dorei Blood Knight excused himself and walked over to him, rehearsing what he wanted to say.

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The orc sat, staring off into space. His eyes were slowly changing color from the red, demonic glow back to the more usual blue. Ger’alin squatted down in front of him, green eyes

meeting clearing eyes calmly. “What...what is happening?” the orc grunted, looking confused.

“The demonic haze is lifting from you,” the sin’dorei answered evenly. “Magtheridon is dead.”

“Then you have doomed us all!” the orc said, trying to interject some anger into his words but too overcome with lethargy to do so.

“Why would you think that?”

“How can we serve Lord Illidan, how can we hope to stand against the might of the Burning Legion, without the blood of demons to aid us?”

“There are other avenues you may follow.”

“Lord Illidan will kill us. Weaklings are of no use to the Lord of the Black Temple! We must be strong! You have sapped us of our strength! Why? Kael’Thas would never...”

“We no longer bend knee to one who would inflict demonic bloodlust on your people. We have fought to free you from that, to restore you to your places as honorable warriors in the fight against the Legion.”

“Honor?” the orc spat. “You speak of honor against the Legion? What good will our honor do when the demons rip our women and children to shreds? What good is our honor in fighting creatures that have none?”

“Your honor is the most important weapon in the fight against them,” Ger’alin said softly. “It is a pity that you have let yourself be convinced it is of no importance. Come with us and you will see how you can fight against the Legion without sacrificing yourselves and your children into slavery to demon-blood.”

“You make fine words, elf,” the orc sighed after a long pause. “We are your prisoners, it seems,” he said, glancing around.

“You are not our prisoners,” Ger’alin said, rising to his feet and holding his hand out to pull the orc to his own. “You can be our allies.” The orc looked at the sin’dorei in surprise before grinning, taking the man’s hand, and listening to Ger’alin’s words once again.

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Seeing Ger’alin speaking civilly, even friendly, with the orc commander, Alayne smiled in relief and began looking around for Callie and Jez’ral. Zerith and Dar’ja still moved among the wounded, healing and offering comfort to the friends of those who had been crushed by the demon or by falling debris. Alayne sighed with relief when she saw Callie sitting next to Jez’ral, speaking to the man. Walking over to them, her brow knotted in confusion when she realized that Jez’ral was not responding. His eyes stared at the ceiling, not seeing it. Only the rise and fall of his chest said he still lived. The sense of impending peril she’d felt for days now returned. “Zerith doesn’t know what’s wrong with him,” Callie explained when Alayne looked a question at her.

“Jez’ral? Are you awake?”

The man did not respond.

“Jez’ral Cloudslasher, are you awake?” she demanded, waving her hand in front of his eyes.

The man did not respond.

“Did he hit his head or something? I didn’t see him take any injury after I dragged him out of the fight.”

“No. Zerith just muttered something in Thalassian that sounded like a phrase I’d like to learn before telling me to keep an eye on him while they took care of the wounded. Ger’alin, are you well?” the Forsaken asked, seeing the fighter walking slowly over towards them. The orc commander returned to his own men and began speaking with them. Callie

watched as their blank faces turned incredulous and then grateful. It seemed Ger'alin had managed to find a way with his words.

"Not as well as I was when I thought I might have three wives to celebrate with," he joked. Alayne glared at him. "Belore, what's the matter with him?" he asked, pointed to the staring Jez'ral.

"I was hoping you could tell us," Callie replied. Alayne was still waving her hand in front of Jez'ral's face, muttering beneath her breath, and reaching over to pinch him. Ger'alin glanced at the Forsaken who shrugged. Squatting down, Ger'alin placed a hand on the man's forehead.

"Nothing," he sighed after a moment.

"You mean there's nothing wrong with him?" Alayne said quickly, moving her hand over her employer's face. "Jez'ral, this isn't funny. Mir'el will have your hide for scaring me like this."

"No, I mean I don't know what's wrong but there's something damned funny going on here. Come on," he sighed, rising to his feet and pulling his wife to hers. "Let's get him and the others out of here. The battle is over and I, for one, am thankful to be alive. Alayne, you go on ahead to Shattrath and warn them that our new allies will be joining us," he said, gesturing to the orcs. Alayne grinned, then sighed, and glanced at Jez'ral worriedly. "I'll look after him," Ger'alin promised. "Now, go on. Don't fall asleep, though," he winked.