

Alayne watched as the others rode off. She grinned and blushed, wondering how diplomatic Ger'alín would manage to be considering he'd gotten no sleep at all. "I tried to tell him," she muttered to herself, "but he wouldn't listen. Not that I really wanted to listen to me either." Turning away, she saw Jez'ral wandering aimlessly around the tier. With a sigh, she walked over to him. "How are you feeling today?"

"Better. I remember my name, now. I'm Jez'ral Cloudslasher."

"That's good," she cooed, speaking as she would to a child.

"Young woman, I lost my memory. I didn't become an idiot. Please don't use that tone of voice with me."

"That's even better," she sighed in relief. "You still can't remember who I am, can you?"

"You're not Mir'el by any chance, are you?"

"No, I am not," she said blushing.

"Actually...you look exactly like a woman I think remember. She was called Miris."

"I know. I'm told I favor her greatly," Alayne sighed. "You don't remember me at all do you?"

"Not really, no," he muttered, looking dejected. "I know that I should, though."

"It's all right, Jez'ral," she said softly. "Why don't we go have a picnic, just the two of us, and you can tell me anything you do remember."

"That sounds...do I like picnics?"

"If you don't, you'll learn to because I do. Come on," she said, gesturing for him to fall in behind her.

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"You're a good cook," Jez'ral complimented the young woman after he swallowed another spoonful of stew. "This stew is delicious."

"Thanks," Alayne sighed.

"You aren't eating any."

"I'm not really hungry," she muttered, setting her bowl aside. "I've got too much on my mind of late."

"Perhaps you would prefer to spend time with the others?" he asked. "You seem to spend a lot of time with me."

"Oh, they've all gone someplace else for a while to take care of some business," Alayne replied. "So, is there anything you recall?"

"Well, I told you about my name. I can kind of remember being in a battle with you and some others and there was this gigantic green monster. He...I think he hit me and that's when I lost my memory. Other than that, I don't remember much of anything when I'm awake. I can recall things in dreams but, when I wake up, it all slips away except for the memory that there was something there."

"What about that book?" she asked, pointing to the treatise he carried with him everywhere. "Do you remember it?"

"No, but it is filled with interesting information about demons."

"What about the name of the person who wrote it? Mir'el? Do you remember who that is?"

"I know that I should," he answered slowly, feeling the panic begin to well within him. "But I can't recall who he or she is. Just that...whenever I see or hear that name, my heart turns over and I want to scream because I should know who Mir'el is! Young woman, would you please tell me?"

"I'm very sorry, Jez'ral," Alayne said gently, "but I can't. The healers..."

“... You mean your husband Ger’alin and your brother Zerith, neither of whom is old enough to be let outside without supervision...” he snorted derisively. Alayne stared at him, her jaw hanging open. “I think that I remember not liking them,” he said, sounding delighted. “Yes, yes, I remember distinctly not liking them at all and wishing you would stop associating with them because... because they were disrespectful to me, once. I guess I like them now,” he sighed. “What would I be doing living alongside them if I disliked them?” Alayne nodded slowly, uncertain of how to respond. “If you’re not going to finish your bowl, may I have it?” he asked.

“Between you and Ger’alin...” she sighed, handing the bowl over. “Jez’ral, I’m going to have to leave you alone for a while. I’m going down to Lower City for a bit to try to clear my mind. Will you promise me that you’ll stay here and won’t go wandering around? I don’t want a repeat of what happened yesterday when you saw the Aldorites.”

“Excuse me for screaming when I saw blue devils walking around,” he muttered sullenly as he slurped down the last bit of stew. “I’ll be fine, young woman. You really will have to tell me your name.”

“Are you certain you can’t remember it?” she asked quietly. Jez’ral stared at her for a long minute before shaking his head. “I’ll be back shortly,” she whispered sadly. “Stay out of trouble.”

The man watched her leave, his heart sinking in his chest. He knew that he should know her. Was she his daughter? A younger sister? Who was she? Was *she* Mir’el? “No, she’s not Mir’el,” he muttered to himself. “If she were, she wouldn’t need to read those books. She’d know what they said. Maybe Mir’el is her father, if I’m not. Light, why can’t I remember who she is?” Standing up, he began walking around the Tier, idly considering taking the elevator again to go down and look at those blue devils the others called ‘draenei.’ Something about them tickled the back of his mind; they were related to something... “Bah! I’ll never remember anything!” he moaned. “I’m going to go take a nap,” he said to no one, patting his stomach and feeling the comfortable lassitude that came after eating more than he should have. “At least when I’m asleep, things seem to make sense.”

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Alayne kicked irritably at loose stones in the pavement, keeping her hands at her sides and a careful grip on her money pouch. Callie had warned her about the pickpockets who watched for the unwary on the underside of Shattrath. The naaru and the draenei boasted that anyone was welcome in the sanctuary of the City of Light. Alayne snorted and wished that their welcome didn’t have to extend to criminals. “Or that they’d at least send some guards down here. Light, this place is filthy,” she muttered, her nose wrinkling in distaste. “I should have gone to Nagrand,” she sighed. “Jez’ral is fine by himself and, frankly, I’m getting tired of his not knowing who I am and my not being allowed to tell him anything. I should have gone. I hope they’ll be back by this evening,” she whispered, wiping tears of self-pity from her cheeks. “I had no idea just how alone I would feel with all of them gone. Light, woman,” she growled to herself, “it’s barely been two hours. Get a hold of yourself.”

Walking through the bazaar, she stopped to finger some of the thick carpets the weavers had, showing their skill and artistry. “This would go great in the living room,” she muttered beneath her breath, sighing as she let it go and continued her stroll. For long moments, she wandered, her gaze turned inward as she lost herself in a daydream about all of them moving into the house in Nagrand. She grinned and laughed to herself, seeing Jez’ral, his memory completely restored, getting upset and flustered because one of Zerith’s daughters had smeared jam all over some text he was working on. Mir’el would be there, too, laughing at whatever they were up to, happily buried in adopted grandchildren. She, Dar’ja, and Callie

would be plotting some elaborate prank that would completely backfire on them, and Ger'alín and Zerith would be working with the Scryers and the Aldor to establish better relations once Prince Kael'Thas came to his senses and gave up his delusional plan to summon the Burning Legion into Azeroth. They'd be free to come and go from Quel'Thalas, retiring out to Nagrand only because it was such a pleasant place to get away from it all – especially after the research she and Jez'ral were working on led to a way to re-ignite the Sunwell. She'd spend her days teaching arcane techniques to the kids, able to feel the warm glow from the distant font of sin'dorei magic...

Stumbling, she threw out her hands to regain her balance, catching herself just before she landed on her face. Feeling something moving beneath her legs, she rolled over, surprised to see an elven girl, no older than five or six, staring up at her in terror. "Are you okay?" she asked.

"I'm so sorry, Miss!" the little girl cried. "I was just trying to get the ball that they kicked over there! The Matron says we should look both ways before we cross the street and I always forget. Please don't tell her; I'll get in so much trouble!"

"Whoa, calm down," Alayne said. "I won't tell anyone anything. I should have been watching where I was going. Are you alright?" she asked again, examining the girl closely. Her light blonde hair floated around her face, the fine strands slipping out of the braids her mother must have plaited to try to keep it from getting dirty. That attempt had failed; the girl's clothes were dusty and torn, as if she'd been playing rough. Sweat and tears trapped the dirt to her face; her futile attempts to wipe it away just smearing mud across her cheeks. The girl's hands and knees were red and bleeding where she'd skinned them when Alayne had tripped over her. Alayne glanced at her own palms, smiling ruefully at the asphalt burns stinging the skin of her hands. Standing up, she bent over to dust her knees off and reached out a hand to pull the girl to her own feet. "Where are your parents?" she asked.

"I... I don't have any," the girl muttered. "I live with the Matron at the orphanage. Please don't tell her I didn't look both ways; she'll get very mad at me."

"No, she won't," Alayne muttered, wondering where this orphanage was. "Show me where you live; I'll take you home so you can get those cuts cleaned up." The girl stared at her for a moment before glancing down at her own palms and knees. She lifted her ripped and ragged skirts and stared at them in horror.

"Oh no," she breathed. "Matron will be so upset with me! I can't go back now!" she cried as she started to run away. A nearby group of children started laughing and taunting the little girl.

"Sar'la, you're really going to get it this time!" a draenei boy laughed, pointing at the panicking girl.

"Girls don't play with boys!" an elven boy shouted. "See, you just get hurt whenever you try!" Alayne glared at them, her gaze rolling off of them like water off the back of a duck. Reaching down before the girl could bolt, she grabbed hold of her collar, nearly strangling the child before the warlock could get her to stay put.

"Is your name Sar'la?" she asked, squatting down to look the girl in the eye. The girl nodded, casting her glance back towards the other children and chewing her lip worriedly. "Well, Sar'la, I'm Alayne. Do you live around here?" The girl nodded, looking confused. "Good. I'm not from around here," Alayne continued, "and, if you could just show me where everything is and tell me about this place, I'd really appreciate it. I keep getting lost," she grinned. Sar'la nodded and smiled gratefully. Alayne closed her eyes and whispered the incantation to summon her fel steed, stifling a laugh when she heard the girl gasp and the other children begin whispering in awe. Reaching down, she plunked the girl on the fel steed's back and leapt up behind her. "Now," she said to Sar'la, "this is a magical horse. You just tell him where to go and he goes there. I'll bet none of the other kids have gotten to ride a

horse that can do that,” she grinned, swallowing her laughter with an effort of will when the girl began talking to the horse. Using her legs, careful not to spoil the illusion, Alayne let the orphaned child lead her on a tour of the City of Light.

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“Mir’el, please, come down from there!” Jez’ral shouted up the steep hill. “Please don’t make me climb up there after you,” he moaned, eyeing the embankment warily. He waited for several minutes, hearing nothing but silence, before tucking his shoulder-length black hair behind his ears and walking up to the hill. Digging his fingers into the soft dirt, he began pulling himself up the way the other man had gone, his eyes clenched shut so hard that his ears rang. “Mir’el, for the love of all that is holy, say something!”

“I think,” the other man called down, “that we’re lost.”

“Something *useful!*”

“Okay then, we’re most definitely lost. Wait where you are. I’m coming down.”

“Mir’el, get me off of this Light-forsaken cliff!” Jez’ral shouted, wincing when his words echoed back to him. There was no telling what was waiting out there, listening to potential prey panic.

“Jez’ral, it’s not even twenty feet,” Mir’el sighed, jumping lightly out of the tree he’d climbed to get a better look at the surrounding area. “I know, I know. You’re afraid of heights. You really should get over that. It’s been ten years now and Tel’ar has apologized for it repeatedly.”

“ShutupandgetmeoffthiscliffbeforeIfallanddie!” he shrieked, trembling because he’d made the mistake of opening his eyes and looking down. The ground seemed very far away.

“Keep your eyes closed,” Mir’el muttered, laying down at the top of the hill and reaching down as far as he could. “Give me one of your hands.” Jez’ral freed one from the dirt and slowly inched it up as far as he could, ready to dig back into the cliff if he felt the slightest disturbance. “That’s my skin, not the hill!” Mir’el shouted. Grunting with the effort involved, he heaved the other man up over the edge of the hill and sat back to catch his breath. “You can open your eyes now. You’re up.”

“Thank you. Now, did you say we were lost?” Jez’ral asked shakily.

“I did.”

“May I remind you that I said eight times that this short cut through Zul’Aman was a stupid idea? Master Bor’in is going to kill both of us if we ever get out of here. Miris is going to have a fit, too!”

“I’ll handle Miris,” Mir’el replied. “And, I’d like to remind you that I told you nine times not to follow me.”

“As if I’m going to let my best friend go wandering into troll territory alone. Light, why did we come out here to begin with? I’ve forgotten what with the worrying about whether or not a troll is going to jump out and eat both of us.”

“Fireberries,” Mir’el said absently. “I came out here to get fireberries for Father. He said we were running low.”

“Mir’el, I swear, as soon as we’re safe, I’m going to kill you. That is, if your fiancée doesn’t kill you first. Fireberries! In Zul’Aman?!”

“Well, the wild ones are the most potent,” Mir’el replied defensively. “And I told you...”

“I know, nine times not to follow you. I’m starting to wish I’d listened.”

“You should try backtracking,” Mir’el said suddenly. “I swear, Jez’ral, you know every tree personally. I get lost going into the garden. You backtrack, figure the way out of here, and then come back here for me.”

“And leave you alone while I wander, alone, in ZUL-LIGHT-FORSAKEN-AMAN?!” Jez’ral roared.

“Ach, you’ll do better on your own anyway,” Mir’el muttered sullenly. “All I ever do is get you in trouble.”

“Shut up. I don’t want to hear another word out of you unless it’s an incantation to zip us straight back to Quel’Thalas where we belong.” Mir’el snapped his mouth shut and began staring at his fingernails, sighing in frustration. “Now, what is going on with you lately? Ever since Master Bor’in announced your engagement to Miris, you’ve been acting oddly – even by your incredible standards of ‘odd.’” Mir’el continued to study his nails, picking dirt out from under them. “Okay, moron,” Jez’ral snorted. “You can talk.”

“Nothing has been going on with me,” Mir’el answered. “I’m still rather upset that Father didn’t bother to even warn me, though. I know our family has done the arranged-marriage thing since...since...since forever but I’d still have liked a little warning.”

“Why? Because Miris is a commoner? Don’t you start with that, too.”

“That doesn’t bother me at all, actually,” Mir’el sighed. “I mean, look at you. You’re my best friend and you’re not completely... I mean... Your mother wasn’t exactly...no offense intended, old friend, but...”

“I know. She was the cook. I think having that held over my head by all of those other little hellions would be enough to let you know that I remember that!”

“Don’t let them bother you. At least she was married to your father before you came along. Most of those other brats couldn’t make the same claim,” Mir’el giggled, his eyes sparkling with amusement. “Oh, it made them so mad when I would tell them that. That was fun.”

“As pleasant as remembering seeing you put those brutes in their places is, do you think you could tell me just how we’re getting home?”

“You are going to climb down from here and backtrack. I will stay up here and wait for you.”

“I already told you; that plan is stupid. Come up with another one.”

“Well, then I suppose we could wait for the trolls to get us. That’s the only other way out of here I see.”

“Or we could climb down together and find our way out.”

“I’d just get us more lost. Face it, Jez’ral. Father’s right. I’m a complete failure at everything.”

“You are not! Master Bor’in...well, he’s wrong. Just look at how quickly you picked up those...those...what were they called? The demons you enslaved and made paint the living room?”

“Voidwalkers. And, being good at demonic control is hardly something to be proud of. The only reason it’s tolerated at all is because my family has been studying it since the Sundering. It’s our tradition. That’s why I have to marry Miris,” Mir’el said, as if by rote. “She’s got so much raw talent for arcane workings. Our blood is getting a little thin. I have to do my duty and carry on the lineage of the Darkreavers. I am the last of the line right now.” After a lengthy silence, Mir’el said suddenly, “Does all of that sound as stupid and pompous to you as it does to me?”

“I’m just glad I won’t have to listen to those lectures for at least another ten years,” Jez’ral laughed dryly. “I’m also glad I’m not my father’s only son. Hearing that nonsense second-hand from you is bad enough.”

“Just pray that you don’t come home one evening to be told to dress up, be taken to a feast, and learn that you’re going to marry someone you stumbled across at the Runestones when she was barely old enough to have mastered walking.”

“Good times, those,” Jez’ral giggled.

“Oh, be quiet. You weren’t much better at walking either.”

“I was so! I was six when that happened. She was only three.”

“And I was twenty-five. You both were little klutzes. I felt like such a buffoon that day; two kids clinging to my legs while I tried to understand the arcane wardings laid on the stones to shield us from demonic attention. And, the whole time, I had either you or her constantly asking, ‘Miwel, whatcha doin?’”

“And ‘why?’ Don’t forget ‘why.’”

“She preferred ‘how come’ and ‘what’s that?’”

“Her father nearly passed out when he saw her riding on your shoulders,” Jez’ral laughed. “A noble, bringing his little runaway home.”

“It was even worse a few days later when my father rode out to their farm to announce that he was going to sponsor Miris’s entry into the Academy. I thought the man was going to die of a heart attack. I wonder, how far back was Father planning this whole thing? Ah well,” he sighed, rubbing a hand over his face and knocking the beaded band he wore around his forehead askew. “If all goes well, it will be over, soon,” he whispered, too softly for Jez’ral to hear. “Let’s get going,” he said aloud. “I’ll climb down first, to catch you if you fall.” Suiting actions to his words, Mir’el scaled back down the hill and stood at the bottom. Jez’ral peeked over the edge, his face going white. “Come on!”

“It’s...really high.”

“You’re the one who wanted to get out of here.”

“I know but...it’s so high.”

“Jez’ral...,” Mir’el glared, tapping his foot angrily.

“Just give me a few minutes. I’ll be down. Just a few minutes.”

“Actually,” Mir’el said, glancing off to the south, “you stay where you are. Don’t follow me anymore, Jez’ral. I want you to go home. Tell Father I died fighting,” he shouted over his shoulder, running into the woods before Jez’ral could work up the nerve to climb down.

“Mir’el, where are you going? What are you doing? Mir’el?!” Jez’ral called after him. “Oh, don’t leave me up here alone,” he moaned, burying his face in the grass at the edge of the cliff. “Mir’el? Mir’el! Come back here! Oh, Light,” he sighed, turning and beginning to climb back down slowly, clinging to the side of the cliff with all his might. “Mir’el, get back here! Mir’el!” he shouted, his foot slipping. “Oh no,” he groaned as he felt himself beginning to fall...

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“Ouch!” Jez’ral cried out as he landed on the floor. Blinking, he stared at the ground for a moment before recalling that he was in Shattrath, in his room. “Zul’Aman,” he muttered as he twisted around and tried to untangle the sheets from his legs and robes. “I...I remember!” he brightened. “I remember who Mir’el is! He’s my best friend. And...that young woman I’m out here with must be Miris...no, she couldn’t be,” he said, his brow furrowing as he reasoned it out. “She’s far too young and...she’s married to that big man, Ger’alin. All right, I don’t remember. Not everything, at least,” he sighed, rubbing his nose. “Now, when did that happen? We couldn’t have been very old. My hair was just barely clearing my shoulders, back then,” he said, staring down at his waist-length tresses. “And, if the bad feeling I get from just thinking of Zul’Aman is any indication, we would have had to be in that ‘young and immortal’ phase of life to even think about going in there.”

Pushing himself up to his feet and catching himself before he could trip when the sheets tangled around his ankles, Jez’ral stood up and began rummaging through his things, looking for anything that would help him remember more. Books and vials of reddish liquid –

blood, he thought it was – did nothing to jog his recollection. A vial of clear liquid that gave off a warm glow tickled the back of his mind. He shoved it in a pocket, intending to ask the young woman who he wanted to call Miris what it was. Sighing, he left his room in shambles, striding out into the hallway, his hands behind his back and his expression severe while he tried to force memories to return.

Outside the inn, he heard laughter. Glancing up, he threw back his head and roared when he saw the young woman being overrun by children. One child, a elven girl, seemed to have adopted her and was tugging at her skirts, pointing and babbling on. The others; elven, draenei, orc, and tauren, surrounded the pair, clamoring for the woman's attention and asking something about a magical horse. "Having trouble there?" he asked amicably.

"Jez'ral," she said slyly, "just the person I wanted to see. Hey, kids," she called out, "he's got a magic horse too. Let's see if he'll take you for a ride." Jez'ral blinked and stared at her, his eyes turning cold. She grinned, winked, and walked over to him, going onto her tiptoes to whisper in his ear. "It's easy. Clear your mind, reach out into the Nether as if you were reaching out for arcane energy, and use the following command," she explained, telling him an incantation to use. His eyes widened in shock; he knew this spell. Stepping back, he summoned the fel steed and smiled, tears springing to his eyes as he stroked its nose.

"I remember," he sighed. "I remember when I learned this. Mir'el...he thought I would never be able to make it work. I spent days trying and the creature would slip right out of my grasp."

"You remember?" Alayne asked, patting him on the shoulder fondly. "What else do you remember?"

"Getting lost in Zul'Aman looking for wild fireberries," he muttered warmly. "It had to have been well before you were born."

"You remember when I was born?"

"No. I don't even remember your name. I think...though, no," he sighed. "I don't know enough. Now, why did you want me to do this?" he asked, gesturing to the horse. Alayne bit her lip and twisted her fingers as if a tad worried about the wisdom of this idea. "What is it? For helping me remember this, I'll do whatever you want – within reason," he added quickly.

"Well, I've kind of bitten off more than I can chew with these kids," she said in an undertone, pointing behind her. "It started with me letting Sar'la guide my fel steed; the other kids were picking on her and she was so afraid she was going to get in trouble...I felt sorry for her." Jez'ral nodded impatiently. "After I'd let her ride with me all over Shattrath, she wanted me to let some of her friends come up here and ride around. If you could just let a couple ride up with you and just direct the fel steed where ever they tell it to go, that would really help me get out of this mess."

"Sounds simple enough," he laughed as he climbed onto the fel steed's back. Alayne grinned in relief and, placing a firm, experienced hand beneath the horse's jaw, led the beast over to the crowd of orphans.

"Jez'ral here is going to let some of you ride his magic horse," she announced to applause and cheers. "Remember what I said earlier, though. We take turns; only one trip around the Terrace of Light and Lower City and then it's someone else's turn."

"I got to ride more," Sar'la bragged importantly. "And she told me all about her adventures, too. She's my best friend." The other children stared at their comrade, expressions ranging from awe to envy. Alayne clucked her tongue against the roof of her mouth, wondering if she was setting the best example for them. Shaking her head, she picked up one of the other children, set him on her fel steed's back, and climbed up behind him.

"Remember," she said again, "stay here. Anyone who wanders off will not be having that dessert I promised to make for all of you." The children nodded in agreement and she

smiled to herself, whispering to the tauren boy in front of her that he needed to tell the horse to go.

“Horse, go to the Terrace,” the orc girl seated in front of Jez’ral said imperiously.

“Does he have a name?” she whispered to the warlock, sounding worried.

“Hm, I don’t remember,” he admitted.

“You don’t remember your horse’s name?” she said, shocked.

“I don’t remember a lot of things, little girl,” he answered.

“Did you fall down and hit your head? Do you have *ham-knee-see-ah*?” she wondered, sounding the word out and proud of herself for remembering the term. Jez’ral barked a quick laugh and nodded.

“Something like that,” he grinned ruefully.

“Well, okay,” she muttered, thinking furiously. “Then, we’ll pretend that your horse’s name is Durotan. He’s a hero, not like that bad old Hellscream,” she confided. “And I’m his daughter. I’m a princess and, one day, he’ll come back for me and we’ll kill all the evil demons and I’ll make the world whole again and everyone will want to be my best friend.”

“My horse is your father?” he asked, putting on his best befuddled expression.

“No, silly. Durotan the Hero is,” she giggled. “You named your horse after him because he’s so brave and strong and wise and powerful.”

“Oh, I see,” he said, mock-seriously.

“Durotan, go down the ramp,” she ordered the horse. Jez’ral listened to her with half a mind, his thoughts turning inward. The names ‘Durotan’ and ‘Hellscream’ tickled something in the back of his mind. He gritted his teeth in frustration when he couldn’t force the memories to come up. The knowing that he knew but not knowing was driving him mad. Just as he was about to give up, something moving in the shadow of the structure dominating the Terrace of Light caught his eye. He gasped when he saw a hulking troll, spear-points over his shoulder, strolling towards them. He remembered...

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“Where I am?” he asked thickly, rubbing his head.

“You are staying in the best accommodations that Zul’Aman has to offer to the quel’dorei,” Mir’el joked. “I must say, this is the nicest cage I’ve ever been put in. Very roomy with a great view of the bonfire and spit we’re going to be roasted on.”

“Please be joking, please be joking, please be joking!” Jez’ral moaned as he opened his eyes. “You’re not joking,” he sighed.

“I told you not to follow me.”

“I didn’t! I fell off that cliff. That’s the last thing I remember.”

“That explains why your nose is broken,” Mir’el sighed. “I thought they had beaten you up. Lay still,” he muttered.

“We have got to get out of here.”

“I’m working on that,” Mir’el growled. “At least, I think I can get you out of here.”

“We’re both getting out of here.”

“Jez’ral, I’m not going to fit under the cage,” Mir’el muttered, pulling the other man up so he could see the hole. “I started digging that a few hours ago when they dragged you in here. This is going to be a long shot anyway, but here’s the plan. I’ll summon a demon when the guards change out in about fifteen minutes. I’ll let the thing run amuck; that should pull everyone away from here.”

“Unless, of course, the demon decides to come this way.”

“Try not to be a total pessimist. Anyway, I’ll do that to distract them. You squeeze through there and run out of here. With luck, they won’t be able to find you in the forest.”

“I’m not leaving you here to die.”

“You don’t really have a choice. I want you to get out of here and go back and tell Father something that will assuage his pride. Tell him to adopt Miris; her father will be honored beyond reckoning.”

“Mir’el, what is wrong with you? Are you saying that you want to die?”

“No, I’m saying that I’m just too tired to try to make that hole wide enough for me to fit through and I’ve accepted that this is how I’m going to meet my end.”

“And running off into the forest, leaving me up there on that cliff alone... what was that? Mir’el, stop lying to me! I know you better than anyone in this world. I’ve been following you around since I could crawl. I’m not leaving you out here to die.”

“Jez’ral, for once in your life, just do what I ask and leave.”

“Oh, da pretty elfie be awake,” one of the guards sneered. “I wonder if da pretty elfie scream pretty when we stick him,” he said, reaching over his shoulder for a spear. “He cry like a baby when we find him.”

“Sorry for getting you into this, old friend,” Mir’el sighed. “Hey, broken tusk! Yeah, you, the ugly one,” he shouted at the troll. “Why don’t you come in here and say that to my face?”

“Oh, da other elfie be protectin’ his baby,” the second guard snorted. “You protect little elfie from da mean troll?”

“Can it, big nose. Did anyone ever tell you that you smell like a human?”

“What you say?”

“I said you smell like a human! And look at you, so short there! Was your mother a dwarf?”

“Mir’el, what are you doing?” Jez’ral asked worriedly.

“Getting you out of here,” he said in a hushed whisper. “Yeah, that’s right. I said your mother was a dwarf and your father stank like a human! I’ll bet they conceived you in a pig-pen! That’s why you’re so flabby and too scared to come in here and face us like true warriors!” The troll guards stormed into the hut and ripped open the cage, crowding in, their spears pointed at Mir’el. Jez’ral stared at them in horror, seeing the points of their weapons pressing against Mir’el’s throat on the verge of drawing blood. The other quel’dorei stared them down defiantly, his eyes filled with bitter humor as he continued his barrage of insults.

“Little elfie gonna die,” the troll muttered darkly, throwing his spear to the ground and cracking his knuckles. Mir’el changed his stance, raising his hands as if he was going to wrestle with the big beast. The man closed his eyes and quickly muttered an incantation. “Little elfie say his prayers?” the troll taunted. His feral eyes went wide when he smelt the scent of a demon behind him. Turning, the trolls gasped in horror at the voidwalker and began backing away from it, backing into the cage and into Mir’el.

“Run now, Jez’ral!”

“Not without you!”

“Before they get over their... fear,” Mir’el sighed as the trolls let loose their battle cries and ran at the demon. “Great plan, Mir’el-you-idiot,” he muttered to himself.

“Let’s get out of here before they realize they’ve left the cage open! Come on, Mir’el, we can make it easily!”

“You go. Go now!”

“Very well, old friend,” Jez’ral sighed, standing up. He walked over and stood in front of his friend, putting his hands on Mir’el’s shoulders as if to say good-bye.

“Tell Father I...Jez’ral, what are you doing?” he gasped, choking.

“Like I’d leave you here,” Jez’ral muttered, tightening his grip on Mir’el’s neck, wanting to wring it. When the other man’s eyes rolled back in his head, Jez’ral lifted him over his shoulder and made his way out of the hut. The entire troll village had been called out to

fight the voidwalker; none of the trolls so much as glanced in his direction. Whispering a quick prayer of thanksgiving, Jez'ral crept through the shadows to the forest where he began running north, hoping to avoid any humanoids until he'd crossed the border into Quel'Thalas.

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"Mister, are you okay?" the orc girl asked as they rode the elevator back up to the Scryer's Tier.

"Oh, what?" Jez'ral asked absently, "I'm fine. Quite well."

"Whatcha been thinkin' about?"

"Oh, just remembering something that happened when I was a lad."

"I thought you had ham-knee-see-ah," she said reproachfully.

"I do...I did...You know, little girl, I'm not quite sure anymore," he sighed.

"You took your time," Alayne muttered as she strode over and lifted the orc child down from the fel steed. "I was starting to wonder if you'd gotten lost. What's the matter, Jez'ral? Look, just three more and you can go back to doing whatever it was you were doing earlier," she grimaced, hoping the man wasn't going to back out of his agreement now.

"Young woman, I'm going to ask you a question and I want you to answer it and Legion take whatever the others said," he snapped briskly, leaving no room for argument. Alayne stared up at him; he sounded more like his old self than he had in days. "Why would two elves go into Zul'Aman?"

"A deathwish?" she murmured, shrugging. "No one goes there anymore. The Amani shut themselves away after the last war. They don't like trespassers. Why do you ask?"

"Personal reasons," he grimaced, trying to recall the rest of the story. "How many more did you say? Three? I'll hold you to it." She grinned up at him, a self-satisfied grin that made him do a double-take. He'd seen that expression before. Mulling it over while she sat a draenei boy-child in front of him, he directed the horse with half a mind while glancing over his shoulder at her, trying to remember where he'd seen her smile at him like that before...

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"They came back last night," Mir'el rejoiced, his hands on his hips and looking exceptionally proud of himself. Jez'ral glanced up at the other man absently and then turned his attention back to the ledger. "I've sent her a note inviting them for supper tonight. We'll have to clean out the dining room. I'll go see if the enchantment on the broom is still holding; the dust bunnies have probably developed intelligence since the last time we used it was during Father's funeral."

Yes, I remember. This was years later. Master Bor'in had died and Mir'el had sold off most of his family's estates. He hired me to run the arcanist shop he'd kept. It'd been his way of telling me he forgave me for not letting him die all those years ago. That had been between us for a long time even though he'd never mentioned it...even though...

"We're low on arcane dust," Jez'ral muttered as he marked a tally on the page in front of him. "We need to order more from Dalaran. We also need to put out a notice for silverleaf, firebloom, and mageroyal."

"Did you hear me?"

"You want the dining room cleaned. Why?" he asked, looking up. Mir'el grinned at him, bemused, rolled his eyes and walked away wagging his head. "Whatever," Jez'ral sighed as he turned back to the inventory.

"They'll be bringing their little girl. Do we have any toys that a fourteen-month-old could play with?"

“We have a crate of miniature golems that never sold. There may be a few dollies left over from Winter Veil as well. That reminds me,” he said, making a note in the margin of the ledger. “We should definitely order more of those and see if they have different kinds. I couldn’t keep them on the shelves after Hallow’s End.”

“Appropriate for a fourteen-month-old, Jez’ral!”

“Well, how the devil should I know?” he snapped. “Shouldn’t the mother know what’s safe for her child? Do not make me stop doing this inventory to come up there and straighten out a mess, Mir’el. We’re already a week late on this because you can’t be serious. What?”

“I’m going to clean your ears out for you,” Mir’el laughed. “You’ve not been listening to a word I’ve said!” Marching back into the stockroom, he grabbed Jez’ral’s head in his hands and bit his ear affectionately.

“Not in the store, Mir’el! And not while I’m trying to take inventory!”

“I presume I have your attention now,” Mir’el grinned. “Listen closely to the words that are coming out of my mouth,” he droned. “They are coming over for supper. Clean the dining room. Find something to entertain their toddler. She’s fourteen months old.”

“I’ll get right on it,” Jez’ral mumbled, stepping away from the other man.

“Fine, fine. Finish the inventory. I’ll take care of the rest,” Mir’el sighed, striding up to the front of the store. Jez’ral watched him go, laughing silently before turning back to his ledger. Mir’el didn’t care if the store turned a profit or not; he just wanted an excuse to be eccentric. It was up to Jez’ral to see that they actually had things to sell when customers came in. Tiptoeing down to the end of the aisle, he pushed open a chest filled with children’s toys. Pocketing a miniature golem, one of the human dolls, and an enchanted story-book with talking pictures, he let the chest close silently and wondered what Mir’el would come up with.

“Mir’el? Are you here?” a familiar voice called out from the front of the store. Jez’ral’s ears twitched as he recognized tones he hadn’t heard in years. “Mir’el? I got your note, Mir’el?”

“Mir’el, customer!” Jez’ral shouted loudly enough to be heard in the apartment above the shop. He giggled when he heard hurried footsteps running down the stairs and out into the store front. Glancing out the curtained door, he watched as Mir’el ran and grabbed Miris up in a fond embrace, twirling the woman around in delight.

“Miris, my dear, you have been missed!” Mir’el laughed. “Where is that husband of yours?”

“Oh, Tal’ar is reporting to the guards this morning. He’s got a meeting with his old Captain about getting his commission back.”

“Captain Remar? I shall speak with him as well. Tal’ar deserves to be restored to his place in the guard force.”

“You’ve already done so much for us, Mir’el.”

“Oh, please, Miris. It’s my fault you were banished to begin with. I practically shoved you into Tal’ar’s arms when I saw the way you two looked at each other. I was delighted to hear that the pair of you had run off to Lordaeron and gotten married. I couldn’t believe it when Father had the Council of Silvermoon exile both of you for breach of contract.”

“How is Master Bor’in? Did you ever tell him the truth about why you didn’t want to marry me? Light’s honor, Mir’el, I was stunned when it hit me that he might not have known.”

“Father died earlier this year,” Mir’el said softly. “And, he knew. I think everyone knew. Even *Jez’ral* knew and he’s a complete dunce!”

“That reminds me,” Jez’ral shouted from the back, “we’re low on enchanting rods as well!”

“Still following him around like a shadow, Jez’ral?” Miris called out fondly.

“Someone’s got to keep him out of trouble! Might as well be me.”

“Jez’ral, I do not get into trouble...” Mir’el protested, setting the man up for their favorite joke.

“Zul’Aman?”

“I got lost. Trees all look the same!”

“Uh-huh. What about sinking the boat in Lake Elrendar?”

“That was not my fault! I was trying to get dry!”

“Wood and fire, idiot! Do you want me to bring up the time we were visiting Dalaran and you...”

“No!”

“And let’s not forget when you dragged home a sack of itchweed thinking it was holly! Neither of us could don robes for a week after that!”

“Ah, but that was when we...”

“NOT IN THE STORE, MIR’EL!” Jez’ral yelled, hiding a smile.

“The two of you?” Miris asked Mir’el, gesturing. He smiled and nodded, making her double over with laughter. “I should have expected that one. You’ve been inseparable all the long years I’ve known you. Still, if your father knew, why did he arrange a marriage for you?”

“Because I’m the last of the line,” Mir’el replied. “Unless, of course, I kidnap and adopt that little girl of yours. Where is she? Did you leave her at home?”

“Oh no, she’s right over... Alayne, where are you?” Miris said, her voice rising an octave with worry. “I swear, ever since she started walking, if I set her down for a moment and turn my back... Alayne!”

“I’ll go lock the door,” Mir’el whispered worriedly, hurrying to the entrance and looking to see if the little girl had run outside. Jez’ral turned his attention back to the shelves, shaking his head in irritation when he reached the disordered robe rack. Human sizes were mixed in with elven and dwarven sizes. Setting the ledger on the floor, he rolled his sleeves up and began arranging the rack in its proper order. He frowned when one of the smaller human robes hung up when he tried to lift it. Tugging, he felt a gentle resistance, as if something were holding on to the hem. Shoving the other robes aside, he jumped in fright when he saw a tiny fist gripping the hem of the robes. Shaking his head, he bent down to see a toddler hiding among the fabric, staring at him with large blue eyes.

“Hewwo,” she said gravely.

“Hello,” he replied. “You’re not supposed to be back here.”

She blinked at him, looking confused. “I walk,” she said proudly, standing up and demonstrating.

“Very nice,” he muttered, hanging the robes where they belonged and quickly rearranging the rest of the rack. Bending down to scoop up his ledger, he saw that she was sitting in the middle of the aisle, one of her shoes pulled off in her hand as she waved it around. “You should go to your mother.”

“Up?” she asked, lifting her hands over her head.

“I suppose I’ll have to unless I want to trip over you. I’m Jez’ral,” he winked, picking her up and balancing her on his hip.

“Jesthal?”

“Close enough. Miris, I think I found something of yours back here,” he laughed as he set the ledger on a lower shelf and reached up to shove the jars of wintersbite aside as he counted them, noting that they would probably need more as soon as the plant came back into season.

“Jesthal, what that?” she asked, pointing.

“Wintersbite.”

“Winnersithe,” she repeated, making his lips quirk in an amused smile.

“Jez’ral, have you seen...Miris, I think I found her,” Mir’el said, heaving a sigh of relief. The woman came running, crashing into Mir’el in her haste and putting a trembling hand over her chest when she saw her daughter clinging to Jez’ral.

“Alayne, what have I told you about running off?” Miris said breathlessly.

“Mama,” Alayne grinned, pointing at the jars on the shelf, “winnersithe.”

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Jez’ral shook his head as if to clear it, wondering if his suspicions were correct. “That can’t be Alayne,” he muttered beneath his breath. “Can it? The little girl who used to come in and make a mess of Mir’el’s shop all the time? The one who chased a miniature golem all over his house that evening and scared us all to death when we couldn’t find her? Then made us laugh when her father did find her curled up, sucking her thumb, asleep beneath Master Bor’in’s old desk?”

He reached down into his pocket, feeling a sudden surge of heat burning the side of his leg. The vial of clear water glowed, pulsating, emitting a strange sense of power and tranquility. “Are you the one making me remember?” he asked the vial, causing the draenei child in front of him to look up in confusion. “Whatever you are, bless you,” he whispered, pocketing it again, wincing and wishing his robes were thicker as the heat from the vial burned his leg.

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Alayne sighed as she brushed her hair and glanced at the window. The sun had long since set. Ger’alin and the others still had not returned. She’d lingered over supper, picking at her food until Tau’re threatened to tell Ger’alin she’d not been eating. Pulling the window closed, she sighed and sat down on the bed, her arms crossed over her stomach and one finger tapping idly against her other arm. “I guess they had to stay in Nagrand,” she sighed finally, letting her head lean back against the wall. “I...hope they’re all well. I have the strangest feeling that...”

“Alayne!”

“Ger’alin?” she said, sitting up and looking around quickly. “Where are you?” Striding over to the door, she pulled it open and ducked her head out, glancing up and down the hallway. “Jez’ral,” she asked, seeing the man heading to his room, “did you hear anything just now?”

“No, Alayne, I didn’t,” he said, grinning at her.

“I must be hearing things,” she muttered to herself.

“Yes, Alayne, you must be,” he agreed.

“Good night, Jez’ral,” she sighed, turning back towards her room.

“Good night, Alayne,” he said, placing emphasis on her name. He blinked in confusion when she closed the door behind her. He’d been so certain she was that little girl whom he’d begun to recall. There was so much he wanted to tell her, to see if he was remembering correctly; some he prayed he was remembering wrongly. Breathing out through his nostrils in frustration, he stumped down the hallway, turning when he heard a door creak open behind him.

“Um, Jez’ral?” she asked, looking a little embarrassed. “Did you just call me ‘Alayne?’”

“I did.”

“So, you remember me?”

“I do!” he laughed. “I remember so much about you now!”

“Like what?” she asked, a broad grin splitting her face from ear to ear.

“That you hate flying, for one thing. Oh, and that you could crunch away rock candies like no other child I’d ever known. You were a real biter when you were little,” he said, laughing when she blushed. “Your poor mother and father didn’t know what to do when you started gnawing the furniture! Mir’el used to keep a whole jar of wintersbite and earthroot set aside for you when you were teething. I remember when you used to come in our store...”

“Wait, that was you? You’re Jesthal?”

“Yes! And Mir’el is Murl!”

“Oh Light! I never thought...I had wondered what happened to you! Mother used to take me into your store all the time if I was good. Then, one day, I noticed we hadn’t been there in a while even though I’d been really good and she said that you two had had to go away to fight the orcs and demons. Why didn’t you say anything when you found me in Menethil?” she demanded gleefully, walking over and pinching the man on the arm.

“I...I don’t remember that,” he admitted, putting a momentary damper on the conversation. “I *do* remember you chasing a miniature golem all over Mir’el’s house, though. I set it on the floor in front of you and you poked at it, not quite certain what to make of it, getting bored with it quite quickly when it didn’t do anything. Then, Mir’el muttered the word to make it start and it stood up and poked you back. You and it traded pokes for a while until you stood up and waddled off a bit, trying to climb on your father’s leg. The golem followed you so you started jogging; it chased you. You chortled and squealed and ran circles around the room, trying to get away from it but always stopping to see if it was still following you. Then I whispered the word that made it lurch off on its own and *you* chased it all over the house. ‘Hey sop, you!’ you said a thousand times that night.”

“I’m afraid I don’t remember that at all,” Alayne giggled.

“Not surprising. You weren’t even a year and a half old.”

“I wonder why your memories are coming back now?” she mused, tapping a finger against her nose as she stared at her former teacher.

“I don’t know, but I suspect this is helping,” he said, reaching into his pocket and pulling out the vial of clear liquid. Alayne plucked it from his hand, juggling it until she could work her sleeve over her palm. “It’s warm, I know.”

“What is it?”

“I don’t know. I was hoping you would.”

“I’ve never seen anything like it,” she said. “It looks like water but it feels like...it feels like some form of arcane energy. Not the usual kind that you find in the wild; something more potent, more pure. Or, at least it did,” she muttered, staring at the vial in consternation. It had gone cool again and the power emanating from it seemed to have evaporated. She knew she had seen it before but could not recall where or in what context. “I suppose you should keep this with you. We’ll take it to one of the Magisters tomorrow. Perhaps they’ll know more about it.”

“I hope so,” he nodded, pocketing the vial once more. “Good night, Alayne,” he grinned.

“Good night, Jesthal.”

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“Sweetheart, it’s just a *dream*,” Alayne groaned, reaching over to pat Ger’alin on the back. She jerked up quickly when her hand landed on the mattress. “But...I could have sworn...that’s it,” she said resolutely. “It’s finally happened. I’ve gone completely crazy.”

“Alayne?” Jez’ral asked, poking his head into the room. “Are you feeling better?”

“Oh, I’m fine,” she muttered, rubbing her forehead. “I just couldn’t get any sleep at all last night with him gone. Every time I’d nod off, I swear, I would hear him call my name or moan and I’d be wide awake again.”

“That’s good,” he said, sounding troubled, “because I may have just inadvertently started a small war just a few moments ago.”

“What?” she said flatly, sitting up and throwing her legs over the side of the bed. Her eyes bored into his relentlessly, demanding an explanation.

“You remember that vial of water I showed you last night? Well, I took it to... Voren’tal? Yes, Voren’tal. He said it seemed to have some kind of very special arcane energy and suggested I show it to A’dal, that big glowing thing,” Alayne nodded impatiently, standing up and walking over in front of him, her arms crossed and her expression carefully and obviously too patient. “A’dal said that it had – he had? – heard of such a thing before but it was a long time ago and back on our world, not here in Outland.”

“Get to the part about the war,” Alayne grimaced.

“I’m getting to it,” he sighed defensively. “Well, while I was standing there, talking...er...thinking? I don’t know how to describe it! Communicating with A’dal, this strange blue elf with ears that give me a headache just thinking about them came up and tried to snatch it out of my hand. He started yelling at me, accusing me of being in league with Illidan, which, I guess is a bad thing? He said that I was carrying around water from some eternal well or something that destroyed the world. Anyway, A’dal managed to convince everyone who had gathered around at this point that I wasn’t in league with Illidan and I decided to make good my escape. They chased me all the way back up here, shouting things I don’t understand at all. Only the golems and the guards managed to keep them from following me further and, there’s still quite a riot going on outside.”

“Eternal well? *LIGHT OF HEAVEN AND BLESSED ANCESTORS!*” Alayne roared. “Jez’ral, where is it? Is it safe? Do you still have it?”

“I gave it to Voren’tal’s assistant. When I told the old man what A’dal had said, I think he had some kind of fit.”

“Jez’ral, right now, I don’t know whether to be glad that you have no idea what you were carrying around or to kill you for not knowing what it was,” she snarled, her tone at complete odds with the delighted look on her face. “Water from the Well of Eternity,” she breathed. “With that...we could re-ignite the Sunwell! There’d be no need for Kael to continue down the mad path he’s taken. This could all be over and we could go home, where we belong. Oh, I know, I know,” she sighed fondly, reaching up to pat him on the cheek and smiling through her tears at his bewildered expression, “you don’t remember any of that. None of it makes sense to you. Don’t worry, Jez’ral. You’ll stay here and be safe from all the trouble. I’m going to go out and see...see what can be done now.”

Alayne glided down the hallway and out of the inn into a scene of chaos. She stared, appalled at the fighting washing over the normally tranquil Tier. “Var’tanos!” she shouted, seeing the night elf who had been so amused to ‘correct her erring ways’ in Zangarmarsh. “What are you doing?”

“You blood-borne...we should have executed all of you instead of letting you set sail to further destruction and the damnation of us all!” he shrieked, trying to push his way past the arcane guardians. Alayne gasped in horror as she watched her people battle against their attackers. Wading into the fight, she began flinging her spells, using them to sap the fight from the others regardless of side, wincing when one landed on someone she considered a friend.

“Stop this now!” she shouted as much to her own comrades as to those who had invaded the Tier. “Shattrath is a *sanctuary!* Stop fighting!” Drawing on her reserve, she

wrenched her succubus out of the Nether and ordered the demon to pacify the enraged night elf without harming him.

“You!” the night elf screamed, shaking his head and trying to ignore the demoness’s seductive snares, “I had thought you were one of the wiser ones! You are as corrupt as your ancestors!”

“And you are as foolish and cowardly as yours!” a young sin’dorei yelled, a ball of fire erupting from his hands. Alayne jumped in front of it in time to take the heat in the back instead of it exploding in the night elf’s face. She rolled across the ground, too stunned from the blow to try to catch herself. Coming to a stop on her stomach, her body twitching and her back a mass of burns, she prayed that the arcane guardians wouldn’t crush her underfoot.

“Please, for the love of the Light, stop,” she croaked hoarsely while all around her the riot continued. “Please, no, stop,” she moaned, feeling strong hands grabbing her arms and dragging her across the pavement, away from the front lines. She tried to scramble to her feet and fell back to her knees, shivering as if the cool evening air were the heart of a frozen winter. Glancing up at her rescuer, she sighed. “Tau’re, you’ve got to...”

“I’m trying,” he muttered. “I’ve been trying to calm everyone down since the riot started an hour ago. We almost had it in hand until some hot-headed rogue tried to break in to the library and steal back the Vial.”

“Why didn’t you come and wake me when it started?” she demanded wearily.

“Because, though he may be shorter and smaller than me, your husband has a mean left-hook and he told me that if I didn’t take care of you while he was gone, he would use my hide as a rug in that house you’re building. Now, quit struggling and let me look at these burns.”

“They’re arcane burns,” Alayne mumbled. “You’d need Zerith or Dar’ja to heal them in a reasonable amount of time. I’ll be fine,” she continued, making it to her feet, albeit unsteadily, and pushing away from the tauren. He followed her closely, wishing he could just grab hold of her but fearing touching her burnt back until one of the healers was available. Alayne ignored the fighting, walking over to one of the slender trees. Gathering herself, she leapt up, grasped one of the smaller, thinner branches, and jerked down, breaking it away. Nodding in satisfaction, she waded back into the fray, foregoing her magic in favor of clubbing anyone fighting over the head with her new staff. Anyone foolish enough to touch her back got a double-helping of the club. Tau’re hovered behind her, not too near, and shook his head with a mix of amusement and frustration. “Stop fighting, everyone!” she screamed. Before long, she was the only one still fighting. Lowering her makeshift staff, she saw that the Aldor Vindicators and the Shattrath city guard had finally arrived, cordoning off the rioters and quelling them with fists or threats – whichever worked to the greatest effect.

“What is going on here, blood elf?” one of the Vindicators demanded roughly, grabbing Alayne by the bicep and wrenching her arm behind her back. He relaxed his grip when he saw her burns but the impatient anger in his tone did not slacken by a hair. “I said what is going on? Who started this?”

“They’re harboring a power that could destroy us all!” Var’thanos shouted. “Make them turn it over to us; we can dispose of it safely.”

“We’re not harboring anything!” Alayne protested. “We found it and we have as much right to it as you!”

“What are you two talking about?” the Vindicator demanded, his blue face purpling with anger.

“A vial of water from a source called the Well of Eternity,” Alayne answered quickly. “Once, it was a great source of pure arcane energies back in our world. One of our common ancestors...”

“That witch is no ancestor of mine! I fought her alongside Cenarius, Malfurion, and Tyrande!”

“One of our common ancestors and her followers,” Alayne continued as if she had not been interrupted, “abused the Well’s power and were lured into summoning minions of the Burning Legion into our world. They attempted to summon Sargeras as well.”

“Don’t leave out the satyrs and Xavius, foul demon-monger! Don’t look so innocent, witch! You know of what I speak!”

“I have no clue what he’s talking about now,” she muttered in an aside to the Vindicator. “Satyrs are demons. My father and mother used to tell me tales of disobedient children being kidnapped and turned into demons by satyrs. I didn’t even believe they were real until I saw them with my own eyes.”

“So, you admit to harboring a source of arcane power that, from the way this riot has leapt up, sounds very deadly,” the Vindicator said, cutting to the chase. Alayne nodded wearily. “What do you plan to do with this thing?”

“Keep it safe; let it stay with those of my people who are older and wiser. We would not use it to cause harm to this city or its people, that I swear under the Light!”

“It cannot be trusted with these arcane addicts! It belongs rightfully to our people,” Var’tanos shouted, shoving his way through the cordon. The Vindicator holding Alayne nodded, ordering the others to let the man pass through. “It is our curse; turn it over to us and we will destroy it.”

“No!” Alayne shouted. “Are you mad? Can it even be destroyed? We discussed this before, you and I...”

“Shut your mouth, child-witch!”

“You can’t destroy it! Your people haven’t practiced the arcane arts for millennia. You could wind up unleashing destruction by meddling with it.”

“I will not speak with you any more,” he spat, turning his attention to the Vindicator. “These blood elves have caused nothing but problems throughout their entire history. They cannot – must not – be allowed to keep this Vial,” he began, outlining the sin’dorei’s history from his perspective. Alayne twisted futilely in the Vindicator’s grasp, struggling not to reach up and smack the night elf across his arrogant face.

“I see,” the Vindicator said once the kaldorei finished his tale. “We’ve walked into the midst of a millennia-old family feud,” he sighed, irritating both kaldorei and sin’dorei with his words. “Since this Vial has disturbed the peace of our city, I am ordering it turned over to the naaru. Certainly no one would consider them to be unwise stewards. You may put your case to A’dal. He will decide what to do about it and you will accept his decision. Where is it?” he asked, shaking Alayne.

“I...you can’t do this! It is ours by right!”

“It’s safe,” came a thin, reedy reply. Alayne looked up to see Voren’tal descending the stairs of the library, leaning heavily on one of the Magisters. “It is everything that man says it is and more,” he continued. “I will give it to A’dal myself after I have consulted with him. In return, I ask only this; that any other Vials containing such water be turned over to the naaru as well. Not destroyed or hidden away,” he said, glaring at Var’tanos. “Your people survived by hiding themselves away and refusing to wield their power. That worked only so long as the Legion did not come for you. It was doomed to fail the moment that humans became sensitive to the arcane...”

“Which was your fault...”

“They were sensitive to it before we taught them. Had we left them alone, they would have developed spellcraft and arcane studies on their own. Yes, it would have taken them much longer, but it still would have happened. Look at the gnomes, the trolls...we passed nothing on to them, yet they wield arcane currents as deftly as any human.” The night elf’s

face darkened when he could not speak out against that truth. “Had your people bothered to listen to our ancestors, you would have known that we learned our lesson from the Sundering. We erected great warding stones to hide our existence from demons. For generations, they worked. And now, here we are again, toe to toe against the Legion. How will you defeat them? How can you withstand their magics, their powers? Druidism can only protect you so far when nature itself has been devastated.”

“It is agreed, then,” Var’tanos spat. “I will speak with the others but any of ours who stumbles across these cursed Vials will turn them over to the naaru. I pray to Elune that she will guide them to a wise and just decision.”

Slowly, the rioters began to drift away. Alayne chewed her lower lip worriedly, giving the elder sin’dorei sidelong looks from the corner of her eye. When the last of the brawlers melted away, Voren’tal turned back and began to climb up the stairs. Pausing for a moment, he turned and looked at her. “A’dal will know what is best. Too many here would see such a thing as a tool in their plans. Better to turn it over – even temporarily – until things are more settled. Still,” he sighed, “were I a young sin’dorei like yourself, I might consider finding someone to help me lead that small army that came with me. Someone to whom the orcs will listen. Who knows how long this peace will hold if the naaru decide they do not wish to guard our problem?”

Alayne waited until the elder was at the top of the stairs before turning and jogging back to the inn. Jez’ral sat in the main room, looking troubled. She stopped and spoke with him quickly, explaining what she must do and that she would be returning shortly. Exchanging brief words with Tau’re, she let the tauren follow her to her room and smear a cooling, soothing salve on her burnt back. Changing her robes after he left, she wished that the bodice were looser. Moments later, she was aboard her fel steed, galloping south to the Bone Wastes and wondering how she could convince her brother and husband to give up on Garrosh for now and return to Shattrath before the riots broke out again.

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“Alayne!” Ger’alin groaned, twisting and writhing on the pallet, sweat beading on his forehead and his eyes glazed with fever.

“Calm down, Ger’alin,” Dar’ja whispered, her voice pitched low. Even that seemed to be too loud for the other sin’dorei; he moaned and covered his ears with his hands, shuddering as if in great pain. “Try to go back to sleep,” she murmured even more softly. “Zerith and Callie will be back as soon as they can and then we’ll all return to Shattrath.”

“They’re everywhere!” he shrieked. “I can feel them, see them, even with my eyes closed! They whisper...it’s driving me mad!”

“You’re just having a reaction to...”

“Make them stop, Dar’ja! Please, for the love of the Light!” he sobbed. The woman pursed her lips, biting the insides of her cheeks to keep from weeping herself. The sight of the normally strong, healthy, confident-to-the-point-of-arrogance man in front of her brought so low that he wept like a child at things that were not real wrung her heart. Reaching out, she gently brushed his hair away from his forehead and tried healing him once again. Sighing in defeat when nothing happened, she wished, for once, that Zerith was not the leader of their band. He was so much more gifted than she with healing; perhaps he could have eased Ger’alin’s pain enough to let poor man sleep. “Dar’ja, I’ll do anything, *just make it stop!*”

“I’m sorry, Ger’alin. I’ve done everything I can,” she said, her voice no louder than a gentle gust of air. “Try drinking some of this potion that Zerith left for you. He said it would help you sleep.” She rolled her eyes in anger at her own forgetfulness when the man began

heaving. Mention of eating or drinking was enough to set him off. Thankfully, the fit was over in seconds; he didn't have much left in his stomach.

"Alayne!" he moaned fretfully once he'd collapsed back on the pallet.

"She's still in Shattrath. We'll be going back there as soon as you're well."

"Go away, go away, go away!" he wailed in frustration, closing his eyes as tightly as he could bear to. "Alayne? Alayne!"

"I'm here," came a very quiet, very still voice from the door of the room.

"Alayne, what are you doing here?" Dar'ja whispered. "Please tell me you didn't bring Jez'ral with you."

"He's still in Shattrath. Tau're and the others will look after him. Grandmother told me what happened here. Ger'alín?" she whispered, her voice barely audible as she knelt down by the pallet and took his hand in her own.

"I...I can...all around you...I see..." he shivered.

"He's having a reaction to..." Dar'ja started to say, cutting off when Alayne raised one of her hands for silence.

"And the ghosts?" she continued in the same tone, her expression unreadable. Ger'alín nodded wearily. "Around her?" she asked, pointing at Dar'ja. He glanced and winced, covering his eyes with his free hand and squeezing Alayne's until the bones in her fingers creaked. "Dar'ja, will you leave the room, please?" she requested mildly. "I can help him, I think, but I don't want you to hear this. Light's honor and truth, I don't want him to hear it either."

"What are you talking about? The effects of the potion he drank will wear off eventually," the other woman muttered in confusion.

"Not for a while, I think," Alayne said flatly. "Months, if not years before his heightened sensitivity fades completely. He'll have to learn to live with it. If it is, as I suspect, something akin to certain things I've learned in my travels, then I can help him with that. If not...at least I can be here with him."

"Alayne, I'd really like an explanation," Dar'ja whispered. "And, why are you here? Couldn't stand being away from him another day?" she teased. The warlock shot the paladin a withering look and pointed to the door. The other woman sighed, raised her hands in surrender, and left the room. She closed the door behind her and stood staring at it, wishing she could decipher the hushed murmurings she could hear through the wooden frame. Whatever Alayne was saying to him seemed to be calming him down. Ger'alín no longer groaned or shrieked in terror. When the whispers died out into silence, Dar'ja began wondering if she was wasting her time waiting outside. Just as she was about to push open the door to see if they slept, it sprang open, a waxen-faced Alayne staring off into the distance as if something had been torn away from her and she was powerless to do anything about it. "Alayne, what..."

"I will not tell you," she said firmly, still staring. "It is not something you or anyone else should ever know. At least it worked for him."

"Fine then," Dar'ja sighed irritably. "If you won't tell me about whatever is going on with him, at least tell me why you've come out here. Were you worried about us?"

"No. When we defeated Vashj, Jez'ral found something on her: a vial of water. Only, this is no ordinary vial of ordinary water. This is a vial of water from the Well of Eternity. How she came to possess it I have no idea. Perhaps it is a naga matter. But, once it was discovered, riots broke out all over Shattrath. The night elves demanded that it be handed over to them for disposal. Our people want to keep it because it could help us with our addiction. Frankly, I think we have the right to it," she said bitterly, "but Voren'thal is planning to hand it over to the naaru, to A'dal."

"And this couldn't have waited until we got back because?"

“Because the naaru are not going to accept it. I know they won’t, Dar’ja,” she shivered, glancing back at the doorway, “Or, even if they do, there could still be riots. When I left, things were calmer but the fighting could spring up any moment now. I didn’t want to drag the whole Disorder of Azeroth out here and I can hardly make them see reason and not red whenever they look at the night elves or their allies. I...had hoped that Ger’alin or Zerith would return to Shattrath with me to help me keep things calm.” *Light, I was hoping one of them could make me think this whole sense of déjà vu is nothing serious*, she thought to herself. Aloud, she continued, “And...I’ve been thinking. What if Kael finds out we have this Vial? What if he comes for it? Could we stand against him or would we all die?”

“Alayne, get a grip on yourself,” Dar’ja said, grabbing the other woman lightly by the arms and forcing her to look her in the eyes. “Zerith and Callie had to return to Orgrimmar to speak with Thrall. Ger’alin’s...not well. That leaves you and me to try to lead a small army. Would they listen to you?”

“Barely. I managed to send the worst of the hot-heads back to Zangarmarsh. I lied and told them I thought there might be other vials in the caverns where we fought Vashj. Those who remained...well, they seemed to hear me out but most wanted to come here, get Zerith and Ger’alin, and start planning a battle the likes of which Shattrath hasn’t seen since before the destruction of Draenor,” Alayne sighed, clenching her fists in frustration. “And, the worst part of it is, *I want to let them!* It’s ours, Dar’ja! Ours by right! We fought Vashj, we took it from her – or, at least, Jez’ral did. Its magic was restoring his memory! Its power could reignite the Sunwell! We have lost so much...I...they can’t take this last hope from us!” she sobbed, collapsing in a heap on the floor. “Oh, Light, why can’t someone tell me what to do or how I’m supposed to feel?” she cried bitterly. “I can’t do this on my own! What I want and what must be done are tearing me in two directions!”

“Alayne,” Dar’ja said firmly, softly. “I...wish I knew what to say to help you, husband’s sister, but I don’t.” Kneeling down and holding the woman by the shoulders, Dar’ja continued in the same tone, “All of us pray that the Sunwell will shine once again. You’re telling me that we are on the verge of that actually happening and that the chance might be lost...that makes me angry. It makes me want to go back to Shattrath and take that Vial and Legion take the consequences! But...we can’t. We must trust the naaru. They are wise and puissant. They will know what to do.”

Alayne nodded dumbly, tears still trickling down her cheeks. “Go in there with him,” Dar’ja suggested. “Get some rest. Tomorrow, take him back to Shattrath with you. He can help you keep things from boiling over until Zerith gets back.”

“You’re right,” Alayne sighed. Dar’ja smiled sadly and wrapped her arms around her sister-in-law, her eyes widening when Alayne stiffened and gasped in her embrace. The warlock pulled away and grinned sheepishly as she undid the buttons of her robe, letting the bodice fall open in the back to expose her burns. Sucking in a breath through her teeth as the chilly evening air touched them, Alayne whispered, “I told you, there was fighting before I left Shattrath.” Dar’ja nodded, her eyes bulging, and gently laid her hands on Alayne’s back. Letting the Light flow through her, she smiled as the burns faded and vanished beneath her ministrations. Alayne sighed with relief and stood to go back into the room. Pausing in the doorway, she turned and looked at Dar’ja, chewing her bottom lip in thought. “Don’t say anything to...about the burns, please. I don’t want him to feel guilty that he couldn’t help me this time.”

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Dar’ja sighed and stretched, blinking when her hand brushed against something warm and solid. Turning her head, she grinned when she saw her husband’s back facing her and

heard his gentle snoring. Sitting up and grabbing his shoulder, she rolled him on his back and shook him awake. “When did you get back?” she laughed.

“Just before dawn,” he muttered tiredly. “What is Alayne doing here?”

“She came looking for you and Ger’alin.”

“Why’d she do that?” he yawned, blinking his eyes and nearly nodding off back to sleep. Dar’ja laid back down on her side, facing him, rubbing his cheek and feeling the stubble of a day’s growth on his jaw. “Dar’ja, why?” he asked again.

“It’s a long story, sweetheart. Why didn’t you wake me when you got back?”

“I couldn’t. You were out cold. You didn’t even wake up when Callie came in here screeching that Alayne was here. Are you feeling well? You normally don’t sleep so soundly unless you’re under a lot of pressure. Did something happen that Alayne told you about that has you upset?”

“I’ll tell you about it when you’ve gotten more sleep,” she sighed.

“No, you’ll tell me about it now,” he growled, reaching over and pinning her down. “You’re the one who woke me up. Tell me while I’m awake so I can go back to sleep or you are going to be my new mattress.”

“Alayne’s here because she wanted you and Ger’alin to come back to Shattrath with her and try to keep a war from breaking out since it seems that Jez’ral found a vial of water from the Well of Eternity and everyone wants it turned over to them,” Dar’ja said quickly, well aware that Zerith really would lay across her and go to sleep. While she normally didn’t mind this, her nose wrinkled a bit as she realized her husband needed a bath.

“Right. I’m still asleep,” he muttered, dropping back down and pulling the pillow over his head. “This is the strangest dream I’ve ever had.”

“How did it go in Orgrimmar?” Dar’ja asked, laying down flat and lifting the edge of the pillow up so he could look her in the eye. He gave her a cantankerous glance before sighing.

“Thrall is on his way out here. I thought it was going to throttle Callie when she told him about his grandmother. He’s also looking forward to meeting Hellscream’s son. I think the plan is for him to come here tonight. The Darkspear magi were working on setting up a temporary portal when we left. When I told him about Garrosh refusing to assume leadership of the Mag’har, Thrall said he would take care of it. He’s very pleased to hear that the orcs of Outland no longer suffer from demonic bloodlust and has promised all sin’dorei who will take an oath of fealty to the Horde his protection. He seemed pleased to learn about Voren’tal and the Scryers and wants to speak with the naaru personally. So, I suppose you could say it went well, except for the bit where he picked Callie up by the throat and growled that he wanted no part of Sylvanas’s games – whatever that means. Not, of course, that any of that holds a candle to your ‘Jez’ral found water from the Well of Eternity’ story. Really, that one’s a doozy.”

“Do you think Alayne would make something like that up?” Dar’ja asked worriedly.

“No. I just think that my life got a lot more complicated than it ever needed to be. All I wanted was to come out here and keep her out of trouble, have a little fun, make a few memories, and then sink back into Silvermoon and work on starting our family. I know, I know; you’re not going to hit your fertile cycle for another fifty years at least. Still, it’s fun trying. It’s all right, dearest,” he sighed, smiling when she reached under the pillow to stroke the side of his face. “I had a feeling, back when I first saw her on Sunstrider Isle, that she would make my life interesting. She certainly has. How’s Ger’alin?”

“Where is she? Where is that wonderful woman who knows everything? Alayne, I want you to have my children *right now!*” came Ger’alin’s booming voice as he ran through the hut looking for her.

“Right,” Zerith sighed. “Wake me when the world regains its sanity, would you?”

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Alayne twisted her fingers nervously, wondering how things were back in Shattrath. She and Ger'alín had ridden back that morning and gathered in the Disorder of Azeroth and Jez'ral. The riots had reignited once the naaru had named Voren'thal as the one they wished to vouchsafe the Vial. The Scryers and the Aldor, working together for once, had the Vial secured, for the time. The two sin'dorei hoped that by removing the Disorder of Azeroth from the city, the fighting would die out. It turned out to be a good thing that they had. As afternoon faded into evening, the magi and warlocks had begun to sense a tingle of energy outside of Garadar. Watching the goings-on intently, Alayne worried her lower lip, wishing she could still weave the arcane currents that were shimmering around as the portal from Orgrimmar opened. Zerith and Ger'alín stood on either side of the opening gateway, both dressed in their finest. Dar'ja had spent long moments tugging on Zerith's stole to make it hang exactly as she wanted it. Alayne grinned and looked at her hands; she and Ger'alín had spent hours polishing his armor until it gleamed. She sighed as she glanced down, wishing that the "gift" Jez'ral had given her had been from anyone other than Mir'el.

"Be welcome to Nagrand, Warchief," Zerith said formally as Thrall stepped through the portal. "Garrosh has provided an escort befitting your rank," he continued, gesturing to the wolf-riders lined up along the road. Thrall gave them a brief nod and a quick salute before signaling for the sin'dorei to get on with it. "Follow me and I will take you to Madame Geyah," Zerith sighed. Ger'alín turned on his heels and signaled for the others to fall in behind Thrall. Alayne, Callie, and Dar'ja exchanged quick grins as they fell in with the others. Ger'alín had drilled them all afternoon. The orcs seemed impressed by how orderly the normally chaotic group could be. Alayne sighed again, recalling how Ger'alín's ability to whip the Disorder of Azeroth into formation had been yet another nail in the coffin of Garrosh's leadership. The orc chieftain seemed even more firmly convinced that the elf was better suited to lead than he. Marching into the village, Alayne tried to glance around those ahead of her to see what Thrall was doing.

The Mag'har orcs were lining up and saluting the Warchief of the Horde as he passed by, many of the younger ones staring after him in barely concealed awe. According to Geyah, her son, Durotan, was something of a legend to the Mag'har. Rumors had been flying about Garadar ever since Zerith and Callie had returned. As the orderly lines snaked around the central bonfire, Alayne saw Garrosh go down on his knees, his fists pressed to the ground, in front of Thrall. "Warchief," he said gruffly, "on behalf of the Mag'har, the unworthy son of the cursed Hellscream welcomes you."

"Unworthy? Cursed?" Thrall said, taken completely aback. "On your feet, young man." Garrosh stood, meeting Thrall's eyes reluctantly. The Horde chieftain sucked in a breath, his shock audible to those in the back of the line. "You are the mirror image of your father. There is much I have to tell you of him and his legacy after I speak with my grandmother. Where is she?"

"She awaits you in her home, over there," Garrosh said glumly, turning to point to the small hut. "I will remain here and await your judgment." Thrall stared at the young orc in confusion but said nothing. Disdaining Zerith and Ger'alín's escort, he strode over to Geyah's hut.

"Ranks dismissed," Ger'alín said firmly in a carrying tone. "That could have gone better," he muttered, glancing back and forth between Garrosh and Geyah's hut.

"Garrosh, what..." Zerith began, stopping when the orc waved him off. Ger'alín placed a hand on the priest's shoulder, gripping it firmly in commiseration before he turned to look for Alayne. His wife stood over by the fire, warming her hands and pulling her cloak

about her more tightly. Jez'ral hovered near her, looking as if he wanted to ask her something but afraid of getting his nose snapped off. As Ger'alın began walking towards the pair, Callie rushed up to him.

"I just finished speaking with some soldiers from Shadowmoon Valley," she began without prologue. "Illidan has increased his attacks against everyone tenfold. The Dragonmaw are barely holding on; their fortress is under constant bombardment."

"All the more reason to hope that something good comes of this family reunion," Ger'alın sighed. "Do you ever find yourself missing your family, Callie?"

"Yes," she said simply. "I often hope that they'll break free of the necromancers and regain their independence. That is...if they're still in existence. Even we die, eventually, Ger'alın. What about you?"

"Some but not as much as I used to," he admitted. "I have a new family, now," he said, gesturing to include Callie, Alayne, Zerith, and Dar'ja.

"That's got to be the sweetest thing you've said to me in a while," Callie grinned. "What's the catch?"

"There is no catch," he laughed. "I meant it."

"What are you two talking about over here?" Alayne asked lightly, siding up to Ger'alın and straightening his cape. Ger'alın picked her up in a bear hug, grinning and winking at Callie when Alayne started kicking and pushing away. "Ger'alın," she said primly, smiling, "plate is cold."

"I'll fix that later," he muttered, setting her back down. "We were just talking about family and...what was that for?" he asked, bending down to rub his ankle. Callie threw back her head and laughed at Alayne as she hopped about on one foot, cursing beneath her breath about needing to remember that plate was also not something she wanted to kick.

"Please don't make me repeat the conversation we had to have about the difference between elven women and human women. It was embarrassing enough the first time," Alayne said, her cheeks heating.

"Oh, Light, we weren't talking about *having* a family. We were talking about family in general. It's a natural enough subject what with Thrall being reunited with his grandmother. Are you alright?" he asked.

"I'm fine. My toes are a little angry with me right now. I just hope that something good comes of this family reunion," she said, exhaling.

"Will you two..." Callie said, rolling her eyes.

"It's not on purpose!" they said in unison. Alayne's face turned a darker shade of red and her lips quivered as she fought to hold back her laughter. Ger'alın just stared at her for a moment before throwing back his head and letting his own laughter echo through the still late-evening air.

"You two were strange before you got married," Callie said with elaborate and amused disdain. "Now, you're just down-right *weird*."

Ger'alın managed to get his laughter under control and was about to respond when a loud cry from Geyah's hut cut him off. Whirling around, he started striding over, Alayne and Callie on his heels and Zerith and Dar'ja heading the same direction. The door of the hut flew open with a bang and a grief-stricken Thrall stood in the doorway, his anguished gaze focused on Garrosh. Ger'alın glanced around the Warchief, sighing with relief to see Geyah kneeling next to her hearth, watching Thrall with tears in her eyes. "You never knew?" he asked. Garrosh looked at him in confusion. "You never knew that your father was one of our greatest heroes?"

"Hero? Hero?! He was responsible for the destruction of everything we hold dear! My cursed father drank..."

“He did. Grom did many things that were wrong. But, in the end, he freed us all from the bloodlust. Here,” Thrall said, sounding pained, “I will *show* you...”

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Alayne blinked as she found herself hovering over a dusty, desolate plain. The stench of sour wood-smoke and sulfur assaulted her nostrils, making her gag. A breeze stirred the ash on the ground, sending tendrils of it swirling through the air. Turning her gaze further down the plain, she could see two orc warriors approaching. The eyes of the elder were tinged with red, a sign of the curse that came from drinking demon blood. The younger looked around uncertainly, gripping his enormous hammer and sniffing the wind for the scent of his prey. Alayne gasped when she heard a foul, evil laugh and saw the warriors turn to face their enemy.

A hulking pit lord rose out of the dust of the plain. He laughed, a twisted, amused laugh, and pointed at the pair. “So predictable,” he chuckled, his voice echoing through the empty canyon. “I knew you would come. And I see you’ve brought the mighty Hellscream. His blood is mine,” the demon said savagely, “as is your whole misbegotten race!”

The younger orc could take it no longer. Alayne could practically feel his outrage, his anger. Sprinting as quickly as his legs would carry him, the warrior threw himself at the demon, hefting his mighty hammer as he aimed a blow at the pit lord’s midsection. The demon flicked the warrior away with a lazy swipe, chuckling in true amusement as the orc rolled across the rocky floor of the canyon, coming to a halt in front of his companion. The older orc’s eyes widened in horror and tears of grief and rage began to trickle down his craggy green cheeks. “The boy believed you could be saved, but he didn’t know what burns within your soul when in your heart, you know we are the same!” the demon roared.

The older warrior stood up, stepping over his comrade, and began running towards the demon faster than Alayne believed possible. The orc’s eyes blazed red, shining almost as fiercely as did those of the elves. She gasped in horror when she saw the warrior struck down, then again in astonishment when she saw his axe planted firmly in the demon’s chest. The demon stared down at his wound in amazement, letting loose a roar of defiance and disbelief as his corporeal form began to waver and disintegrate. An explosion rocked the canyon, throwing the older warrior back, flinging him down the canyon like a rag doll. Alayne felt the rush of the wind and the surge of power that came from the uncontrolled destruction of a mighty demon. She glanced down at the older orc’s prone body in awe; it had taken dozens and dozens of fighters, magi, and healers to bring down Magtheridon. This lone orc brought down a demon of comparable power by himself! She wracked her brain fiercely, trying to recall what little she knew of orcish history. Truly, this warrior must be a legend among the green-skinned orcs of the Horde. Was he Durotan? Drek’Thar? And who was the young orc with him? He looked familiar to her. Her reverie was interrupted by the sound of the younger warrior dragging himself up and over to his comrade.

“Thrall... The blood haze has lifted,” the older warrior gasped, his breath rattling in his throat. “The demon’s fire has burnt out in my veins. I have... freed myself,” he sighed contentedly, drawing breath no more.

The younger warrior, Thrall, reached down and gently pulled his friend’s eyes closed. “No, old friend,” he sighed sadly, proudly. “You’ve freed us all.”

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Alayne blinked and swayed on her feet as the vision left her. All around her, she could see others doing the same. The Mag’har orcs were staring at Thrall in shock, their shoulders

lifting in pride that they had never really allowed themselves to feel before. Garrosh stared at the Warchief, tears of joy and relief shining in his eyes. "For my entire life I have thought my bloodline cursed. I have lived beneath the shadow of my father's greatest failure. I hated him for what he had done. I hated him for the burden he left me," he said, tears trickling heedlessly down his face as he walked over to Thrall, lifting a hand to grasp the other orc as if afraid he would vanish as the vision had. "But now...you have shown me truths that I would have never known. You and your allies have gifted me with something that cannot bear a price. Redemption. Thrall, redeemer of the Mag'har, you honor me as none ever have..." Thrall grasped Garrosh by the shoulders, forcing his head up proudly. Garrosh smiled and lifted his gaze to the sky, "On this day, a great burden has been lifted from my chest. My heart swells with pride. And for the first time, I can proudly proclaim who I am. I can finally unleash the fury in my heart. I am Garrosh Hellscream, son of Grom, chieftain of the Mag'har! Let the battle call of Hellscream give you courage and strength! Be lifted by my rallying cry. Thank you, Son of Durotan."

"You need not thank me, Garrosh. Your father was a brother to me. I would do anything for you and the Mag'har. I must now return to the Greatmother," Thrall said awkwardly, glancing around and realizing that the entire camp was staring at the two of them. Alayne averted her gaze quickly, giving them the privacy the two chieftains seemed to crave. Thrall quickly stomped back into the house, slamming the door behind him. Garrosh stared after the other orc thoughtfully. Giving himself a shake after a long moment, he blinked and looked around, his eyebrows lifting as if surprised to see the gathering.

"You there, Ger'alín," he said gruffly, pointing to the Blood Knight. "I want to speak with you." Ger'alín nodded and waved Alayne and Callie away as he stepped up to the orc chieftain. "I owe you much, sin'dorei. By your efforts, I...no, I will not speak of it. I owe you a debt. For days now, you have spoken about allying the Mag'har and the other clans in this broken world. Ever since you and your fellows broke the chains binding the others to the demon blood, you have spoken of uniting us and facing down the ones responsible for such an offer. I will not presume to speak for the others – even if they have offered me such a voice – but I will tell you now that the Mag'har will march with you against the Black Temple even if the others do not."

"There is no debt between us," Ger'alín insisted. Garrosh waved a meaty hand, cutting him off.

"If it were not for you trying to convince me to cease worrying about my father's legacy, Thrall would never have come out here to show me the truth. Tell me, sin'dorei, why did you not reveal this to me?"

"Honestly?" Ger'alín said before he had a chance to consider the wisdom of his words, "because I didn't know that Grommash Hellscream slew Mannoroc. At the time that battle took place, my people were struggling to survive against the undead Scourge. We were scattered to the four corners of the world. Only recently have we come together again and now..." he sighed, stopping. "Our worries are none of yours, chieftain of the Mag'har. And, there is no debt between us. I did only what honor demanded. Nothing more, nothing less."

"And you have paid a price that many a warrior would dread," Garrosh said firmly. "None walk the world of spirits lightly, sin'dorei. In remembrance of the debt I owe you for all that you have done for my people, I declare that you are my brother and that your enemies are my enemies," he grunted, placing a hand on one of Ger'alín's shoulders. The Blood Knight stared at the chieftain, uncertain what to do next. Green eyes meet blue in confusion, then acceptance as Ger'alín reached over to grip the orc's shoulder.

"I declare that you are my brother, Garrosh of the Mag'har, and that your enemies are my enemies."

“May we go down in song as will the mighty Thrall of the Horde and Grommash Hellscream,” Garrosh grinned, clapping the Blood Knight on the back. “Come now, brother. Let us celebrate the home-coming of the Son of Durotan by feasting, drinking, and plotting Illidan’s downfall.”

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Alayne watched as Ger’alin, somewhat bewildered, and Garrosh walked over to roasting pits. Her husband grew more relaxed and animated as the two talked and joked. She grinned to herself, relieved to see that Garrosh had overcome the pain he had masked with his lethargy for so long. She’d overheard enough to puzzle out that they would be going against the Black Temple soon.

“What are you doing over here smiling to yourself?” Zerith whispered in her ear. Alayne gave a start and grinned at him. “I think Garrosh and Ger’alin are going to be good friends,” he said, nodding towards the pair.

“I think they’re brothers now,” Alayne murmured. She rubbed the scar on her palm, recalling the day she’d found her own brother. Zerith lifted his own scarred hand to take hers.

“Our little family is growing,” he said softly. “It started out with just the pair of us. Then came Callie and Dar’ja. You’ve finally married him, bringing him into the fold,” he laughed gently. “Now, we have an orc. Whom are we going to adopt next? Oh no,” he chuckled. “What does that look mean?”

“I met the orphans living in Shattrath,” Alayne said, her eyes locking onto Ger’alin. He and Garrosh were engaged in some kind of eating contest. Several members of the Disorder of Azeroth and Garadar guards formed a semi-circle around them, clapping and laughing encouragement to the pair. Alayne grinned when she saw Callie shaking her head as she handed Ger’alin another windroc leg. “They are so...eager and so lonely at the same time, Zerith. Jez’ral and I took them riding through the city for a few hours the first day you were gone. All of them talked about growing up and...”

“...making the world a safe place where there were no orphans and all of the kids who didn’t have parents would come and live with them?” he finished for her.

“I thought only Ger’alin could...”

“Oh please,” Zerith snorted. “I can read you almost as well as I read Dar’ja. So, what? You want to start an orphanage?”

“I was thinking more along the lines of working at the one in Shattrath. Still, do you think he would be bothered by it?” she asked, gesturing towards the crowd around her husband.

“I think he’d be delighted, actually. I know that if I had grown up with no family around me, no one of my own people to teach me... and then, years later, the love of my life wanted to spend time with children who were growing up as I had? I would be thrilled beyond reckoning. Besides,” he added mischievously, “it would give Callie a different target for her pranks and we could always make them do chores for us. My father used to say the sole reason he and Mother had five children was to have some help around the house.”

“I still haven’t figured out how your mother had so many children,” Alayne muttered. “While I’m eager to be an aunt, I don’t think I need to be one five times over.”

“Human ancestry. My mother’s great-grandmother was a half-elf,” he replied, somewhat embarrassed. Alayne’s eyes widened but she said nothing. “Nowadays, such...um...help me out here, sis...”

“Fecundity?”

“Yes,” he said, dragging the word out, “would probably be considered a good thing. Mother just got a hefty dose of ostracism over it until people got used to the idea. Father said

that the entire village was agog when, not even two years after I was born, Mother was pregnant again.”

“Zerith, as interesting as it is to hear you talk about your family, could we change the subject?” Alayne blushed.

“Yes, new topic,” he blushed. “Have you worked out a plan for going against Illidan? Thrall said that if Garrosh would not lead the orcs against the Black Temple, he would do it himself. He also wants us to ‘take care of Kael’Thas’ but thinks we’d be better doing it on our own. Before we left, Thrall was sending messengers to Sylvanas and Lord Lor’themar concerning what we told him.”

“Remind me never to let you choose the topic again,” Alayne growled. “From what I can put together, our best bet in the fight against Illidan Stormrage would be for us to learn how to tap into the energies from the Vial...”

“No way,” he interrupted. “Dar’ja told me about the riots and about your back. We are not going to wade into that mess again. Leave it with Voren’tal.”

“Then the only other way is to just overwhelm him and hope we can kill him before he kills all of us,” she sighed. “I’m sorry, Zerith, but he’s very powerful. Very powerful.”

“Perhaps the Dragonmaw will know a weakness,” the priest sighed. “We’ll be riding out to meet with them tomorrow. I’m hoping that Garrosh, with his new-found leadership, will be willing to come with us.”

“Have you thought about what we’ll do after?”

“I don’t want to think about it, Alayne. But, yes, I have. We have to stop Kael. We allied ourselves with the Scryers to do that. Once Illidan is done for, if Kael won’t relent...we’ll have no choice but to take the fight to him before he can summon the Legion on top of us. I’m sorry, Alayne,” he said, wrapping his arms around her and patting her on the back fondly. “He’s made our choice treason or certain destruction.”

“I know,” she sighed. “I know.”