

Callie and the other Forsaken gathered away from the living. Each one looked around suspiciously, wondering if one of Putress's spies were part of their number. Ger'alin was still down in the valley and the handful of others that the dragons had managed to waken before Zerith begged them to stop were salvaging what was left of the Vanguard and trying to refit the wagons Putress had used so they could cart their wounded and sleeping to a place of safety. The rogue sighed; she could have been helping with that. Instead, she was gathered with others of her kind while they tried to determine what to do about the betrayal.

"I always said Putress was an ass," Callie muttered to no one in particular.

"What I want to know is if the Dark Lady knew about this. The Apothecaries were hers body and soul," Davran growled.

"Why would Sylvanas turn against the Horde?"

"Revenge," another grimaced. "Many of us have wanted to taste that bittersweet drink."

"But against people who had nothing to do with us? Who did not cause this? Surely we – and Sylvanas herself – know better than any that not all humans, dwarves, elves, or orcs are the same!" Callie said harshly. "Why would she order an attack that would kill so many?"

"Perhaps she didn't," a priest sighed. "Perhaps she's been betrayed as well."

"We should go back to Undercity and take our knowledge with us," Davran suggested. "We should confront Sylvanas and if she was behind this, we should send her on to the final grave. If she wasn't, then we should root out who was behind it and send them on to their reward."

"We can't just abandon our allies here in Northrend," Callie protested. "If we all run back to Undercity, that's exactly what it will look like. It will look like we were part of the plot and that we're going to regroup. They'll never trust us again and all the work that so many of us have done to prove ourselves to the Horde will have been in vain."

"It's a damned inconvenient time to have a civil war, I'll agree," Davran said sadly.

Uncomfortable silence fell among the Forsaken again. Only by banding together under Sylvanas's leadership once they were freed from the Lich King's brutal control had any of them managed to survive. Callie thought back to her first days of freedom. She'd wandered through the lands she'd known as a child and youth, looking for a place to find refuge. Hunger and weariness were no longer concerns; safety from the living humans who hunted her like an animal was. She'd tried to explain, she'd tried to reason with them. For days, she had been running through the thickness of the wilderness, hoping to lose her pursuers. Then, she'd stumbled over another like herself. He'd led her to Undercity and, once she was able to see past the destruction of her home city, she'd been relieved to be among those who understood. When Sylvanas had petitioned for entry into the Horde, Callie swore to do her best to prove that the Forsaken were worthy members. She'd grown to think of the Horde as her extended family, now. First Zerith and Alayne, then Ger'alin and Tau're. Now, her friends numbered far more than she could have counted when living and they were spread among races that she'd never dreamed of encountering during her life.

"We should go back," Davran repeated. "It's our people who did this. It's us who should take responsibility for cleaning it up."

Callie sighed and nodded. Davran was right. "We'll leave in the night," she said softly. "We'll return to Undercity and deal with matters as we find them there."

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Alayne lay her head on Ger'alin's chest and listened to his heart beating. She felt strangely apprehensive about something. She felt as if panic were trying to overwhelm her and pull her beneath its murky depths until she lost all sense of reason and control. Listening

to his heart thudding gently away and letting the rise and fall of his chest beneath her cheek calm her, Alayne closed her eyes and tried to return to sleep. True, she'd slept most of the day, not waking until the sun was just a bare orange rim over the mountains. Zerith had been relieved when she opened her eyes; she was one of the last to rise out of the effects of the strange mixture Putress had used on her. "Thank the Light," he'd muttered as he'd helped her to sit up. "Just you and two others left. I guess you took a heavier dose than the rest, sis."

"What happened?" she'd asked, confused.

"The best we can put together is that Putress used some kind of gas against all of us. It knocked everyone out – including the Forsaken. There weren't enough traces left for us to figure out what he'd used so we just had to wait for everyone to wake up. The dragons would have used their magic to dispel it from everyone only I didn't want them suffering the aftereffects like that," he grimaced. "Don't ask. Be glad you slept through the worst of it."

Alayne turned her head and pressed her lips against her husband's chest, wishing he were awake but not wanting to rouse him from sleep. He'd been beside himself with anger, sorrow, and fear when he'd come into their tent carrying bowls of soup to try to tempt her appetite. All he would say was that Putress was a bastard – something she'd learned already. The betrayal of the Apothecaries and the murder of the forces in the valley was something Zerith had told her about; a nightmare from which she prayed to wake.

The night was quiet. Too quiet. While Ger'alin snored and occasionally muttered something in his sleep. Alayne lifted her head, knowing that she would be unable to get back to sleep any time soon. Quietly, she stole from the bed, slipping a thick robe on over her night gown and pulling on her thickest boots. A walk in the night would help tire her back out. And, it would give her time to think. With so many of their forces gone, with the Apothecaries – she refused to believe it was a mass uprising of the Forsaken! – counted amongst their enemies, storming Icecrown would be suicidal at this point.

The blackness of night swarmed around her as she left the tent. Here and there campfires sprang up but, instead of lightening the darkness, they seemed to enhance it. She crept past Zerith's tent, wondering if Dar'ja would be in the same straights as she was. Listening at the tent flaps, she heard only Zerith's broken snores. She didn't want to risk waking either of them by putting her head in. Instead, she walked back through the camp, surprised she heard nothing from the guards. Ger'alin had told her that the Forsaken – all of them – had volunteered to watch through the entire night. Needing no sleep themselves, Callie had pointed out that they wanted to prove themselves to any who thought they had a hand in Putress's betrayal. Alayne thought it was a futile gesture. So far, the only ones who thought the Forsaken had any role in Putress's abominable schemes were the Alliance. The Alliance wouldn't be convinced that Callie and the others had been just as betrayed as the rest if every Forsaken petitioned to join the Order of the Silver Hand and swore under the Light that they had no role in it. With a sigh, Alayne walked over to one of the guard stations, thinking that she could at least find out where Callie was and reassure the woman. The sin'dorei blinked and rubbed her eyes at what she saw. The guard station was empty.

"Perhaps they went to check something out," she muttered to herself, heading for the next one. When she found the next two stations empty, her heart began to pound and sweat formed along her face and hands. At the fourth station, she found a letter nailed to the post. Tearing it down, she hurried back to her tent and, careless of waking her husband, lit a lamp and read it, groaning the whole while.

"What's goin' on?" Ger'alin slurred, rubbing his eyes tiredly.

"They're gone," Alayne muttered absently, re-reading the letter again.

"Who?"

“The Forsaken,” she replied, shaking the letter at him. He squinted, rubbed a hand over his face again, and sat up. Blinking until his vision cleared, he motioned for her to come to him and bring the lamp. The letter was short but the impact woke him completely.

To our allies and friends,

We are not sure what happened with Putress. We found no signs of his death here in Northrend. We are also not sure if he was acting on or against Lady Sylvanas Windrunner’s orders. All we do know is that his betrayal must be punished. As this is a matter for our own to take care of, the Forsaken here with the Disorder of Azeroth have decided to return to Undercity and confront Sylvanas and Putress. If the Banshee Queen was behind this, her head will hang from the ruined gates of our city and we will select a new leader to make recompense to the Horde.

Once matters are resolved, we will return to Northrend and work towards our common goal of defeating the Scourge and the Lich King.

The Forsaken

“This is madness,” Ger’alin muttered. Combing his fingers through his hair, he blinked and shook his head. “Go, wake your brother. Bring him in here. This is utter insanity.”

“Why wouldn’t they say anything to us about this if they were planning it? More numbers could make the difference...”

“In attacking Undercity? Woman, are you mad? I’d rather go up against the gates of Orgrimmar, Stormwind, Ironforge, or Silvermoon itself! Only Gnomeregan would be nearly as bad. Just go get Zerith. And prepare to rouse the entire camp. If they waited until nightfall, they’ll have a few hours on us. I’m hoping to catch up to them...now what?” he yelled angrily, letting the letter flutter to the ground as he sprang to his feet, grabbed his sword, and ran out off the tent. Not caring that he stood only in his britches in the cold night air, he glared until he saw that the disruption came from orcish wolf-riders bearing the banners of the Warsong clan. “What news from Garrosh? I assume Mordenai arrived to tell him of our losses?” he asked, letting his sword drop to his side.

“We had a hell of a time breaking through your defensive barriers,” one of the orcs grunted. “My compliments to the magi. We’ve come because we’re under attack and could use you to rout the humans who are besieging Warsong Hold. They’re vowing to kill every member of the Horde they can lay hands on in vengeance for the murder of Bolvar Fordragon.”

“Just what we need,” Ger’alin growled, lifting his sword and slashing at the air beside him in anger. “Why bother fighting the Scourge? Let’s do their work for them!” Drawing a deep breath, the sin’dorei exhaled slowly. “I’ll rally what we can and we’ll ride for Warsong Hold. Stay here and you can ride with us.”

Striding through the camp, stopping at every tent and campfire, Ger’alin bellowed for everyone to wake, dress, put on their armor, and get mounted. He could hear curses coming behind him whenever he turned away but he could also hear the rustling and the jingling that meant his orders were being followed. Obeying his own shouts, he rushed back to his tent in time to nearly run over Zerith who was hurrying back to his own to dress. “Ride beside me and I’ll get you caught up on what’s going on,” the paladin muttered.

“Alayne’s given me the general idea. I can see why you wouldn’t want to attack Undercity. Talk about fighting at a disadvantage the whole time.”

“We’ll gore that ox when we get to it. For now, we’ve got to try to pull the humans off of Garrosh’s back before we find ourselves fighting a three front war.”

Ger’alin quickly dressed, letting Alayne help him strap on his plate armor and then sitting patiently, his foot tapping to give away his desire to get moving, while she brushed his hair and muttered that he should take a moment to “shave that bush off his face.”

“It’s warmer wearing it,” he muttered to her. “Do I look presentable now?”

“You’d look a lot more presentable if you’d shave.”

“That’s a yes if I heard one,” he grinned. “Let’s get going.”

He and Alayne quickly left the tent, striking it down and getting it packed away. The makeshift camp bed they left, pulling only their blankets off of it and rolling them into a pack to tie down behind their saddles. Within the hour, they were mounted and beginning to trail out of the Kor’kron Vanguard. One of the orcs glanced back over their ranks, his eyes pausing to try to decipher why they seemed to be fewer than he recalled. Ger’alin grimaced and tapped him on the shoulder. “We lost mostly Horde forces under Saurfang in the valley. The Forsaken who came with us have decided to return to Undercity and regain their honor by rooting out and punishing those who betrayed us.”

“I see,” the orc said softly. “How many left?”

“All of them. It cost us close to thirty good fighters, magi, and healers.”

“Garrosh will be glad of anything you can send. The defenses are holding but he feels restrained by the Warchief’s orders not to fight the humans. We’ve been capturing them and holding them prisoner when we can avoid killing them. I wish they had the same consideration for us.”

“We’ll do what we can to take the pressure off. I would imagine that Thrall would permit fighting in self-defense.”

“He might but Garrosh thinks Thrall is a human-loving coward. He’s binding himself to those orders, hoping that when this comes to light, he can throw them in Thrall’s face.”

“Great. Just what we need,” Ger’alin sighed sadly. “More divisions. We might as well surrender to the Scourge now. We really are doing their work for them.”

The orc stared at Ger’alin for a long moment and then nodded in glum agreement. Muttering his pardons, Ger’alin let his horse fall back until he was level with Zerith and Alayne.

“What’s the plan?” Alayne asked, pulling her cloak more tightly around her.

“That’s a damned good question,” the paladin sighed as he stared at the Wrath Gate. “A damned good question.”

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By the time the Disorder of Azeroth arrived at Warsong Hold, the battle was nearly over. Garrosh stood on the ramparts, bellowing out orders while the humans had retreated to the road to regroup. Several squadrons tried to intercept the Disorder of Azeroth but Ger’alin managed to arrange for a hasty pre-dawn parley.

“There need be no more fighting,” he explained to the human commander. “We don’t wish to do the Scourge’s work for them. Let’s make them kill us instead of us killing each other while they watch on with the Lich King laughing.”

“You’re not entering that keep to reinforce your allies,” the human commander said flatly.

“Fine,” Ger’alin growled. “Then let me enter alone. I carry some weight with Garrosh Hellscream. I’m sure he’ll listen to my words. Just pull your forces back and I’m sure something can be worked out.”

“The only terms we’ll accept are total surrender and death to every member of the Scourge in your ranks. If you won’t purge the Forsaken, we will.”

“Why should we surrender?” Ger’alin asked, raising his eyebrows and burying his anger. “The way it looks to me, the orcs are about to pound you into paste. If anything, you should be surrendering to us. But I’m not asking that,” he added quickly, seeing the stubborn

look on the human's face. "All I'm asking is that you stop fighting us long enough for me to try to calm Garrosh down."

"The only reason I haven't killed you yet, elf," the human spat, "is because Highlord Bolvar had some measure of respect for you and called you a man of rare honor. If all you're going to do is keep murdering us, then we're going to keep fighting."

"Just give me one hour," Ger'alın groaned. "And, remember, it was your people who attacked this base. By any law of war or honor, you've brought your own deaths on yourselves."

The human commander fell back, muttering beneath his breath. Ger'alın affected to not hear it and heeled Lucky down into the quarry. He prayed that Zerith and Alayne would be able to keep their heads if the humans decided to take them hostage. He prayed he would be able to keep his head if they did that. Galloping into the keep, he leapt lightly from Lucky's back and ran inside. Garrosh, having seen him approaching, was already racing to meet him. "Those cowards attacked us in the night!" the orc shouted. "They came after us for no reason! They've cut off our supply lines! I saw fires and smoke on the eastern horizon as well. No doubt they've gone after the taunka as well!"

"The taunka were able to hold them off until we arrived and managed to negotiate a cease-fire," Ger'alın replied. "The dragons are coming as well to try to help us keep the peace. Alexstrasza is guarding the Wrath Gate and the bronze and green flights are doing what they can. Mordenai has sent word to his brethren to ask them to come help us. At the very least, we should be able to evacuate to safer ground where the Alliance can't attack us and we can continue our fight against the Scourge there."

"Never!" Garrosh roared. "I will kill every human I see! I will not be driven from my hold in shame by a race of cowards who attacks with no provocation! I would rather die!"

"Then you might as well go ahead and take that axe in your hand and use it on your throat, Garrosh Hellscream, chieftain of the Mag'har!" Ger'alın shouted angrily, his face flushing an ugly red and his green-tinged blue eyes blazing like twin fires. He'd had more than enough to deal with lately. First Alayne nagging him about Putress. Then Putress turning around and proving that he was just as vile an asshole as Ger'alın had ever suspected. Now the Forsaken had gone and gotten themselves embroiled in a possible civil war, the Alliance wanted to declare war on the Horde, Alexstrasza still felt some threat to all life and the Scourge were waiting, watching for their opportunity to strike. The only thing that could make things any more impossible would be for Sargeras himself to show up. That, Ger'alın thought privately, would be the icing on this malodorous cake.

Garrosh stood glaring at his brother, his friend. His arms and chest heaved with the effort of not strangling the tall elf. He'd been bound by Thrall's orders to leave the humans in peace. He'd done so, even after they and their allies had attacked supply lines from Dragonblight. He'd stayed his hand when the humans left him to be overwhelmed by the nerubians. He'd said nothing when they offered insult after insult. When they had failed to take care of Naxxramas anywhere near as well as Ger'alın and the others had cleared Azjol-Nerub, Garrosh held his peace. And now, after a horrible betrayal by once-humans, the humans were attacking him and, hemmed in by the Warchief's commands, Garrosh could barely repulse their attack.

"Down, in the cells," he said stonily, staring at Ger'alın with anger in his own eyes. "The humans we've captured. Get them out of here. I never want to see another pale-skinned small-faced human again. If they're not out of here in a half-hour, I'll execute every one of them and send their heads back to the others as a warning of what happens when you cross Hellscream."

"Garrosh, we can't..."

“Get them out of here. And then you get yourself out of here. Pleading with me to surrender, to flee,” Garrosh grumped, stomping back up the ramps. “Tell the humans that if they attack again, I will paint the walls with their blood. I won’t move against them if they’ll leave me alone. My Warchief forbids it. But if they move against me, I will crush them! And any who ally with them! Even you!” he roared, pointing at Ger’alin. “Even you.”

Ger’alin turned on his heel and began walking down to the cells, fuming. He wanted to beat Garrosh within an inch of his life. He wanted to run every human he could find through a grinder. He wanted to find Putress and make the man scream for mercy. Most of all, he wanted to go directly to Icecrown and punch Arthas in the face. “Get out,” he growled at the humans as he kicked in the wooden cell doors. “Your comrades are waiting for you outside to the east. Get out and stay the hell away from all of us. You’ve done enough damage this night.”

“Our weapons,” one of them began, halting when he saw the hatred blazing in the sin’dorei’s eyes.

“Will do you no good. Get out and stay away from us,” Ger’alin finished for him. Following the human captives out of the keep, he wondered if there would be any way out of this mess.

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Zerith was glad when Ger’alin ordered them to turn and ride for Tanka’le Village. They’d stopped there briefly on their way to Warsong Hold to put an end to the fighting. A small force of what the priest prayed were rebel forces had attacked the taunka. Getting the humans away and putting out the fires had taken precious time but was worth it. The humans had been somewhat sheepish at attacking a settlement largely deserted, inhabited only by elderly taunka, women, and a handful of guards. The taunka had been angry, wondering why they were being attacked by those they had sworn a truce with. Ger’alin had promised to sort things out if both sides would agree to put down their weapons and meet with him in seven day’s time. Now, the Disorder of Azeroth was bedding down with the taunka while Ger’alin sent messengers to Agmar’s Hammer, requesting more forces.

“We’re not likely to get anything from them,” Zerith pointed out when he and the paladin sat down in a darkened corner of the town, away from the others. “They lost many of their own at the Wrath Gate yesterday.”

“Whatever they can spare,” Ger’alin said tiredly, shaking from the emotions he’d let run through him over the past hours. “Taunka’le needs more defenders in case the humans decide to attack again.”

“What about Warsong Hold?”

“Warsong Hold can go to the Nether and rot,” Ger’alin growled. “Garrosh wants a war with the humans. He’s mad as hell about this attack. He’s been spoiling for a fight and they’re giving him every reason to have one. I say let them pour each other’s blood out until they’re too tired to do anything else. Then we can move in, take over, and beat the snot out of both sides until they’re ready to listen to sense.”

“You’re kidding,” Zerith muttered, praying that this was a momentary lapse of sanity and that Ger’alin wasn’t serious.

“Somewhat,” Ger’alin admitted glumly. “I’m too angry to think straight. Everyone wants to fight everyone else. I can’t see any way out of it.”

“We could always just leave,” Zerith pointed out. “This was never our fight. We didn’t have to come to Northrend. We could have remained in Outland.”

“We could have if we were someone else.”

“Go, get some rest, Ger’alin,” Zerith said softly. “You’ve done more lately than anyone has any right to expect of you. You’re right; you’re tired and you can’t see a way out of this. Staying up will not help.”

Ger’alin muttered his apologies but did as suggested. Zerith heaved a sigh of relief when he saw the paladin walk into the inn. He hoped his friend would find more rest sleeping in a real bed tonight than he had in the weeks spent sleeping on a slab in an oversized tent that often doubled as a meeting point.

“Did you ever think,” he heard Alayne mutter, nearly startling him out of his skin, “back when we came up with this bright idea, it would lead to this?”

“How long have you been there? I thought you were in bed already.”

“I’m too tired to sleep.”

“That makes tremendous amounts of sense.”

“Did you?”

“Did I what?”

“Did you ever think we would amount to this?”

“No, Alayne,” he sighed, “I honestly did not.”

“Neither did I,” she admitted. “But, I have something that the pair of you are missing right now.”

“Oh, and what’s that?”

“An idea on how to get out of this mess without having to kill every third person in Northrend.”

“I’m all ears,” Zerith replied, wondering what scheme she had concocted but glad that she was sharing it with him instead of haring off on her own as she had in the past.

“I’ll need your help with this, if you agree to it,” she said before she began. “If you don’t agree to it, then I’m going to do it anyway,” she added. “And since I’m telling you in advance, you can’t dare accuse me of running off on my own without a word.”

“Let’s hear your plan,” he groaned.

“Mir’el and I will travel, using the paths of magic, to Theramore and Orgrimmar. Jez’ral will go to Undercity. We can return the same way but we’ll be extremely tired from it. They know the spells, Zerith. They’re not much used because of the energy requirement it takes but we’re down to the wire, here. We’ve got to know what’s going on and we’ve got to report in with others on what has happened here.”

“So, you three go and report in. Why to Theramore, though?”

“Because of Jania Proudmoore. Out of all the humans, she’s the one least likely to declare war and most likely to listen to us and believe what we’re saying.”

“And, she’s always been respectful to Thrall,” Zerith mused. “Okay, sounds good so far. What next?”

“If everything goes well and Jania can convince the humans to hold off fighting for a while, we’ll put together our group, their forces, and anything the Horde can spare and hunt down Putress and the Apothecaries. We’ll give Putress to the Alliance for punishment and we’ll take the Apothecaries.”

“And if it turns out that Sylvanas was behind this whole thing?”

“If Sylvanas was behind it, then I’d say each race should get a part of her body to hang like a trophy from their gates.”

“I never thought I’d hear you speak so of the Lady Sylvanas Windrunner.”

“If she’s betrayed us, it will be the last mistake she ever makes. That I can promise you now.”

“If I let you go, you have to promise me you’ll come back as soon as you can. No running off on your own.”

“I promise on my marriage vows that I will return to you, report what has happened, and follow your orders faithfully,” she grinned. “Now, are you going to object to this plan?”

“Considering that it’s the only one that might have a chance of working, no,” Zerith sighed. “However, please tell Ger’alin where you’re going. I don’t want him taking my head off for it.”

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Alayne rubbed her eyes and tried not to knuckle her back again. She was tired but fought not to show it. Thrall had been startled when she appeared in the middle of his audience chamber. Sylvanas had laughed but managed to hide her mirth after that. The sin’dorei had not meant to drop in quite so quickly; she’d been aiming to appear outside the gates of Orgrimmar. Resolving that, when she had time, she would practice the teleportation spells more thoroughly and with a more remote destination in mind, she put her mind back on the errand at hand.

“I am glad that there are still Forsaken loyal to me,” Sylvanas was saying, “but your friends have walked into a trap.”

“They have,” Thrall agreed tiredly. “We’ve been taking in refugees from the fighting all day. Still, my Lady,” he said, turning to Sylvanas with a grumpy glare, “how did such plotting escape your notice?”

“The Legion is not comprised of idiots, Warchief,” she snapped. “Varimathras had me convinced he’d killed his brother. After all, I saw it with my own eyes. How they managed to fool me, I’d love to know. The best I can estimate is that after I founded the Society, Varimathras began worming his way into it, influencing them against me.”

“But you did seek a new plague, did you not?” Alayne asked. “You’ve admitted as much.”

“Yes and no,” Sylvanas replied hotly. “I sought a way to reconstruct the plague that was used against us. I wanted it studied so we could develop an inoculation against it. I felt that would be a way to get the Scarlets off our backs, to settle the humans down, and to also learn how we might be able to fight the Scourge by freeing them from the Lich King’s control. I’m no alchemist. I’m no magi. I founded the Society, encouraged the study of such things, and largely left them to themselves. The only time I put my nose in their business was when they came to me needing more funding or wanting my blessing on a new research project.”

“Be that as may, my Lady,” Thrall said gruffly, “in the future, I’ll expect you to keep a closer eye on your people.”

“If we manage to wrest Undercity back from them,” Alayne muttered. Thrall eyed her with a mix of irritated sympathy.

“I am glad you and your friends thought to contact Jaina,” the orc said. “That will be the first step in stopping a war between us and the Alliance. However, you are not going to get very far with me if you doubt that we will take back Undercity, we will bring to justice those who have betrayed us, and that we will come out of this stronger than ever before, young blood elf.”

“I’m just tired, Warchief,” Alayne said quickly, not wanting to rouse the Horde leader’s ire against her. “And, I thought Mir’el would have been back by now. I’m worried about Jez’ral as well. If there’s a battle raging in Undercity, he could be trapped right in the middle of it.”

“We’ll take care of that soon enough. Ah,” Thrall said, seeing the whirling currents of magic that announced a portal, “news arrives already.”

Alayne reached out and helped to solidify the portal, sighing with relief to see Mir'el and an escort of Theramore guards bringing Jaina Proudmoore into the Warchief's audience chamber. "Thrall, what has happened? The King is preparing for war..." the woman said as soon as she was through the portal. "I've received so many conflicting messages that I decided to risk coming to speak with you before I settle on a course of action."

"Jaina, what happened at the Wrath Gate," Thrall sighed, "it was a betrayal from within."

"Lady Proudmoore, the Warchief speaks the truth. This subterfuge was set in motion by Varimathras and Grand Apothecary Putress. It was not the Horde's doing," Sylvanas said, gesturing with a cutting motion. "As the combined Horde and Alliance forces began their assault upon the Wrath Gate, an uprising broke out in the Undercity. Varimathras and hordes of his demonic brethren attacked. Hundreds of my people were slain in the coup. I barely managed to escape with my life."

"The Horde has lost the Undercity," Thrall continued, sighing. "We now prepare to lay siege to the city and bring in the perpetrators of the unforgivable crime to justice. Know this, Jaina; war with the Alliance is not in our best interests. If we are forced into a conflict, the Lich King will destroy our divided forces in Northrend. We will make this right, Jaina. Tell your king all that you have learned here. We have nothing to hide."

"I will deliver this information to King Wrynn, Thrall, but...," Jaina sighed sadly, chewing her lower lip as if wondering how to continue. "Bolvar was like a brother to him. In the King's absence, Bolvar kept the Alliance united. He found strength for our people in our darkest hours. He watched over Anduin, raising him as his own. I fear that the rage will consume him, Thrall. I remain hopeful that reason will prevail, but we must prepare for the worst... for war."

Thrall nodded in acceptance. "I hope it will not come to that. Many among my own people share my hopes that we will be able to continue to live in peace with the Alliance until the day comes when all enmities are ended and we have no reason to fight. Those who oppose that dream..." he growled, slamming one fist into the palm of the other hand. "I will deal with them myself."

"Farewell, Warchief. I pray that the next time we meet it will be as allies," Jaina replied simply, her face pale but her eyes filled with determination. Turning, she began casting the incantation that would open a portal to take her to Stormwind. Mir'el and Alayne lent their energies to the human, glad to have some way to be of use.

"There's been a battle raging in Undercity since the Wrath Gate," Alayne whispered to Mir'el in an undertone. "Our friends and Jez'ral may have just walked right into it. Thrall's gathering his forces, calling back every Horde soldier from every corner of the world save Northrend. He's going to retake Undercity and execute Putress, Varimathras, and the Apothecaries loyal to them and offer their heads as tokens to the Alliance."

"I'll be glad to lend my aid in making certain Varimathras is gone for good," Mir'el replied. "Have you heard from Jez'ral?"

"No."

"We should return to Northrend and bring the others. Of course, it means that you and I will probably sleepwalk through the battle."

"I'll find the energy to fight."

"I know you will. You are your father's daughter, after all."

"Darkweaver and Sunrage," Thrall said loudly, startling both elves out of their whispered conversation. "Vol'jin has arranged a transport to Northrend. Step through the portal into Warsong Hold and if Garrosh Hellscream gives you any trouble, tell him he'll regret it until his dying days. I'm sending a detachment of Forsaken and Darkspear magi with you. Once you have rejoined the Disorder of Azeroth, you are to transport immediately to

Undercity and await my instructions there. I know, I know,” he said, seeing something in Alayne’s face, “your brother and your husband have probably already come up with an entire campaign for it. I’ll hear them out and it will probably be the very thing we’ll devise. Just get them there. We’re going to need every fighter to retake that place.”

Alayne and Mir’el nodded and saluted the Warchief. Moments later, the portal to Warsong Hold opened and they and the others stepped through. “Kor’kron,” Thrall said as he watched the portal blaze out of existence, “prepare the transport for Undercity.”

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Ger’alin stood impatiently next to Vol’jin. Alayne and Mir’el were catching a quick catnap over on the other side of the zeppelin tower after having lent their energies to establish a long-standing portal between Orgrimmar and Undercity. They had managed to transport the Disorder of Azeroth through a portal themselves, the effort of holding it open long enough for everyone to rush through tiring them out. Ger’alin had ordered both of them to get some rest once he’d passed through it. The bags under their eyes and the paleness of their skin spoke of the price such a spell cost to cast and maintain.

“I want to scout ahead,” Mir’el had panted, doing his best to keep on his feet while also trying to hold Alayne upright.

“We’ll find Jez’ral just as soon as we have enough forces to break through the wall,” Ger’alin had promised. “He’s a smart man, is he not? Keeps his head in battle better than you do, Mir’el.”

“He’s young and reckless,” Mir’el grimaced, “but then, I repeat myself.”

“We’ll find him. Go over there, here, I’ll carry her,” the paladin sighed, scooping Alayne up and ignoring her feeble protests. “Rest. You’re going to need your wits about you and all the strength you can find for the battle. Don’t worry. I’ll rouse both of you before we begin.”

“Why are they letting us muster at all?” Alayne whispered wearily. “They have a clear view of what we’re doing.”

“Arrogance,” Ger’alin replied. “They think they can win.” He kept silent about the knowledge that they very probably could win. Assaulting a city was always a chancy business. One set up like the Undercity would be an absolute nightmare. With a sigh, he relaxed when he saw that both Mir’el and Alayne dropped off to sleep immediately. He wondered at the wisdom of his promise, hoping that they could rest another hour or so before he had to wake them but also wanting to begin the attack as soon as he could. Vol’jin had held them back, refusing to let them go forward until Sylvanas and Thrall were there. There was wisdom in that; those two should lead the assault. Sylvanas would want to show that she could not be defeated and Thrall would want to show that the Horde would not tolerate rebellion and insurrection. Ger’alin wished for a moment that Garrosh could be here as well. The chieftain of the Mag’har needed to see how Thrall would deal with those who disobeyed him and triggered wars that the Horde did not need. He also needed to see that Thrall, while preferring peace and tolerance, would lay the hammer down on anyone who deserved it.

Zerith walked over to Ger’alin and pulled the man out of his reverie. The pair decided to pass the time by getting their own forces lined up, mounted, and to explain various things they might need to do. “It will help keep them focused on what’s to come,” the priest explained. “It will also make organizing whatever Thrall wants us to do easier.” The two spent the next hour doing just that, stopping to sit and catch their breath just as Thrall and Sylvanas led the Kor’kron guards through the portal. The Warchief motioned for the two men to come apart with him and spent several minutes in a whispered conference. His plan was

mostly the same one they had devised. The differences came when he mentioned the artillery and heavy weaponry that the goblins would be bringing by zeppelin.

“As soon as that is in place, we’ll begin the attack,” Thrall said simply.

“At your command, Warchief,” Ger’alin replied, saluting.

“How long do you think it will be?” Zerith asked.

“Not much longer. The zeppelins had already left Durotar when we came through the portal. Saurfang the Elder commands them and the goblins, for all their wily ways, have no wish to cross him,” the orc grinned. “Now, take your positions. I will rally the troops. You two have served the Horde well. You are therefore granted the honor of riding behind Sylvanas and I and your forces will be mixed in with the Kor’kron. Yes,” he laughed, seeing the looks on their faces, “your wives may join you. I’ve heard that the ladies are warriors of renown themselves.”

Ger’alin and Zerith nodded and hurried to Dar’ja and Alayne while a contingent of Kor’kron riders galloped off to the large sewer entrance, prepared to act as a holding force to prevent any of the usurping forces from coming to take the Horde from behind. Alayne sputtered and nearly jumped out of her skin when Ger’alin shook her to wake her, thinking that the battle had already begun. Within moments, the four were positioned on their mounts behind Thrall and Sylvanas. Thrall glanced over his shoulder, grunting in satisfaction at seeing the orderly lines behind him. “Heroes of the Horde, your Warchief calls!” he bellowed suddenly, startling everyone. “Soon we march upon our fallen city and reclaim it! For the Horde!” he shouted.

“For the Horde!” came the rallying reply from the ranks behind him. The Warchief turned his frostwolf around to face the others and pumped his fists in the air.

“Blood and thunder, champions of the Horde! We fight on this day for our fallen brothers and sisters! Mourn them not for they all died with honor in their hearts! Though we face great conflict, our might combined shall obliterate those who would oppose us! The grave injustices committed against the Horde will be met by an unstoppable force of reckoning!”

Ger’alin could feel his heart pounding against his chest as his spirits soared. For all the defeats they had suffered, for all the times he had worried about waging campaigns in Northrend, his blood surged for this confrontation against those who had betrayed them all. Thrall’s rallying cry burned through him and, looking around, he could see eager determination on the faces of the others. Zerith and Alayne seemed to glow with it and Dar’ja glared at the gates of Undercity. Thrall turned his face to the sky and raised his arms, beseeching the spirits that had led him and aided him in rallying first his own people and then others under the banner of the Horde. “I call to you great spirits! Grant the Horde your blessing! For on this day our cause is righteous and just! Spirits of wind, carry to Saurfang the Younger the song of war! May all of our fallen brethren be vindicated by this battle! The battle for the Undercity begins now! Sound the horns of war! Champions of the Horde, be empowered by the might of your Warchief!”

Ger’alin felt his body growing stronger. Fatigue was washed away and replaced with boundless energy. Beneath him, he could feel Lucky growing restless, eager to move but retaining the discipline that the Blood Knight had instilled in him. Looking over at Alayne, he could find no trace of the former weariness in her face. She looked as if she could run twenty miles and fight a battle at the end of it. She met his gaze, nodded, and grinned slightly.

“Onward!” Thrall roared, wheeling his wolf and urging it to a gallop. The others let loose their own battlecries and galloped after the Warchief. When they reached the gates of Undercity, a foul stench filled the air. Ger’alin wrinkled his nose in disgust and fought not to spew the contents of his stomach. The others reacted similarly.

“It’s that damned mixture Putress had us test,” Alayne shouted. “It’ll devour living tissue!”

“It will not stop us,” Thrall said confidently. “Great wind brother, clear our path!”

A gentle breeze blew out of nowhere, scattering the stench and sending green clouds rolling thinly over the walls and away from the army gathered at the gates. From inside the courtyard, Ger’alin could hear curses as the Apothecaries bemoaned the loss of their strongest weapon. Before they could let loose another volley, before the wind died, Thrall led the army through the gate and into the ruined courtyard of Lordaeron.

Standing in the courtyard at the rear was Varimathras. A dreadlord of the nathrezim who had once served the Legion, he had long been considered tamed and brought to heel by Sylvanas and the Forsaken. He smirked at his former queen and the Warchief, gesturing around the courtyard to where catapults filled with the deadly green toxin stood waiting to fire it upon the forces that had come to reclaim Undercity.

“You must answer to the elements, demon!” Thrall shouted.

“Welcome to my kingdom of darkness!” Varimathras laughed. “Did you enjoy my minion’s terrible creation? Potent, is it not? But enough prattling! You wish to reclaim your city? Come then, heroes! Your souls will fuel the host! You will have this place back in pieces!”

The Apothecaries launched another volley and Ger’alin prayed that death would come swiftly. Before the volley could land, rain began pouring down from the sky and the once-putrid waters of Undercity burst from their banks, flooding the courtyard and clearing away the lethal mixture before it could do any harm. “Great water spirit,” Thrall said, his eyes closed in concentration “wash away this corruption! Heroes of the Horde, attack!”

Ger’alin wheeled Lucky towards the steps leading up to the walls. His warhorse’s hooves clicked loudly against the pavement as he leaned forward, his hammer at the ready. He took the first Apothecary in the face, his blow throwing the man further than he would have thought possible. He could feel the strength of the elements the Warchief called upon surging through him, giving him strength and stamina far beyond his normal abilities. Calling upon the Light as well, he felt himself almost invincible as he unleashed his rage. Lucky reared beneath him, his hooves breaking apart catapults. Nearby, Tau’re leapt from his own mount and began tearing Apothecaries apart, literally ripping them limb from limb as he roared his own outrage. In the courtyard, Alayne flung her most deadly spells, fire searing the flesh of the Apothecaries or engulfing the catapults until they exploded. Ice rained down from above, mixing with the rain that protected them, lancing the demons and undead who fought against her until blood poured down their arms and bodies and they trembled with a mix of cold and fear. Zerith felt his own spells being enhanced by the Light’s own outrage and the aid of the spirits of nature. His protective spells and healing spells were more potent than they had ever been before. Standing near Alayne and firing arrows that never missed, Sylvanas began singing a song of victory and glory. Other sin’dorei took up her chant, filling the courtyard with an ancient hymn of elven might.

As the Apothecaries and their catapults were destroyed, Varimathras began glancing around, his eyes tinged with panic. Beating his wings as he prepared his exit, he called in a monstrosity that made the assembled forces gape. Before they could halt him, Varimathras was gone, leaving them to face a grotesque and gigantic perversion of nature. Standing impossibly tall, its head almost level with the walls of the city, was a pallid-skinned man. A mask covered its face and most of its bald head. Tubes from the mask lead down to its chest and protruding gut. In the place of hands were a metallic hammer and a spray filled with noxious green liquid. After a heartbeat of study, Thrall ran in, attacking the creature. Ger’alin dismounted and ran to join the Warchief. Using his mace and his shield as weapons, Ger’alin fought side-by-side with the leader of the Horde. A golden glow surrounded the paladin as he

called upon the Light to aid him in destroying this creature of pure shadow. The others quickly dispatched their own opponents and turned their energies on the strange aberration in the courtyard. Spells of ice, fire, Light, shadow, and nature landed on it and it roared in frustration and pain. Swords, axes, maces, and arrows struck it. The creature tried to spray the puny attackers with the liquid sloshing in its right hand but the wind and the rain swept it away before it could harm the Horde fighters. After long moments of battle, the thing collapsed to the ground with an earth-shaking thud and Ger'alín heaved a sigh of relief. His eyes widened in amazement when he realized he felt only revitalized from the fight. Thrall grinned at him and pointed ahead. "The courtyard is ours! Onward to the inner sanctum!"

The army followed behind the Warchief and the Banshee Queen pausing to pay a moment's respect at the tomb of the last king of Lordaeron. When they reached the shafts where the elevators led down to Undercity, Sylvanas flung out a hand to stop them. "Hold!" Thrall ordered, staring down the empty tubes "They've destroyed the elevators!" Sylvanas leaned over to take in the scene

"The shaft is trapped, Warchief. A fall would mean certain death," she swore.

Thrall closed his eyes once more and gentle breezes filled the corridor, swirling around the fighters and blowing through the trapped shafts. "Great air spirit, hear my call once more!" he prayed. "The spirits of air have heard my call. Cyclones will lower us to safety. Now we jump!"

"Beats the jump in Azjol-Nerub," Zerith laughed as he stepped off the balcony and floated gently down to the ground below. Just as his feet brushed the spikes at the bottom of the elevator, the wind tossed him outside and he landed lightly on his feet, quickly moving forward to make room for the others jumping down behind him.

"We have breached the inner sanctum, heroes! We press on!" Thrall shouted once the last ones were landed. Alayne felt strange seeing the once-bustling trade district so empty. The few times she'd been here, Forsaken had been gathered, hawking their wares, gold exchanging hands just as it did at the bazaar in Silvermoon. Now, it was a true ghost-town. The bodies of Forsaken lay sprawled where they had fallen. The carts and crates had been broken and overturned. Banners hung limply from the walls, tattered, torn, burned, and covered with blood. Alayne glanced around, looking worriedly to see if Callie's body was one of those laying broken on the floor.

"What have they done to my beautiful city!" Sylvanas cried, staring around at the empty quarter. She made her way down the walkways that led to the heart of Undercity. "The only redemption for the traitors responsible for this will be an agonizing death. My vengeance will be swift and without mercy!"

"Lead the way, Dark Lady. We will follow," Thrall said calmly. Alayne met Ger'alín and Zerith's glance and nodded. Callie was not among the fallen...thus far.

"Very well, Warchief. The Royal Quarter is this way. Stay on guard. There's no telling what Varimathras and Putress have in store for us," the one-time Ranger-General of Silvermoon said as she led the army through the trade district and into the canals that circled Undercity. Alayne's ears perked forward and her body trembled as dark energy washed over her. She knew that kind of magic – she had once practiced it when bereft of the arcane. Opening her mouth to warn the others of a demonic trap, Sylvanas beat her to it. "Hold!" the Dark Lady ordered imperiously. "I sense dark magic. Demon magic... Stand ready!"

"Clever girl..." came Varimathras's dark, amused laugh. "My brothers have grown hungry. Your souls will sate their appetites."

Alayne braced herself, casting back to the shadow spells she remembered as waves of demons – fel guards, succubi, and doomguards – swooped down upon the army. She felt Mir'el doing the same, wrenching control of some of the demons and forcing them to fight against their allies. She drained several of their power, sharing a grim look with Mir'el as she

fought against the hot acid pouring through her body at the use of Nether magic. Using the static magic she wrested from the demons, she poured it into her arcane spells. Waves of arcane energy poured out of her, knocking demons back, pulling some out of the air with the shock of power, and blasting several to pieces. In the thick of the melee, Ger'alín grinned and shook his head when the demon he was fighting disintegrated. "For the glory of Quel'Thalas!" he shouted.

"For the Horde!" the orcs roared as they dove back into the fight.

"The ancestors guide us!" Tau're shouted.

Long moments of fighting stretched out as yet more waves threw themselves against the Horde offensive. Then, without warning, the attacks ceased. The Disorder of Azeroth glanced around warily, wondering if they had just carried the day or if something worse were about to descend upon them.

"Look there!" Alayne shouted, pointing over the canal where a shadowy portal was opening. A red-skinned, black-winged demon emerged. Its fel green eyes glowed with hunger and demonic bloodlust. Acidic saliva dripped from its fanged mouth and taloned hands whirled in spellcasting. Thrall and Ger'alín raced forward flinging spells of the elements and the Light at the creature. Fire singed its wings and the Light shocked it, dropping it out of the air and into the tainted waters of the canals. It stomped on cloven hooves out of the brackish water and roared, lashing out and scattering the fighters. They quickly reassembled themselves and threw their mite against the demon. The ring of steel against steel and the stench of demonic blood filled the air as the battle raged on until, at last, the demon fell to the ground. Alayne pinched her nose closed, nearly gagging at the putrid odor that came from the demon's corpse. Thrall and the others moved quickly away, heading towards the Royal Quarter and, thankfully, upwind of the demon.

"Is that all, demon? Have you nothing left to throw at us?" Thrall bellowed defiantly as they prepared to cross the canal bridges and enter the Royal Quarter. The Apothecarium lay nearby and Alayne glanced that direction as a troop of Kor'kron ran to it, intent on capturing or killing Putress while the main force went against the master of the betrayal: Varimathras. "We come for you! Prepare yourself!"

"The Royal Quarter is just up ahead, Warchief," Sylvanas said confidently, her bow clutched lightly in her hand and a slight spring in her step. The army crossed the bridges and converged on the doors that led down to Sylvanas's audience chamber.

"Bring down the halls! Now!" Varimathras shouted. The ground shook and the walls collapsed, sealing the way into the Royal Quarter. Alayne glanced once more towards the Apothecarium while Thrall studied the ruins in front of them with a smile.

"Coward!" he chuckled, "You think to stop the Warchief of the Horde with pebbles? I will show you the true power of the elements! Great spirit of the earth, help us in our hour of need!" The ground shook once more, but gently this time. Alayne watched in amazement as the chunks of concrete and marble disintegrated into dust before her eyes, leaving the way clear for them to continue on. "Let's go!" Thrall said, suiting actions to words as he ran through the corridor. "Quickly!"

The forces followed after the Warchief. Ger'alín took Alayne's arm and helped her to stay level with him and Zerith as the three ran headlong after the Warchief and the Dark Lady. Dar'ja ran next to Zerith while Mir'el hung just behind, wondering where the other Forsaken and Jez'ral were. He half thought about heading back to the Apothecarium himself but decided to wait. Hopefully, with such power as the Warchief could command, the battle would be quickly ended and they would be reunited with their friends and loved ones. "What is this?" Thrall asked, sounding stunned. They had reached the end of the hallway and stood in the doorway to the audience chamber. Varimathras stood atop the dias, power surging into

him – or was it through him? – and into portals around the room. Through the portals poured waves of demons.

“Welcome to your future -- what little there is left of it...” Varimathras laughed as the demons ran towards the Horde forces. The battle was quickly rejoined as spells, steel, and bolts were used against the demonic legions.

“We’ve got to destroy those portals,” Alayne grimaced.

“We do,” Mir’el agreed. The pair hung back, conserving their energy and watching for an opening. When Ger’alin and Thrall took down a pair of pit lords, they made their move, dashing past the front rows and into the middle of the chamber. Ger’alin stared after them and was on the verge of demanding to know what in the name of the Legion they were up to when Alayne closed her eyes and began allowing herself to feel the matrix of the portal in front of her. Picking through the threads of magic that held it open, she began cutting the main ones, unraveling the portal. The slimy bands of failing shadow magic washed over her and the screams of demons filled her mind as they fought to wrest back control of the portal. She let herself lean against the cold rock wall behind her and focused her entire being on destroying the portal. Nearby, she could sense Mir’el doing the same. While the fight against the waves of demons continued, the pair worked to destroy the portals permitting entry into Undercity. One by one, they winked out of existence until only the last portal remained. Mir’el and Alayne were sodden with sweat, their legs turned to water and their bodies quivering with the effort to remain upright. In spite of the spirits the Warchief called upon, they felt exhausted.

“Too long... Tireless, endless planning... It will not end like this...,” Varimathras panted from atop the dias. He focused his energy on the last portal, striving to hold it open while Mir’el and Alayne worked to pull it shut. “Need more time... The Master is near...” Alayne’s eyes widened. Surely he could not be referring to Kil’jaeden? Demonic power began pouring through the portal, stabilizing it. She grit her teeth and reached deep inside herself, searching for a hidden reservoir of energy that would let her do what needed to be done. “Such power! Can you not feel it, mortals? Cease this foolishness and join me!” Varimathras taunted, sensing the weakness in the flagging magi.

“Alayne, what are you doing?” Mir’el demanded breathlessly as he sensed her pulling in demonic energy and arcane at the same time. “Alayne, you can’t...”

The portal began to collapse, the shockwaves rocking the room. “I will not fail! Not again!” Arcane currents arced against the fel energies of the portal and lanced through Varimathras and Alayne. “I cannot hold... Destabilizing...,” the demon gasped as the portal exploded.

“YOU HAVE FAILED ME, VARIMATHRAS!” a dark voice echoed through the room. Alayne collapsed in a shuddering, sobbing heap, feeling as if her skin had just been removed and she’d been roasted over a fire. Mir’el grabbed her and dragged her out of the way before she could be trampled. The last of the demons went down and the Horde forces raced up the stairs of the dias, intent on Varimathras. Zerith knelt down to offer healing to Alayne but Mir’el nearly threw him out of the room.

“Not a good idea,” he hissed at the priest. “It will have to pass on its own before she can be healed. Trying to infuse her with holy magic would just make things worse right now.”

Ger’alin glanced down the dias, wondering where Alayne was. When he saw her laying across Mir’el’s lap and saw Zerith jogging up the stairs, a look of confused consternation on his face, he nearly leapt down to see what was going on himself. However, Varimathras chose that moment to unleash a nova of shadow. Ger’alin felt himself being hurled through the air. At the last moment, the currents of the winds surrounded him, cushioning him and bringing him safely back to the dias. The nathrezim roared in anger and began fighting the mortals with magic and with might. Reaching out to the Light, Ger’alin let it course through him and into the demon. Varimathras screamed in pain as the holy energy

ran through his demonic body, boiling the blood in his veins and arcing light lightning over his nerves. Thrall hurled the power of the elements at the demon. The earth trembled beneath him, never giving the nathrezim a chance to gain his footing. The wind howled against him, preventing him from using his wings as a shield or a buffet. Lightning struck him, blue bolts dancing over his metallic breastplate, fusing it against his skin. All around him, fighters bore in, their weapons chipping away at his defenses, cutting him, smashing bones, and bringing him down to the floor. "Years... wasted..." Varimathras muttered as he gathered himself for another shadow nova. Ger'alain and Zerith hurled the anger of the Light at the demon and he shuddered violently, pitching forward as the holy power and the power of nature drained him of his energy. Within moments, he lay still. Thrall hefted the Doomhammer and brought it down on the demon's staring face, assuring himself of the kill.

"We are victorious!" the Warchief exulted as he surveyed the room from the dias. "Undercity belongs to the Horde once more! Lok'tar!" Cheers rang out around the room. Ger'alain began making his way down to Mir'el and Alayne to find out what had happened. "Dark Lady, join me! You have fought hard and spilled much blood for this right. The Royal Quarter belongs to you!" Thrall said, extending a hand to Sylvanas. The Banshee Queen ascended to her platform with a satisfied smile. She kicked Varimathras's corpse and, for good measure, fired several arrows into his chest at close range.

"Such will be the fate of all enemies of the Horde, Warchief. Now we must deal with the wretch, Putress," she said grimly, turning towards the entrance of the room. "He will probably be lurking in the Apothecarium."

"We shall, Sylvanas," Thrall agreed as he began to follow her. Horns sounded in the distance and he reached out to grab her arm, halting her. Cupping a hand to his ear, he listened as they rang out again. "Alliance horns?" he muttered in confusion, wondering what was going on. "Stay on guard!"

Moments later, the unmistakable ring of armored men walking down the corridor brought news of the impending arrival. Thrall made his way to the front, Sylvanas at his side. Ger'alain and Zerith flanked him, watching the doorway. The rest of the force spread out, preparing for another fight.

A tall human, well-muscled, emerged from the shadows of the corridor. Thrall gasped and gestured for the others to put down their weapons. The man had long black hair pulled back in a top-knot behind his head. His face carried an expression of pure disgust and hatred. His glare took in the orc chieftain and he grimaced as if seeing a sight that sickened him. "I was away for too long. My absence cost us the lives of some of our greatest heroes. Trash like you and this evil witch were allowed to roam free -- unchecked. The time has come to make things right. To disband your treacherous kingdom of murderers and thieves. Putress was the first strike. Many more will come. I've waited a long time for this, Thrall. For every time I was thrown into one of your damned arenas... for every time I killed a green-skinned aberration like you... I could only think of one thing."

"Do you think you're the only one who knows of suffering, Varian?" Thrall asked, his voice edged with anger. "Do you think you're the only one who knows of betrayal?"

"Silence, beast!" Varian shouted. "In all that time, I could think of only this: what our world would be like without you and your twisted Horde. It ends now, Warchief. Attack! For Stormwind!" he cried. "For Bolvar! For the Alliance!"

Thrall danced backwards, lifting his hammer in time to parry the human king's swords. Soldiers of the Alliance poured into the room, their blades slashing at the Horde fighters. Ger'alain lifted his shield and fought, doing his best to damage the opposing forces without killing too many of them. "Stop this!" he shouted. He heard his plea echoed from the throats of many others. "Stop this! We are not the enemy! The Scourge is the enemy! The Legion that was behind this atrocity is the enemy!"

“Kill them all!” Varian screamed. “For the Alliance!”

Ger’alin felt his arms growing leaden, impossibly heavy. He looked around, startled to see that everyone else in the room seemed to be frozen in place. He could not move. No one could. “No, Varian, stop!” he heard a woman shout. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see Jaina Proudmoore striding into the room. “They are not your enemies. Killing them will not bring Bolvar back. Killing them will make his death empty; a death in vain, Varian.”

“You stink of them, Proudmoore,” Varian snarled. Jaina waved her hand and sighed. Magic engulfed the Alliance forces and their king and they vanished from sight. The spell holding the Horde in place ended and Ger’alin tumbled to the ground.

“It did not have to be like this,” she sighed sadly and then she, too, vanished in a flash of magic.

“It ends like it began...” Thrall whispered sadly. “All that we have fought for in this world is lost. The hopes and dreams carried by my father and mother, by Doomhammer... gone. If only you were here right now, Grom, old friend, you would know what to do...”

“I know what he would do,” came a voice from the doorway. Thrall looked up and Ger’alin lifted his head to see a battered Saurfang striding into the room. “He would say to you what I am about to say to you: Thrall. Lead your people. Let's go home, old friend.”

Thrall nodded slowly, tiredly. The energy that had filled him and the others, the gift of the elements, was gone. Like the rest of his forces, he felt heavy and lethargic. Sylvanas muttered that she would return to Orgrimmar and gather in the refugees.

“We will return to Orgrimmar as well,” Zerith said tiredly. “After we have determined the fate of our friends who came to liberate Undercity ahead of us,” he added.

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Callie continued trying to wake Jez’ral and cursing under her breath. Either the blow to the head he had taken, or the vile concoctions Putress kept testing on him, or the stench that made even her stomach turn were keeping him out. She prayed that their assault had bought Sylvanas enough time to escape. By the time they had reached Undercity, Putress and Varimathras had ceased control already. The most they could do was buy time for others to escape, paying the price with their blood and lives. Davran was among the fallen and Diami had nearly been. Callie herself had lost most of her left arm and could feel an infection setting in. Putress had cornered them in the trade district, capturing them and dragging them down to the cells where Scarlets had once been held prisoner. None were there now; Putress had killed them all with his tests. A pile of human corpses lay heaped in a corner of the jail. Callie bore no love for the humans who had cast her out even after she returned to herself post mortem. But, she would not have wished that fate on anyone. Not even the cursed Scarlet Crusaders.

She heard the ring of steel and shouts wafting down from the Apothecarium above and was heartened. She shook Jez’ral lightly, wincing when he moaned. She put her only remaining hand on his forehead and jerked it back. He was burning up. His normally pale skin was pallid. Dark circles grew beneath his sunken eyes. His lips were tinged bluish green and he moaned softly, as if he did not have the energy to scream. “Don’t you dare die on me,” she croaked. “Mir’el and Alayne will have a fit if you do.”

“Mir’el,” she heard him whisper. “Mir’el...” he began babbling in Thalassian. She gritted her teeth and clutched his hand, biting back a whimper when he gripped it with fevered strength. The only words she recognized were the names of elves she knew. Alayne. Tal’ar, Mir’el, Miris. He groaned in agony and twisted onto his side, pulling his legs up against his chest and crying out in pain. “Shindu before,” he gasped.

Above her, the sounds of battle died away. "Someone!" she shouted, "someone help us, please!" She banged her fist against the door and kicked at it frantically as the elven man continued to cry out in pain. "Please, for the love of the Light, help us!"

Long moments of silence passed. Jez'ral's whimpers began to quieten. His shivering grew more violent and his breath began rattling in his throat. Tears streamed down Callie's eyes as she knelt beside him, clutching him against her chest and praying that something would save him. She did not know what Putress had forced him to take but it was obviously killing him. "If I ever get out of here," she swore, "I am going to kill that bastard. I'm going to find out what he did to you and do it to him about a hundred times worse! Please, Jez'ral, don't die on me! Don't leave me here alone like this!"

"Tell Mir'el," he managed to croak out after several more moments of oppressive silence.

"Tell him what?"

"Mir'el," he repeated. "Tell him."

The door flew open and Callie began weeping in thankfulness when she saw Zerith standing there, his eyes blazing. "Putress forced something on him. He's dying. Help him," she said quickly. Zerith nodded and hurried over, frowning as he let the healing power flow through him. "You can help him, can't you?"

"I hope so," Zerith said flatly. "He's pretty far gone."

"He wanted me to tell Mir'el something," the rogue continued.

"I hope you know what it is," the priest replied.

"I don't. So, you'd better save him so he can tell me," she quipped, her voice quivering with sobs. "Where are the others?"

"Breaking open the rest of the cells. Come on, Jez'ral. You're a tough old bastard," Zerith groaned. "You can fight this."

"Zerith, have you found...*what the hell happened to him?*" Mir'el screamed, his normally baritone voice going up several octaves in fear. "And what happened to you?" he asked, seeing Callie. "You seem to be not all here."

"Let's get him out of here," Zerith said absently, his attention still focused on the sick man. "The damp air and the cold aren't helping. Let's get him back to Silvermoon where it's warm, dry, and familiar. Light, Callie," he added, seeing her for the first time, "what did happen to you?"

"Don't worry about me," she croaked. "Just don't let any more of us die."

The rogue followed the others out of the dungeons beneath the Apothecarium. She smiled when she saw Sylvanas surveying the quarter with an air of determination. That the Dark Lady had survived heartened Callie. With Sylvanas to lead them, the Forsaken would recover and thrive once again. "You there, Callie Morton," the banshee said, pointing to her. "You led the fight against Putress."

"As did several others, my lady," Callie whispered, her gravelly voice filled with pain as she thought about Davran lying dead in the trade district. Diami had been clinging to unlife when they were thrown in the cells. Callie hoped that the warlock would survive but had not seen her yet. The names of the others who had come from the Disorder of Azeroth flashed through her mind: Rickan, Rock, Zena...so many who had come along, giving their all, joining themselves and following along where Ger'alín and Zerith led. So many who had shared her struggle to find some semblance of normalcy after escaping the clutches of the Scourge, only to fall to Putress and Varimathras in their own sanctuary.

"I would ask that you remain here for a time, Callie. I see that you are injured; I will ask one of the shaman to heal you if they can spare the energy. I would like for you to travel to Orgrimmar and gather in the refugees. Rally them and tell them that Undercity is ours once more. Tell them that dark days lie behind and before us. The Alliance has declared war

against the Horde and the Forsaken will be there, fighting alongside those who gave their lives and spilled their blood to retake our city.”

“I will do ask you ask, my lady,” Callie said, her voice cracking. “But, I also have friends among the sin’dorei who I am worried about. With your permission, may I accompany them for now?”

“Yes, of course,” Sylvanas smiled, her normally grim face softening. “Go with your friends for now. But, return here as soon as you are able. I want the names of all who fought to keep our city from the clutches of Varimathras and his minion, Putress. They will be honored in our memories and in monuments as soon as I am able to raise a symbol to their heroism and their loyalty. I pray that it will be a light in these dark times.”