

“Alayne, I think you should come with me,” Callie whispered the next morning as she gently shook the elf woman awake. “Jez’ral’s awake.”

“I’ll be right there,” Alayne yawned as she pulled back the covers and slipped out of the bed, careful not to wake Ger’alin.

“I would have let you sleep through, but he’s panicking and it’s really frightening. I don’t know what he’s saying; he’s babbling in Thalassian.”

“I’ll take a nap later today,” Alayne muttered as she padded down the hallway after the Forsaken. “Oh my,” she said as she opened the door to Jez’ral’s room.

“What is that that he keeps saying?”

“Green,” Alayne whispered to Callie. “Jez’ral, what’s green?” she asked, switching to Thalassian.

“Green, green, green, green, green,” the man moaned over and over again, rocking back and forth and chewing on his thumb.

“Jez’ral?” she said softly, sitting on the bed next to him and reaching up to stroke the side of his head. “Jez’ral?”

“Eyes of fire...green...pain...burning, searing in my mind!” he shrieked, his teeth breaking the skin of his hand as he began trembling. “White pain!”

“Get. Ger’alin. Now!” Alayne said to Callie. She reached up and took Jez’ral’s hand from his mouth, holding it gingerly in her own hand. “Jez’ral, calm down.”

“Green! Gigantic green!” he screamed. Alayne recoiled in fright, her eyes widening in horror when Jez’ral stared at her but did not seem to recognize her.

“What’s green? Jez’ral? Calm down, please?” she begged.

“What’s going on here?” Ger’alin asked as he strode into the room. “Get Zerith,” he muttered to Callie over his shoulder.

“Green eyes of fire, burning, burning!”

“What is he yelling about?”

“I have no idea. Jez’ral? Calm down, please. You’re safe now. There are no green things or fire here to burn you. You’re safe. I swear it.” Jez’ral lifted his hands back to his head, shaking and pulling at his long black hair as if he wanted to tear it out. “Jez’ral, calm down. Everything will be well,” Alayne murmured, disentangling his hands from his hair and holding them. The man stared blankly down at the bed, blinking and frowning.

“Where...where am I?” he panted, looking around in confusion. “Who am I? Who are you?”

“We’re friends,” Ger’alin said slowly, motioning for Alayne to stand up and let him sit down. “We’re not going to harm you. We’re going to help you. Now, I need you to just relax,” he continued, lifting his hands and placing them on either side of the warlock’s head. Letting the Light flow through him as the Aldor instructed, reaching out and directing the energy gently, the way a bank directed a river, he channeled the healing energies into the man. “Do you feel any better?” he asked, standing back up and putting an arm around Alayne’s shoulders.

“Who...are you?”

“We’re friends,” Ger’alin replied evenly, reaching over and placing a firm hand over his wife’s mouth. “What is the last thing you recall?”

“Eyes of fire, burning...” Jez’ral shuddered.

“I see. Go back to our room,” he whispered to Alayne, careful not to use her name. “Zerith and I will need to ask you some questions when we’re finished in here.” Alayne stared at him dumbly but nodded and left, staring worriedly at her former teacher as she exited the room. “Do you know where you are? Does anything here look familiar to you?”

“No...no...who are you? Who am I?” he demanded, turning to put his feet on the ground. He stood and collapsed to his knees, hands splaying to keep him from pitching

forward on his face. His eyes widened as his gaze fell on a book shoved half under his bed. Scrambling for it, he pulled it into his lap, his fingers tracing the author's name reverently. "Mir'el," he whispered, looking up in confusion at the brawny man hovering over him.

"Do you remember who Mir'el is?"

Jez'ral's brow furrowed as he concentrated. The name was important to him. Was it his name? He shook his head. His name was Jez'ral. Mir'el was a blank to him. An important blank, but a blank nonetheless. "I...don't remember," he muttered sadly, feeling a pang in his chest. Ger'alın nodded, saying nothing, and reached down to pull the warlock up to his feet. Jez'ral's legs gave out almost immediately, depositing him back on the bed.

"Callie said you needed me?" Zerith asked as he ducked into the room. Ger'alın nodded and held up a hand, signaling the priest to silence. Walking over to him, the Blood Knight pulled him out into the hallway for a quick conference.

"His memory is completely gone. He doesn't know who he is; he doesn't know where he is. He doesn't remember who Mir'el is though, from the look on his face when he saw the name, it is at least familiar to him."

"Is there something in shadow magic that predisposes a person to mental issues?" Zerith sighed.

"Well, there's the whole fel corruption thing but I don't think that's what we're looking at here," Ger'alın said, exhaling. "No sin'dorei has been a warlock long enough for the corruption to really take hold of them. Besides, Alayne's told me how they plan to hold off the corruption and that they do constantly monitor each other for signs. Most of them would go back to being mages in a heartbeat if they could."

"What have you told him?"

"Nothing. I heard the same lectures from Ma'iv as you. When dealing with amnesia, give only vital information and try to surround the person with people and things from their past. Well, Alayne is really the only person out here he'd be familiar with. We can't exactly risk sneaking him back into Silvermoon; who knows what he would say?"

"What is the last thing he remembers?"

"He said 'eyes of fire, burning.' I'm guessing he's referring to Magtheridon."

"Probably. I'll give him something to make him sleep. You have Alayne dig through his room and find any books she thinks might contain information on what to do in cases of memories being erased after or because of attempts to enslave demons."

"I'll do that," Ger'alın agreed, striding off in the opposite direction. Zerith stared at the door to Jez'ral's room, wondering if they would ever manage to make it through a battle without someone getting themselves hurt.

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"How are you feeling?" Alayne asked later that afternoon when Jez'ral began to wake up again. She and Callie were sitting in his room, both of them poring over the many books on demonic control the man had stashed away.

"I don't know," he muttered. "Hungry, I think."

"Callie, go get some lunch. We could all use something to munch on," Alayne suggested.

"Light of heaven, what's wrong with you?" Jez'ral demanded when he saw Callie. "Is it contagious?"

"No," Callie said slowly. "Poison. Don't worry, I'm fine and you can't catch it. I'll be right back," she sighed, rolling her eyes. The man really had forgotten everything if the sight of a Forsaken had him turning that pale.

"What are you doing? Do you live here, too?" Jez'ral asked.

“Just reading some of your books,” Alayne answered. “We’re trying to figure out what happened to you so we can help you.”

“What did happen? Who are you?”

“I’m afraid that I can’t say anything,” Alayne sighed. “It’s best if you remember on your own instead of us telling you things. See if you can remember who I am.”

Jez’ral stared at her, his forehead wrinkling as he concentrated. “You’re... I know you. I swear I do. I just can’t recall your name, young lady.” Alayne sighed and nodded, turning her gaze back to the book on her lap. “What are you reading?”

“A treatise on demonic control,” she muttered absently. “A very thorough one, at that.”

“Demonic control? Who would want to control demons? Those things should be left in the Nether to rot.”

“We control them. They’re tools. Disgusting, vile, filthy tools but useful nonetheless,” Alayne continued, never taking her focus from the pages.

“We control demons?”

“Yes.”

“We do, don’t we?”

“Indeed.”

“Only, I’m not very good at it, am I? I do better with Nether channeling.”

“Wait... what?” Alayne gaped. “Do you remember that?”

“Sort of,” he sighed, putting a hand on his forehead. “I wish that sickly woman would hurry up with the food. I feel faint.”

“Then lay back down.” Jez’ral nodded and did as she suggested. “Could you please quit smacking your lips? She’ll be back with lunch in a few minutes, I promise,” Alayne said flatly.

“I can’t help it. I’ve got this odd taste in my mouth and my tongue has gone dry as wool. It’s also getting rather hot in here,” he sighed, throwing back the covers and sitting back up. Sweat ran in rivulets down his face and his skin had turned doughy-white. He lifted his hands to wipe the stinging sweat from his eyes and blanched. His hands and arms were trembling. “Young woman, I think there’s something wrong with me.” Alayne looked up from her reading and gasped. Slamming the book shut, she stood up and hurried over to Jez’ral, cupping his chin in her hand and looking into his eyes. They were beginning to glaze over and his trembling was growing worse.

“Withdrawal,” she groaned. “We would have to be the worst of the lot. Not even three days. Jez’ral, listen to me very carefully. Close your eyes and let your mind drift.” The man did as directed. “Reach out to the nearest point of arcane energy you can sense. It will feel warm and vibrant.”

“Yes, I sense something like that,” he whispered.

“Now, reach out and pull it to you. Grasp it and pull it to you. Ouch!” she yipped as the man relaxed, his color turning more normal. “I guess I should have specified that you not wrest it from me,” she sighed.

“I’m sorry. Did I hurt you?”

“No,” she lied. “Ah, here’s lunch,” Alayne grinned, seeing Callie open the door with her foot as she balanced plates of food on her hands and arms. “Get him to eat,” she whispered to the Forsaken. “I need to go lay down again.”

“But you just woke up a few hours ago,” Callie protested. “You’re not wearing yourself out taking care of him, are you? Ger’alin and Zerith both said that...”

“No, it’s not that. I just feel like someone’s removed my skin whole and it’s a rather discomfiting sensation. I’ll explain later,” Alayne sighed, seeing the confused look on the woman’s face. “It’s a sin’dorei thing.”

“I see,” Callie grinned. “Here, take your plate, at least. Your husband will have my hide if you skip meals.”

“Thanks,” the sin’dorei whispered. “I’ll just take this back with me to finish reading it.”

“No!” Jez’ral shouted, seeing the book she was carrying off. “Leave me that!”

“But I need to...”

“Just leave it here! You can take any book but that one.”

“Jez’ral, I need to finish reading so I can...”

“*Just leave it here!*” he snarled angrily, his eyes blazing.

“Right, I’ll just leave it here,” she said quickly, handing it to Callie and hurrying out of the room. “I wonder what set him off like that about that book. It’s just one of Mir’el’s old texts about demonic properties.”

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Alayne rubbed her eyes as the words began to blur again. Next to her, she could hear Ger’alin sigh in frustration. “Just one more chapter,” she promised with half a mind. “Just let me finish this one and I’ll put the candle out.”

“You said that five chapters ago,” he muttered, turning back to face her. “I wonder if that bit about ‘forsaking all others’ includes books,” he teased. Alayne reached over and patted him absently, rubbing her eyes and blinking to clear her vision.

“I had to wait until he fell asleep again to sneak this one out of his room,” she sighed. “As it was, I was afraid I would wake him. He was holding the thing against his chest the way a toddler would hold a doll. Callie says that this book is the only thing he remembers. No wonder he’s clinging to it so.”

“What book is that?”

“Hm?”

“Which book is it?”

“Oh, it’s one of Mir’el’s early texts on demonic properties and summoning controls.”

“Ah,” Ger’alin grinned, rolling on his stomach and propping himself up to read over her shoulder. “Stop turning the pages so quickly,” he teased, hoping to elicit at least a grin from her. “Alayne, I was just kidding. I’ll leave you alone about your reading, I promise,” he whispered, seeing her face harden and her eyes begin to spark and burn in anger. “Sweetheart, I was just teasing you... where are you going? Whatever it was, I’m sorry!” he shouted after her retreating form. “Pa never told me the parts about having to chase your wife down when you open your mouth and shove your whole leg in it,” he groaned, climbing out of the bed and grabbing one of the robes tossed over the chair. Tying it on, he hurried out in the hall, glancing up and down the dark corridor for sign of Alayne. His ears twitched as he heard her voice from deeper down the hall.

“She sounds mad,” Callie giggled from outside of Jez’ral’s room.

“That she does,” Ger’alin agreed, stopping next to the Forsaken.

“You need to teach me what those phrases mean. They sound like what you used to use whenever you got really ticked off.”

“I might have to wash her mouth out,” he muttered flatly. “She’s worse than I am. More creative, too.”

“What is going on here?” Zerith demanded, belting the sash of his robe around his waist. Dar’ja followed behind him, looking amused and bewildered at the same time. “What did you do to my sister? Why are you grinning like that?”

“Oh, wow, she’s good,” Dar’ja laughed. “Sailors and stable hands would stand in awe at her facility with profanity.”

“Ssh,” Ger’alin waved them to silence. “Yes!” he hooted, pumping his arm in triumph.

“What? What is she so angry about?” Zerith asked, tapping his foot impatiently. “A woman storming out of her room at this hour and yelling like that generally means her husband did something wrong. What did you do and why are you smiling about it?”

“I’m smiling because it’s not me she’s angry at,” Ger’alin explained. “Listen.” Zerith leaned closer to the door, listening intently. After a few minutes he nodded.

“You’re off the hook. I wonder what she’s so mad at *him* for?” the priest sighed, jerking his thumb at the door. “We’d better get in there before she kills him.”

“What’s she saying?” Callie asked. “I want to learn those phrases!”

“The cleaned-up version is that she’s calling Jez’ral a fool,” Dar’ja explained. “Why she’s saying that is beyond me,” the woman continued as Zerith and Ger’alin pushed open the door. Alayne was sitting on Jez’ral’s bed, the man’s shoulders in her hands as she lifted him and slammed his head against the pillow, pausing only to slap him across the face. She screamed at him the entire time, tears streaming down her cheeks. Jez’ral was staring at her in fear, completely baffled by her actions. The smile vanished from Ger’alin’s face the moment he saw how upset Alayne was. Crossing the room with nearly leaping strides, he pulled the woman away from Jez’ral and held her against his chest. Zerith spared them a glance before walking over to check on Jez’ral.

“She’s trying to kill me,” the warlock said, sounding surprised. “She says I’m a bast...,”

“Yes, we heard,” Zerith interrupted. “Are you well?”

“A little dizzy and my face hurts,” he muttered, rubbing his jaws. “I’m sorry if I did something to upset her. She kept calling me a fool and asking me why I took that risk.”

“I know. We heard. You go on back to sleep, now. She’ll be in here in the morning to apologize to you for this whole thing, no doubt. Ger’alin?” the priest said, quirked his eyebrow at the pair. Alayne was leaning against the Blood Knight, weeping and sobbing brokenly. Ger’alin nodded and reached down, picking her up and carrying her out of the room. Dar’ja, Callie, and Zerith followed him, closing the door to the room behind them while Ger’alin sat Alayne down and tried to calm her. “What was that all about, Alayne?” Zerith asked gently, leaning against the wall.

“That fool knew, he had to have known, and he still tried it!” she sobbed, knuckling tears from her eyes.

“He knew what and still did what?” Zerith asked, sounding a little exasperated.

“Here,” Alayne muttered, reaching for the book she’d been reading earlier. Flipping through the pages, she found the passage that had sparked her ire and lifted the book up. Zerith walked over and took it, reading the paragraph she pointed to.

“Could you translate that from warlock into non-warlock?” he asked.

“Basically, it says that there is a risk in attempting to control demons who are wandering free on this plane. Normally, when a warlock forces a demon out of the Nether, he enslaves its will at the same time with the summoning spell. That’s why summoning requires a piece of a pre-existing soul. I’ve always trapped the souls of freely wandering demons. If you have to do it, you might as well do it to something that deserves it,” she explained. “At any rate, if a warlock tries to take control of a free demon, there’s a risk that the demon could gain control of the warlock or, in the struggle for control, either demon or warlock could have their mind obliterated. I always wondered why Mir’el told us never to try to enslave a free demon unless we were much more powerful than it. Now I know.”

“But you and Jez’ral combined your powers to enslave that demon in the Pools of Aggonar and you both came out fine,” Ger’alin whispered.

“Yes, we did because that demon was, in the grander scheme of things, fairly low-ranking. I mean, it was more powerful than any I can force out of the Nether or could control on my own. Same for Jez’ral; that’s why we had to join our wills. Even then, one good whack and we lost control of it. Magtheridon was a pit lord. A very, very powerful demon. Enslaving his will, even the attempt to, was foolish and Jez’ral must have known that! I mean, come on, he and Mir’el have been together since before any of us were born. Surely that came up in a conversation at least once!”

“I see,” Zerith sighed. “So, now we know what’s wrong with him and why. Does anything special happen to a person’s will when a demon destroys it?”

“No,” Alayne answered. “Warlocks don’t become demons. I doubt there’s any little shard of Jez’ral floating around in the Nether that could cure him. Demons don’t work that way; they don’t need to capture our souls to enslave us. There are plenty of fools willing to do their bidding *voluntarily* on this plane to make trying to enslave the rest of us a pointless waste of energy,” she sighed. The sin’dorei and Forsaken stood or sat in glum silence for several minutes as they digested what Alayne had just revealed.

“Then we’ll just have to wait and see if his memories come back on their own,” Dar’ja said, breaking the quiet. “Has there been any sign of that happening so far?” Alayne shook her head but Ger’alin nodded. “Which is it? Yes or no?”

“Well, the book was familiar to him,” Alayne volunteered.

“Oh, bother the book,” Ger’alin grinned. “The author’s name was familiar to him. He didn’t recall exactly who Mir’el was but putting his reaction to your trying to take that book earlier together with the way he was practically *caressing* the engraved name this morning, I think it’s a good sign.” Alayne stared up at him, a slow smile spreading across her face. Zerith turned and began hustling Dar’ja and Callie out of the room, closing the door behind them. Laughing, he ran a hand over his face.

“How he can make her go from sad to not-sad so quickly must be a gift from the Light,” he grinned.

“I still want to learn those phrases,” Callie muttered. “None of you will teach me the interesting Thalassian words.”

“Is everything all right?” Tau’re whispered as he and Davril crept down the hallway. “We heard shouting a few minutes ago.”

“Everything’s fine,” Zerith replied, waving the tauren off. “Is everyone awake?”

“Yes,” the Forsaken muttered. “At least, those who normally sleep are now awake,” he amended, sharing a wink with Callie.

“Oh, that’s good,” Zerith said, sounding relieved.

“Good?” Dar’ja muttered, creases appearing in her forehead. “Why would everyone being awake be good?”

“Because that means that *we’re* not going to wake them up,” he said lightly. “Come on, we can’t let those two beat our record, can we?” Dar’ja shook her head, her eyes filled with laughter as she followed him back to their room.

“But I wanted to learn those phrases...” Callie sighed. “Okay, fine. Revenge Plan Number Fifty-Six: I will listen in to what they say now and will ask for a translation tomorrow over breakfast. At the top of my voice. Twenty gold I can make Ger’alin squirt tea out of his nose,” she said, staring a challenge at Tau’re.

“You’re on,” the tauren grinned, striding back to his room as the two Forsaken settled down in the hallway and began listening, talking about the living and their strange habits all the while.

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Ger'alın growled and punched his fist into the side of the building. Zerith winced, wondering how many bones the paladin had just pulverized. "That is not an acceptable answer!" He shouted, shaking his swelling hand. "I don't care if the omens are favorable or the spirits are happy or the wind is blowing out of the east!"

The orc shrugged uncomfortably. "That is the only answer he'll give."

"Thank you," Zerith said calmly. "Please tell Garrosh that we would like to speak with him in person." The orc nodded and walked off, leaving the two sin'dorei in the shade of the building. "There's nothing for it but to go to Nagrand and try to convince him ourselves."

"Does he sound like someone who can be convinced?" Ger'alın groaned.

"He's bound to be more reasonable in person."

"He sounds like a whiny child. 'Oh, I can't meet with the leaders of the Dragonmaw because I saw a ghost and because my dad drank demon blood too.' Bah! The sins of the father do not pass to the son. If they did, I'd be in much more trouble than I am. Long story," he grinned ruefully, blowing on his knuckles.

"I want to hear it one day," Zerith laughed. "Here, let me see your hand." Ger'alın held his hand out to the priest. "Try not to hit stone walls anymore," he murmured as he healed the broken bones.

"I don't make a practice of doing that."

"I know, I know. Still, you can't let things like this get to you."

"I won't," Ger'alın sighed. "Every day, the Aldor Vindicators tell me that I must learn patience. It's just hard to be patient when it seems like everything is coming to a head."

"Then pray for it."

"That's what Alayne says."

"Listen to her. She occasionally has a good idea," Zerith smiled. "She married you, after all." Ger'alın grinned and shook his head. "Oh, so that wasn't a good idea?"

"Stop it," he blushed. "So, we're going to Nagrand. I hope she won't want to drag Jez'ral with us."

"She might not want to go," Zerith pointed out.

"Good point," he sighed. "She is still chewing her nails with worry about Jez'ral."

"Do you want me to talk to her?"

"No. She's my wife. I'll talk to her about going over to Nagrand again."

"Talk to who about going to Nagrand?" Alayne asked, walking up to the pair.

"You, actually," Ger'alın said quickly. "We need to make a trip to Nagrand and talk some sense into Garrosh Hellscream. You've been wearing yourself out taking care of Jez'ral, so I thought it might be time for me to toss you over my shoulder and carry you away kicking and screaming."

"You wouldn't have to do that," she said wryly. "He's up and about now, so I don't have to keep an eye on him all the time. Still, I don't want to leave him here alone right now."

"We'll leave Callie to watch him."

"You should really take her with you. She's got good relations with the Mag'har," Alayne pointed out. Ger'alın sighed and nodded, conceding her point.

"Don't even think about it," Zerith said flatly. "Dar'ja doesn't like Jez'ral that much anyway."

"Maybe I should stay here," Ger'alın sighed.

"No, you should go," Alayne replied, patting him on the cheek. "It's not like it's that far. You'll probably only be gone a few hours. Certainly it can't take that long to make Garrosh see reason. He seemed like a nice enough orc when we stopped over in Garadar last week. Very polite and civilized. And Grandmother was really nice, too."

"Grandmother?" Zerith asked, quirking an eyebrow.

“Everyone calls her Grandmother,” Alayne muttered. “Her real name is Geyah but she said to call her ‘Grandmother.’ She likes my talbuk recipe. That made Garrosh really happy, too.”

“Which, of course, is why you should come with us,” Ger’alin grinned. “You can whip up one of your genuine gourmet dishes and kill two birds with one stone.”

“But then who would stay and watch Jez’ral? Ger’alin, I don’t like the idea of us being apart either, but there’s nothing to do about it but accept it and try to make it as short a time as possible. I’ll stew some up this evening, though, for you to take to her. Maybe a little bribery will help our cause and get you back here the quicker,” she grinned.

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Ger’alin waved down at Alayne as the four made their way through the Aldor’s tier. He sighed and stretched in his saddle, taking a moment to rein Lucky in. The horse was definitely eager to be out of the stables after several days of inactivity. He clenched his jaw when he heard the other three giggle behind him. Perhaps staying up all night had not been the wisest idea. Alayne had told him several times that he should get some sleep if he was going to be anything approaching diplomatic with the depressed chieftain of the Mag’har. Rubbing a hand over his face, he resolved to listen to her more often in the future. He gave a start when Zerith came abreast of him and patted him on the shoulder in commiseration. “Just ignore us,” the priest said. “I remember how bad Dar’ja and I were the first few months we were married. Still, what was all the banging?”

“My armor,” Ger’alin replied curtly. “No, I’m not telling you about it.”

“She’s my sister. I really *don’t* want to know. At any rate, I’ll take care of the conversation. You just stand back and look impressive. Like you were supposed to for the centaurs after you’d finished bragging to them about our battle prowess.”

“I’ll do that,” Ger’alin nodded. “Now, you might want to get back there to Dar’ja. We’re about to enter Nagrand.”

“Why would...”

“Just trust me. It’s too bad you’re not riding double.” Ger’alin stifled a laugh a moment later when he heard Dar’ja gasp and begin whispering to Zerith as they entered Nagrand. She was having the exact same reaction Alayne had when he brought her out here. Taking a deep breath, he relaxed a bit. It was nice to be in an area where the air was clear and the sun shone down through an unfiltered sky. Only a few bands of Nether hung in the atmosphere, attesting that they were in Outland. For the rest, Ger’alin could see why Kael had spread rumors of Outland being a promised land. Nagrand most certainly fit the description.

“It’s really pretty,” Callie muttered politely. “Smells nice, too.”

“It is,” Ger’alin agreed, glancing back over his shoulder and looking forward quickly, biting the insides of his cheeks to keep from laughing at the way Dar’ja was staring at the landscape.

“Will we get to see the house?” the Forsaken asked.

“I can take us by there after we finish up in Garadar. I don’t think it’ll be finished, though. They had just started the foundation after Alayne and I left.”

“It will be fun to live out here. I’ve seen at least five bushes of itchweed so far.”

“I’m going to have to keep a constant supply of that treatment around, aren’t I?”

“You know me.”

“Yes, I do.”

“So, how’s married life?”

“It’s...oh, it amuses the hell out of you, I know,” he grinned. “Why else would you make me snort tea out of my nostrils?” The Forsaken gave a guilty grin.

“I had twenty gold riding on that. Besides, I was ticked off that no one would tell me what, exactly, she was saying.”

“Next time, cut me in on the deal and I’ll teach you all of the Thalassian profanity you could ever want to know. Light, for ten gold, I’ll squirt tea out of my nose on *command*.”

“Sure thing. I didn’t embarrass Alayne too much, did I?”

“She’s getting used to it, actually. Light, since we married, it’s been like Desolace only about a hundred times worse. She has mentioned that the next person to ask after the state of her reproductive system is going to have to deal with a very pissed off demon and a very irate warlock. Not to mention, I think she’ll pull Dar’ja in to it so they’ll have to deal with a very upset demon and warlock who have a healer in their back pocket. Actually, when I put it that way, I’m looking forward to seeing it. Callie, when we get back to Shattrath...”

“No. Besides, I think it’s time we put our game faces on,” she sighed. “It looks like we’re here.”

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Zerith gritted his teeth and prayed for patience. He was thankful that Ger’alin was too tired to grow truly irritated. Glancing back, he sighed in relief to see that the Blood Knight was still awake. Since the man was so silent, the priest was afraid he’d fallen asleep standing up.

“Chieftain, perhaps you are misreading the signs,” Dar’ja tried again. The orc waved her to silence. “Please, hear us out,” she sighed.

“I will not be the second Hellscream to damn the orcs,” the chieftain sighed. “Leave me in peace.”

“Chieftain, this is your chance to...” Zerith sighed.

“I said no! Now that the time approaches when I might be forced to take command, the very spirits of our ancestors have risen up and turned against me! No! I will do no further damage to my people!”

The priest glanced back at the Blood Knight and rogue standing near the doorway. Callie looked horrified. Ger’alin just looked a trifle frustrated. Both shrugged at the priest as if to say they had no idea how to convince the chieftain to change his mind. Bowing politely, Zerith motioned for Dar’ja to follow him out. Once outside, he let out the breath he had been holding and groaned. “Damned lethargy!”

“That’s not lethargy,” Ger’alin muttered. “That’s stubbornness.”

“Well, what are we going to do about it? The Dragonmaw will not follow us directly. They made that clear as good glass. They want one of their own to lead them into battle but they feel as if none of their clan is qualified...”

“Yes, I know,” Ger’alin sighed. “I spent a considerable amount of time speaking with them in Shattrath. They still feel the guilt of having willingly partaken of demon blood and following Illidan. The only other chieftain they might follow is Thrall and he’s got his hands full with the Horde back home. I doubt very seriously he’d like it if we just jaunted back there and said ‘By the way, Warchief, I know you’re busy and all, but we’d like you to drop everything and come to Outland and lead a tribe of renegade orcs whom we freed from demonic bloodlust into battle against both Illidan and Kael’Thas. Oh, and by the way, you’re looking very green today. Please put down the Doomhammer.’”

Zerith glared at Ger’alin. The Blood Knight met his gaze evenly. “Being married to Alayne has certainly heightened your sense of sarcasm,” Zerith muttered. “But, you’re right. We can hardly go and ask Thrall to drop everything and come out here. There has got to be some way to convince Garrosh to stand up and take his rightful place as a leader.”

“Excuse me,” an orc woman said softly from behind the priest, making Zerith start in fright. “Has Garrosh changed his mind?”

“He has not, my lady Drakia,” Ger’alin said politely. “How is Grandmother?”

“Come and see for yourself,” the woman said, her voice barely louder than the gentle breeze. “She has asked for you and for your wife.” Ger’alin gestured for the others to follow him as he strode up the path, adjusting his steps to keep behind Drakia. “Where is your wife?”

“She had to remain in Shattrath and look after a friend who has fallen ill,” Ger’alin replied. “However, she did send some of that talbuk stew that Grandmother enjoyed so much the last time we were here. It will need to be warmed up, though.” Stopping to pull a tightly-sealed pot from his horse’s saddlebags, Ger’alin led the others into the largest structure in the orcish village. Seated near the hearth in the center of the building was an ancient orc matron, warming her hands over the glowing coals. She turned when Ger’alin entered and smiled at him. Patting the rug in front of her, she motioned for him and the others to sit down. Ger’alin squatted down easily in front of her, reaching over and setting the pot near the hearth. “Good day, Grandmother,” he said warmly.

“Good day, young warrior,” she smiled fondly. “Introduce me to your friends.” Ger’alin quickly made the introductions, wincing when he had to explain Callie’s condition. He feared that the orcish matron might take offense to something as un-natural as the Plague of Undeath that had afflicted his friend. His fears were groundless as she merely smiled compassionately at the undead. “I hear you have come to speak with Garrosh about leading the Dragonmaw and Mag’har into battle.”

“We did, madam,” Zerith answered politely.

“Please, call me ‘grandmother.’ Everyone else does,” she laughed, a twinkle in her ancient eyes. “I’m probably old enough to be your grandmother.” Zerith bit his tongue, wishing he knew how long orcs lived and deciding to say nothing. If this elder wanted him to call her ‘grandmother,’ he’d call her ‘grandmother’ even if she were barely old enough to be his mother. “How did it go with Garrosh?”

“Not well,” Dar’ja said curtly. The old woman nodded slowly, as if she had expected that answer.

“Garrosh binds himself tightly with the chains of guilt and shame over the sins of his ancestors,” the matron explained. “As if that were not enough to test him, the spirits have grown restless of late. He believes it is because he is unworthy to lead the Mag’har and that the spirits will abandon the clan if he takes control. He believes that it is only because of me that they remain with us at all; that it is only because of me that he has resisted the bloodlust. I am an old, old woman,” she sighed. “The time when I must walk the world of spirits is fast approaching. Garrosh has lost his heart; if he does not find it by winter, the Mag’har will not survive to see another spring.”

“Is there anything we can do to help?” Callie asked. “Maybe if we try hitting him over the head?”

“No,” the matron chuckled. “His skull is too thick to crack. He won’t listen to me; he hasn’t listened to you. We must ask Mother Kashur for help.”

“Well, where is she?” Ger’alin asked. “We’ll go straight to her. Maybe she can talk some sense into Garrosh.”

The orcish crone threw back her head, laughing until tears trickled down the wrinkles in her face. Ger’alin looked chagrined, wondering what he had said that was so humorous. “Young elf, Mother Kashur walks the next world now. Do not despair,” she murmured kindly, seeing his face fall. “I am too old to attempt the spirit journey; my soul is too ready to leave this life behind and journey on. However, you are young and strong. Perhaps you can succeed where I would fail.”

“How would I journey into the afterlife without dying?” Ger’alin muttered sullenly. “If I die, Alayne’s going to kill me.”

“Do your people know so little of the spirits?” she asked, sounding surprised. All four shrugged uncomfortably. “There is a potion which you can drink; it will allow your soul to pass beyond without dying. Our shamans used it to consult with the elder spirits in days long past. Now, only I and my successors know the means of brewing this potion. I will give it to you if you will promise to uncover the reason for the spirits’ restlessness. With that information, perhaps Garrosh will find his heart again.”

“I will,” Ger’alin answered immediately. Zerith began grinding his teeth, wondering just how he was going to explain this one to Alayne. Next to him, he could hear Dar’ja begin praying fervently in Thalassian that Ger’alin would either survive or come to his senses before he downed whatever brew the orc crone had in mind. Callie simply began an intense study of the ground.

“Then come with me,” she said, stretching out a hand for the Blood Knight to help her to her feet. “Your friends may come as well.”

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“Ger’alin, please take a moment to reconsider this,” Zerith pleaded as the other man reached up to unfasten the straps holding his armor in place. “Alayne will have a fit if I let you do this. There has got to be another way.”

“No. Grandmother Geyah is right. If Garrosh won’t listen to her, and he won’t listen to us, then the only thing left to do is try to find out what’s causing the problems that are bothering him and try to fix them so he’ll be the person he was born to be.”

“But drinking some brew that will do Light-knows-what? Some strange shamanistic ritual drink? Do you have any idea what is in those things?”

“No and neither do you. I doubt it’s poisonous. If the orcs drink it and survive, then I’ll be fine. Quit worrying so much. I know that I can be impetuous, but there’s really no other way. Unless, of course, one of you wants to do this.” The other three shook their heads, having no desire to imbibe some strange, mind-altering, potentially deadly drink and go on some strange vision quest in the land of the dead. “Catch the back-plate would you, Callie? This is much more fun when Alayne does it,” he muttered, making Callie laugh. Turning around and taking the last bit of armor from the Forsaken, he stowed it away carefully. Then, straightening his long undershirt, he sat down on the pallet and waited.

“Ger’alin, please,” Zerith started again, cut off by the door opening. The ancient orc woman walked carefully across the room, a steaming mug in her hands. Handing it to the seated sin’dorei, she watched as he drank it down and handed the mug back to her. He scrubbed a hand across his mouth and scraped his tongue against his teeth, wishing he had something at hand to get rid of the bitter taste in his mouth. Several moments passed before he began to feel the effects of the potion. “Ger’alin?” Zerith whispered, seeing the man blanch and begin to sweat. “Ger’alin?” he repeated, waving his hand in front of the paladin’s glazed eyes. The orc matron nodded to herself and, kneeling down, pushed the man onto his back and covered him with a quilt. “What is happening to him?” the priest demanded.

“He is passing beyond,” she answered gently. “He is going to where he can find the answers to how to make Garrosh assume his rightful place in this life.”

“Grandmother, I don’t mean to be rude, but is this safe? I know you reverence the spirits and nature, but...”

“It is. For those who are strong, at least,” she added. “And he is one such. Do not fret, young elf. He will return to us with the answers we need. He has strong ties to hold him; to keep him from wandering in the grey realms.”

“What do you mean?”

“You three, for one,” she muttered, walking over to a brazier and dropping some dried plant onto the fire. The scented smoke stung the eyes of the four who were awake. “His wife, for another. Seeing the two of them together put me in mind of seeing my own son and his wife before they ventured through the Dark Portal. He will return. For now, all we can do is wait while he makes this journey.”

“But why him?” Zerith pressed. “Why not one of the orcs?”

“Do you think I haven’t tried to convince one to do this? They all fear to incur the wrath of the ancestors. Too many are like Garrosh; convinced that they are unworthy or weak. Others believe that redemption for the sins of the past can only be found through death in glory. Very few among my people understand, like this one,” she said, pointing to Ger’alin, “that redemption comes freely. That there is no need to undertake a perilous journey to prove oneself worthy of it. Ger’alin knows redemption is a gift. By doing this, by getting to the bottom of the real cause for the spirits’ agitation, Ger’alin will rise in esteem so high that Garrosh may finally believe he can be redeemed just by this young one telling him he is.”

“I see,” Zerith exhaled slowly. “Then, we will wait patiently for him to return.”

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Ger’alin stared groggily at the scene before him. He rubbed his eyes, wondering where all of the color had gone. Grey light trickled out from everywhere and the landscape looked as if some power had removed life, leaving only shadow and light behind. “Where am I?” he wondered. “Excuse me!” he said, spying a figure in the distance. “Excuse me!” he called out after it again, running to try to catch up to it. The figure faded into mist, leaving him alone in the colorless landscape once again. “I’m supposed to find Mother Kashur,” he muttered to himself. “Oh, Light, what was that?” he cried out, feeling himself being moved. The land blurred around him, twisting and speeding away as he felt himself being pulled towards the south. “Oh no,” he groaned, feeling the ground lurch away from him as he began to hover just above the tree-line. “What is this place?”

“It is the realm between,” a woman’s amused voice answered. “You are not who I expected. Who are you? *What* are you?”

“I could ask the same of you,” Ger’alin growled, twisting around and looking for the source of the voice. Hearing nothing, he sighed and replied, “I am called Ger’alin. I am a sin’dorei – blood elf. I have come here to speak with Mother Kashur.”

“And why would a blood elf,” the voice said, stumbling awkwardly over the unfamiliar terms, “travel here, to the sacred realm of the orcish ancestors?”

“Because I must know what agitates the spirits of the Mag’har tribe. I must learn this in order to help Garrosh Hellscream assume his rightful place in this world. Could you help me find Mother Kashur, spirit?”

“You have found her. Tell me, what troubles the young Garrosh?”

“He believes that the spirits’ agitation is because his time to lead draws near. He thinks that his line is cursed with the sins of his father, Grom Hellscream. I know, I know, it’s ridiculous,” Ger’alin sighed, feeling silly speaking to someone he couldn’t even see. “But he believes it. If you know why the spirits are upset, perhaps we can figure out how to help so that Garrosh will assume leadership of the Mag’har. Oh no, not again,” he moaned. “Now I see why Alayne hates heights.” Higher and higher into the air he soared until he floated above a white, shining mountain. “What is this place?” he wondered aloud.

“Oshu’gun,” Mother Kashur answered. “The diamond mountain. It was once sacred to my people. It was there that the clans would gather every year to celebrate the springtime festival. It was there that our shaman communed with the honored ancestors. It was the center

of our culture - until the shadows overtook us. When the clans became a horde, the spirits of Oshu'gun fell silent. The ancestors turned their backs on us. Yet, as you know, something now draws them from their rest. Venture to Oshu'gun and discover what could trouble the spirits so. Perhaps there you will learn the answers that will help you put Garrosh back on his proper path."

Ger'alın nodded and swallowed hard as the ground rushed up to meet him. Squeezing his eyes shut, he wondered if he could feel pain on this plane. After several moments of waiting in the darkness behind his eyelids, he opened one eye experimentally. Before him, the white mountain loomed. Looking down, he saw that his feet hovered mere inches above the ground. Grinning in relief, he told himself to step down and nearly collapsed when solid ground met his foot. Adopting a serious mien, he strode down the washed-out landscape and into the white mountain. He felt himself being pulled away, as if some gigantic maw were drawing him in. The closer he came to the washed-out white mountain, the stronger the tug. Within moments, it was all he could do to place one foot in front of the other and stay upright instead of being sucked into whatever lay beyond the unprepossessing entrance that stood darkly in front of him.

His shade touched the shadow of the mountain and he lost his footing. Clawing at the ethereal ground, he tried to slow his descent into the cavern. "Mother Kashur?" he called out in panic. "Alayne!" he screamed as he felt himself being ripped away...

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"You're awake!" Zerith cheered, laughing in relief. "Did you speak with Mother Kashur? Did she tell you what we need to know to help Garrosh?"

"Not exactly," Ger'alın muttered, covering his eyes with one hand. "I mean, I did speak with her and she did say that the cause of the spirits' distress is in Oshu'gun."

"Oshu'gun?" Geyah said in surprise. "The sacred mountain?"

"Yes, that one," Ger'alın replied. "I was just going to step in there and see if I could get to the bottom of this and suddenly, I was back here."

"It is well that you returned before you could enter the sacred mountain," Geyah sighed, putting a hand over her chest and catching her breath. "Had you walked in there in the spirit realm, you would have been lost to us. Oshu'gun is where the spirits of our ancestors travel when their time in this life is over. It is the gateway to the eternal realm."

"Oh," Ger'alın sighed. "I guess maybe I should have asked a few more questions before blundering off. Well, there's nothing for it but to try to find a way into Oshu'gun."

"But if we would all die..." Dar'ja started.

"Do your people truly know so little of the spirits?" Geyah muttered, her voice a mixture of irritation and shock. "Had he entered the sacred mountain in the spirit realm, his spirit would have been taken to the eternal realm. However, Oshu'gun may be safely entered in this realm. It lies far to the south, near the edge of the world."

"So, all we have to do is go down there, walk inside, and see what's going on?" Callie summarized, sounding disappointed. "That doesn't sound like much."

"Perhaps I misspoke when I said it may be safely entered. There are strange creatures that have taken over the outside of the sacred mountain, profaning it. In addition, the once-peaceful elekks and clefthoofs who graze the plains near Oshu'gun have become savage, feral. Should you manage to work your way past those dangers, whatever lies inside Oshu'gun may prove fatal. My people never penetrated deeply into the sacred mountain," she explained. "We left the spirits in peace. But, if the spirits are agitated because of something wrong inside the gateway to the eternal...then perhaps something dangerous awaits you inside the sacred mountain," she concluded.

Ger'alín sighed. "Regardless, we must be on our way. The sooner we can uncover what is wrong inside the sacred mountain, the sooner we can convince Garrosh that whatever-it-is is not his fault."

"You should stay..." the crone began to say as Ger'alín pulled himself up. The elf's face drained of color and she had to move quickly to have the nightjar in place while his stomach emptied itself. "You should rest," she said gently, slightly amused. "Walking the spirit world tires the body, mind, and soul." The man lay back down shakily, looking distinctly unsteady and definitely unwilling to try sitting up again. "Rest. I will bring your wife's soup." Standing up, she turned and left the room.

"You look rough," Zerith muttered. "I'm glad Alayne's not here to see you like this. Given how she worried and fussed over me and how she worries and fusses over Jez'ral, she'd probably be a few thousand times worse with you."

"I'll be fine in a few hours," Ger'alín sighed sullenly. "Just a short nap and we'll be on our way before early evening. Just a short...nap..." he muttered, his eyes drifting shut and his breathing growing deep and even.

"So, who wants to be the one to tell him that it's well after midnight?" Callie asked when Ger'alín started snoring.

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Ger'alín tried not to grind his teeth anymore as he finished fastening his armor back on the next morning. He couldn't believe he'd been under the effects of that drink for the entire day. When he'd woken near dawn and Callie had gotten him up-to-date, he'd wanted to scream in frustration. They should have been back in Shattrath by now. He should be sitting next to Alayne, reading some arcane tome or treatise over her shoulder; not getting ready to ride off and face down some orcish ghosts haunting a huge hunk of rock. "Now, now," he muttered to himself. "Patience. The orcs reverence the spirits of their ancestors and the spirits of the natural world. Disturbances to one or the other are cause for much worry to them. Just because I don't particularly believe in it myself and just because it seems incredibly silly to me is no excuse for belittlement. I must be patient and compassionate. Light, help me," he prayed as he belted on his sword. "Still, it would be easier if she were here. She distracts me even more when we're apart than she ever does when we're together." Drawing a deep breath and forcing thoughts of his wife to the back of his mind, he strode out of the room and out of the hut to where the others were waiting.

Zerith nodded curtly to Ger'alín, hiding his relief at seeing the man up and about. The priest had been worried that the Blood Knight might not be up to traveling this morning. Only Callie's insistence that Ger'alín's color was much improved and that his appetite was back had begun to calm the priest. Zerith watched carefully as Ger'alín climbed into Lucky's saddle, looking for signs of weakness. Ger'alín caught him staring and glared back at him. "I'm fine. Nothing a good night's sleep couldn't fix," the elf muttered irritably. "Let's be on our way," he continued, clucking to his horse and leading the way out of Garadar. The others fell in behind him, bowing politely in their saddles when they saw Garrosh watching them leave. Grandmother had gone up to her customary seat in the hospice after breakfast, a crowd of children running about attesting to her presence there still. Once the group was outside of Garadar, Ger'alín kicked his horse to a canter, eager to be finished with this messing about the spirit world. Taking the road south through Halaa, he sawed on the reins, causing Lucky to rear. "My apologies, good sir," he said politely to the orc walking down the middle of the road. "I did not see you."

"Ger'alín, who are you talking to?" Callie asked, pulling up alongside him.

“That gentleman right there,” he replied, gesturing to the orc. “I think he’s angry with me. I nearly ran him over.”

“I don’t see anyone.”

“He’s right there.”

“There’s no one there.”

“Callie, I swear, he is right...where did he go?”

“Ger’alin, maybe we should go back...”

“No. I’m fine. Let’s just get this over with,” he growled, heeling his horse to a quick walk and keeping his eyes peeled.

“What’s wrong with him?” Dar’ja whispered to Callie when the Forsaken fell back, staring at Ger’alin worriedly.

“He’s seeing people that aren’t there,” Callie muttered. “I wonder if he’s caught some kind of sickness like Alayne did.”

“I’ll check him later,” Zerith sighed. “He seemed perfectly fine this morning, though.”

“You do that.”

“He’s stopping again. Looks like he’s talking to someone,” Dar’ja muttered.

“This might be a long trip,” Callie sighed. “If we’ve gotten her husband ill, Alayne’s going to skin all of us.”

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Ger’alin tried to ignore the worried stares from his friends and tried to ignore the wandering spirits, all intent on Oshu’gun. After the fourth orc had ignored his apologies, he’d started to realize that he wasn’t seeing orcs; he was seeing orc spirits. The same orc spirits that Garrosh had seen. The thought made Ger’alin’s skin crawl and made him wish Alayne were here. Her experiences with the dead and undead in Northrend would have done much to calm him; to reassure him that he was not losing his mind. Not to mention that her simple presence would have acted as a balm on his troubled soul. “I am never leaving her side again,” he vowed silently. “I just get in trouble when I do.”

“This looks like the place,” Dar’ja said evenly, a slight edge of concern in her voice whenever she glanced at Ger’alin. “It’s a big, white rock.”

“This is Oshu’gun,” he replied. “We should find the entrance over there,” he gestured towards the north facing, towards a point where all of the spirits seemed to be headed. The other three stared at him; there was nothing in the mountain to indicate any entrance point. Ger’alin stifled a groan and strode off, blinking and praying that he would not be cursed to see the orcish dead for the rest of his life. His ears twitched in agitation when he heard the others whispering about him. Ignoring them and trying to ignore the ghosts, he continued on, unsheathing his sword and bringing his shield down when he saw the strange creatures Grandmother had mentioned.

“What are those?” Zerith asked, pointing to the glowing beings.

“Oh, good, you see them too,” Ger’alin sighed before he could clamp his mouth shut. “I don’t know,” he continued, irritated at himself and at the others. “They seem to be ignoring us for now, though. Maybe if we leave them alone, they’ll leave us alone.” Walking onward, he groaned when several of the creatures turned to stare at the four. “We come in...peace,” he sighed, pulling his shield up and slashing in with his blade as the creatures began running towards them.

“What in the name of...?” Callie exclaimed when several of them vanished, only to reappear much closer to the four. Whipping her daggers out from her sleeves, she rushed up to stand behind Ger’alin while Dar’ja and Zerith hung back, preparing their spells and watching to make certain the creatures couldn’t flank them. Ger’alin let loose with a roar and rushed to

meet them, his shield blocking the blows from one while he slashed at a second. Callie followed on his heels, her daggers moving nearly as quickly as the ethereal creatures. She gritted her teeth and tried to ignore the way her blows made shocks and sparks dance up her arms. Within moments, they had the first four down, but more were coming to replace them.

Long moments passed while Ger'alın and Callie fought on, swords and daggers working to destroy the beings. Pressing onward through the fighting, they drew near the entrance to Oshu'gun. "Hurry, inside!" Ger'alın ordered, waiting for Zerith and Dar'ja to run in before he began backing his way into the mountain cavern. Using the narrow entrance to his advantage, he forced the creatures to take him one at a time, careful not to actually touch them or let them touch him. He feared that another jolting shock to his sword arm would put him out of the fight. Callie scrambled to his side, hiding behind his shield, ducking out only to throw the occasional dagger at one of the creatures. By the time the glowing humanoids decided that keeping the four out of the mountain was more trouble than it was worth, a pile of their wrappings littered the entrance way nearly ankle-deep. "Some kind of demon?" Callie suggested as the last six broke off their attack and retreated.

"Could be. Grab a few of those remains if you can. Alayne will want to study them," Ger'alın muttered, slamming his sword into its sheath and shaking his nearly numb hand. "To be honest, though, I thought they would be spell casters."

"Why would you think that?" the Forsaken asked as she gathered a few of the strange wrappings. "Light, that stings!"

"There is a definite sense of arcane energy in those things," Zerith muttered, confirming Ger'alın's suspicions. "Maybe we can find someone around here who knows more about them. Come on, let's move deeper into this cave," he suggested. "Who knows but that they ran to get reinforcements?" Ger'alın nodded and took a calming breath before heading after the priest and the other Blood Knight.

The cavern opened up into a soothingly lit room. Cool, marble railings lined the walls and banners, faded and tattered with age, hung at regular intervals. Lines gouged into the smooth floor glowed faintly, evenly, with soft light. A ramp wound its way deeper down into the mountain. Ger'alın stared at the room and then turned and looked over his shoulder, startled by the contrast. From outside, it seemed as if this were just another rocky mountain cave. From inside... Shaking his head, he marched ahead of the others, praying that he wasn't leading them into danger by following the dead orcs. He stopped and motioned for the others to halt, cupping his ear and straining to hear. "Uh oh," he breathed, reaching for his weapon.

"Uh oh what?" Zerith groaned, stepping back and letting the others move in front.

"Uh oh that," Ger'alın nearly screamed, his jaws clenched, as a doom guard rushed up the spiraling ramp at the far end of the room to meet them.

"You know, I really wish Alayne was here," Dar'ja sighed as she unsheathed her own sword.

"I wish that too," Ger'alın muttered.

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"How many demons have we killed?" Zerith asked as they moved deeper into the mountain.

"I lost count around twenty," Callie grinned.

"Twenty-four," Ger'alın answered. "That's twenty-three too many in my book."

"Well, I don't think we're going to see any more, other than the one I found earlier," Dar'ja offered helpfully. "Because that way leads to a blank wall," she continued, pointing down the corridor she'd just come back from exploring. "And, as I said earlier, that way has a room leading off of it. I think that's where we have to go."

“What? We can’t be at the end of this thing already,” Ger’alin growled. “We haven’t found the cause of the spirits’ distress!”

“Maybe it’s in that room I mentioned?” Dar’ja sighed.

“All you said was that there were demons in there,” Ger’alin spat.

“Yes, and they seem to be doing something. They’re not just standing around. That six-armed swordswoman is hovering over something and shouting at the warlocks around her. Maybe that’s what it is,” she said, brightening. “Those warlocks must be causing the problem! If we get rid of them, we get rid of the problem and Garrosh will lead the orcs!”

“I don’t know,” Ger’alin said slowly. “I think there’s got to be more to it than just a bunch of warlocks mucking things up. But, let’s go on and assume you’re right, Dar’ja,” he said calmly, hoping that the woman wouldn’t snap at him like she used to. “You very well could be. Let’s try to sneak up on them and see if we can learn more.”

Not waiting for the others, he began to tiptoe down the hallway, moving slowly to keep his armor from giving him away. He winced when he heard the silvery ringing of Dar’ja’s armor chiming from behind him. Motioning for her to stay put, he gestured for Callie to go ahead of all of them. The rogue grinned and snuck down to the door, glancing in quickly. Her eyes widened in shock and her expression changed from one of humor to one of anger. Without waiting for the others, she dove into the room. “So much for stealth,” Dar’ja muttered as she ran ahead and into the room. Ger’alin and Zerith followed on her heels, both wondering what had set the rogue off. Entering the room, they saw that the warlocks were ignoring the two women completely, their concentration focused on some object behind the demoness. Callie and Dar’ja fought the six-armed demon; the rogue ducking behind her while Dar’ja attacked from the front. Ger’alin rushed in, shoving the elf woman aside and taking one of the blows from the many-armed monstrosity on his shield. Dodging and weaving, he bore on, keeping the demon’s attention while the women worked it from rear and side, all three fighting until the vile creature was defeated. Ger’alin tensed, preparing for the warlocks to begin unleashing their spells, agog when, after a moment, nothing happened.

“Ger’alin, look,” Dar’ja said, pointing to the platform in front of the demonic corpse. He glanced up to see a shining being, a naaru, hovering over the platform. His eyes rolled back in his head and his legs gave way beneath him, dropping him in a heap on the ground just as the warlocks ceased their channeling and turned on the other three. “I didn’t mean for you to faint,” Dar’ja muttered, her voice a mixture of concern and irritation as the three rushed the warlocks, trying to keep them from trampling the fallen sin’dorei.

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The place looked familiar to him. It seemed as if he had been here once before. He could see the shades of orcs gathering around him, their essences merging, mingling with something behind him. Turning, Ger’alin gasped. A darkly glowing naaru hung before him, a sinister feel emanating from it. Wrenching his gaze away, he had to remind himself to breathe as he watched the orc spirits darken and twist, their form giving way to shadow until all that was left of them was a forbidding, black void. Once the transformation was complete, the former orc spirits glided from the room. “What... where am I?”

“You should not be here,” familiar chimes sang in his mind. “This is not your place; this is not your time.”

“Who are you?”

“I am K’ure of the naaru,” the chimes rang in reply, “and you stand in the heart of Oshu’gun, my vessel, the one which first brought the draenei to Draenor.”

“What is going on here? Do you know what is turning the orcish spirits into...demons?” he asked, bracing for the blow.

"I am," the being replied sadly. "Many hundreds of years ago, this vessel crashed into the world that became known as Draenor. My weakened energies have remained trapped within the vessel which the orcs know as Oshu'gun or the Diamond Mountain. As my energies bled away over the centuries, a void slowly grew in my place - devouring the souls of those nearby. Helplessly, I watched as generations of orc souls were drawn into the vortex. Recently, my enemies harnessed the vortex and used it to draw countless void minions into their Burning Legion."

"You're the cause of the spirits' distress."

"I am."

"What must be done to end it?"

"I fear that only time will end it. This is a natural regeneration cycle among my people. You have done much to end the manipulation of the orc dead, young mortal, by freeing me from the demons' control."

"That's impossible! The naaru are beings of Light! You're some of the most powerful creatures in the universe!"

"We are also beings of shadow, young mortal. Without one, the other could not exist. And we weaken in time; our energies fading into void. So it has ever been; so shall it ever be. However, you have, at least, freed the orcs from falling into the void. There is one who can ensure my peace and solitude until the cycle turns back; speak with A'dal. He can explain further. You must return now. Leave this place before you become trapped in the void."

"I'd like to but I have..."

"...no idea how to get out of here," Ger'alín muttered, opening his eyes.

"Look, Ger'alín, a naaru," Dar'ja said, pointing to something on a platform above him. "The warlocks must have been holding it prisoner."

"They weren't. This is K'ure's home. Some kind of ship, not that it looks like any boat I've ever seen," Ger'alín groaned, rubbing his head. "There was something about draenei, crashing, shadow and Light, and that the Legion is using K'ure in his current state to twist the orc spirits into creatures of the void and bleeding his energies to summon demons. No wonder there were so many in here. K'ure is the reason the orc spirits are wandering but that, since the demons controlling him are dead, the orc spirits should make their way on. He said that the only way to prevent it from happening again would be to have someone come who can ensure his rest and tranquility until this centuries' long cycle plays itself out. Why are you three staring at me like that?"

"Did you hit your head when you fell, Gerry?" Callie asked, squatting down beside him and turning his face to look into his eyes.

"No, I didn't."

"Are you feeling light-headed or dizzy?" Zerith asked.

"No, I'm not."

"Are you hearing voices?" Dar'ja added.

"No, I've not lost my mind! I passed out and went into the spirit realm right here in this room and talked to K'ure, the naaru hovering up there, and he told me all of this."

"Zerith?" Dar'ja asked.

"Seems fine to me," the priest sighed, his hand pressed to Ger'alín's forehead.

"Nothing wrong that I can tell. He just sounds crazy is all."

"I am not crazy."

"Maybe it's because of that thing he drank last night?" Dar'ja whispered.

"I'm right here. Could someone try talking to me?"

"Regardless, we should get him out of here. Ger'alín, you just stay right where you are. Callie, grab his feet."

“I can walk! You three are the ones who are crazy!” Ger’alin shouted angrily as he sat up and, giving the room time to settle back down, pulled himself to his feet. “I wish I’d never drank that stupid potion now,” he said woozily as he staggered out of the room. “I wish Garrosh wasn’t so stubborn. I wish that this place would settle back down again because I do believe I’m about to be sick.”

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Zerith sighed and craned his neck to try to see around Ger’alin. He was tempted to let Dar’ja lead the horse from her own mount the way Callie was leading El’a. The Blood Knight had done well, walking unsteadily up the passageways beneath Oshu’gun. Once he’d left the shadows of the cavern and stepped into the sunlight, he’d collapsed again, shaking and covering his eyes. Now he gibbered incoherently while Zerith tried to keep him from falling off Lucky’s back. The only things the priest could make out were “void” “K’ure” “A’dal” and “Garrosh.” “I never should have let him drink whatever it was that orc hag mixed up for him,” Zerith sighed as he reached up and pushed Ger’alin back straight.

“Stop!” Ger’alin groaned. “You’ll run her over.”

“There’s no one there,” Zerith said soothingly. “Just go back to sleep.” This was worse than when Alayne would wake up in mid-flight. At least she would stop fighting after a second. Ger’alin grew more combative, trying to grab the reins from the priest. “Ger’alin, stop it,” Zerith said warningly. “I will let you fall if you don’t stop that.”

“You’re trampling them!”

“There is no one on the road other than us,” Zerith continued. “Just close your eyes. We’ll be back in Garadar shortly and you can sleep off the rest of the effects of that Light-forsaken mixture.”

“I must speak with Garrosh. He has to know it’s not his fault.”

“You can speak with him when you’re feeling better.”

“No! I must speak with him right away! And look out, there’s another one!”

“Light, grant me patience, wisdom, and understanding,” Zerith prayed beneath his breath and he tried to keep the other man on the horse. “Also, a little more strength would not be amiss right now.” He heaved a sigh of relief when Ger’alin settled back down, his head hanging and his voice dropping back to incoherent whispering. “Thank you, Light,” he whispered when he saw Garadar coming into view. Wishing that he could spur Lucky to a trot, he prayed that Ger’alin would stay calm until they could get him off the horse. “Thank you, Light,” he whispered again in gratitude. Callie and Dar’ja dismounted and hurried over to catch Ger’alin as Zerith let the man fall out of the saddle. “He’s heavy.”

“Thanks for the warning, dearest,” Dar’ja said, her arms straining and her eyes bulging as she tried to hold the other paladin up.

“Not at all,” the priest replied as he leapt out of the saddle and let his shaking arms hang down. “I never realized just how strong he is until I had to wrestle with him. How Alayne managed to best him at all will remain a mystery to me.”

“Zerith, that sounds fascinating but maybe you could help me?” she groaned, staggering under Ger’alin’s deadweight. Callie sighed and reached over, grabbing the unconscious man by an arm and pulling him up to his feet. Draping his arm over her shoulders and wrapping an arm around his waist, the Forsaken began to try to drag him some place where he could finish sleeping. Garrosh noticed the activity and motioned for two of his grunts to stop what they were doing and help the Forsaken out.

“I heard you traveled to the sacred mountain,” Garrosh said to Zerith and Dar’ja without prologue. “What did the spirits say?”

Zerith held his tongue and squeezed his wife's hand, requesting her silence as well while he tried to think of an answer that would not cause further problems. Telling the orc chieftain that the sacred mountain was infested with demons might work in their favor. Of course, it might also work against them. The priest wished Ger'alín were coherent; the Blood Knight at least had some basis for understanding the inexplicable system of honor, ordeal, and pride that made up most of orc civilization. "What did the spirits say?" Garrosh pressed, his expression growing more and more glum with the passing seconds.

"We ventured deep into the sacred mountain," the priest said quickly. "But, we do not understand what we saw. We would like to speak with your shaman about it before..."

"Shaman? The shamans who refused to serve the Legion were all killed by my father and the other blood-drinkers! Those who try to practice shamanism now find themselves at odds with the spirits. I know what you must have seen; you must have seen that I *am* unworthy to lead my people. I...will send Grandmother to you. Your friend will be taken to her home. What happened to him?"

"That's what we need to talk to a shaman about," Dar'ja said quickly. "While we were inside the sacred mountain, he collapsed and when he came back around, he wasn't making much sense. Perhaps the spirits revealed something to him that we simply don't have the knowledge to understand."

"Then Grandmother will help you. She is the wisest of us. The spirits still listen to her and speak where she can hear."

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Geyah stepped out of the room where the young elf lay resting. The other three stared up at her. "He will be well," she said softly. "He possesses an unusual attunement to the spirit world."

"Did you understand any of what he was raving about?" Zerith asked.

"Yes," she sighed sadly.

"Has Garrosh changed his mind?" Zerith started to say, biting his tongue when he saw the orc storm out of the other room. "I take it he's still the same." Geyah nodded.

"He refuses to accept that it is not his fault. He will not see it. If anything, Ger'alín has made things worse. Garrosh says that Ger'alín should lead the Mag'har – that the spirits accept the elf while they only haunt him."

"That's insane!" Zerith growled before he could stop himself. "No offense intended, Grandmother. The spirits don't accept Ger'alín. He's just having a reaction to whatever was in that concoction he drank yesterday." Geyah said nothing but glanced back at the doorway. "I apologize," Zerith began again, feeling as if he had just put his foot in his mouth.

"It's not that," the ancient orc matron said. "He would make a fine chieftain. He reminds me of my son. My son was just as determined, strong, honorable as that young man in there. He would stop at nothing to aid our people. He sacrificed himself to give future generations a chance to grow up in a world that did not know the demonic bloodlust...How I wish he were here now. Durotan, your people need you..."

"Durotan was your son?" Callie said, shocked to her toenails. Geyah nodded sadly.

"Everyone calls me 'Grandmother.' I insist on that for, in a way, I am everyone's grandmother. I saved many of the orcs here when Blackhand abandoned them, saying that they were too weak to worry about, that only the strong should survive. But, I never had the chance to see or know my own grandchild. Durotan's wife told me she hoped to have a child before they went through the Dark Portal. She wanted her child to be raised in a world without Gul'dan's dark Horde; that's why they left. I...never heard from them again. I begged

the spirits to be with them, to protect them. They must be dead, and their child, too. Did you know my son?"

"We never had the honor," Zerith answered. "Back in our world, however, he is remembered as a great hero. The orcs of Azeroth named their new homeland 'Durotar' in honor of Durotan. And..." he said, taking a deep breath and wondering if the elder matron would survive the shock of what he was about to reveal. She met his gaze evenly, expectantly, her dark eyes calm. "The Warchief of the Horde in Azeroth, our leader, is the son of Durotan."

"My grandson, the son of my son, lives? I want to see him! I must see him. Please, young elf, ask him to come to me. I am too old to travel to him. Tell him that his blood lives on here, in his shattered homeland. Tell him of the troubles with the spirits. Tell him everything. I will take care of him," she said, seeing the priest's troubled glance towards the doorway to the inner room. "He is a hero to our people. As, it seems, my son is a hero to yours."