

Lights Templar

Origin - Book VII

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by
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Dedicated forever and always to Anna
and the Lights Templar group.

Prologue

Iris's Journal

*F*ar too much time has passed and really this journey should have started right after I learned about Genevieve and the fact that there were others. In our defense right after that there was the issue of dealing with Chaos which the aftermath of that turned the world upside down, well at least our world. The Order and Crusaders are now without magic and are not able to perform their regular tasks, the Council was also in shambles due to most of their core members sacrificing themselves to defeat Chaos and all in all this left everyone worried and afraid. Bandits and thieves actions were on the rise on the fringes of the kingdoms as they were less protected now and the same goes for traveling routes, so generally this feeling of fright in the people's hearts simply grew.

That said it was not all bad, even without power the Crusaders still showed up and the Order did everything they could to help those that needed help. The Council, once again, helped facilitated emergency transports or supply runs that needed to reach certain locations. While our world had been turned upside down, none of the core people gave up even while they were at a disadvantage which in turn helped the others also not give up and also started to build a new path for everyone to follow in order to reach a place where we could all feel safe once again.

While it will read as a selfish action as the rest of the world is trying so hard to rebuild itself, for us we simply left them alone this time. I think that

with everything that has happened and what we did, the people don't automatically hate us or want to report us as Chaos had ordered everyone to do, but there are still a lot of them I'm sure that resent our actions or decisions that we made. I mean in their eyes we took away their safety and for a large number their roles in life. That is not an easy thing to forgive assuming you are even willing to try to do that. So with that we left on a vacation of sorts and did what we could to help out with small attacks and so on. During one of those there was a period of time where we had to wait and so it was decided that we would tell some of our stories before we meet each other.

Some of them where inspirational and other sad, and when it came to my turn I froze. I knew the story that needed to be told and I also had complete confidence that the people I told it too would listen and not belittle any of it, but still I froze. At the time I blamed the scar of it and not wanting to relive all that, now looking back, I know that the real reason was that I simply did not want to face it. This was something I had not talked to anyone about and also something that I simply wanted to forget, and I suppose that I could have done that but what good would that have done. The feelings would never simply go away, the fear, loss and terror that I felt back then is inside of me and I can't run away from that. But I know that I'm surrounded by people that want to help if I allow them and I also know that I ran away from this for far too long, so in the end I did tell my story and as expected they listen and cried with me as well.

After that it was decided that we would follow up on my past and confront it. The first step was the place I was born, and the first action there had consequences as I met another family that had been close to ours that also suffered a loss during

my capture, or as I learned from them my death. The situation was explained as best as we could but the words and action still hurt. For a while they saw that I was alive, and hope that I was not the only one manifested in their hearts. It made me question if we should be doing this at all, I mean in the end this was mostly for me and here I was causing pain to others in my quest to become healthier, what right did I have?

That answer became clear as the family, while still hurt, was looking content in a way, or maybe content is the wrong word but it looked like finally they could move on as those questions in the back of their heads of what had happened that night was finally put to rest. Eventually they then asked if I wanted to go see the place where my parent, and myself or what was thought of being me, was put to rest. Secretly, or maybe not so secretly, that terrified me but given what they had just gone through there was no way that I could not take the next step as well.

The grave site was regular, nothing flashy but three tombstones, and I thought that seeing that would cause a bigger emotion inside of me but that was not the case. When I saw the site I saw that it was well taken care for, clearly someone or a group of people made sure to visit it often enough to be in the condition that it was in. Everything had happened so long ago and yet people still remembered and paid their respect, we were not forgotten as I had feared.

I had not actively prayed for a sign to tell me if what I had been doing was the right thing but signs I got and I listened. From there a goal was created and a path had appeared, we needed to deal with this, or better said I needed to deal with this and my friends, my best of friends, my family was going to help with every step of the way.

The first question was how to find the locations, which was answered by K'azugg when he was contacted to get more information. The locations still had traces of magic, that magic was dark magic which is impossible to now create but was still present for things already put in motion. All that was needed was a bit of it and from there Alexandria could create a way to find the first location. I had assumed that I would have been the perfect candidate for this considering my past but that was not the case as at the time a lot of focus was put on me by Rosa in order to cleanse me completely, still there was another that in the group that had fallen in a similar situation but had not been cleansed, Mike.

With that we found the first location, which given the leftover residue was harder than expected but we did find it. The place had been abandoned but more residue could be found and in larger quantities, from there a larger map was built.

Currently we have been at this for six months; all locations on the map from the human side have been visited. At each most were empty but some had leftover Dark Clerics. They were depowered but also quite mad, they raved about their lord coming back to have his revenge on us, there was nothing that we could do but to put them out of their misery. Their lord was dead and was never coming back and sadly they had no information that could be extracted from them about the others that had been captured. So with that we took what we needed and destroyed what was leftover so that no one else would be encouraged to use these places again.

Eventually the locations took us to the lands of the orcs, and we did in fact contact K'azugg to let him know at Anna and Mike request, mind you we all think it was more Anna's then Mike's. In the

end it was the right move as it made navigation easier as we knew very little of the land, but also slower. In order to visit the locations it was ordered that escorts follow us to the entrance of each one. Once at the entrance, K'azugg had little care for what we did as he had little love for those clerics or what they had left behind. He did want to make sure that we did not cause any issues in poking our nose where it did not belong, as he had said, and so the escorts had tagged along which also forced us to use normal means of transportation to get from one location to another.

At least the escorts have been cooperative with us, which is more than I expected. I can't say that I have any love for the orc, I mean they did kill my family and many others. I understand their view point of it and why they did what they did, and I also cannot disagree that our side probably did the same to some extent. That all said forgiving them is another matter. Still I'm not blinded by those emotions and I do see that they too have families, children and elders and for those non combatant and their way of life we have been more alert when visiting those locations and destroying them.

While that work has been worthwhile as certain dangerous traps had been left behind there have still been no clues or answers on the ones that had been taken. Currently we are at the last location on the map and it seems promising. Its entrance is layered with a magical spell that would be dangerous for us to simply approach; the challenge is that the entrance is at the side of a mountain so some regular climbing is in order to reach it.

Part of me is scared, and the others know it too. I'm assuming they think it's because of the fact that this is the last location and if nothing is found that there is nowhere else to look, but they

are wrong. I spent a lot of time looking at the maps and I know of one location that is missing, mine, the place that I was kept and tortured. If that place is missing then there must be others, but then how to we find those?

I have yet to tell anyone about it because I still think that we will find something as I have a lot of hope ridding on this last one; I mean why guard it so heavily if there is nothing there? There has to be something...

Chapter 1

"*I* know that this is going to be annoying but are we there yet?"

Adam was frustrated by the comment and did not put an ounce effort into hiding it. "It would be much less annoying if you didn't ask every ten minutes." He looked around; here they were all attached by a rope climbing a very high mountain in order to get to this cliff which was the last location on the maps that they have been following for a while now. "Sad part is that this is mostly your doing anyways, if I recall correctly you said..." His voice suddenly went a bit higher to add to the teasing, "There is a large magical bubble on the top and we simply can't fly all the way up there otherwise the drop that will occur when we are above the ledge will be dangerous, leaving us with few options..."

"I know what I said, you don't have to repeat it with such an annoying voice too. Look this is not easy for me, I'm okay with most physical labor but this is a bit much for me. My hands hurt so much." She then looked down at him, "And my hands are important to me."

Iris chuckled at that, "Now she remembers about that."

It's not that he did not understand, even after they had used the flying spell for most of it, the climb had been a lot for everyone. So for someone like her he could see where it would be difficult but there was something that she seemed to be forgetting. "Your hands! What about our everything? You, unlike us, wear little armor, so

you think this is a picnic for us as well?"

"You could have left that with the orc, I'm pretty sure that it would still be there when we came back down."

Adam's frustration with the so called magical princess was rising and from the top Mike could only chuckle. Anna looked down to confirm her suspicion that Adam was in fact simply egging her on. From the top you had Mike and Anna, then Iris and Rosamia and below them Alexandria and finally Adam. He had insisted that he be after her as he figured that she would need extra motivation. "From the looks of it, it seems that the task is starting to get to him."

Mike had no intention of disagreeing, "Considering the situation it's to be expected in a way, still a long climb and a complaining mage." He gave her a little smile, "Seems familiar for some reason right?"

Anna wondered about that for a second and then suddenly laughed, "Oh my god, William... that has been a long time."

This instantly drew the attention of Alex, "Who is William?"

Instantly Adam jumped in, "No, no, nooo, absolutely no story time for you. You will just use it to slow down again." Before anyone could comment a thought came to him, "Wait on second thought, let's do this, you climb about two meters and then she can tell you a part of it and continue when you've done about another two meters."

Alexandria was not amused at all, "I am not some child that you can simply wiggle a toy in from of them so that they can do what you wish."

Adam cleared his throat a bit, "Well child is not really what I had in mind but sure lets go with that..."

Iris turned to Rosamia, "I think that it's

escalating a bit too much with that last one."

Rosa was a bit discouraged by that as he had been doing so well in the past while; she chalked it up to the fact that they were all very tired.

Thankfully by looking up she saw a quick way to defuse the situation. "Guys, Mike has finally reach the ledge so you can stop now, we are finally here..." She was about to add more but then she saw him carefully go back down and whisper something to Anna.

Iris was worried, curious and instantly on edge at the same time, she was about to ask what was happening but then saw that Anna was pointing at her mouth and then her forehead. Suddenly understanding Iris looked down, "Alex connect us, I'll help."

She was still frustrated from Adam's comment and also by the situation. The spell to communicate linking everyone mind was not an overly complex one, the complexity came more with blocking out thoughts and emotion that you did not want to leak out and also the amount of people. Given the group in order to cast the spell for all of them she would have needed both hands, something that could not be afforded at this time. Alexandria did as best as she could and linked Rosa, Adam and herself to Iris, then when Mike and Anna where further down, in order to avoid the spell that had caused this whole issue, Iris linked them to the rest.

Iris then asked the question that everyone could hear clearly in their head '*What did you see?*'

Alex voice then chimed in '*Simply picture it in your head and we should all see what you saw.*'

A small sense of terror was felt as everyone saw the image of a Dark Cleric that had fully transformed into a larger shadow form. His size took up a large portion of the ledge which was

connected to an entrance that was too dark for them to see, or in this case was too dark for him to have seen anything when he had looked that way.

'Hey that's not funny at all...'

Rosamia was extremely concerned, this enemy was not supposed to exist anymore. *'Funny is not the word I would use Adam.'* She then looked down, *'Alex, how? How can this still exist?'*

There was a lot of sad emotions linked with Rosa's question and Alex could feel it all as well, *'Look, like I said before if a spell was already cast before the link was destroyed or shut off, however you want to put it, it will still function. The issue is that that form constantly draw power from a source and with the typical one cut off I don't really have an answer for you Rosa, I'm sorry.'*

Iris wondered about that, *'So that means that inside is something fuelling it?'*

'It stands to reason, yes. Now if you ask me what, well there could be a number of things really and most of them are not good news for anyone.'

Frustration and concern was mostly on Adam's mind, *'Can we even kill this thing as we are now? Also why is that spell not affecting him as well, and why did he not attack yet, it's not like we're where all stealthy a little while ago so he must know we're here.'*

It's then that everyone had a sudden headache, Alex and Iris refocused on the spell before it unraveled. *'Guys, I know this is hard but not all at once it causes a feedback...'*

Still reeling for the pain that was quickly going away Iris tried to answer one of the questions, *'I'm assuming that he is immune to the spell surrounding the cliff, at least that's the safe assumption of it.'*

Mike quickly jumped in, *'Alexandria are all spell neutralized in the zone?'*

'Not really...' As soon as she said it there was a sigh of relief from everyone. *'Before everyone gets too happy about that comment I'll add that the pool of spells is very limited. From what I saw the spell is an advance but still run down version of what was in that tower, so basically personal spells are good but then anything else that is outward casted will fizzle out.'*

Sensing confusion Iris clarified a bit more, *'Spell that affect your physical abilities like Adam's old speed boosts or enchantments that are very close to your person will still work to some extent but things like a lightning bolt, fireball or even a holy shield will not.'*

'Okay but what about the enchantment on our blades?'

Alexandria thought about it while Mike simply looked at her waiting for the answer, *'There will be a lot of wasted energy but those will still work if you simply enhance the blade only, as soon as the energy leaves the blade it will be wasted. Keep in mind that its power will still be drastically dropped.'*

As he nodded concern came from Anna and then resolution and before the spell could even communicated what he was starting to think about she knew the plan. *'Fine, Mike and I will go on top and distract it. Iris and Rosa, climb up but stay away as there is very little room as is but we at the same time don't know what is in the cave so be ready to cover us from there. Alex you need to take care of that spell and Adam you protect Alex.'*

Adam was once again very frustrated. *'Why play hero? Let's just all wait until she cracks the spell and then jump in. I understand that trying to avoid it and running in the entrance is a worse plan as we don't know if there is another more dangerous trap inside but still...'*

Mike started to move up slowly, *'It's not about*

being a hero but more about one of your other questions that I was wondering about as well, why not attack us now? It must know that we are here, but it's not reacting. This is great news but will it stay the same when Alexandria starts removing the spell around the area? It's not about being the hero but more about being the decoys.'

Anna quickly looked at the others as Mike was still going upwards, 'Let's get ready, as soon as we see Alex start we will jump in.'

As both of them moved up, the spell around the area cut them off from the link. Rosa and Iris moved into position and Adam carefully moved himself next to Alex. "I'm assuming you will need both hands and everything for this one so I'll wrap myself around you and support you for the time you need." While he move on top of her and solidly gripped the rocks around him she casted a quick spell to reduce her weight drastically and then slowly and carefully pressed her back at his chest to make sure she was secure before she let go with her hands.

A small smirk appeared on his face. "It's like you say, don't worry I won't let you drop."

She knew it was true but still she suddenly felt the need to apologize now that she was feeling what it was like when the shoe was on the other foot. Still before she could he just nodded upwards, "Just focus on getting that thing down as quick as you can the rest can wait."

With a quick nod she turned her head and started the process, which was the cue Mike and Anna where wanting on. Having already unclasped the climbing gears safety precautions Mike charged in at the target with Anna right behind him. As he raced towards his target he pulled out his sword and focused on the enchantment. A faint dim red glow started to appear around the blade, pushing

more energy into it made no difference at all. *'Alexandria was not kidding when she said that it would be drastically diminished, if what we are going against is what we all think, this will do very little against it.'*

Before Mike had started his charge the target had started to move closer to the edge, but now with a person coming at him with a glowing blade his attention was refocused. As he or it reached out to him, Mike moved a little to the right to miss the blow and then reaching his target made his first attack with a horizontal slash at the mid section of the dark shape's body. Not stopping and using a bit of the momentum of his arc, he then moved more to the right of the Dark Cleric. The blow had done very little but it had drawn the creatures attention, leaving it open for Anna to strike to the same section but for her she moved to the left after its completion.

It had been expected that a single strike would do little after they had seen how much the power of the enchantment had been diminished due to the spell surrounding them, still it had been hoped that two strikes at the same spot would have done more damage but sadly this was not the case as already the wound had been healed by its power. Ever the optimist Anna shrugged it off. "Its fine, we just need to keep going as we are."

She was right, now flanked the creature was completely preoccupied with them and that was leaving Alexandria to finish dismantling the magical protection around the area unhampered. Which was good news, the bad news was that the Dark Cleric did not seem to appreciate his current situation and started flaying his arms left and right without really targeting either of them specifically. Those attacks themselves where really a diversion as little pellets of dark energy started to drop as he

wailed them around. Due to the limited space around them, current size of the transformed Dark Cleric and random patterns the arms where moving about, this silly attack was a real problem.

Still there was some luck on their side as they moved around as much as they could while sometimes being able to poke at it from time to time, as the pellets being dropped where very small and both of them where covered from neck down. As there was no way to avoid them all focus was put on avoiding the arms and also making sure that their heads stayed clear, everything else was another matter. It did not take long for the droplets to start having an effect, already their blue capes was full of holes and pieces of their armor where being eaten off as the dark energy had essentially transformed into little droplet of acid.

Finally the creature stopped flaying its arms around and still being in a flanking position both of them took advantage of this and attacked from both sides. The damage had been minimal but seemed to have angered the creature, he quickly turned toward Anna with both his arms and suddenly a cone of dark energy poured forward. Mike knew that it was useless as she saw the attack and that it was too late as it was already committed but still he acted by slashing at the creature as much as he could to get its attention, "Anna!"

With the ledge behind her with a drop that she could not survive and a cone of darkness coming at her there were little options available. Assuming she even survived the blow, there was enough power behind that it would probably knock her over the ledge and this reason was probably why the transformed Cleric had targeted her with this attack. With less than a second to spare Anna dropped on the ground to her side while brazing

her single edge sword upwards. The action caused the sword to slash along the length of the cone that was being extended; it was Anna's hope that some of that cone would be part of the creature's arms and so possibly hurt it. This was something she hoped with all her might as she clenched her teeth in order to bear with the extreme pain of goblets of dark energy dropping all over her. The sensation was the same as all the other times, with the possible difference of its overall power being a little bit less. Still that overall difference resulted in very little difference in the end. When the move was done Anna quickly rolled to the side around the creature towards Mike. Those actions alone were equally painful but she needed to get away; thankfully Mike had continued his attacks on the creature and was now a more pressing target for the Dark Cleric.

"...It's the same as before, so be careful." That last part was useless to say just as when he had shouted her name in order to warn her, but just as before, it was said none the less due to the growing worry.

"It's not the only issue, still I'm thinking the answers are inside the cave... but we just can't spare it right now."

Starting to shake off the pain Anna once again stood in proper position to join back in, "Alex will be done soon, I just know it."

Adam was looking up as he saw black goop drop from the sky and heard Mike shout Anna's name. Thankfully the dropping goop was far enough from them. "I don't think you have much time left, so if you could maybe rush this a bit more..."

She was too focused on the spell to answer him but it seems that she was close to done as her hands stopped moving and then both of them

reached out towards the mountain side. There was little room available so contact was quickly made on the side of the mountain, then a faint blue glow appeared in her eyes and moved from her head to her arms, hand and then the mountain itself. This kept traveling upwards as it reached the peak and then shimmered to then disappear.

"...Is it done?"

Alexandria did not answer but quickly casted another spell but this time on him. "I think I know this one..." After that, there was another similar spell and then she turned around with a small smile on her face and grabbed onto him. "I would hope so seeing as I have just casted it on myself to help you hold on to me while I was dealing with this stupid protection spell."

When he saw that she had a hold on him and also what she had done he suddenly let go of the ledge and as soon as he did they both flew upwards to meet up with the others. When they got to the top they saw that Anna and Mike were pretty worse for wear but their swords were now glowing in full force. "I think you realized it but the shield is down now."

As she dropped Adam in the back, Rosa and Iris moved next to him having made their way on the ledge as well. Before they could ask Mike yelled the battle plan, "Iris, Adam you go inside, Alexandria and Rosamia help us defeat this thing."

In order to help with the room Alexandria kept the flying spell active and joined in, while Anna and Mike took turns to get some of their wounds healed by Rosamia while she also provided defense with her holy shield as well.

Adam quickly looked back, "Looks like they have this covered, so let's get some answers." Iris quickly casted a fire enchantment on Adam's already drawn swords and then they both made

their way inside and as soon as they stepped in they were assaulted with a horrible smell.

He knew this smell but wondered on its meaning, "Well something died here..."

The light provided from the fire enchantment was enough to provide them with enough cover to see that the so called cave was rather small. It had an oval shape with the sides being about fifteen feet and the depth about twenty-five to thirty feet. The cave itself was very bare, at the end you had what looked like a body sitting on the ground and in the middle you had a small cylindrical podium that was that was about four feet high with a glowing orb on top of it.

"I'll check the body just in case but I think that you need to check that thing."

Iris sighed a bit, this was not what she had hoped for overall and was more curious to know who the body was more than the orb but there was little choice in the matter. Adam saw her start casting a spell and then he started to do a quick investigation. By moving his swords around to get a better view he saw that the body was long dead. It was as they saw when they entered sitting on the ground, but now he could see that one of its arms was completely missing except for its elbow joint and the other was resting on its stomach. Most of the skin was gone revealing mostly a skeleton but due to the smell still being present there was probably still something left in the chest area. What was left exactly was a bit hard to tell as most of his body was covered in the typical robes that the Dark Cleric wore, but one thing was for sure, this was not one of the captured victims.

Being pretty confident on his analysis, Adam started to walk back towards Iris. "Dead Cleric over there, nothing more... and you, figured out what that thing is yet?"

Iris nodded, "I did and it's not good at all." She suddenly turned to him, "Switch with Alex, I need her here for this. Basically this thing is fuelling the thing outside and I'm pretty sure simply smashing it is not the way to go."

He wondered about that but did not question it as he then started to run at the cave entrance.

Alexandria was still flying around and attacking the creature strategically as she could. Essentially they had fallen into an old tactic of Anna and Mike opening sections in the Cleric's transformed body and having her drop in a little flaming gift. The trick was that the gift would wait a bit until the wound had closed and then explode reopening the wound, and if the timing was right explode with another, causing the creature to need to spend even more energy on healing itself. Now with the protection magic away and the two being able to use most of their full potential with Rosa backing them up this fight was looking much better then how it had started, still there was something wrong about it. Not once had the Cleric said anything, not even a scream or yell, plus while it was clearly monitoring it's consumption it still felt like it would have reached its end by now. Something was wrong but what was it.

"Alex! Switch... Also don't doddle too much with what you will see in there okay."

"I do not doddle, I inspect and clearly identify..."

"Whatever, just go. I'll take your place."

Alex was not sure that he could do that given the enemy they were facing but while she could not see Mike she did see that Anna gave her a quick nod and with that she start to fly to the entrance. "Before I go..." She waited a few seconds for the others to move away from her cue and then snapped her fingers to command all the leftover

spells detonate, "A little parting gift." While the damage inflicted was very serious, again no scream or anything, just simple reconstruction.

Worried she walked inside, "Oh that's not pleasant..." She then stopped as she saw Iris next to a quick light spell and a mysterious orb. "But that is... any clues?"

"From what I can tell the sphere is hording dark energy inside of it and it's also linked to the creature outside fuelling it. It seems to be at about half now, also don't touch it. There is a dead body with an arm missing and around the pedestal I see a few small pieces of bone fragments so again touching is probably bad."

Alexandria was simply fascinated by this, but then suddenly her eyes went wide. "What... the ... heck..." Iris was confused, "What's going on"

To explain Alex moved her finger and pointed at the line where you could see the top of the dark energy inside the sphere. "Look very closely..."

Following her order Iris saw the pool of energy starting to go down, but quickly after it then climb back up and was now above where Alex was pointing. "Wait... how?"

"I don't know but I need to find out." Alexandria casted few spells around it and learned quite a bit. First there was a protection spell around it for those that tried to pick up the fist size orb, and then you had the orb itself.

"This is not good at all, I need and want way more time with this but I don't have it." Very worried but at the same time excited as someone had just showed her a new magic trick that never even occurred for her to try, she continued her explanation. "That fight outside is going to go on forever. That's probably why that transformed Cleric inside is not reacting to anything as I'm thinking it's already dead but more probably it's

just a conjured form like went we did that final test in the tower."

Iris then interrupted, "Okay sure, so it's being maintained by this thing and acting on whatever command that it was given after its creation and that part is scary in itself but understandable. What's not is how is this thing gaining new dark energy to feed it, that should be impossible you said so yourself."

Alex thought about it, "I did say that and I still stand by it but never could I have imagined that something like this was possible, so I never thought about this being in existence. Essentially, it's a few spells at once. First you have the energy containment, which we have seen before and also something we use often but on a much smaller scale. Then you have the link between it and the creature, again no surprise. But what is a surprise is the creation, but saying that is wrong in a way as the proper word should be conversion."

"...Conversion... how?"

"I have no clue, and that is what I want to know more of. But I'm assuming its taking its power from something and converting it to dark energy in order to then full the... guardian I guess."

Still confused, Iris thought about it more. "Sure but where is it getting its new energy? Can it simply do that create new dark energy?" There was this pause and then a thought clicked in her head, "It's using the attacking spells energy and converting it. So in a way we are fuelling this thing." She then focused her gaze on Alex, "I'm right, right?"

"I think so, as for the other question, I'm assuming that it needed an original sample first in order to convert whatever to it, which could have been done long ago. So I still stand by what I said but this is an interesting loophole on that." She

then sighed heavily, "And as much as I hate to say this, we now need to find a way to destroy it... I so want to learn more about this."

Iris hand then reached out to Alex's, "Wait, do we need to destroy it? I mean I'm sure we can simply destroy the spell that is linking it to the creature right?"

Now Alexandria was very confused, "Suuuure, I mean that could be done but would destroying this be not a much better thing?"

Iris nodded, "Probably, but then we have nothing and this could give us another lead that we did not know about. I mean there is no way that simply anyone can create something like this right?"

There was no arguing that and Alex did understand why Iris was suggesting it, this was the last spot and there was nothing. "Okay, well I'm game." Focusing on the new task at hand a plan formed in her head. "I'll deal with link spell and also add in something to make it inert without making it inert and you focus on that trap spell and also its general containment. Last thing I want is for something to go wrong and have it blow up on us."

As much as Alexandria wanted to rush this as already a lot of time had passed and her friends out there were fighting a fight that she now knew that they could not win, she had to take the time she needed. This would be very complicated. First she would modify its field of conversion, she needed that spell intact otherwise most of what made this a marvel would be destroyed, but at the same time she could not have it take and convert energy from any spell and also the range that it had needed to be modified. In the end, she neutered it to only be able to take in from one spell in particular and also the effective range now was

basically touched only. The next part would normally be easy and that was to terminate the link spell, what made it hard was that she needed to do it very quickly. Now that there was no way to replenish itself that creature outside was draining it rather quickly.

Iris stopped casting herself, the traps had been disarmed and the orb could now be picked up and also it's containment was now secure, even more so then before. "I'm good..."

Alex looked at what was left over, it was about at one quarter full, as she started to raise her head and acknowledge Iris the rest of the group ran inside the cave.

"Alexandria, cast a spell to blow it away from here...NOW!!!"

Typically Mike left the choice of spell to use in a certain situation to herself as she would ultimately know better but in certain cases there was no time for that. Without knowing how much power or anything she created a large gust a wind and aimed it at the entrance, by then all of her teammates where behind the pedestal and where also on the ground taking cover. It's then that she had a pretty good idea on what was happening outside and dropped to the ground herself. As she was still falling the cave went white due to a brilliant flash outside and then she was forcefully thrown down by the pressure of the blast.

Once everything had calmed down the others looked around. The cave entrance was now much larger then before and the cliff was vaporized. Still everyone seemed safe, but Alex was nervously looking around for something. Other then Adam and Iris there was no way for the others to know that the orb was no longer on the top of the pedestal. Its then that Iris got her attention and pointed at her belt pouch, *'Oh good she grabbed it*

while I was casting the spell.' She then felt a weight suddenly leave her shoulders as she thought that it had disappeared somewhere during the blast.

Mike pointed at the pedestal, "Adam filled us in while we were fighting that thing, I guess that when you destroyed the orb that the creature suddenly used its final option in order to try and destroy us as well." He then turned to the new cave entrance, "I'm glad that you were able to push it away before its final moments as I'm pretty sure that we would have been done for otherwise."

She was very happy about that as well, "Agreed, but on the orb situation..." Iris then interrupted her and pulled it out of her belt pouch, "Simply destroying it was not the best course of action so instead we needed to contain it." There were worried and concerned looks from everyone else and mostly from Adam.

"Are you sure that is wise, I mean these things then to come back and bit us somewhere we don't like normally and we have plenty of examples of that."

There was no denying that fact but it also was their only other best lead. Sure she knew that there was another location but there was no real way to find them, this could help. It would take time to figure out but she was confident that Alex would be able to and while they would need to wait until she did, it would still be better than the alternative. Still this new temporary dead end was annoying and frustrating. It's then that she realized that she had taken a while to answer Adam comment, she raced to think of something to put him at ease but nothing really came to mind.

It's then that she felt Anna's hand on her shoulder, "This orb is currently contained right and essentially can't cause any issues at this time?" Both Alexandria and Iris nodded in

agreement. "Well in that case for now let's keep it with us, I mean it's better than to simply leave it here." She then looked at the dead body that was now lying on the ground, "In case someone else find it and uses it for something that will cause us issues."

"Look I don't disagree with that but..." He then turned to Rosa for support on this. She too looked unsure on this course of action, "I'm not a fan of what that thing is. I mean a containment orb that can fuel something like that is not something we want to keep around." She then looked at Iris with concern, "But I also know what that thing represent for you as well now and if you are okay with this course of action then I'll support your decision."

Iris's worries suddenly melted away, if forced too she would asked Alex to destroy it but this was a link and they could learn a lot for this orb's construction. Once that was done then they would destroy it, now they just had to hope that the time of that event would happen before Adam's premonition which she was sure everyone agreed with.

There was still some grumbling from Adam but before any focus could be put on that a light blue floating figure of a face showed up around them. "Miss Alexandria, I need your services as soon as possible. Can we speak in private now?"

There was a lot of forcefulness and urgency in Lithius voice which worried Alex a bit. "It's just me and the others in the middle of nowhere with no one else around so we should be good, still do you want me to erect something in case or is this conversation for me only?" She did not think that would be the case for the last comment but had to ask.

"In the case of our teammates, they can be

included and as for the other... I'm sending you a symbol, so follow all the other expected procedures." A bizarre shape then appeared, it looked like a bunch a randomly drawn lines intercrossing themselves sometimes and not for others. Other then Alexandria they mean nothing to anyone, Iris included.

After a few seconds the symbol disappeared and Lithius terminated the communication, Alexandria let out a small sigh and then turned to the others, "Well, I can't say that I ever thought I would have to use that when it was explained." Ignoring everyone's confused looks she then immediately started to get to work by casting a few spells. They all let her finish her work as they saw a shimmer of a dome appear around them, assuming that eventually she would fill them all in. In the mean time they turned to Iris, who may have a better understanding of what was happening. When she realized that they were waiting on her she shrugged, "I have no clue what is going on, I understand the spells being casted but other than that I don't really know why..."

Alex finally finished with her preparation suddenly cut her off, "And there is no way that you would know. These protocols have been set in place in order for emergency communication to occur at a distance and are only shown to Council members." She then paused for a second before continuing, "Which make me wonder if that's gone now seeing as some members in the current Council would not be able to cast these spells... Anyways, the idea is that random symbols are learned that are keys to the type of communication spell that will be used and also the symbol itself act as a random key to link the spells between the parties."

Suddenly Mike started to understand, "So

even if someone sees the key appear it's not good enough as they also need to know the corresponding spell to use as well in order to listen in."

As she nodded in approval, Iris then continued the explanation having pieced the rest of the puzzle herself, "Then you also have the extra steps of this one way shield that allows us to see outside but no one else, added with the other spell of making it so that nothing we say will make it past the dome around us."

Adam's ears perked at that one, "Well that is nifty, so we can see no issues and they can't, plus we can also strategize and no one will hear us?" Iris then nodded, "Pretty much."

While he was still thinking of the implication and also how helpful this would have been in the past while he was still with the Crusaders Anna wondered on what had happened that would warrant such steps. She did not voice her concerns but did reach out to Mike hand, who then grabbed and held it, as she quickly checked she was not the only one it seems that was wondering the same thing.

"Okay so I'll cast the spell to link all if us, it's not an easy spell considering the distance involved so I'm guessing that he has no clue where we are at this moment." A quick forced smirk appeared and then it was suddenly gone as she started the spell. It took a bit of time but once done a full figure of Lithius suddenly appeared in the middle of all of them.

"Thank you for following protocol, Miss Alexandria." Other than Alex all the others wondered how he could know if she had done so or not but did not follow through with the question.

"No problems, still an easier communication spell would have been appreciated considering

everything."

"As you know the type of symbol used for these moments are random and that one was the one that was picked, still I agree there where issues creating contact... how far are you presently?"

"Currently in the orc's land inspecting a lead for Iris."

Iris then chimed in, "I'm trying to find clues on the others that were captures as I was, now that we know that there are others and have the time to look for them."

A worried look suddenly appeared on Lithius face, "Hmm, had I known..." Alex was now worried, "What is this about? Did something happen with the new Council?"

"No nothing like that, a book has been stolen called 'Weight distribution how to'... I will add that it's a Council marked book."

The implication of that sent Alex in deep thought instantly while left the others confused a bit and due to the silence that had been created Adam self volunteered. "Okay so, I mean I know how important books are to all of you but this can't be the first time this has happened and from the sound of it the content it seems... I want to say not important as others that even I could think of."

"True this has happened in the past and happens more often the most realize but because it's a Council marked book these extra precautions are being followed."

Before Adam could self volunteer again Iris explained more, "This one I know, Council marked books are books that have been set aside for specific reasons. Most are due to the knowledge they hold but in some cases it's because they could be key into something secret. Because of this they are not to leave Astrum ever, typically." She then

turned to the image of Lithius, "Does this mean that the book was stole from Astrum?"

The implication of that last questions sent everyone in deep thought as Alex still currently was.

"No, which is of concern to me, the book had been approved to be lent out to Calculus."

While that was better news it still was not good, which made Rosa wonder, "So a book was stolen from Bernard, the most powerful mage in probably the biggest trading city in the human lands?"

As Lithius nodded in approval, Adam let out a small whistle. "Well that's not going to be simple assuming you wish for us to go and find this book back."

"That is why you where communicated, yes. Normally other Council members would deal with this but given our current numbers I cannot really spare any of the two that are left. That said I also had no clue of what you currently where doing at this time."

Iris knew where he was going with that last comment, "We sadly just hit somewhat of a dead end with the search, there is another lead but it will take some time before we can follow it. That said your timing is not bad, plus given everything that you have done for us in the past I don't think that we would have ignored any of your requests."

She then turned to Mike and Anna, who both nodded. "We completely agree, at the same we are not sure how much help we can be to track down a magical book but we will help out where we can." It's then that Mike turned to Lithius, "That said, it could be helpful to know why the book was flagged as a Council book, it could help with the search."

Alex suddenly looked up, she figured she already knew what the answer was going to be but

wondered if she would be surprised none the less. "Sadly I cannot give you that information at this time."

Alex let out a small chuckle, "Council marked books are marked by the leader of the Council only, so when Lithius got the position he must have also gotten that knowledge... knowledge that he was probably told not the share."

"That is correct Miss Alexandria. I understand the implications of me not telling you but I cannot break this rule at this time given the current situation. I will let you know that there is a clause that does allow me to share the information assuming you already know of the reason."

Everyone suddenly turned to Alex, "Yea sorry I don't. But I will admit that the book in question is familiar to me for some reason, but I can't remember why."

This time it was Lithius that signed deeply, "Well in that case, I will thank you for your cooperation with this and will wish you the best of luck." He then focused his gaze on Alex, "I will contact Bernard to let him know of your arrival." He then panned to everyone, "Also while you are on this mission you are not to divulge this to anyone that is not involved under any circumstances. If anyone asks you are simply visiting or are still on your quest to find the missing people that were taken a while back."

Alexandria nodded, "We understand."

"Again good luck", and with that his image disappeared.

Sarcastically Adam turned to the others, "Well this should be fun." He then looked around and made his way to the podium that was still standing but damaged after the blast that had occurred. "At least it will not take long to destroy the contents of this place." As he raised his leg and kicked it down,

Alex suddenly raised her arm in order to stop it but then Iris reached out for it to grab her attention. "I made sure to disabled all traps, podium included."

The sudden worry then disappeared from her face. "Oh good..." She then angrily looked at Adam, "Not that we would had time to do anything if you hadn't mind you." The lack of reaction from him did not help her mood but she let it drop as there were more pressing matters as she pointed to the dead body. "I'll leave that to you as I move the other below and we explain to our escort that their services will no longer be needed."

"Sure, once it's don't I'll meet up with everyone." Once confirmed everyone moved closer to Alex and then she magically moved them out of the cave. Iris then made her way to the dead body and casted a quick spell, "I've breathed in enough of your kind from my taste." She then pointed her hand at the body and let out a jet of flame that started to incinerate everything, as the bubble around her protect her from the smoke she made sure that only dust would be left.

"Okay now to join the others." There was a small pause as she quickly looked around, "I promise that I'll find you, but sadly it looks like it's got to wait a little longer."

As she appeared with the others she saw that Anna was finishing her explanation of what had happened. "With the Dark Cleric gone and all leftover spells destroyed that place is once again safe. We do apologize for the explosion mind you as we had not thought that we would have to fight something like that again given the current circumstances."

"Better you people then us, and there is no love lost on our end with another of those kind now gone."

"Well seeing as this was the last location we

will head back and see if new leads can be found, please inform K'azugg and thanks again for the escort."

To that the orc escorts simply grunted. Adam then whispered to Rosa, "I was expecting a bit more for that last one, I mean we are finally leaving."

A small smile appeared on her face, "... So you wanted a group hug or something?" with that she chuckled as Adam let out a grunt not too dissimilar to the ones that orcs had done.

Alex then extended her hand, "Okay with Iris back, let's once again hold hands and make our way out of here."

While they made a circle and held each other hands, Iris turned to Alex, "I take it that we will not be going there directly right?"

"Nooo, we will have to do a quick stop in the desert, take a bit of a break and then we can do the final jump. I'll send you the location I have in mind."

Iris nodded and then closed her eyes, "Got it, and ready when you are."

"Well off we go."

The orcs looked ahead as both Alex and Iris synced they spell casting and then they all glowed blue and disappeared.

"Good riddance I say."

"Agreed, I'll report back to K'azugg and you go to the others."

The orc nodded, "That was the plan all along. Hopefully next time we will be better prepared to stop these intrusions."

"Agreed..."

With that the escorts separated and left for different locations.

Chapter 2

Rosamia stretched out her arms and looked around as they walked from Calculus teleportation circle towards Bernard's tower. "I need to stop here sometime and admire this place more, the work is gorgeous, the way they have adapted their sculptures in the base of building, walls and arches makes this place a marvel to explore."

"Considering the amount of vacation we take that might be a while if we wait until next time, I'm just saying."

Anna smirked, "You know Adam it does not mean that it took years before we enjoyed our first vacation that the next time will take as long. It's not really how it goes."

"It's not? Hmm well I guess time will prove me wrong then."

"Pfff, Anna's right and plus if she is wrong then who cares, I mean this is why Rosamia gave us a whole extra life so that we could find the time to enjoy it at one point."

Anna then turned to face Alex, "True that we have the time, but keep in mind that now is only now and not then or will be."

"That statement has a lot of hidden meanings there." It was sad to say but most agreed with Adam's comment save for Mike who chuckled a bit. "You think that's loaded, try having a discussion late at night with things like that popping up from time to time."

Anna suddenly gave him a quick jab to his shoulder and glared at him; he simply raised his arms to indicate his immediate surrender and chuckled again. "I'm just pointing it out, no need to

worry too much about its meaning." She then turned to Mike who had a grin on his face he then got closer to her in order to give her a quick kiss on the cheek, "No worries from me, as I love that about you."

"Hmm, on that note then I think that I want to do an extra stop while we are here then." This puzzled Adam, "We don't have to take everything she says to heart you know." Again Mike chuckled, "Even if she is right most times?"

Before Adam could comment, Rosamia interrupted him. "It just reminded me about something I have yet to do. I mean I should apologize to Kyle seeing as I'm here, I was the one that pretty much put Jessica in the spotlight and I can't image that it's been great between the two of them being apart so much because of it." Adam reached out to hold her hand, "I'm sure that those two will work it out, and I'm sure none of them blames you for it at all."

She gave him a quick smile, "You're probably right, still I have caused that couple a lot of issues and considering that they have always been there for us I would like to still have it said."

Iris looked at the two, "I think he's right too and I'm also sure that time can be found for that."

Alexandria then turned to them, "Yea, this little visit should not take a long time at all, so no worries okay." While she tried to be convincing deep down she knew that there was a chance that it would be anything but that. This sentiment was also share by Mike who suddenly stopped in front of a door leading to a tower that did not seem to have a handle on it to open. "So Alexandria, stupid question here but do we simply knock?"

She moved in front of the door to Bernard's tower, "I guess we could, but that should not be need."

There was an awkwardness that was created after about a minute had passed and Alex was still standing confidently in front of the door with the door still shut in front of her. Its then that Adam could simply not hold his laughter anymore, "Haha, ah that's precious, you were expecting him to wait on the other side until you suddenly arrived and open the door for you?"

Her face suddenly turned red, "... No... I was just... I simply expected him to have a spell ready for our arrival that's all. I mean this is an expected visit so..."

"Hahhahaha... oh that's rich..."

"HEY! Stop laughing..."

Trying to hide her own smile, Anna looked at Mike and reached out to knock on the door, "Looks like we simply knock after all."

It did not take long for the door to open and for them to be greeted by a slender man in with brown hair dress in student robes that could often be seen in Astrum. "Welcome, my master has been preparing a room for you in order to talk, I was told to lead you all to it when you arrived, please follow me."

As they walked in Adam gave Alex a small nudge, "See he at least prepared a room for us, so it's not all lost." She angrily looked at him, "Mmmm... Stop it."

What they assumed was a student of Bernard, led them up the tower to one of the higher floors. While the stairs continued up the apprentice then pointed to some large double doors. They were on a wall that had been made to block off most of the area with the exception of the passage that allowed them to climb to the next floor. He then opened the two doors and motioned for them to go in while he stayed outside. "Please wait here and I will go and tell Master Bernard that you have arrived."

When the last of them entered, the doors closed behind them before they could ask for anything else. As they looked around they saw that the room was mostly circular due to the towers shape but had no windows. There were many book cases on the walls, all of them filled with what looked like different types of books and in the center a large throw rug with a table that seemed to seat eight people. Most took a seat while they waited with the exception of Alex who was obviously taking this time to look at the type of books that he had around. Iris was doing the same but in a more passive manner, "This looks like a mini library."

"Hmm, this is probably his personal library I would guess. I mean you must feel it right?"

It took a moment but then she nodded in agreement as the others had curious looks on their faces. "Most mages have certain spells active on them at all times in case, this place seems very protected and is setting off a few alarms due to it."

Having finished with her quick inventory Alexandria then joined the others, "And considering how many warnings I'm getting from this place I have to assume that's it's his and his alone."

It's then that the doors opened and that Bernard stepped in the room. "I'm sorry for not greeting you all but I was busy with some last minute preparations." As he continued, Alex quickly glanced at Adam with a stare in order to inform him not to make a comment; Adam simply smirked and said nothing.

Bernard then focused on Alex, "I'm about to set the final sequence that should complete the spell, I just want to warn you in advance as I'm assuming this will be very harsh on your senses Miss Alexandria."

She took a deep breath, "Thanks for the warning, but go for it." While Alex was very easy going with her comment it seemed that Bernard was the complete opposite. "Very well, with your permission I will complete the spell."

While he casted Alex shrugged at the curious glances that the others gave her. It was easy for them to not realize as while they had homes in Astrum none of them actually lived there to study or had served under a master there. Given what had happened, it was easy for Alex to see how hard this all was for Bernard and it was the main reason why she had expected him at the door. Ever since this happened there is no way that this person has had any rest what so ever, she tried to downplay this situation but the loss of a marked book was a pretty big offence normally.

Suddenly she cringed as the spell finished. As Iris had explained mages had spells that were always active around them and it acted like a sixth sense in a way, when the spell concluded that sense suddenly went dead.

Seeing her discomfort Bernard worried, "I am sorry but I needed to cast this spell in order to make this room completely secure."

Mike looked to Iris, "In a similar way that Alexandria did in the cave?"

It took less time for Iris to recover as she had less active spells, "Similar yes."

Alex having finally recovered added, "Think of it as a very blown up version of that spell." She then quickly turned to Bernard, "But given what occurred and what we are about to talk about it was necessary." There was a bit of a white lie there that the other saw but that Bernard did not as he suddenly relaxed a bit after that comment. "I was not sure that the standard precautions would do so for the past while I have been preparing these

extra measures in case. I'm glad that you approve."

She wanted to remind him that things are different now and that she was not part of the Council anymore but there was no point, and she simply was glad that her comment made him be able to relax even for a little bit.

"Now that the security measures are in place let me explain what happened."

He then proceeded to go over the details of having received the book at the appointed time from the appointed person. Once done he then marched to this room and he did not stop along the way, when he arrived he casted the extra spells on the book that would warn him if it was picked up, opened and also if it somehow left the room. With those precautions in place he placed the book in one of the bookshelves and left. When time finally permitted itself he came in order to start reading it and then noticed that it was gone. When the theft was reported many standard questions were asked, like did anyone suspicious visit, did any event occur that was out of the ordinary and also which defensive spell had been broken in order for the theft to occur. When he answered that no spell had been broken and that all were present and active it was then that the questioning suddenly stopped, he was then told that a group would be sent along to continue the investigation.

"And now we are here, I must say that I was surprised to hear from master Lithius himself that it would be you conducting the investigation and not a group of elves as it normally would be."

Alexandria agreed with that one too, but in the case of Bernard where this change of event would seem like a good thing for her it looked like anything but for him. "It normally should have been but something came up and we were all Lithius could spare." She then smiled, "But hey,

better us than a group of very serious elves constantly asking questions and not answering any of your own in a situation like this."

"You seem to be talking from experience there?"

For once, or maybe twice, Alex was happy to have Adam take his jab at her. Showing that she too has been where Bernard is right now was a good way to help, because this was not a good time for him and she feared that this would be a continuing trend as the day went on.

"It has happened a few times yes." She then looked at Bernard, "Now before we start there is a question that I will ask that would have been redundant if the elves had been here, but what did you need the book for? Like I said they would have known as you would have told them when you made the request but we don't have that information."

"Oh yes I suppose, that makes sense, ah the request actually came from the Guilds. They were asking me to look into a way to see if a certain spell could be modified in order for them to lighten the load on precious gems when they are being moved around."

This confused Alex, "Should the normal spell not be good enough?"

Bernard slowly nodded and then reached in one of his pockets and pulled out a small ruby, that action surprised Rosa. "Now I'm assuming that it's a sample and you don't always have rubies in your pockets?"

That reaction suddenly made his smile a bit, again a good thing, "No I don't and this is a defect actually, that said in this city some do." Adam joined with Rosa in wondering on the implications of that last part as Bernard continued his explanation. "Every item is built in a certain way

which makes it what it is." He quickly casted a spell that magically show a shape in the air around them, "This is a ruby. Now when you cast the spell to lighten its overall mass, this happens to it." Once the spell was casted the shape drastically changed.

Adam quickly turned to Alex, "Wait how many times did you cast that thing on us when you made us fly around, you mean to tell me that this is what you did to me?"

"Please, do you really think that I would use a spell that would change your physical characteristics so wily nilly permanently?" She then quickly raised her hand in his direction, "Also before you continue please wait until the show is over. I mean once the spell is canceled or stops then everything goes back to the way it was, that's how the spell works. There are exceptions mind you, mostly with certain volatile items as I once explained to you but those are rare and also don't include the human body."

Bernard slowly nodded, "All very true but in this case..." He then terminated his spell and then the image shifted again, it was now pretty much what the original one was but there were some very small differences.

"Rubies!!! for real? That was not in the documented list of items for the spell."

"No it was not and this was something that displeased the Guild members tremendously for many reason."

Still a bit in shock Alexandria reached out for the gem and Bernard handed it to her. "Well that answered that I guess."

Adam still had a frown on his face, "This explanation still does not make me feel comfortable about all this. That aside knowing this does not help us figure out how and who stole the book. So

what do we do to figure that out?"

Alex, still playing with the ruby, let out a deep sigh. "Well for that I will need to spend some time in this room with Bernard to go over all the spells he has in this room, depending on how that goes it should give us an answer on the how. As for the who, well again if we figure out how it was done it could give us a clue on who."

"Hmm, I will not be able to help out much with that and after that last explanation I'm not so sure I want more details on how your spells work at this particular time. So with that..." He then stood up, "I think I'll go see what I can find out there. I don't think that who did this is still in this city but there may be clues lying around."

Alexandria eyes suddenly went wide open, "WHOA remember we are not to talk about any of this to anyone..."

This time it was Adam that raised his hand in a gesture to stop her from talking, "No worries, you know this was a part of my job when I was a Crusader. There are ways to get information without giving away what you are looking for you know."

Clearly she was not convinced, but it's then that Rosa also stood up, "I think that I'll join him, like Adam I think I can be of more help out there then in here." She then gave Alex a small smile, "Plus I can keep watch on Adam this way too."

With that Alex suddenly relaxed. Which frustrated Adam a bit, but not because of Alex's reaction but of Rosa's. Bottling that emotion at this time he suddenly switch gears and reached out for Rosa's hand in mock amusement "Shall we then go out and divulge some secrets to the public?" Rosa only signed as they both made their way out the door, who magically closed itself as soon as they were out of the room.

"Well that's one protection spell." Alex then turned to Iris, "While we do this can you help out?"

Iris nodded, "Of course while you go over everything with Bernard, I'll do what you showed me in order to analyze a room."

A warm smile appeared on her face, "Thanks."

Being pretty much forgotten in the room Mike looked at Anna and then at Alex. "Well like Adam I'm pretty sure there is not much that we can add in the magical department but, but unlike Adam I am interested to know." Anna nodded as well, "Same here and plus I think that we can probably add once you understand more what this room is about."

Having been explain the way they reasoned things out at one point Alex was not going to disagree, "That sound like a good plan." She then stood and then turned to Bernard, "Well shall we as well?" He simply stood and nodded in agreement.

The process of dissecting all the spells that protected the room took a long while but did go well. Overall the list of protections where as follow, on the physical side of thing the room was completely enclosed and the only way in it was by the door which was magically enhanced in order to make it impossible to break using physical means. This left only magical ways to forcefully enter the place and for those you had an overall protection that prevented scryings of any sorts and also random teleportation spell. The walls where covered with different protections against them so that if something changed or moved through then an alert would be triggered. Books as mentioned before where marked so that when there were picked up, opened or moved out of the room then a trigger would occur to alert or even move the book elsewhere. As a last measure, and it was a pretty

big one as the spell was still intact after the book had been stolen, if any spell were casted in the room then Bernard would automatically know.

"That took longer than I thought but that should be all of them."

Bernard took a seat with all the others at the table, "You are correct Iris that is all of them and also as I mentioned every one of them is still functioning just fine."

"That means that somehow the thief was able to get around all the spells in order to steal the book, given all the active spells that seems pretty hard."

Bernard smirked a bit at Mike's comment, something that was odd considering his character, "It's more than pretty hard actually as it should be near impossible." His smile instantly disappeared, "And yet, somehow it got done..."

Anna wondered on that, "Could it be that the book is not missing at all and that there is a trick in play, I mean that would explain it."

Bernard was suddenly hopeful, secretly he had hoped for that as well but if there was a trick at play it was a really good one.

"Hmm, I don't think that's the case."

Alexandria then looked at Bernard, "I'm sorry to say but the book was stolen."

It was clear that he wanted to say something but held back, after a few uncomfortable seconds to see if he would say anything Iris looked at her sister. "Have you figured out how they did it?"

She nodded, "I have yes, and it's exactly like Mike said."

Again Bernard wanted to say something and after a bit of a pause this time he did. "...I'm sorry Miss Alexandria I don't want to disagree with you but what you say should be..."

"Impossible, and yet you said it yourself the

book is gone none the less." She then stood and looked around; eventually she picked up a book from one the bookshelf, opened it and then placed it on the table. "Tell you what Bernard, I'll leave this room and prepare outside. While I do that remove the permission you put for me, then take this book and put it somewhere else, when it's done simply open the door and close it. I'll probably be still preparing but it will tell me that I'm good to go as during the preparing process I really can't break focus. When it's all done then you will see with your own eyes."

As she left the room Bernard was simply stunned, he simply stayed there for a few minutes and then the task at hand came back to him. Once the spell was modified he then took the book and moved it to the other side of the room where there was a spot where it would fit. He then made his way back to the others, "I know what I said and I also know what happened but this really should be impossible."

"If my sister says that it's possible that I believe her one hundred percent." Iris then looked at the door, "She got a plan alright."

Bernard then nodded, "I guess I simply have to wait and see for myself. Still before that I'll let her know that everything is ready from my end." He made his way to the door and then opened it as she had instructed, as she had mentioned she paid him no attention. He looked at her sitting on the floor with legs crossed in deep thought, she was preparing something but what he had no clue. After closing the door he returned to the others, "I must say that I'm nervous for some reason, plus I should have show her to a room in order for her to get properly ready... for her to be on the floor like that."

Iris chuckled, that last comment was very like

Bernard and if only he knew the situation that she had been in, he should know that a floor in a secure tower would be considered an okay place for her. Before she could comment on her inner though the door suddenly opened and her sister stepped in.

Bernard nodded, "I see currently she is masking herself in a way that is telling the spell that she is me...Interesting especially considering that I'm already in the room. Still that is the easy part." He then stopped talking and watched with the others as they looked at her wave her arm around the room which created a pulse. Instantly Bernard eye opened wide, "HOW! She casted a spell but it did not trigger my protection." He looked at the two and they simply shook their head, obviously they were not trained in magic so they could not know but the sister maybe.

Iris smiled and shrugged at the same time, "Hey I said that I believed her not that I knew how." She then pointed at Alex, "Still if that surprised you then I think that next little while will be a really big shock then."

Her comment had been right, with every action that Alex took Bernard simply could not believe and the worst part she made it all look very simple and for the most part it was. First a spell to make the room believe that she was him, then a locator spell, followed by another spell to remove the ones on the book in question that had in fact been found where he had hid it. When she could finally pick up the book a few more spells where casted to remove all the other protections he had placed on it and then she turned and made her way out of the room and simply left. No warning at all had triggered during the whole process, such a thing should be impossible and yet he had just seen it with his own eyes.

He had no clue how long he had simply been lost in thought but then a knock on the door brought him back. "Ah hey, can you invite me in again I look a bit odd like this with a book in my hand and all."

Inside his head Bernard cursed, so lost in thought that he had been that he had completely forgotten to do that. As he started part of him was confused by what she had said, standing there with a book made her feel out of place but preparing this magical feat that she had just preformed was okay, he put that confusion aside and focused on the task at hand, still how did she do that.

After a while he opened the door and let her in, as she handed him the book it was clear to Alex that he was still very confused at what she had just shown him. As she sat down all eye were on her, and normally this was something that she would enjoy as there was nothing like the rush of explaining on how to solve a puzzle to others having been the first to figure it out but in this case she would have to be very careful. "So I'm assuming that the question on everyone's mind is how I was able to cast a spell? Before I do that, Iris how does the protection spell work?"

Iris was a bit stunned for a second, rarely if ever did Alex ask for help when explaining something. "Ah, well, it's pretty basic really. If the spell itself detects another spell being casted in the area then it triggers." She then turned to Bernard and her sister who both nodded their head in agreement.

"Okay now for the next part, Bernard what triggers the spell that a spell was cast? Or better yet answer me this, when is a spell considered being casted?"

He knew there was a trick there and therein

laid the answer to the question he still really had no answers to. "Well when the spell takes effect..." He then paused and thought about it more, "Wait... that's not true, it's when the power is converted and given to the spell, essentially at that point it's committed... but then... that means that..."

Alexandria smiled as he had just figured it out. "And now you know, well partially anyways." She looked at the other two who understandably where confused still. "I'll use the example of your sword enchantment, and ask you this, does the enchantment activate when you see the glow or when you feed it your power or I should say your stamina?"

They looked at each other and it was clear to see that they understood as well but Mike was still puzzled. "Okay but there is more to it than that; I mean I've seen you hold a spell in a way so that explains the first one but what about all the others? You must have had to commit inside the room otherwise the only explanation was that you did it all when you where outside."

Bernard then nervously chuckled, "Hahah, you don't understand that should be impossible, I mean sure holding a spell can be done like that and I could see being able to do another but even then that was way too many..." He then looked at Alexandria.

"I am so sorry Bernard but it's not impossible, not at all. But you are right, it's not easy and really not a skill that I have practiced that much. It's one of the reasons why I would not acknowledge anyone while I was preparing or when I was doing it as it takes a lot of concentration. That said I do know of certain elves that have practiced the art of it for a long time now that they are able to converse with others during. Heck I think for one of them he wanted to be able to do this while casting another

spell in front of others, while I know it's something that could be done the discipline and concentration it would take to do it boggles even my head."

It was clear that this realization was still being processed by Bernard so Iris figured she would ask her side question then. "I'm surprised that it's not something that you practice, one would think that it would be very useful."

"Hmmm, you would think that and so did I for a while but then I was forced to agree with my father when he told me that the art of doing something like this was simply for that alone and its usefulness was now obsolete. As I said the effort it takes is quite a lot but really how much easier is it for me to cast a spell and make it pause around my arm until I need it? Or better yet put it in an orb in order for the effect to happen when you need it."

While everyone seem to understand Mike wondered on something, "Okay so from what you are saying the other method are easier and have the same result so there is no point in using that harder way anymore, correct?"

Alexandria nodded with a small smile in agreement.

"But, that's not really true right? I mean there is a pretty big difference between the spells still besides its complexity."

Anna then suddenly chuckled, "Oh I see now." She then slowly looked at him and nodded her head, "Tks tsk, now really, thinking that way and so quickly."

Iris was clearly missing something and looked at Alex, "I don't get it what would be the point of using the harder way?"

"Think about it for a minute when I have the spell around my arm you can see them and when I

pull out an object I need the object..." She then paused for a while in order to see if Iris would then understand the point that Mike had mentioned.

"I think I see what you are trying to tell me, the old way is useless if your goal is simply to cast the spell at the enemy or to defend yourself, but if your goal is to hide the fact that you are about to cast a spell or a series of them from everyone then it becomes more useful." She then thought about it more, "Still that does limit its uses to mostly nefarious reasons does it not?"

Alex hesitated a bit on that one, "Well sure... I guess... I mean..." She then chuckled a bit, "Did you really have to use that word to describe it? I mean depending on the reasons why you do it..." Then suddenly something popped in her head, "I mean some, as myself, use it as a tool to improve concentration and discipline, others sometimes use it as a key of sorts in order to open certain doors, like a series of spells casted in quick succession and then you get the combination right and then..." She trailed off as she saw that the others were not really buying her explanation at all. She then sighed deeply, "I am so glad that Adam is not here right now..."

As the others chuckled at her last comment Bernard then suddenly turned to her with a serious look on his face, "Miss Alexandria how known is this skill. This is important as it could undermine any safe room built by other mages out there."

This is the part that Alexandria needed to be very careful with, "More than you would think actually, but before you continue to worry it's not as bad as you think it is."

For the first time Bernard managed the courage to cut her off, and Alex understood where it was coming from. "How can you say that? How to

build these rooms is a process that is taught only to certain mages. I mean sure any mage plays with the idea of creating this secret place or lock that only they can open but the measures in this room in particular comes from mages that where in the Council and some still are. If they can be circumvented so easily then they must be told about it."

'Please don't realize it, please don't realize it'.

"Your right Bernard but you are also missing something. It was easy, I say loosely, for me because I had just spent time taking a full inventory of all the spells that you used to protect this place, given that knowledge the steps I needed to take where clear." She then stopped and then quickly looked at Mike and Anna and then turned back to Bernard only to see that once again he was lost in thought. *'Please don't realize it, please don't realize it'.*

Iris then suddenly clued in on something, "I see..." Bernard then looked at her and so did Alex but for her there was a hint of concern. "Then that's means that this stolen book is an inside job then. How else can you know all that then by being with someone that lives here or has the knowledge of someone that has been here for a while?"

Alex then turned to Bernard who seems to think about that idea, *'Thank you Iris'.*

"This thought worries me but then again it could be possible." He then stood. "There are only certain students or people in general that could have that information or have pieced it together; still it will take me a bit of time to compile this information." He then looked at Alexandria, "I'm sorry but it seems that I will have to make you wait until I'm done in order to continue this. You can use this room as you please, as I trust you and your comrades implicitly but also other

arrangement will be made if you wish to stay longer. Before I start I'll ask one of my students to prepare proper rooms and guide you to them once he is done. I'm sorry for all this."

She smiled, "Don't worry about it so please go do what must be done." He nodded in agreement and then left the room.

Anna let Alex relax for a moment and then figured that she would ask what had been nagging at her. "What are you hiding?"

"What!? I'm not hiding anything at all..." Again they were not buying it, "I need to learn how to lie better."

Iris was confused, "Did you lie to Bernard somehow?"

She signed, "No, I just omitted something important. But I did it to spare him as if he does learn about this then I think it will hurt him too much."

"I'm simply more confused, what do you mean? Did you figure out a weakness or something that you did not tell him about?"

As Alex thought about how to break it to everyone Mike suddenly reached out and pick up the book that had been used for Alex's demonstration, he then looked at a few pages over and over and then suddenly closed the book. "I think I know what you omitted."

She signed, "Yea I was afraid of that. You know for someone that does not know spells you sure have a scary knack for this. Go on, I'll fill in the rest."

Suddenly he felt sorry about pointing it out, but Anna had talked to him about it a while ago about that so he pushed it aside for now. "Bernard said that he was taught how to build this room by someone and you mentioned that it was easy because you had just gone over all the spells in

this room but really was that the case? I mean when you teach someone something and you need to teach it again you typically don't add too much variation when you find the right way to impart this knowledge. So I guess I have a question for you Alexandria, did you at one point take the same course?"

"That's pretty much what I did not want him to realize. All mages do when they get the privilege of having certain access to certain book and other things."

Still wondering where this was going Iris jumped in, "So you had the same teacher?"

She thought about it, "I guess, maybe, probably not... I really don't know... but that's not really the issue here."

"It's not, but I thought?"

Anna then cut in, "It's about Bernard character right?" When Mike and Alex confirmed it with a nod she continued her explanation for Iris, "I'm assuming Bernard is a good mage compared to most."

Alex jumped in "Very much so..."

Anna smiled and continued, "But is also very stuck in formality and is very rigid, I mean to this day he still treats Alex very formally." She then smirked and turned to Mike, "Like a certain someone that always uses everyone name fully all the time..."

"But... I, ah... Do that with everyone..."

She let it dropped and looked at Iris, "That formality and rigidity is what cost him as when he was shown by a member of the Council then he took their words and teachings too much to heart."

"I get it now... I really get it now... This is the exact same thing that happened to me when I challenged Mike a long time ago to prove myself. The reason why I was lost so easily was because I

used Adam fighting style to the letter and did not deviate from it."

Anna nodded, "That's exactly right, in his case he built this place so much so like he was shown that it's the same as what was shown to him and others with no deviation."

Iris suddenly felt bad, "Should we not tell him? I mean this could happen again if nothing changes and then what?"

For that they looked to Alex as the other two agreed with her on that one, and so did Alex but it was less of a concern for her. "Normally I would be convinced to do that, but in this case I think it would only serve to hurt him and that's not something I want to do." In order to convince them further she continued. "Look while I could not acknowledge him during my little demonstration I was listening and already when I started he mentioned something about seeing a weakness in the spell not seeing that he was already in the room. Right then and there he saw that it's not perfect and after what happened I'm sure that he's not simply going to ignore that or let it remain as it is." She then looked around the room, "No I'm confident that this room's defenses will be changing in the near future I just know it."

Iris slowly nodded, "Hmm, yea I see what you mean." She then sighed, "Still that's too bad in a way as it means that my idea of an inside job is now busted in a way."

"Well it helped me avoid the subject of what we just talked about so I'm happy about it and at the same time it may not be such of a waste. With the list we can maybe see who knew enough about the spell in order maybe give that knowledge to someone to use?"

"Hmm, you don't sound too convinced."

She shrugged, "I don't know, logically it makes

sense and it could help us figure out who did it. I mean we probably know the how now but as I said there are more mages than you would think that can do this so it narrows the list a bit but not really and this list of people could help narrow it more but still..."

Anna wondered on what she was thinking. "You think that there is a better way to get more information."

"Maybe, part of me thinks that it would be faster to figure out who if we knew the reason behind why that book in particular was targeted. I know that motive is an obvious thing but for some reason something tells me that it's where we should focus on to resolve this quickly."

Mike nodded at that, "Yes but in order to do so..."

Alex then cut him off, "In order to do so we need more information on that book that is not with us, or may be know why it was marked by the Council which we can't know until we already know... how stupid is that in the end."

"I'm sure Lithius has a valid reason."

Alex sighed, "I guess, and I somewhat understand that more now than before but still it's somewhat frustrating none the less."

Iris reached out to grab her sister's hand, "We will figure it out, and we will all help." She then smiled, "And you never know maybe going over the list or when Adam and Rosa come back we will have more piece of the puzzle to help out."

Normally, and especially if Adam was around, after a comment like that it would be the perfect time to drop a comment at the guy but given the situation only a small smile appeared on Alexandria's face, "Maybe you're right."

"It's getting late and pretty much everyone is starting to go for supper, are you sure you want to continue this Adam?"

He grumbled a bit, "Well I'm convinced that the day time crowd gave us everything we can find in the amount of time we took, but then again..." He then gave her a quick look, "You know I'm sure that if you go back that you can report to them that I played by the rules so you don't have to stick around anymore you know."

Rosa was stunned, "What, are you talking about?"

"...Nothing, just the reason your here is all."

She was starting to put the pieces together, "Is that why you have been grumpy since we left?"

"I'm always grumpy, and its fine I guess."

"Grumpier then usual and it's not fine, we agreed remember we would try it like them for a while and see where it goes."

"And we also agreed that it would probably not work for us, heck even they said it."

Rosa was starting to get frustrated a bit, "Now your switching the subject around, we both agreed to still try it out to see, so spill it's just me here."

"Hmm, fine... I'm just a bit hurt that you took her side when the topic of me spilling the beans came up."

"What? Took her side?"

"Yea you instantly did your thing where you play my chaperone to keep me in check."

Rosa was still confused by this, "But Adam I've always done that even when we were kids. Still that said in this case I simply did it by habit I guess."

"Yea well this time it was hurtful."

She took a moment to replay the event in her mind; clearly this affected him so she had to figure it out. "Hmm, now that I think back I did simply

act out of habit a bit. That said I did agree with you on my usefulness in staying and I also wanted to maybe take the opportunity to maybe stop and see Kyle at the same time." She trailed on a bit, "Plus maybe something else... Still, you where not egging her on that time and I did instantly play the role I often do for no reason..."

Adam was partially satisfied but also curious, "What was that other something?"

"Well..."

Seeing that she was hesitated he figured that he would push the matter as she had, "Remember the agreement."

She instantly had a teasing look on her face with that comment, "Fine... If you must know we are always with everyone and not often apart. I figured that this could be a nice time for us, alone. But then someone was grumpier then normal so that part never happened."

Instantly he regretted asking and also remembered why he had hated this new agreement, "Ah... yea... well..."

She gave him a playful look, "It's fine, these things happened. Now where are we going next?"

Adam was suddenly struggling inside, "I guess we can head to Kyle, he may have information as well. Plus the night time crowd will take time to pick up and even then questioning them may not be a possibility if it will cause issues with Kyle... Plus why is it that you did something wrong and yet I'm the one that feels guilty about it?"

"I have absolutely no clue at all why you feel that way." She then gave him a quick smirk, "Maybe we should talk about it on our way to Kyle?"

"NO! No more talking, I'm good, seriously... onwards to the captain of the guards."

With his new pace it did not take long for them

to make it the headquarters of the guards of Calculus and as soon as they did Adam was the first to ask a passing guard if they could see Kyle. Funny enough the guard led them to someone else then Kyle, "He'll be better to answer your question."

The person in front of them was also a guard, and one that they both had not seen before. His armor and was the same as everyone and for him the weapon of choice was a rapier. He had brown hair and looked to be in his mid twenty. "Kyle is normally too busy, but I guess for you guys he'll probably make time." He then looked around, "Only you two?"

While they did not know him, he clearly knew them and also this so called reputation that followed them. "Yea just us, we just want to ask him some quick questions if certain types of people have been around." Adam then looked at Rosa, "Also we also have a personal matter that we would like to discuss with him if possible."

The guard sighed, "Yea figures. Come on I'll lead you to his office."

They made it to the second floor and passed a few rooms until he finally knocked on a door, "Boss, people from the list are here." Instantly they could hear Kyle behind the door, "Its fine."

They made their way in Kyle's ever so busy looking office and took a seat in both chairs in front of his desk. They also noticed that the person that had escorted them here closed the door but only after he himself stepped inside and simply stood behind them.

It was easy to see that Adam was not the only one wondering on the extra formality, "Ah Kyle something we should know? Also list? I take it that's not a good thing?"

He smiled and shrugged, "It's a thing, think

nothing of it. As for my associate due to resent events he is shadowing me so if it has to do with the city then he must also know. That will be okay right?"

The way he said it he did not really give them the option still this did not bother any of them. "Not at all, we were simply curious."

"Like she said, personally I thought that we had simply crossed to many line and you where finally tired of us and that now new procedures were in place when we visited."

Adam stopped as Kyle suddenly started to think about his comment that had been made in a joke in a way. "Well, that's not exactly how I would put it but let just say that your visit often brings unexpected moments that we all wish to be better prepared for."

Rosamia smiled, that had been a very political way of saying that where they showed up trouble followed. "We are simply looking for information, no issue or large alarms this time."

Seaming unconvinced Adam jumped in, "It's true, we are just looking for something and were wondering if someone had been around that was very influential or had a lot of information on hidden places recently. That's all."

"Hmm, that statement alone is pretty very broad." He turned to the person behind them that he had yet to introduce. "To my knowledge they maybe some like that that passed in but that was a while ago, still I'm sure there will be others soon enough if you wish to wait."

Rosa looked at Adam, "That's probably not going to work out as we will probably be on our way before then."

Then the person behind them made his way to the desk, "So what are you looking for?"

Adam then had a sad look on his face, "Well

the youngest in our group Iris, had a pretty bad thing happen to her when she was young where she got captured by orc during the war. We were able to save her but recently we learned that she was not the only one that was captured. We had a trail but it suddenly got cold and we figured that we would ask around to see if there were any influential people around that could help us get new information or if they knew of old hidden places that could have been used." He then looked at the guard and then at Kyle, "Look she is simply trying to find them alive or dead in order to help the families, assuming some are still left to close things out."

Rosa smiled internally, when it came to Iris Adam was a completely different person, she like that a lot about him. Kyle then took a deep breath, "Well, yea...That's never an easy one. Go and get them the map on the hidden caves, maybe it could help them out."

"Ah, are you sure. I mean the Guild will not like it that we shared this information with them I'm assuming."

Kyle thought about it, "Maybe, but then again they are simply afraid to share the information in case there are left over products to mine. I don't think these people care at all about that nor would they sell the information to others that would be."

"I guess you're right, I'll go prepare it but before I do, there was another matter."

Rosa nodded, "Yes it has to do about Jessica..." Kyle suddenly raised his arm and pointed at the door, "That one is between me and them; you can leave and get them those maps."

The guard agreed and left the room. "Sorry about that, he's a good guy I picked him myself but he's trying really hard and tends to follow the rules a bit too much to the letter."

Rosa did not mind and in fact had seen a lot of people like that during her time with the Order and also while she was a member of the High Order. "I take it that he is to replace you? Or something if you don't mind me asking."

"Well we don't know for sure about that, it all depends on Jessica really or I should say where they build this new Council location."

The situation became clearer for both Adam and Rosa, "Oh, on that, I wanted to stop by while we were in the area to apologize for that. I'm not the one that nominated her directly but I did shine a light on her and was the cause of many events that lead to where she is now. And while I think that she is a great person to be there, I can also see where it would cause extra issues between the two of you and I do feel sorry for that."

"Long distance relationships are not fun at all, but having Bernard as a friend that has access to a teleport spell does help a lot in that department. Still I appreciate the concern but I don't think it's necessary. It took a while but in the last six month she has enjoyed it a lot, I'm not sure if she would use that word for it but I can see it. And sure it would be easier if she was still here but as busy as she is now she also has so much influence and she is using that to do so much." He then looked at Rosamia, "Again no worries needed." Then he saw a look on confusion on her face, "You don't believe me?"

Rosa shook her confusion away. "No worries, it's not that and I'm very happy that it's worked out for her I really am. Still it make we wonder why it was the complete opposite for me during my time." She thought about it more, "I guess there must really be a larger difference between the High Order and the Council then I imagine."

"Nope you're wrong there, while she is a part of

the Council and they do meet often most of her time is spent with the Order more than anything." He then focused his gaze on both of them, "You left the world in a pretty sorry state you know, especially Missa, and they are doing everything they can to repair the issues still it's a big job but those two ladies are up to the task I'm sure of it."

His comments made Rosa only worry more; she had complete faith that Catherine and Jessica where up to any challenge but she had to admit that she had pretty much left everything on them to resolve. While the history between her and the Order was deep and had many twists she did feel a lot of guilt by having pushed it all off, but given how things where was there any other choice.

She snapped back when the door suddenly opened.

"I have the maps." The guard handed them to Adam, "Please make sure that these stay hidden."

"Oh that should not be a problem." As he folded them more and then put them in his backpack Kyle looked at Rosa, "Was there anything else?"

She seemed hesitant but answered him anyways. "No I'm good."

Kyle smiled a bit, "Don't go jumping into something that you shouldn't, sometime it's best to wait until they ask for help instead of simply giving it."

It was not hard to see that Kyle had figured out what was in her head that said with their real current mission this detour would be un-recommended, still she did have confidence in the two but part of her wondered if they would ask for help from her if they needed it. As they both left she hoped that they would.

It was the middle of the night and Anna had woken up and figured she would move around a bit. Adam and Rosa had come back and given the information that they had found which mostly had to do with the other mission that they were on and not really anything about the current one. What had bugged her during the whole time was Rosa's mood, she seemed lost and her mind was elsewhere as Adam went over the details of what had been found from their end.

She figured she would leave it alone for now, Mike had said the same thing when she had mentioned it to him, but it still bugged her and was probably the reason why she had woken up. Her walking around had lead her to Bernard's secret room that they had all been huddled in for most of the day. When she walked in she saw that it was still occupied with Alex who had her head on the table while sitting on a chair and Iris who was reading a book at the other end.

Anna pointed at Alex and whispered, "Is she sleeping?"

Iris looked at her sister with a bit of frustration, "Na... This is just her being stubborn."

Suddenly Alex's hand pointed at Iris and then at the book she was reading and then went flat on the table again.

Anna took a set, "I take it that going over the list that Bernard compiled did not help her gut feeling that we should focus on the reason why the book is important."

"You got it, and right now she is punishing herself for not knowing why. Heck she even tried to distract herself by figuring out the issue with the spell and the ruby in case that it would help her with the content of the book." She then looked at Alex, "She figured that out but in the end it was no help at all."

Anna turned to Alex, "Don't do that to yourself, you can't always know everything." She then reached out to her, "Come on lets go to the rooms that have been prepared, you of all people deserve some rest."

Suddenly it looked like Alexandria collapsed on the table and after a few seconds she stood, "Fiiine..."

"WHAT!?! I've been telling you that for hours and all you keep telling me is to take this time to study. How come it's different when she says it?"

Alex mockingly thought about it and then gave Iris a wide smile, "Because it's just different."

Iris then suddenly closed the book and stood herself, "Ah, the frustration, I swear." She then looked at Anna, "The worst part is that all this frustration is caused by the fact that she remembers reading about this book a long time ago and now it's only floating vaguely in her head."

Suddenly then Alexandria stopped on a dime and then Iris's head dropped, "Oh so close... what is it?"

She then quickly turned to her with a serious look on her face. "You made me remember."

Both Iris and Anna where suddenly on high alert, "You remember the content of the book?"

"No not really, but I do remember why I read the book in the first place."

Anna wondered on that, "Clearly that gave you the hint you needed, is it because the reason is linked to why it's marked?"

They could both see that Alex was lost in her thought, like many dots where suddenly connecting and she was checking to make sure that the shape it took was what she had seen. She then closed her eyes, "Oh no... This is really bad, really bad and there is no way that Lithius does not know." She then looked at both of them, "Both

of you go get the others, I need to leave something for Bernard while you do that and then we need to make are way to Astrum as soon as possible."

They were curious about the why but made no comment about it as they both hurried out of the room as instructed.

As they left Alex grabbed an orb that she would use to leave a message to Bernard, "Stupid stupid, stupid, that took me far too long to remember..."

Chapter 3

"Why did you drag us out all the way to Astrum in the middle of the night? I mean won't Lithius be asleep too?"

"Ha! Show what you know. From what I just figured out there is no way that he's been sleeping at all." Adam had been mildly complaining since he had been awoken, that was not a big surprise considering everything as even Alex was feeling very tired but there was no way that she could go to bed after figuring it out as this would be gnawing at her. They made their way to Lithius house and right away she knocked on the door.

"I see that you waiting in front of the door policy is suddenly gone, I mean I get it but you may want to knock harder if you wish to wake h..." He suddenly stopped as Lithius fully clothed in his usual robe opened the door.

Iris smirked at him as Alexandria paid him no attention at all but focused solely on Lithius, "I figured it out."

Admittedly Anna and Mike were partially not surprised by his lack of reaction to that comment as it was pretty vague. "Hmm, I suggest that you come in before saying anything else."

Lithius barely had time to close the door as she blurred it out. "It's because of the spell that makes this city float, that's why it's marked."

Everyone save for Lithius was surprise and mildly in shock which only served to confirm it to Alex. "Wait, wait, wait that book has to do about weight not flying..." Iris then stopped herself for a moment, "Oh never mind I get it now, the flying spell can only do so much and this is a rather large

piece of land so in order to lighten its load the weight was changed."

Adam then interjected, "Okay, I understand too but I'm a bit puzzled, did you not say that you read that book a long time ago, why would you research that? Was there nothing else?"

Lithius then looked at her, "I would like to know as well, or more importantly how you figured it out and when."

Iris wondered where the confusion was coming from, "Funny I find it totally normal that she would question or try and figure out how this place is floating like it is." Alex gave her a warm smile, "Ah my dear sister you know me so well." She then looked at Lithius, "As Iris said I had to know, I mean I spent a lot of time looking out the window that it was bound for me to wonder at one point. The issue was that at the time there was no way for me to get access to the books I needed to understand but all that changed after I passed that test and had more access."

"While I can see that having access to more books during that time would have helped I can't stop but wonder about that. One would think that there would have been more interesting books to study, not only that but time could not have been on your side given how much work was given to you during that time."

Alexandria nodded at that one, "Oh yes you're right you all kept me very busy during that time but there was still time and it was something that I had been working on for a while so as soon as I got the chance..." Mike then cut her off, "Wait, you mean to say that you waited all that time without knowing? Having known you for a while now that must have been really hard dropping something like that, I mean that would have made me go insane to drop a puzzle that without knowing for

so long."

It's then that he felt a poke from Anna as Alex tried to brush off the comment, "Well you know sometimes those thing happen right?"

Lithius was not convinced, "There is more to this, as I agree as well, but if it was that long ago... oh no, miss Alexandria don't tell me that even at that age you made your way in to the Council library. Still I find it hard to believe that you could do that."

"Why? I think that is totally in character."

Lithius nodded his head, "I too agree with that Adam but during that time she should not have the power or knowledge to do so."

"Are you sure about that, she can be very crafty."

Having had enough of her character being insulted for a while Alex yelled at both of them, "HEY! I'm right here you know, also I did not break in the Council Library during that time, I mean there is no way I could have done that, plus there was an easier way..." She suddenly mumbled, "I simply asked my dad..."

Anna suddenly wondered if made the situation better.

'*Oh Richard, you where too soft on her.*' while that last part explained everything Lithius needed to know, Adam was not so satisfied. "But did you also not admit that you did at one point break into the library when you where not supposed to?"

She suddenly turned to him with a bit of an angry stare, "Oh please... he knows that already."

Adam looked at Lithius thinking that the scolding was going to continue but when it did not he gave up, "Seriously even from way back when you have not changed at all."

"...I've matured... what you are talking about..."

Lithius suddenly let out a deep breath, *'Your child has cause so much trouble over the years, I don't think there is a rule that she has yet to have broken at least once and Adam's comment is true she has not change since she was so young... which is a good thing I suppose.'* After a moment he then took his finger and pressed it to her forehead, a quick glow could then be seen.

"Coordinates, but where..." He then cut her off, "Come, I'll explain when we all get there, but first we need to head to the main teleport circle as it's the only way to get there..." He then stopped, "Oh... I supposed that's not true anymore, hmm new defenses will have to be implemented. Still in the meantime follow me."

It took little time to make their way back and considering the time there was little to no people around which was a good thing in Lithius mind. When they got there he grabbed on to a few of the members and then Alex did the same in order to make their way to the coordinates that he had given her.

When they appeared they where underground in a room that had a flat floor but other than that looked spherical. Its diameter was about thirty feet and other then a pedestal with a large orb, a bit bigger then a human head, sitting on the top there was nothing else.

"Now let me explain where you are and what this is..."

Suddenly Adam cut him off and pointed at the orb, "Have we not seen something like that recently?"

Instantly Lithius looked at Alexandria with a very stern look, "What does he mean by this? Explain now Miss Alexandria?"

It's been a while since she had seen him give her a look like that, it was uncomfortable then and

it was uncomfortable now. "He needs to cool his comments; I know that I woke him up from his beddy bye but still..." She suddenly stopped as Lithius was no longer playing, "I mean sure it's similar but essentially when we were going around trying to find the missing ones in the last place we found something like this powering up a Dark Cleric." She then had a pleading look on her face, "I sear we found it minutes before you contacted us about the book." Then she looked at Adam with an angry stare, "In fact once again someone was causing issues for us about the subject matter."

Before he could respond again, Rosamia caught him and Mike tried to change the conversation, "So this is what is powering the spell to make the place float I take it?"

Lithius was still looking at Alex as he answered his question, "Yes it is, but it not only powers the spell to float but also the outer shield that protects this place."

Joining in on the help and also to get more information Anna then jumped in, "But its power can't be infinite right?"

He gave a low sigh and turned his gaze away from his friend only biological child and put his worries away for now to continue what he had planned with his explanation. "No you are correct, in fact the way this works is that a small part of energy is taken every time a spell of any kind is casted in the city. This make it so that the orb is able to power both spells without the need for someone or a group from fueling it with magical energy. "

Iris did not say a word, but after realizing that Adam had actually been pretty accurate in comparing this orb to the one that they had found, still there was something different about the one they had. "So it takes a bit of Arcane Energy,

stores it and then uses that same energy to keep the spells up." She then looked at her sister, "And you knew about this from way back when and took that long to remember?"

She shrugged, "Well I did not know about this, I mean when I figured out about how the city was able to stay afloat and how that spell worked I pretty much stopped the research when it came to how to power the spell. I mean obviously there was a power source but what and how and so on, there were too many possibilities and well that part is boring."

Lithius was relieved to hear her say that, *'Child like curiosity still, never change that about yourself miss Alexandria.'*

Adam wanted to say another comment but responsibly looked at Rosamia before doing so, "It's just a simple observation this time." Waiting on what seemed like permission for a few seconds he then turned to Lithius, "You do know that now that you have shown us this, I mean it has to be the target right? So how many people know of this place and can access it?"

It was a good question and they all waited on its answer. "Its exact location is only known to me and now Miss Alexandria. There were others like Solanar but they are no longer of this world, so very few know. As for its target, when the book was stolen I had a similar thoughts and it was the reason I contacted this group. If someone is targeting this object then they need to be powerful and they need to be stopped, your group has good qualifications when it comes to those."

Mike nodded at that one, "True as that may be at this time while we may have figured out how the book was stolen we are no closer to figuring out who did it."

Suddenly this news made Lithius more

hopeful and considering the ups and downs of Alexandria past escapades, it was very welcomed. "I had hoped that by sending Alexandria and the rest of you there would have helped to figure that particular secret, still that was a bit faster then I would have thought." He then turned to her, "Was there an issue in his security that was so obvious?"

She hesitated to answer, "...Well that's a hard one to answer." Seeing her discomfort and taking in the discomfort that she has already gone through tonight Anna stepped in and gave a full detail explanation in her stead. She was careful when the time came to explain what they had figured out but it was clear to see that after she had mentioned all the precautions in the room that he had already figured out the problem himself.

"A talk will be needed with the Master of Calculus it seems."

Alexandria pleaded again, "Please don't, as Anna said he has learned from this mistake and is already beating himself over it. Doing it more is not going to help."

He thought about it, "I will take your comment into consideration but certain actions will still be needed to be taken."

"... Fair enough..."

The mood was suddenly gloomy again, "On that note I suppose that we now have a few paths available to us." Seeing as Mike now had everyone attention he continued, "We could continue and try and find the person that stole the book, but now that we know more details of the spell and possibly its final target we could also secure those instead in order to try and be a step ahead."

Lithius agreed, "I was actually doing so while you focused on the first part. Currently a portion of the books that are not in Astrum that have to do with the spell are being recalled. Of course not all

of those are marked and more importantly not all of them could be recalled at the same time as that could send a signal to whomever is doing so. With that in mind extra items have also been recalled to simply create a bit of a smoke screen, still some books needed to stay at their present location, one of which I'm still in the process of locating."

He then paused for a moment, "Seeing as all this work needed to be done by only me it has caused delays, and with that said the final book should be located before morning. When it is I think it would be best if you go there and secretly guard it, to as you put it be one step ahead and possibly catch the person in the act."

The two gave themselves a quick glance, "That sound like a great plan." Anna then continued Mike's statement, "And now that it's all said and done, maybe we should head back and finally get some rest." She then looked at Lithius, "Can we use the same places as before?"

Before he could answer Alexandria commented for him, "I'm pretty sure that I've said it before but those places are yours and yours alone. They are your homes you know."

Anna and Mike simply smiled and nodded, there were enough emotional comments being throw around tonight that there was no need for any more. Still it seems that the acknowledgment satisfied Alexandria, "Good then with that lets head all head home."

Only a few hours had passed and a knock was suddenly heard at Anna and Mike's bedroom door. As they both sad up he turned to her, "What a considerate burglar." She gave him a half smile, "Funny..." Once they were both sitting on the bed she voiced for the person on the other side to come

in.

There was a list of people that they figured it would be and while he was at the bottom Lithius was a member of that list. "I take it that there is something else or is it simply that you have found the location of the book and wanted to let us know now." Mike paused for a second, "No that would be more something Alexandria would do." He then smiled, "So with that assumption it must be something else, what can we do for you Lithius."

"I am sorry to bother you with this at this time but you are correct with your assumption, with everything that I learned and seen from others... There is a concern that I would like to share with you."

"I take it that is has to do with Alex."

He nodded, "It does..." He then took a moment to clear his thoughts, "Before I start I wish to say that I am very proud of her in every way and that she has proven herself many times over to be very reliable and a good person overall."

Anna smiled at that, while she maybe Richard's daughter it was clear to see from his comment and also his many actions in the past that Lithius had also become a surrogate parent along the way.

"Still I worry, I have seen it often in the past where a mage simply gets lost and become very power hungry. I don't see Alexandria like that but the actions that she does worry me. Added to that the access that she has to power... Well it's as I said worrisome." A sad smile appeared on his face, "I realize what I am telling you and also my past and current actions have been at odds with each other but..."

Anna suddenly stopped him, "Its fine Lithius, we get it. It's something in the back of your head that you would rather ignore because of how she is

and who she is."

Mike nodded, "Plus added to the fact that you are now in charge, you can't simply ignore and let her actions go as you could back then as your new responsibilities demand that you look into them."

His smile was now a warm one, "I am glad that you both understand my position and I'm also glad that people such as yourself are in her life."

The both smiled, "The feeling is mutual. In a way I'm pretty sure that we all see each other as family members at this point in time." Mike smirked at that, "Even Adam?"

She closed her eye and smiled, "Yes even Adam, while I had understandable issue with him at the start he's changed a lot and serves a big purpose in the group... even if some other members don't see it for what it is." He then smiled as well, "Hmm, very true."

It's then that they both saw Lithius turn around and make his way to the door, "Sorry about that, but was there more or anything else?"

He only turned his head to face them from the corner of his eye but it was easy to see that he was happy. "No that was all and part of me is a bit ashamed that I brought it up. She is in very good hands." And with that he made his way out of the room.

"I take it that we will keep this visit between us?"

She turned to him and kissed him, "Come now, you have learned far too much to know the answer to that question".

He kissed her back, "It's true that I had a great teacher."

She simply smiled and with that they both went back to sleep.

It was mid day when the Lights Templar arrived in the city of Navis using the teleportation circle. At this time the city was at its busiest, you had carts and people moving all over the place. You could also hear the screams of people trying to get the attentions of others in order for them to sell their merchandise. Navis was considered second between Calculus and itself in terms of overall wealth but when it came to the people and the comings and goings it was number one.

Rosamia stepped out of the circle and was stunned, she had been to large cities but this was something else. "I've never been here before I must say that..." She then had to move as a group of people needed to get through, "It's very different then I..." again she stopped as she needed to get out of the way, this time from a cart that was coming her way and did not seem to have any intentions of moving for her account. "Okay this is pretty wild; there are so many people here."

"Alexandria, what was the location that he gave you? We really can't stay standing around like this in this place."

This was Alex's first time here too and she had to admit this was pretty overwhelming in a way. "I understand, it's in the south section." She then pointed south, "So that way."

Adam then took her hand and then pointed in another direction, "If he said section then it's this way, come on."

Alexandria was totally confused but followed along as Adam with Anna and Mike lead the way. "Navis, has a bit of a hidden thing to it where the sections are not based on the cardinal directions. So to avoid confusion when someone references a place, for outsiders, they use the cardinal points and say 'in the south of the city' but if they know the place then you will use 'south section'."

Iris and Rosamia were having a hard time keeping pace due to all the movement, "So I take it that you have been here before?"

Still holding Alex's hand in order to help guide her Adam nodded, "Not as much as you may think but it was a closes place to the Old Cathedral where we were all stationed and a lot of men and supplies came from here so there were a few visits here and there."

Alex then let go of his hand, confident that she could follow along without getting swept away. "You two seem to know where you are going as well; I take it that it's not your first time here as well?"

Still focused on where he was going Mike answered the question, "We both stumbled here, about a month after leaving the Crimson town?"

"Sounds about right, and no worries it was confusing for us as well the first time, heck it was the first city that we had both seen in our lives. Only thing that we had seen where small towns before this, so saying that this place was confusing and impressive is putting it mildly."

"Plus this is probably the worst time to move around, well if you are sightseeing that is."

"That must have been interesting from country mouse to city in one fell swoop."

Mike nodded, "You could say that, but we only happen to stop here due to who we were with." While still moving he stopped his answer for a little while, "That's funny, as again the person we were with was William. Twice in such a short time, odd that. Anyways we needed the climbing gear so we stopped here and while we were at it he explain the place and also the issues at the time with Astrum, Navis and the war with the orcs."

Alex was skeptical, "Who was this William, you mentioned a mage but a traveling mage with a

sense of the political landscape is odd. How strong was he?"

Anna thought about it, "That's a hard question to answer as we were only together for a short while and then we never saw him ever again. I would say that he was in your league when we first met you I suppose."

This information helped very little, "That makes little sense; I mean if he was that strong and human then you would think that I would know the name."

"I could see it; he was much older than us at the time so I would guess that now he should be in his late forties probably mid fifties."

Before Alex could continue the questioning she and the two that had been trailing noticed that it was starting to get easier to move around and that there were a little less people now. Rosamia now finally closer to everyone started to look around a bit more, "This is much better, also there seems to be fewer stores around now."

Adam made his way next to her now that they were able to move around as a group more, "This section is less commercial and also is not in the paths leading to the ports so it's easier to move around." He then looked at Alex, "It should be here by the way, so if you can give us more information."

She then pointed at a building that had two stories. The first floor was elevated by a few feet above the ground with a large step case leading to it. You also had a few pillars decorating the outside that held a bit of a lip that extended on the front side. For the second floor, it seems that it was split in half. The first as one of the section lead directly outside where you had a large balcony with tables and chairs. "That's the place he showed me, it should be inside."

Iris was still looking at the place, "A Library with a top patio in order to read? That's... interesting I guess."

Alex nodded as she made her way to the entrance with the others following along, "Agreed, but some like to read as they take in the outside. I've been known to do in from time to time when not reading something too serious."

Entering the place they saw what you would expect from a library, a lot of books on many shelves and bookcases, but this one was organized differently. As expected you had bookcases next to the walls but most were in the middle of the place, this made it like the floor was split into two different sections without being completely cut off from one and the other. Between the middle shelves and the walls you have chairs and small tables that could sit a maximum of four people. Alexandria quickly looked around; the place was one third full with people which made it fairly busy considering but still very empty compared to the crowd outside. She then pointed to a location on the other side and in a lower voice called to Iris, "You mark that spot and I'll take this one."

Iris nodded and made her way to the other side to the room. When she finished casting her spell Mike questioned her about it, "I take it that this is for later?"

"Yes we may have to get here quick so those are two spots that will make it simpler to teleport too. It's not really needed in our case but it does make things quicker by a bit." Seeing as Iris was finished too, she then started to look at the selves themselves.

Adam was impressed, "You know I half expected you to gush as you typically do when you are around a lot of new books."

Still while looking around she smiled a bit,

"I'm not that bad..." As the others looked at her she quickly took it back, "Okay fine, maybe I am like that. It's just that this time the situation is different, plus while I approve of this place most of the books I'm seeing are many things I've read before."

Adam did a quick count, "Okay, but that's a lot of books."

She nodded, "I agree, but I was also alone for a long long time and had very little of anything to do." She then pointed to the stairs, "Up we go it seems."

The second level was deserted and there was no one on the large patio. The second level was also very different then the first as bookcases where only found next to the walls and you had some table next to them even smaller then below. This left a large path leading to double doors that lead outside. "Oh now this is more like it. I guess they keep all the fun stuff on the top floor."

Iris looked around as well, "Agreed, the first floor had basic, historical and also fictional stuff mostly. This seems to have a sprinkle of magical book around."

Mike wondered about that, "Alexandria you mentioned that Astrum was the place that had everything if you wanted to actually learn magic but I take it that every place has a certain level that can be found in then?"

"Yes, in most places you will always have the basics in order to teach those that are interested or to simply experiment. Some larger places like this one will have a certain level of specialty magic but still nothing too dangerous or too powerful. I mean you don't want just anyone to be able to call lighting from the skies right?"

"Wait does this mean that this book is a basic book again, that's odd no?"

Rosamia laughed a bit that one, "Most spells that do anything focus a lot on the basics."

Alexandria pulled out a book from one of the shelves then with a smile on her face turned to Rosa, "You have it right perfectly and also found it..." She then looked at everyone else, "So... now what?"

Mike chuckled at that and then made his way to the double doors to get a clear look outside. "Well now you put it back and make it look like you never touched it and then..." He paused and then after a while pointed to a taller building that was more like a tower than anything, "And then we take shift and start the lookout for anything suspicious. I also think that we should make our stake out place that tower. It's got a good vantage point and allows us to see this place very clearly for anything physical."

Alexandria was suddenly less excited about this process, "I see, well then in that case if magical means are used..." She then moved to the corners of the room and took out a small glass orb and after casting a quick spell hid it so that it would not be visible. "This should help us see inside while leaving the book spell free in case it's checked. And if someone cast an area spell to find and destroy the orb well that will also make it obvious."

Adam agreeing with the plan and also the lookout point turned to Mike, "So what are the groups?"

Clearly Adam had done this many times before as well, Mike then looked at Anna. "I would say that Alexandria and I will take the first go." Seeing no objections he then looked at the others, "Then it will be Anna and Iris, with you and Rosamia as last. First shift will be until nightfall, second during the night and last during the day to mid

day." He then had a bit of an apologetic look, "Sorry about the long shifts but considering what we may be facing I don't want solo teams." The plan made sense and so the group left the area to go find rooms at an inn and then Alexandria and Mike made their way to the tower.

When they got closer to the tower they saw that it was in fact a storage place, it looked like it was about six stories tall and all the windows where on the top of it. The door had only one guard but even that was a bit too much. They both walked around and made their way to the back of it.

"I'm assuming that the guard will make a round around the tower now that he's seen us."

Alexandria shrugged, "Plenty of time, I think." She then casted a few quick spells, "Yep plenty of time." She then grabbed his hand, "This is very important, do not let go under any circumstances, also if you can let me know when we are clear."

As she closed her eyes to focus on another spell Mike looked around, and after about a minute everything was good. "I think we are good but given..." He did not have time to finish as she suddenly walked in the outer wall of the tower and then started to make her way thru it and as instructed Mike followed along at the same speed as her.

It was pretty odd and jarring passing thru a wall and then containers filled with various items but eventually they made it to a clear section.

"So far, so good." she then looked up and saw that there was no way to make it up to the windows and also nothing around them. "Well that's a minor problem." She let go of his hand and then flew up, "Just give me a moment."

He looked at her make it to the window and then inspects the walls around. After a while she then places her hands on the walls and then suddenly part of the wall itself seemed to melt around. Using her magic and also some of the wall material Alexandria rigged up a ledge of sort that connected itself to the window. She then moved under it and reinforced the bottom to create a better support. After a quick test she came back down and picked him up, as they flew to the make shift ledge that she had made, Mike looked down. "I wonder how Adam will make it up?"

"Meh he can figure it out for himself, or worst case bug Iris."

When they landed on the ledge they both sat down and looked out to their perfect view of the outer library. "And now for the final touch" she then pulled out a small glass globe and waved her hand on top of it and the image of the inside of the second floor appeared.

"Any one of us should be able to activate it, I guess that should do it right?"

Mike nodded, "Yes that should do it. Now all we need to do it wait until our mystery thief shows up."

They spent about twenty minutes before it was clear to see that Alexandria was really bored out of her mind. "So this is it right... This is a stakeout? And it's going to be like this for the next few hours?"

"I'm sorry to say but that's right." personally Mike was stunned that she had lasted this long already and wondered on how the next few hours where going to go.

Suddenly Alexandria pressed her back against the side of the window and got a bit more comfortable. "You know part of me is surprised I would have thought that you would have partnered

me with Anna, I mean considering what happened last night." He was about to answer her but waited as she then suddenly continued, "As typically it's what she does, but then again often times when I've been in a situation it's been you not her, I mean if I exclude Iris in this equation."

Mike chuckled at that one, "About that, I have to say that we are sorry. I mean most of those times Iris needed the help more then you, or at least that is how it felt, so in a way you always ended up with the short straw, again sorry about that."

Thinking back again Alex could see where he was coming from, "Hmm, maybe but I can't say that I took it that way personally. Still this time it's totally not needed. I mean sure Adam did ruffle my feathers and crossed the line but I'll get him back..." An odd grin then appeared on her face, "I'm thinking frogs flopping around while he sleeps... oh wait no I can't do that, him and Rosa share a room." Then a small sparkle appeared in her eyes and the smile turned a bit maniacal, "Oh but they don't share a bed yet as they took split beds in their rooms, excellent."

Mike was feeling a bit awkward, "I'm not sure I should be hearing this..."

"Oh don't worry he will love it I'm sure and he will get why. Still in the end I don't even really care about what he did." Her mood then went somber a bit, "What really bothered me was that look Lithius gave me. Sure it's not the first time I have seen it but the last time was when I was around nine or something like that. It's still intimidating and also... it's stings a bit inside."

She then looked at the library and at the multitude of different people passing back and forth. "Maybe I'll try and be more careful in the future, I'm sure that will make him happy."

Mike smiled, "I'm sure it would."

She then nodded, "Yea, I'll try that..."

He assumed that she was serious about what she had said, but knowing her he figured that this promise would only last until the next weird or odd discovery and then that promise would probably be off. Surprisingly enough after that she simply looked out the window, she looked lost in thought and he figured that he should not disturb her. But after about one hour had passed he was surprised she had not said a word, as he looked closely at her he then chuckled. "She fell asleep." He made sure to check that she was secure from time to time but made no efforts to wake her.

When the time for the shift change came close he reached out and grabbed her shoulder and did not let go as he shook her a bit in order to wake her but still had a good hold on her in case she woke up startled as the ledge was not that big.

Still groggy she looked around, "What... Where..." Then her eyes went wide "I am so so sorry about that. I can't believe that I just fell asleep. How long was I out?"

Letting go he shrugged a bit, "Pretty much the whole time, actually Anna and Iris should be here any minute so I figured that I would wake you beforehand."

She was thankful of that as Iris was generally good, she sometimes pulled an Adam and let a comment go from time to time. He then pointed next to her mouth, "You also have a little something there."

As she wiped out the little bit of drool her face turned red, "No worries, I mean there is no way that you got any sleep last night so it's all good. And if something would have happened then I would have woken you up and no harm would have been done." He then had a sly smile, "As for

that little bit there that will be between you and me."

"Mmm, not fair at all you know that. Still you are right as there was an extra something I needed to do after the meeting and lack of sleep was an issue." She then looked down and saw two figures move thru the stuff below, "Looks like they are here."

"Sorry it took so long, Anna needed to wake me up and then getting in was interesting. I guess I'll have to help Adam when the time comes." Now flying next to them Anna and Iris hovered as they stood up. "Sorry about that Alex, I mean you must be really out of it right now."

"Ah sure, you could say that I'm a bit groggy due to sleep issues right now." She then looked at Mike, "But I think more than anything I'm kinda hungry more."

"Let's stop for something before we head back." He then looked at Anna and gave her a quick kiss, "Nothing to report as well." he then whispered "on all fronts." She smiled, "Good to hear. Now go and take a break."

Alexandria then took his hand, "Will do." and then suddenly they were gone. As they sat and took their position Iris was still a bit baffled, "I'm really stunned that she stayed that long, without any distractions." Anna smiled, "Well even people close to you can surprise you sometimes."

The next shift changed arrived in the form of a yell from the bottom of the tower from the inside. "Okay now how are we supposed to get there?"

Iris then looked down and saw Rosamia and Adam and made her way down to get them, "I'm wondering how you even got in?"

"Oh he has his ways... and they seem to be

intact after all this time." As she flew them up Iris still wondered but did not press the matter. They carefully switched positions and then Adam and Rosa where on the ledge and Iris and Anna where in mid air. "Nothing abnormal, also just wave your hand on top of that globe and you will be able to see inside." Iris then looked down, "If there is anything..."

Rosamia then cut her off, "We will contact you via the pendant, no worries. Now the sun is about to come up you better make your way outside soon as it will be harder..." She then stopped as Iris smiled and then after a few words disappeared with Anna. "Ah yes teleport spell." She then looked at Adam, "You know I get the feeling that both of the other teams where better equipped for this look out position then us for some reason."

"If Alex would have made the teams up I would agree with you, but seeing as it was him he probably thinks that the thief will have a higher chance of showing up mid or end of the day more than the morning and so no real need to an immediate caster."

"I guess that makes sense." She then waved her hand above the globe and then they both got as comfortable as they could.

A few hours passed and she broke the silence between the two, "Well at least we got to see a nice sunrise together, can't say that happens often."

He then had a warm smile on his face, something that only she saw most time. "Yea that was nice."

"So I have to ask..." He then cut her off,

"Please don't..."

"About Alex..."

"Its fine, she's fine..."

A doubtful look then appeared, "Are you sure about that, I mean frogs right?"

He was suddenly disappointed, "Yea, I'll have to tell her that next time she does that to use real ones, the magic ones just disappear once you kill them. I had a thought about frog legs for breakfast... maybe with a side of eggs."

Knowing that the first attempt was going to end in failure she tried a different tactic, "Still don't you think you should apologize for going too far there?"

To her surprise he seemed to actually give it some thought she had assumed that it would have taken more time to get there, but then she saw a shrug and wondered about that.

"Look did I go too far, sure I'll agree to that... but I will not apologize." Seeing hope and then quickly seeing it dashed, he continued his explanation. "Again sure I went too far but don't you think that it was needed? Sure her breaking the rules saved tones of lives and ours many times, I won't argue that but there does come a time where you can't simply turn a blind eye to her going where she is not supposed to or keeping things that she probably should not."

Then it was Rosa's turn to think about the situation a bit more, "I see your point but still being right on that does not make it right to do it the way you did. On that you have to agree."

He signed, "Sure, fine, I'll give you that... but I'm still not apologizing to her."

"Oh Adam, maybe..." She then stopped and then quickly turned to him, "That's got to be him right?"

Adam was suddenly angry and his fist where clenched, "Yea it's him, I mean he's practically making himself a bullseye for us."

Rosa quickly grabbed her pendent, "Mike, he's here..." A nervous look then appeared on her face, "Also it's a figure clad in a full black armor."

His eyes suddenly went wide in shock, remembering the last time they hunted down a fully black armored person left Rosa stabbed in her stomach bleeding to death and him getting captured. "Iris will be there to pick you up, Alexandria, Anna and I will head out... also thanks for the warning."

Adam looked at Rosa, "Same thing is not going to happen again, I swear."

She knew that he was simply being overprotective, I mean with his magic gone she had a better time of defending herself that he possibly could. Still this was an animus start to all this.

Anna, Mike and Alexandria suddenly appeared inside the library. Thankfully it was still early so there where only three people around and then on the way to the second floor you had the black armored individual. With the helmet it was impossible to tell who this person was but now being close enough they could tell that it was a woman, which made things worse in a way as it made it the exact same as the last time.

"No way... that's impossible right?"

"Well we have dealt with people coming back from the dead before Alexandria but this, while similar is not the same things for some reason."

It's then that Adam, Rosamia and Iris appeared on the scene and instantly when they did the armored figure pointed her finger at Iris and then silently taunted her to come at her with her hand. Iris was stunned for a moment.

"...Genevieve?" It was silent enough that only Adam and Rosa heard her but still hearing the name out loud made it semi real for the both of them as well.

The armored figure then looked back as five mages suddenly came down from the second floor,

it was impossible to confirm but somehow their appearance seemed to frustrate her. Once again she pointed at Iris and then at the ceiling and then made her way up leaving the mages to themselves.

Anna shouted at the people that were still present mostly in shock wondering what was suddenly happening, "Get out, NOW!" She then waved at the entrance behind her, "Tell the guard to be careful when they come."

Mike also screamed some orders soon after the people started to react to Anna's commands, "Adam, Rosamia, Iris don't let her get away."

They acknowledge the command by running forward at the mages coming at them. While the mage did try and stop them with lightning spells and quick small fireballs, they were no challenge for Rosamia's holy shield nor Iris and Alexandria's counter spells. While Alex stayed behind with the others she saw that they were able to make their way to the stairs unharmed. "Just so you know that inside I'm a bit limited."

Mike had figured as much, "Anna, Alexandria go right and I'll go left."

When the command was issued the mages reacted in kind and split up as well with three on the left and two on the right where Mike was. He pulled out his sword and powered the enchantment as he charged at one of the mages. As one of the mages pointed his hand at him, Mike smirked. A lightning spell in general was not something that you could simply dodge in the regular environment when they came from the skies. But inside, the mage needed a point for the spell to launch from and most of the time that point was their hand, which made the bolt act more like a straight beam coming from the middle of the hand. It was still hard to dodge but it gave you the opportunity to do so as the bolt would come from

wherever the hand was pointing.

As the lightning spell finished Mike quickly move to the side a bit too forcefully due to the charge and rammed into the bookcase next to the wall. The lightning spell went passed him but there was no time for him stay still, Alexandria had taught him enough to figure out the next spell that would be coming at him. Just as he tumbled forward a large ice block appeared where he had been a few seconds ago courtesy of the other mage that was present. Had he stayed there a few seconds more the fight would have been over with him completely trapped.

At this point a fireball was coming at him and he needed to retaliate, swinging his sword and letting a bit of the enchantment go he aimed for the small ball of fire that was about to explore. When the two spells connected a mini explosion occurred which made the mages pause for a second, and in that second Mike launched another blast at the farthest mage.

This time it was him that was surprised a bit as the mage started casting a spell he had never seen before and simply took the blast square on the chest. The mage still stood but had been wounded, Mike then remember a comment from Adam about mages being able to cast a magical armor around them to protect themselves. *'Had to happen at one point, still...'* by this time He was close enough to the first mage who had started to cast something but was not quick enough as he sliced him on the side of the abdomen, continuing forward he then spun around and hit the mage with the flat of his blade knocking him out cold. There was still one left but from the look of him the armor that he had casted had not been good enough as he was nursing the point on his chest where the impact had occurred. Hearing a blast

from the other side Mike did not wait until he was ready and charged at his last target.

"I'll try and..." Anna cut her off, "Keep an eye out but focus on your target more." She then charged at the middle mage leaving the closes to her. The middle one was already preparing a fireball spell as Anna move at him; a fireball spell was essentially like throwing a baseball only difference was that once it connected with something the real danger would appear in the form of a fiery explosion. Still this was something that was easy for her to dodge and at the same time mover forward to her target as the explosion occurred behind her.

Alexandria wondered on casting the anti spell barrier around her but decided otherwise, so far she had only seen the main attack spells so she figured that this is how it would continue and as planned the mage next to her aimed a lightning spell at her. She raised one hand at pointed it at the spell that was aimed at her and then casted a counter spell with enough power to rival his attack spell that made it fizzle away. Instantly he started casting another spell but that was too slow as Alex then launched a prepared ice spell that was spinning around her other arm. There was no time for the mage to counter it and within seconds his whole body was trapped in a block of ice with only his head popping from the top. Deciding to keep the remaining prepared two ice and two fireball spells for later she then pulled out her staff and then rushed at the mage to hit him on the back of the head to knock him out.

When that was confirmed she looked at Anna who was now close enough to the mage and with one slice of the enchanted blade she slashed at his

leg below the knee and cut it off.

The mage screamed in pain as he started to fall, Anna grabbed him and started to put him down but then she something inside told her to move away quick. She pushed the mage away and used that to push herself backwards as she saw a fireball spell connect with the wounded mage having been thrown by the left over target. Anna landed on her rear and due to the blast was now prone on the floor, with an angry look on her face she turned to the mage that had just sacrificed his comrade in order to have a shot at hurting her.

The mage was angry that the spell had missed but he was also very confident as he pointed a lightning spell at Anna who was still on the ground but now sitting with a look in her eyes that wanted him dead. The spell activated but she did not flinch or moved from where she was and then suddenly a wall of ice appeared between her and the spell. As soon as contact was made the wall shattered in pieces but it had done its job of blocking the attack spell.

The mage had a confused look as the ice wall dropped and Anna was suddenly not where he had expected. He had time to turn and see that she had quickly moved to the right of the wall when the wall of ice shattered but before he could act he saw two range enchantment spells coming at him from a quick dual cross slash that she had performed in front of her. Both spell connected and he was blown back.

"Are you okay?"

Her angry look went away as Alexandria got close to her, "I'm fine, it's just that tactics like that anger me to no end." Alex nodded as she casted a quick gust to blow out the leftover flames, "No worries I get it... they even had no issues burning the books around them, pitiful mages, they have

no right casting spells in the first place."

She chuckled at that, "So very true."

Mike then appeared from the side, "I take it that it's all good from your side?"

The both nodded in confirmation, "Good now let's go see about the real target then."

Anna was the only one not having a form of déjà vu from this situation as she had not been with Mike and Alex when they had first faced Genevieve the first time. Still considering what had happened then there was no way that the same thing would occur again. Not with all of them being present.

Iris, Rosa and Adam made it up the stairs to see the black armored figure tie a leather strap that had been bounded around the book to her belt. "There is no way that you are her, so who are you?"

To acknowledge Adam, the person looked at Adam and then unclasped her helmet and then removed it. The person was a woman with black hair tied in a pony tail and blue eyes. Her eyes where full of anger as she they stared at Iris, "It took you long enough to finally come, I was wondering if I had to start doing other acts to attract your attention." She then threw her helmet on the ground in a way that reminded them of old duals where one would throw a glove at another to challenge them.

Iris pulled out her dual blades and enchanted them with lightning as she had done to Adam while they made their way up, but before she could move forward Adam raced at her. "Not going to be that easy."

"Oh is that so." She then pointed her hand at him and a large gust of wind pushed him

backwards. Instantly she then raised her other hand and then followed the first spell with a lightning spell at Iris. Rosamia moved in the way and then a holy shield formed in front of her. The spell connected with the shield and it held with no issues.

"You're still able to do that, interesting."

Iris then made her way around Rosa and rushed at their enemy. In response instead of blowing her away like Adam she smiled and pulled out her sword. "Show me what you are capable of."

She obliged her with a quick piercing attack to her side, which was dodged, followed by an overhead slash which was blocked by her blade. Instantly Iris smirked as she released the lightning enchantment that would travel to the other blade that was connected during the block. But then she was surprised to see that the spell had been countered. "Is that all you have, no, that can't be it right?"

Iris quickly crouched and kicked at her legs to make her off balanced, she then followed with two upward slashes with her blades. The enemy quickly sidestepped the kick and blocked the sword that had no enchantment with her own and then avoided the other. On top of that somehow, as she avoided the blow, she was able to disenchant the magic around the blade.

Iris was now frustrated, she quickly went on a series of close attacks and tried as best as she could to move around her target as Adam had shown her. The blows where good and so where their speed but somehow the mysterious enemy was able to dodge, block or use magic to avoid them all.

She then pushed her away and then had what looked like a look of disappointment, "This is really not what I had expected. Still I guess it will make

this easier." For the first time she started to attack Iris but then suddenly pulled back as Adam moved in.

Using the enchantments he launched them both at the target and continued to move forward. She moved away from one and then used her free hand and a spell to counter the other. Adam had figured that both spells would not have hit but it did give him time to move closer to her. Same as Iris he used both his blades and tried to hit her, but just like Iris she countered all of them by using her own sword. Finally after a while he felt like he was gaining grounds and then she moved backward and dropped her sword on the ground, "Is that how you plan on getting me? By using others? Is that how you did it back then too?"

Not really sure what she was talking about Adam advance with a thrust, as planned she avoided by moving to the left of him. As she did he followed with his other blade with an overhead slash. Her next move puzzled him as she reached out and grabbed his wrist as the slash was coming down. Instantly he reacted by twisting his other weapon to perform a horizontal slash, seeing as she was so close there was no way to avoid. But then he suddenly felt a burning sensation all over his body and all his muscles suddenly tensed up as a lightning spell coursed through him.

"Having friends to help you is fun, true, but it does open you up as well." She then looked at Iris as she sent another bolt thru Adam's body.

"Let him go!" Rosamia pulled out her spear and then charged at her. The armored knight then pushed Adam's body forward in hopes to distract her attack.

Rosamia saw Adam's limb body be pushed in her general direction and as he got close she sidestep it and continued on to her target with her

spear. The two were stunned at her action, but that reaction made her more determined to press forward and attack her target with a quick jab. Sure Adam would want healing after this but more than anything he would want her to go down, plus she knew that what he would survive the blows and landing and also Iris was there so there was nothing to worry about.

When the first attack missed, Rosamia then twisted around to force her opponent to move back or be hit by a full force horizontal slash from her weapon. She then flipped her spear and performed an overhead attack. When the attack missed and hit the ground Rosamia looked up to see that a quick fireball spell was aimed at her, which she quickly countered using her holy shield that appeared further in front of her to connect with the ball of fire.

The explosion sent them both backward, "I'll admit if all priest and priestess fought like you then Crusaders would not be needed." She then picked up her sword and with her other hand touched the ground. Near instantly the floor rock melded around her arm encasing it with stone. Another spell was cast to make the stone lighter as she stood up. "I guess I have to deal with you before I can deal with her, fine..."

They both went into a guard position but then a gate portal suddenly appeared behind her. This seemed to aggravate her, but before anything could be done Iris jumped in, "No you don't."

Pushing her ego aside, Iris knew that she was at a disadvantage against this person but still she had to try, she could not let her run away. Best as she could, this time things were harder as she had to avoid a stone covered arm that she used to block and sometimes swing at her. Getting hit would probably not cut her like her blade but it

could hit like a tone a bricks depending on what spell had been cast on it. Time was running short as she could feel that she was losing grounds, and then as a last resort Iris casted a spell.

Once the spell finished she felt a blow to the stomach from that stone covered arm of hers and she had been right on its power. She was forced to move backward and with the wind knocked out fell on the ground. As she saw her move forward they both looked behind her as they heard a yell.

"Iris!!"

Anna, Mike and Alexandria had finally made it up. Suddenly frustrated again the black knight raised her foot and stomped on the floor. The spell was cast and as the foot connected it made the floor crack and then part of it started to collapse and drop to the first. Iris quickly dropped her weapons and reached out to Rosa and Adam and grabbed both of them as she casted floating spell.

As their target jumped in the gate spell Alexandria propelled herself to the gate that was suddenly closing. She quickly started to cast a few spells but as she landed on the other side and the gate closed she turned back with a bit of frustration in her voice, "Sorry I was not quick enough." She then stood, "I did get a general location and she is not far but..."

Iris then moved everyone to a safe spot, "That's okay, I know exactly where she is. The last spell I cast was a tracking spell on the book. Your right she is not far at all."

Now on solid floor once again Adam looked at Mike, "We are following right?"

They all waited on his word, but really there was little choice in the matter. "We go after her, yes." But quickly he continued before anyone else could comment, "Keep in mind that I'm assuming that gate spell did not open on itself, so yes we go

after her as she is our only lead but we may not engage depending on what we find there."

Everyone got ready and healed up their wounds as Alex found a proper spot to teleport them all too once Iris had given her the location. While Rosa took care of Adam Iris made her way to Mike and Anna after taking care of her own injuries. "She fights just like her and the things she said... There has to be a connection and I need to know."

Mike nodded, "I understand but if it's too much..."

"I know, I know, than we pull back me included."

They formed a circle and then in a blue glow disappeared in order to try and ambush their target.

"You are sure that she is around here?" Adam then looked at Alex, "I mean it's an odd place to magically gate too right?"

It was hard to argue with Adam, currently right now the coordinates that Iris had given her was in the middle of the forest next to the city of Navis. Part of that made sense as you would escape in a place that was easy to hide in and then teleport someplace else using any teleport circle beacons. While all that made sense what didn't was the fact that the book was still being shown as in the forest after some time had passed.

"This is probably a trap then, I mean why stay here now that you have what you wanted?"

"Pff, still not going to stop us right?"

Mike wondered on that but so far so good, Iris had taken to lead as the spell was telling her where to go exactly and everyone else was on high alert but so far nothing.

"I think we should stop and figure a different route." Iris then pointed ahead at the small clearing, "The spell is telling me that she or at least the book is right behind that clearing."

Before anyone could say or do anything a figure came out on the other side, "Ready for another round so quickly? Even after the last one turned out like it did, well I'm right here."

While that was true she was not the only one that had suddenly showed up as six more mages made their advance but made sure to stay away from the clearing.

"Great quickest way to get to her is using the clearing but then you have to deal with a gauntlet of spells." Still now that they were outside things would be a bit different then last time. Mike turned to the others, "Okay we go in, Rosamia, Iris and..." He then looked at Anna which frustrated Adam, "Anna you go in after her. Adam and I will provide the distraction that Alexandria will need to deal with the mages."

Iris turned to Adam and he showed her his sword, "Fire, I think I have an idea on how to use it." As she enchanted his blade with a fire enchantment Alex made her way to Anna and took her hand. Having seen the spell before Anna was a little bit surprised as a glimmering shield suddenly appeared around her and then disappeared. "Are you sure?" Alex nodded, "No holding back okay, we need to know why she's fixated on Iris."

"Got it.", she then made her way to the others as they then started their sprint to the clearing and then waited for the right time to move ahead.

"You know Alex another shield like that would be useful."

"Sorry Adam but I can't." She then turned to the spells around her arm, now again with three ice spells and two fire spells and then waved her

arm twice a few feet in the clearing and then two walls of ice suddenly appeared to the left and right. "I can manage that mind you."

"Swell..." Both he and Mike made their way to the walls. "Well Adam you ready to play hero?"

"Pff, you mean decoy again right?"

"Tomato, tomatoe..."

"Right..." Now ignoring him Adam focus on his targets, two mages on his side where pretty far but one had gotten close, he had still made sure to stay on the side of the forest and had not stepped foot on the actual clearing. He smiled as he like it when his planned worked out as expected. The mage casted a fireball spell at the wall of ice, as he did Adam then swung his sword to release the fire enchantment and then moved to left and charged at the mage. While the wall was semi destroyed the mage had not moved an inch as Adam had directed the blast upward. From afar Adam could hear his taunt, "Where are you aiming? Are you blind over thei..."

He was cut off as he then heard a sudden mini explosion above him and then a large crack, as he looked up he saw that a large part of a branch of the tree that he was next was falling on top of him. He screamed as it landed on top of him. "What the heck..." Once again he stopped as Adam was suddenly on top of him, "How did you get here so fast?"

Adam did not answer him but then had a maniacal smile on his face as he pulled back his two swords. Fearing for his life the mage started to freak out, "No no no no, please..." That did not stop Adam as he plunged both swords at each of the mage shoulders.

"Maaaaaaaaaaaaaaaarrrggg!!!"

The large cry in pain was heard by everyone, Iris then looked at Anna, "That's as much of a

signal as you can get from Adam."

She nodded in agreement and then charged using the left side of the clearing that Adam had opened up a bit. "Iris I'll distract one of them and you get the other, Rosa make sure nothing hits us as much as possible."

"Sure thing, but what about the mages on the right?"

She smirked as she launched a large blast from her sword at one the mages, "Oh I think Adam gave someone an interesting idea that will keep them occupied."

Mike smiled as he saw Adam attack the tree branch, "That is a great idea." After the scream that had come from the mage he charged out from behind the wall of ice and made his way to the two furthest mages. This left him very opened for the one like Adam that had moved forward but has threw a fireball spell at him Mike saw that he had been very fortunate and not properly figured out the distance that was separating them. The spell landed but it was far enough not to cause any damage to him at all. "I know I'm close enough." and with that he stopped and then swung his sword in the air twice in quick succession as two blast left the blade each time they made their way to their targets that where further away.

Unfortunately, Mike had not been the only one that had seen what Adam had done and so the trick was not as successful but one of the two mages did get trapped and was suddenly yelling at the other to help him out. Figuring that would do the trick to help the others he then turned his attention at the closes mage that had now moved forward into the clearing in order to be able to reach Mike with his spells. "I suppose..."

They had made it passed the clearing and the mages were still busy with their attackers that they had paid very little attention too Anna's group. This did not hold true for their target mind you.

Iris magically charged at her target and swung both blades at her when she got close. The female dark night dodged the blow and then swung her own blade at the ground which was the catalyst to a spell that caused the ground to erupt around Iris. She moved back and as she did the dark knight charged her blade at her. Suddenly a floating holy shield appeared in front of her weapon that forced her to recoil back.

Rosamia used her spears reach to attack her target from afar, "Who are you and what do you want with Iris?"

Now the knight was furious, "She killed the last person that meant anything to me." She then gave Iris a vengeful look, "You killed Genevieve!"

Suddenly the sky then turned black, "Tsk, this is her doing I'm sure." The knight then knelt on the ground and used a spell to cover herself from the stone and dirt around her. She had just made it when bolts of lightning dropped from the sky. One of which targeted her but her makeshift shield mostly held. Using the rubble caused by the lightning spell the knight aimed her hands forward and suddenly large shards of rock and piles of dirt made their way to the three in front of her.

Rosa used her shield and Iris used the ground as well to create a barrier to stop most of the debris.

Now standing the black knight repeated the process, "How could you kill her? She was the only reason I did not take my own life when I was stuck in the god forsaken nightmare. When she was thrown in with me she convinced me to survive.

And for a while I believed her when she said that help would come and eventually something did come but it was them again." Her eyes were filled with tears, hatred and frustration, "I screamed for all I could and tried to stop them but the only thing that it gave me was a fierce beating and the realization that now I was alone again as they took her."

"They left me there to die and then when I was finally about to give up hope again, a man in a similar dark armor came to me and helped me out. He never said anything as he killed all around him and then freed me. As soon as I could my first goal was to find her again, but when I finally got a lead I found out that you had killed her." She then screamed, "HOW COULD YOU DO THAT!! We were the only ones left, and after going thought that you killer her? Could you not even try to return the favor and try and save her too?"

Iris was in shock and Rosamia was busy shielding her and could not counter attack. "This is getting out of hand." Anna refocused her emotions towards the enchantment and then rushed in.

Anna sliced at her and she dodged the blow, "You have a few facts out of place..." As the knight retaliated Anna saw that there was no way that words would reach he at this point, she was completely lost in the moment. Frustrated Anna focused again turning the enchantment around the blade light green. Quickly she attacked with a piercing maneuver, as her target moved to the side to dodge, Anna countered with a slash to the same side that she had moved forcing her to use her blade to block the blow.

'One', Anna then flipped around and used the momentum to put more strength in the horizontal slash that forced her to once again use her blade to deflect the blow upwards.

'Two', having had her momentum pushed upward Anna arced her sword overhead and slashed again but this time aimed for the enemy's sword. When the blow connected the blade broke, *'Figured that would be enough.'*

Still being weaponless did not seem to stop her as she stepped back, figuring that she would cast a spell Anna charged forward but in a bit of a sloppy way to purposely create an opening.

"Much better than the other, but still not good enough." as the knight dodged the obvious attack she then grabbed on to Anna's other arm and suddenly held her close. Instantly, the same way as what had happened to Adam, lightning made its way from her to Anna. The knight's sudden smile was replaced with a scowl as she saw a shimmer appear all around Anna.

Anna, now close enough, head butted the target with enough force that she let her go. Without losing a beat she flipped her sword.

"Anna, wait!"

The sword stopped just as it reached the knight's throat. Anna never had any intention of finishing that move, so Iris's concerns were unfounded, still now that she had her close.

"Calm down, now... We can tell you the full story but you need to stop..."

It was still no use, as Anna suddenly looked down she saw that the knight was far from finished. When she saw that she was casting a point blank fireball Anna kicked her away but it was too late and the spell activated and sent them both flying back.

In Anna's case Alex's shield spell still held, but that did not help her from the landing. She shook it off to see that the knight armor had been mangled, but as she had feared she was far from done as she outstretched both hands at them.

Shards of lightning came pouring out of her hands and went everywhere. Anna turned back and saw that both Rosa and Iris were once again using their spells to cover them but something was off with Iris and with that she then lunged at her to shield her from the coming bolts.

Rosamia was now crouched on the ground hiding behind what was effectively a medium size buckler in order to cover herself from the spell but the target was completely wild and some hit her on the sides. She held in the pain and focused on the shield which was holding back most of the attack.

In the case of Iris her spell had not been quick enough and had it not been for Anna, now covering her, the incoming spell would have done a lot of damage.

Anna was thankful that the shield on her still held, but wondered how long it would last as the knight stubbornly stood and once again casted bolts their way. But then she heard a voice from the back and her worries diminished.

"If it was a contest of spells you wanted then all you had to do was ask." Alexandria suddenly casted a counter spell to get rid of the random bolts of lightning and then using the two fireball spells that had already been prepared she launched them at the target, leaving her only one ice spell. The knight tried to evade but she had little luck and the resulting explosion dropped her on the ground.

Alexandria moved forward, "I don't think that you will last long with me in your current state, are you sure you want to continue this?"

The knight suddenly chuckled a bit and then a gate spell appeared behind her. This did not surprise Alex at all as already she starting casting as the knight forced herself to stand.

She moved next to the gate and then stopped

and reached out for the book that she still had in her possession. It was a bit singed but still in one piece as she unclasped it from her belt and then threw it in front of her on the ground. "This is what you were really after so come and get it."

Suddenly Iris moved away from Anna and raced ahead, "Wait stop, what you said are we really the only ones left?"

This comment puzzled Alex but she did not stop what she was doing and suddenly as Iris had now moved passed her she was really happy that she did, "Iris stop!"

Iris did as Alexandria instructed and then suddenly a wall of ice appeared in front of her. When she looked back at her sister she suddenly felt a large force push her forward, with the wall in front there was little for her to do but brace for the impact of her face and body where being pushed on the wall.

The others were far enough to see that the gate spell had activated and was suddenly sucking in everything close to it. It only took a few seconds for the knight to disappear and after that the gate as well, once gone Iris dropped on the ground.

Adam moved to Rosa to make sure she was okay and then turned to Alex, "Why did you not stop her this time, you must have had the time to?"

Alex made her way to the book that was still on the ground, "Yea I could have but I was busy securing this and then getting information on the gate that told me about its interesting effect." She then made her way to Iris, "I guess she was willing to use anything to try and lure you closer probably knowing about it, not that she needed to it seems... So what was that comment about?"

It was clear that Iris was confused, so Anna stepped up to give her more time. "Let's head somewhere else and we can fill everyone in on the

situation."

Mike looked at the group; her suggestion was an easy thing to agree with. "Alexandria, can you contact Lithius so that he can pick up the mages that have been left behind. They may have information that was can use later."

Still looking at Iris with concern Alexandria nodded and reached out for one of the many communication pendants that she had, "Sure thing then lets head home and heal up." She then helped her sister up and gave her a smile, "Okay."

Iris responded with a small smile, "Sound good."

Chapter 4

Everyone had gathered at Lithius house once again, as Alexandria was still too cramped due to all the books piled up everywhere. The returned book was lying on the coffee table in the middle of sofas and chairs that made up his living room, as expected the place was rather clean and clutter free. Most of the time so far had been spent explaining what had happened and who they had met up with as their book thief.

"Hmm, that is interesting... and very unexpected."

Rosa thought the same, "With what we know now can we assume that maybe the target is not Astrum as we had assumed and maybe one of us once again?"

Mike thought about that for a little while, "I would rather still stay with Adam's first assumption. While this was a surprise the pieces still fit better with that in mind as a target."

"Okay, not that I'll disagree with you saying that my hunch was right but why is that as I'm wondering the same as Rosa a bit."

"While having her as our thief is very unexpected the action done don't match in simply trying to get our attention. I mean there are easier ways, simply by killing villagers or..."

It's then that Iris interrupted Mike's explanation, "Ah, I don't think that she would do that. I don't see her hesitating to kill one of us or even a guard if they are in the way but someone that is innocent like a villager... My gut tells me otherwise."

Mike suddenly conceded, "Sure, bad example,

sorry about that. Still what I mean to say is that there are plenty of easier ways to get our attention then sneaking in to the top mage of Calculus library and taking a book without even leaving a hint of anything that it was taken in the first place in order to get us to show up."

Rosamia thought about it more, "Okay, that's fair but still how does she fit into this?"

"That I don't know..." Anna then grabbed his hand, "At this time there is no way to know, still can we assume that there may be another player that is involved?"

Suddenly Iris was hopeful, "Do you mean to say that maybe she being controlled somehow?"

Anna did not even think about it, "No, you saw that raw emotion; there is no way that she is being controlled." Seeing the dreary look on Iris Anna forced herself to continue, "She could be influenced, that's possible." A weak smile then appeared on Iris face.

Alexandria suddenly wanted to switch things a bit, "So our next step..." Iris immediately jumped in, "We need to find her, and I want to save her. I don't want a repeat of last time, we need to save her."

No one was sure how to answer that, they all agreed but it was hard request. Adam then looked at Alex, "Well we do have a target, can't you track her with magic?"

"I wish, well maybe we could but it would be really hard and could lead to many false leads. I don't even have her mark to help with the process."

"...mark?"

Rosamia repressed her smile as there is no way that Adam would know about mage mark even if he really should. "It's unique to everyone and every time a spell is cast it inserts itself into the spell, it's the same way as you touching a glass

and leaving a finger print but instead the print is the mark and it's on the spell."

Adam was still confused a bit, "I get that but why do you know about that?"

"Everyone that can cast a spell has a mark, I have one and so do you as the same thing happens when you cast a holy spell... or it did I guess."

"What!? But how come I never knew about this, I mean the tracking implication alone."

"I learned about it during my High Order training and the reason you don't know about it is... how does the expression goes, 'it was above your pay grade?'"

Adam had to think about that one and then suddenly a light pop in his head, "Ahhhh, Enforcers." Rosamia then nodded in approval.

Then he turned again to Alex, "Wait then that makes no sense, did you not figure it out while looking at that gate spell?"

"I did actually but that can't be her mark."

This time it was Lithius that was confused, "How can you know that?"

"It's true I can't be sure at one hundred percent but the mark that I got was, odd." She thought about it more, "It's hard to explain, it seems like it was modified somehow."

This made Iris wondered about something, "Mark are hard to modify, to follow with what Rosa said it's like modifying a finger print, it can be done but... could it have happened during the torture?"

"Hmm, I guess but still no, I mean then your mark would be modified as well if that was the case so I don't think so."

Lithius wondered on this more, "Can you show me this mark? Maybe I have seen it before." Alexandria then reached out and grabbed his hand and gave him the information that she had seen. Lithius seemed troubled by it but then his look

changed to a confused state, "It... feels familiar and yet not. I will have to think more on this. Still this does lead to a confirmation that someone else is helping her or is with her for some reason."

Alexandria nodded, "Seems like it, still I'll ask again what our next step knowing all this?"

While they looked at Mike it was Lithius that started to answer, "On that there is another location for another book that you may want to look into. This one was tricky due to the location and also who was going to go. With that arrangements have been made but there are strings attached."

Alexandria was confused as much as everyone else, "What are you talking about? Is there a place that we are not welcomed that much that they would to throw us out as soon as we entered the front gates?"

Suddenly both Rosa and Adam looked at each other, "Oh, when you put it that way I think I know where Lithius is talking about." Seeing as Alex still had not figured it out Rosa continued, "The holy city of Missa. We did not comment on it but when we had our talk with Kyle he did mention a few things about maybe staying away and waiting until they asked for help before we showed up wanting to help."

Alex was clearly not happy about this, "What? Okay sure maybe we killed what they thought was their god." Adam interrupted, "In a way he was."

"Fine, he was controlling them..."

"Well yes but they were willing to follow his lead without question."

Alex was getting frustrated, "And we showed them that this was the wrong thing to do and gave them their freedom again."

"Sure, but not everyone saw that they were being controlled and not only that soon after all

their magic was gone so really."

"Fine fine, so Missa is out as a vacation spot, does that mean that we stay away anyways."

Mike chuckled, not a few hours ago she had promised to try a bit more, oh well it had been expected. "We still go but, Lithius, you mentioned strings?"

"Yes, you can only go when Lady Jessica marks a specific spot as that will single that she is ready and that the area is free. Also you will need to change your appearance a bit. The idea is for no one to know that you are in the city."

Anna suddenly knew where this was going, "Please anything but black and gray..."

Rosa chuckled remembering her displeasure when they visited Capio, "If Iris or Alex can help then I can suggest something more suitable in order to blend in more. That said we will have to lose the armor."

"Are you sure?"

Alex was stunned, "Adam, anyone else and I'm sure you would have said, I don't like that instead."

Before he could respond Mike cut in, "Let's lose the armor, I mean against mages it's of little use and if it will help us deal less damage than we already have then we really have little options."

"Well since it's agreed then I can help with that, I'm sure Alex will need to focus on something else so this will help take my mind off things a bit at the same time."

With that figured out Mike looked at Lithius, "Do you know when it will be possible for us to go?"

"I'm not sure, I will confirm but from my last contact it seems that sometime tomorrow may be available."

"Good..." He then paused for a moment and then struggled with something, "I know that this

will sound weird but, is there a way to evacuate this city?"

Lithius was stunned as was everyone else, "Why such extremes at this time?"

"We are not winning this race, and sure we know more but they are so far ahead and given our target."

"While I agree with you that this thief's main target is not your group and that it is Astrum related as was first assumed with this new player involved it is possible that it could not be Astrum that is targeted but a person in Astrum. Given the grunge with miss Iris I could see a small group of people helping each other in other to both get their revenge as being a better motive for all this and could be the missing explanation that you where looking for."

There was no way to refuse his explanation but at the same time it made him wonder, "True that is possible and make sense. Okay then, forget I mentioned anything." He then stood, "I guess then that we should all rest up and prepared for the next location when we get the permission."

With all of them agreeing and not having anything to add everyone left separately, Iris left with Rosa and Adam, Alex stayed with Lithius for a while longer and Anna and Mike left on their own.

On the way to their temporary home, Anna grabbed Mike's hand who was lost in thought. "There is no way that you will forget about it, and I know you don't agree with him."

He shrugged, "I don't but there is no basis for it so there was no point in arguing it. Still this puzzle is getting more complex very quickly."

"Well there is no point in worrying about it now as there is no way to gain more information so try to relax and enjoy the moment more instead of worrying."

He smiled at her, "You make it sound so simple."

She then chuckled, "It is actually but you do have to learn to let it go a bit in order for it to make it easy. Otherwise you get stuck in this loop of repeating the same answers and questions in your head and that eventually becomes a dark and lonely place to live in."

He saw that her amused face showed concern, he then took a deep breath, pause for a second and filled his mind with other thoughts. He then gave her a kiss, "My light in the darkness."

She then whispered, "You're here for me and I'm here for you."

On that note Mike figured he would go for what was annoying Anna, "So any plans for tonight? Or will we have another visitor perhaps?"

She laughed at that one, "I wish we would get interrupted by Iris there is no way that this is easy for her right now and I feel that we need to help her but I'll wait a bit longer on that one. Plus Alex is there so I'm sure that she will be the first to try." She then thought about it more, "There is also Rosa, with everything that was mentioned about Missa, well with everything that has happened to her I'm sure she still cares a lot about the place and probably most of the people there too." She then sighed, "But then again those two have been trying to work things out between the two of them to communicate more in order to get closer so suddenly showing up to help could ruin that."

Anna then gave him a quick glance, "So no I don't expect any visitors tonight... even if part of me would be happy if one would show up."

Mike smiled, "Who knows..." He then stopped and looked around, "Let go do something to distract both of us. I mean I'm sure it will still be in the back of our minds but you never know."

She laughed, "Let's do that."

Much later during the night Alexandria figured that she would grab a quick something before finally going to bed, it's then that she saw that a light was coming from below Iris's room door. Curious and also worried considering everything Alex forgot about her original errand and opened Iris's door. She then saw that her sister had her head in a book and was studying.

"Okay... what's so interesting?"

Iris did not look at her and kept on reading, "I figured that you would like for me to study, given all those time you told me too and I ignored you."

Alex then made her way inside and then sat on the bed that was next to the small desk that she was sitting, which had a pile of books on it that Alex had a long time ago encouraged her to read. "Sure... but given the situation I'm not sure the right motivation is behind this than the joy of learning magic." She then grabbed her hand in order to get Iris's attention, "Talk to me, what are you thinking?"

Iris took a deep breath and then put the book on the table, after a while of thinking about it more she started to answer her question, "I was... outmatched. I mean I don't see myself as a slouch, I practice every day and it's not like she completely had me but she was better." She then looked at Alex's eyes, "Should I not be better? The only weakness that I can see is what I've been ignoring and for that I'm truly sorry and with that I ask selfishly if you once again could teach me to be better."

Alex did not know what to say in the moment, part of her was very happy but the other part knew that this was wrong. "I can, I will... but I don't

think this is right."

Suddenly Iris was confused, "What? It's the only explanation, it has to be why she was better."

"Is it? I'm sorry but I was not there so I can't really help you but is there a part that you are forgetting or overlooked? What about the others did they not fight her as well? How did that go?"

Iris did not really want to do this but figured that she would if it would help her get help, "Well Adam was no match at all, sure in sword only but that is a massive handicap on her end. Rosa was able to hold her own with her holy shield and the range that her short spear gives her...." She then paused for a bit and then suddenly confusion appeared, "And Anna completely overpowered her?" She then looked at Alex, "How did she do that? I mean the enchantment is one thing but."

Suddenly Alex had a smile on her face as a path to help had opened up, "This we can ask..." She suddenly stood and immediately Iris stopped her. "Wait! Don't tell me that you were going to teleport us both to their room right?"

Alex then had a playful look on her face, "Maybe..."

"Please they are married and it's the middle of the night..." Suddenly she blushed a bit, "They could... you know, be doing something else."

Alex then thought about it which seriously confused Iris. "Hmm, I guess but I don't think so."

"Wait there is no way for you to know." Suddenly she was scared, "right?"

Alex was a bit insulted by that one, "Are you implying that I have them magically bugged, well I will have you know that I have done nothing of the sorts..." The way she stopped that sentence still worried Iris but then she dropped it as Alex suddenly turned serious and then reached out for the pendent that she had around her neck. "Even

so, if that is what you are worried about, then simply whisper her name, it should be less intrusive that way and you may get the answer you need. There may be a rematch tomorrow so..." She did not have to finish and Iris though the name.

A floating head of Iris suddenly showed up in Anna and Mike bedroom, "Anna, you must be sleeping right... please be sleeping."

It took a moment as they had been sleeping for Anna to grab the pendent that was on the nightstand next to the bed, as she did so Mike whispered "Hey, look at that, you got your wish..."

She could not help the chuckle as she answered Iris, "its okay Iris, what do you want to ask?"

Instead of hearing Iris answer she instantly heard Alex instead, "See they were sleeping, all good then." and then the communication suddenly stopped and then blue shimmer appeared in their bedroom and instantly Alex and Iris showed up.

"See we could have done this from the start." Before anyone could comment Alex's eye realized the mistake that she had done, "Oh, maybe we should turn around for a bit."

After a minute or two when the two had put some clothes on Iris and Alex turned around. Suddenly Iris was really embarrassed that she had mentioned anything to Alex, still she had a point in that there was little time until the next time for the situation to repeat itself. "Ah I just wanted to know how you overpower her so easily when I couldn't... so sorry about this as well by the way."

Alex turned to her, "its fine, see they are fine."

Anna tried not to laugh, "She's right it's fine, and to answer your question, in that particular situation it was not my skill that got her but the

fact that I was protected by her spells from Alex's shield that she had casted on me. Given a different situation it could have gone another way."

Mike then suddenly looked at her, "Wait, What?"

She gave him a half smile, "I can't always win, and you know that."

"Sure, fine, but can we not talk about battles where you can lose... make me a bit uneasy."

Ignoring his comment Iris then looked at Alex, "Can you teach me the shield spell? I mean it could be useful for more than this as well."

Alex had a sad look on her face this was going to be interesting to explain, "No I can't." Before she could argue back she continued, "It's not that I don't want to its that you can't learn it and it's not that you don't have the potential to use it but more that you lack too much in the basics for it."

Iris was confused, which was better than frustrated. "But don't you learn spells all the time above what you normally can do?" Alex simply had a look on her face that appeared like she had suddenly been insulted she let it slide and in that time Iris instantly jumped in to correct herself, "Sorry, you're right you study all the time so it's stupid of me to simply think that I could just pick it up."

Now Alex felt guilty, "Please don't be like that, you can do more than you think currently trust me. You spend all that time with me researching when I need help, there is a reason why I ask for it and that time you use is not wasted."

Iris was feeling depressed but also understood what she was trying to say. "But I need more time in order to do what you can... I get it."

It's then that Anna chimed in, "I don't think that you do. Well I do think that this is what Alex was saying but I think in a way that you both have

it wrong."

"If I learn how to use magic as she does then that will make me better, in a way that balance that she had of sword and spells is where I lost so if I compensate for that using what Alex can teach me..."

Anna nodded, "Yes I agree with you there but I think that you are taking the wrong path with this. While being better at casting will make you better overall I don't think that is your issue overall that you need to focus on if your goal is to get stronger."

Both of them were confused and so Mike added to it in order to help them out. "Think back to what you said about Bernard, or how you explained his mistake that he made."

Iris did that but still did not understand, "But that makes no sense, I'm not carbon copy of Adam, I adapt now..."

Once again Anna nodded, "Yes you do but yet in your case you still follow his teachings after everything that you learned"

"Are you saying that your style would be better?"

She chuckled at that, "Not at all, but style is a problem. The Crimsons tried to teach me their way but it didn't work because they did not care to understand who I was and how I could approach battle by being myself with my strength and weakness. I needed someone to keep that in mind and then show me how to use and work around those in order to learn properly." She then looked at her and then at her hips, "Adam showed you everything he knew and he did that well, it's what you needed at the time. But now I think that you are at a spot where you need to figure out how you want to fight or how you should fight, not as a Crusader, or as Crimson or even a mage but as Iris."

There was a long pause but it gave time for Iris to think about it, "I think I understand what you mean, but that's not going to be easy or quick for that matter."

Anna was suddenly more concerned after that comment, "Your right but it is what you need to do in order to grow into what I think will be your full potential and what you ultimately want for yourself." She then took a quick pause, "As for the speed, please I know that you are worried about her especially with the comment that she gave that there was no others. Still please please, do keep in mind that what happened before was not your fault and also is not the same situation this time around. She is not an avatar nor does she have the powers of one, this give us time to try and help her, which is something we did not have before."

"I understand..." Iris then looked at the window and then at her sister, "I think that we should head back, there is a lot that I need to rethink I guess." She then looked at the two sitting on the bed, "Thanks for this, and sorry to have bugged you like this."

The both smiled, "It's alright and anytime you need to, don't hesitate okay."

She smiled at both of them, "Okay." She then turned to her sister who was lost in thought it seems, "Well you got us here, can you take us back or should I?"

Alex then grabbed her hand, "Oh sure, not a problem... There may be some things I want to talk to you about when we get back."

Mike was about to add in something but then a blue shimmer appeared and the two disappeared. He then turned to Anna, "There is no way that she is going to sleep tonight again. Now I'm really glad that I let her sleep while we had watch."

Anna chuckled, "So that's how you managed,

Iris and I were wondering on that as she simply could not believe that Alex could have waited that patiently."

Suddenly partially worried that he had let it slip, "Well we did talk but after that she simply dropped out, don't let the others know."

Suddenly a coy smile appeared, "I would never."

Convinced that she was simply teasing him he did not bite, "So, are you feeling better now?"

Anna thought about it for a moment and then nodded with a happy smile, "I think I am. It's not going to be that easy but I'm sure this is the right path for her."

He then laid in the bed, "I'm sure she will figure it out now."

Anna then reached out and put her arms around his waist, "Hmm, a more balanced Iris, I'm curious to see where she will end up. But that will wait until tomorrow as for now..." She then reached out to give him a kiss. He kissed her back, "...yes tomorrow."

"Wow you two look like crap."

Alexandria simply stared at Adam as Iris moved a stack of books around so that the two could sit somewhere.

"It was a very late night last night..."

Adam and Rosamia looked around and saw that there were piles of books everywhere, which was not uncommon in Alex and Iris's home but this was different. Normally you had stacks placed in a certain way and this was just a lot of books piled up everywhere, some were still opened at certain spots like they were in mid research. The other thing that Adam noticed, probably more than Rosa was that Iris currently had her sword

equipped but instead of the normal two swords one of them was a regular long sword and both were attached on the same side. He quickly glanced at them, "Something you want to tell me?"

Iris thought about it, "Hmm, just trying something new at this time and it's still in the very early stages."

He was concerned but only mildly, "Okay, well if you need anything." She smiled and nodded.

It's at this time that Anna and Mike showed up; as they entered they looked around but asked no questions. Eventually they found a spot after moving a few things around, Alexandria had wanted to do that for them but at this point she figured that they could manage.

Mike looked at Anna and a small smirk appeared on his face when he looked at the two sisters in question. "Well, maybe we will make this short and see if you two can get more rest?"

Alex nodded at that as Iris stood and quickly moved to each and every one save Alex.

It had been mentioned ahead of time to do a quick meet up in order to get ready and generally stay close to one and the other in case the mark was picked up by Alex magically. Also as it had been requested everyone had left their armor and were wearing simple clothes, now as Iris moved in front of everyone she touched their clothes and then magically transformed them to what had been talked about with Rosa and Adam the previous day. When she finished Anna looked at what mostly looked like sand brown robes that had large slits on their sides in order to open up more if they needed to move, their pants were the same color as the robes and in the back there was a small hood that could be used to hide their faces. "It's very brown. Does this look mean something in Missa?"

Rosamia nodded, "It does, basically it's what

all menial labor and other types of work wear at the church. The hood is there to hide their faces as when at work they are not to be disturbed, I figured that it would be perfect to help us not draw any attention and even help us hide our face to bend in more."

"It's interesting the way to describe these people."

She thought about Mike's comment and then tried to explain more, "I can see where you are coming from but this is not the case. This is a full job, where they get paid for their work as much as anyone else that would be doing that type of work, which involve cooking, restocking, cleaning, gardening, and so on. The group, if you want to call them that as they don't really have a name, was created when there was a lot of people that wanted to follow the cause and help out but for some reason could not... The main reason for that was that they simply could not cast any holy magic which made it impossible to join the priesthood or the Crusaders. So in order for them to still help out the Order paid them to do things that needed to be done all around and that in turned freed up a lot of time for the rest of us. There are still pages or beginners that start off doing the same tasks as them in order to simply learn how to get around and also get used to the customs of the city but generally speaking the main bulk for the work is driven by them and is only superficially monitored by the Order."

"That does make these disguises great for us." He then turned to face Rosa, "Also I apologize I did not mean to imply it's just..."

Rosa instantly stopped him, "its fine, after seeing the like of Capio and knowing that you two where there for a while I can see where you would question the quick description I gave. Still I can

assure you that no abuse is being performed." As he smiled and nodded Alexandria stood and stretched out, she then moved next to Anna and Mike, "Well I guess it's time to go."

While the rest stood as well Rosa was puzzled, "I take it that you got Jessica's signal?"

"Yep, actually I got it a few minutes ago..."

Rosa was instantly worried, "You could have simply cut me off, I mean I'm sure that answering his question as much as I did was not as important as making her wait."

Alex raised her hand in a motion for her not to worry, "its fine, she was told that once the mark was placed that she would have to wait. I mean there was no way to know exactly when and there was no way to make sure that we would all be ready." She then looked at everyone, "I am assuming that we are ready?" When everyone nodded in agreement she reached out to Anna and Mike's hand, "Okay well I think you all know the drill."

"I swear one of these times we will sing kumbaya and not teleport somewhere." Adam then looked at Alex who had yet to start the incantation, "Also I noticed that you moved yourself next to them again, something you want to share?"

Due to being tired as she was there was a lack of emotion in her response, "Not really, and if you are implying I'm playing favorites, well I'm not. I often take Rosa or Iris's hand... it's all just you so don't worry." And with that last comment she started the casting with Iris and they all disappeared in a blue'ish glow.

They reappeared in a closed out room that did not have a window and was wall to wall stone. Around edges you did have a lot of weapon racks

with what seem to look like practice weapons as the edges had been dulled. While Rosa quickly figured out where they were it only took an instant for Adam to see that they were in one the Crusaders practice rooms. Also the only person present was Jessica.

"Yes, that is a great idea to blend in, thanks for following our request."

Rosamia smiled, "Of course we would." She then spread her arms a bit, "Are you okay with a welcome hug?"

Jessica nodded and then reached out to Rosa who was also moving towards her, "Of course, while it may not be the popular opinion around here you are still friends right?" as they gave each other a warm hug Rosa then let go after a few seconds, "Of course." She then pull back more and still with a smile on her face took the lead for the group, "I'm assuming you know what we are here for, so how do you wish for us to proceed?"

"I was told that someone is after a book and ideally you would like to stop them. Well with the way you are dressed it will make it very easy to escort you to where you need to go, after that mind you I'm not sure how long I can allow you to stay. So you may have to grab the book and leave instead." Her face suddenly looked a bit depressed, "I am sorry about that."

Rosa nodded, "It's not ideal but if that is all that can be done... Still do you mind if I ask what the situation currently is?" There was some small hesitation before she continued, "I know that it may not be my place to ask and that we are seen as the cause of probably what is happening so if you can't say..."

Jessica then raise her hand in a way to tell her to stop, "It's fine, I may as well tell you now as it will make things easier, plus it would be hard to

hide from you two who have lived here for a while." She then took a moment to gather her thoughts, "On the surface things are as okay as can be, but there has been a lot of changes. The High Order still functions as head in a sort, and currently Rob, Catherine, Joseph, who is still missing, and I are its members. The Crusaders are mostly lead by the General who has taken his position back."

Adam as puzzled by the way that comment was made, "... Mostly lead?"

Jessica signed deeply, "I was trying to figure out a way to approach this but currently there is a divide in Missa. Where some reject how things are now, and also not all have forgiven the General for what happened during the battle with the lord of light. It's not wildly known to the priesthood and the people outside but a lot of Crusaders do know and it's caused a bit of a rift. This rift expanded and more and more joined and then certain priest and priestess started to follow."

Mike was now very worried on where this was going, "It sound like you are dealing with a potential mutiny on your hands."

She did not seem to have to think about the answer as she replied him, "No nothing that drastic at this time. I mean currently most are frustrated with the current way things are. You need to understand that at this time many in the Crusaders need to relearn how to fight as magic was a part of their tactic and strength. It's even worse for all the priesthood as they don't really have anything to fall back on with all their magic gone, so they question their future a lot now. Plus there are the devout that saw or was told about their gods death..." Suddenly she was sad, "It... has not been easy on people and this has been a hard year so far."

She then took a moment to refocus her

emotions, "With that we have been making a difference with what I have learned teaching others, with my fellow sisters and brothers that have mostly all come from Calculus, the different ways to help out as we used to." She then pointed to vial of red liquid around her belt, "Plus these potions have helped immensely in being able to help regain what we once had."

Alexandria was glad that her work had paid off but something did not make sense, "Wait, are you able to create those yourselves now, of that size?"

Lady Jessica smirked a bit, "Sadly no, I can do a small one and Catherine is now at the medium level but overall most can only accomplish a small. These have been provided with an arrangement with the Astrum mages that Lithius hand-picked."

With the mention of her name this made Rosa wonder, "I have to ask where is Catherine? I can see why she may not want to see me just yet but at the same time..."

Jessica chuckled a bit while she cut her off, "No worries, no matter how she may feel it hurt her more not being able to be here instead of me. But at this time I am ill equipped to deal with the task that she needed to do and Rob was already busy with something else so there was little choice in the matter. I would like to add that it's not a task I mind doing but I would lie if I did not say that I was not worried a bit. As it was mentioned to Lithius, tensions are high and your presence with an association with us could complicate things at this time."

Rosa was clearly troubled part of her wanted to call this off but in many ways this was not for them but for Astrum who has helped them many time in the past. There was also the connection with Iris and that black knight that needed to be investigated more. "We will do all we can to make

sure that we don't cause any issues for you." She then turned and looked at the others that all nodded in agreement. "Still... if you need us to..."

It was clear to Jessica that Rosa wanted to let this go but could not and this was something that she appreciated. "It's okay, but given the circumstance maybe it would be best if you only..." she then stopped as they heard a knock on the door. Instantly the others followed Rosamia's lead and covered their heads with the hood but still because of their location they also moved away from the door so that it could be partially opened without revealing their presence to the other side of the room.

Once everyone was quickly in position Jessica half opened the door, there was a look of curiosity on her face but none of concern as she saw who was on the other side. "Did something happen?"

The priest bowed his head, "Yes Lady Jessica, the library you had me look into it seems that smoke is coming out of it from the first floor. The Crusaders are heading there now..." There was a pause and suddenly the priest had a very worried look. "I should correct myself and say that both factions are heading there now."

Jessica wanted to let out a small sigh but there was no way that she would allow herself that in front of one of her young students. Instead she gave him a reassuring smile, "You did great, thank you for your help. I will head there myself to make sure cooler head prevail and at the same time bring help to deal with the potential fire." With that he bowed his head and left.

After a few second Jessica motioned with her hand for the others to follow her. Keeping their head and hood a bit low but not too much to arouse too much suspicion from others they followed her from behind as she led the way. It

took a while but once they were out of the Crusader section she seemed a bit calmer, probably due to the overall group looking more natural in the more normal sections.

Their pace was quick but not fast enough to not allow Rosamia to look around a bit as they made their way out of the main church and into the main streets of Missa. The occupants of the church itself seemed okay but there was this feeling of emptiness that Rosa simply could not shake off. Once they were outside things looked more normal but even then everything was different. You had people marching along, talking, and so on but part of her wondered if there was a bit of an act going on. Not for the Lights Templar benefit but their own, like they were trying to force their daily lives as they had done so many times instead of it simply happening naturally. This worried her a lot, but there was very little that she could do about it.

It took about fifteen minutes of walking and the she slowed down, at the distance you could see that there were two groups of Crusaders around the entrance of a six story building and they seem to be arguing. The building in question was clearly their target as smoke was coming out of the windows and the cause was a fire as you could also see flames, but as alarming as that was it was still less that seeing the two Crusaders simply do nothing but argue with each other as the blaze continued.

It was easy to see that Lady Jessica was border line angry at the situation, "I need to deal with that as soon as I can. Can you..."

"We will deal with the fire and help those inside."

She then nodded and made her way to the arguing group as they made their way to the

entrance of the library.

As they ran in Mike wondered on something, "Rosamia is it okay for us to simply ignore the Crusader and dive in like this?"

"Should be fine, it is one of our functions, but let's hurry in before anyone clues in that we are jumping in to a fire with no water in hand."

With that they quicken their pace and made their way to the double doors of the entrance that were closed. Mike put his hand on the door to quickly check, it was nowhere near as warm as expected. He then reached out for the handle to open it but it was closed somehow. "Alexandria I think your assistance is needed for this lock."

It took little time for her to see that there was in fact a spell around the lock to keep the doors shut, after a quick counter spell that problem was removed but it did confirm that this fire was not natural and that their enemy was probably on the other side. She moved out of the way and then Anna and Mike got into position to open the doors and rush in, they did a quick count and then did so with the others following right behind them.

Thankfully the inside was not as chaotic as expected; there was a fire but only to certain bookcases closest to the windows. It was starting to jump to others but only starting. Also you had very little people inside, but this is where the good news stopped. While there were few people they were all laying on the ground like they were unconscious which made no sense considering the little amount of smoke trapped in the first floor of the library. The other thing that was odd is that at the other end they could see who they assumed was their target but this time it was a he and he looked like he was dressed in normal clothes. It was hard to tell as he also wore a cloak that wrapped around most of his body with a hood that

hid his face, all in all a very classic thief for sure, but a far cry from a black armor knight that they had expected.

"Alexandria, you take care of the fires.

Rosamia and Iris, the people and the rest aim for the target."

Everyone split up to their assigned tasks and while the group of Anna, Mike and Adam made their way to the unknown figure they saw him pick up a book and attach it to his belt using a strap.

"Put that back..."

The figure then turned to face his attackers, "Your lines are so cliché and plus you act like you don't even know me..." He then pulled back his hood to reveal blond hair and a half shaven beard; they could also see that he was equipped with a rapier. "I should feel wounded but really you did so much more to me in that past that I suppose this means very little now."

Mike was confused and as he quickly looked at Anna he was not the only one with questions popping up in his head. "Hawk! What are you doing here?"

With the mentioned of his name he seemed to relax more, not that there was any reason too. "Ah so you do remember me, I'm surprised as you so quickly forgot about me with that tower incident."

Anna then cut him off, "I explained that to you when we last saw each other."

"Yes, yes, power that could not be controlled but would instead control you." But then an accusing look appeared as he stared at her. "But that's not all that was up there, and that power that would control you was not the only way to use it right?" When none of them answered he continued, "I've watched you all for a while now after that and there is something different about you, there is no need to deny it. And once again

you figured to keep that for yourselves."

"It's not like that..."

He shrugged, "It never is..."

At this point the others had now rejoined and all six of them were there to confront him.

Alexandria prepared herself, "I'm not really sure why you are here and what's your connection but there is no way that you can take us all on."

"Hahaha, no but why would you think for a second that I had any plans on fighting you in the first place?"

That sentence confused everyone a bit and this feeling intensified as a voice could then be heard coming from the stair. "Actually the real question should be what are you doing here at all without me?"

As the female dark knight made her entrance the one that was left more stunned by her appearance was Hawk. "There was no need for you to be here Alice and given how things went the last time..."

"That is NOT your concern!" The anger in her tone was easy for all to see. She then took out her blade, "Now be sure to do your part."

Hawk then signed deeply, "I suppose if I must."

"Same split as last time."

Alexandria, Adam stayed with Mike to face Hawk and then the others made their way to their now named black knight.

While they had spent some time with Hawk when it came to his fighting style Mike knew very little if anything. While he did have a weapon he did not think that it was his main attack choice and given the people that where collapsed, the fire and the lock on the door magic was the best bet. With that Alexandria took the front and center with Mike and Adam to her left and right.

"Let's see if what I heard is true, magical princess." With that he threw a simple fireball their way that Alexandria quickly countered, at the same time she casted a quick spell to have ice suddenly start to encase him starting at his feet.

This was quickly dispelled on his end but something felt off to him and so he figured that he would test out his little theory that was building in his head. He continued the magical battle by lifting his foot and then than in a quick spamming action he aimed for the ground ahead of him. As he did so Alexandria reacted, very quickly he saw, by once again countering the spell and this time her own attack was to launch a gust of wind his way. It was a very strong gust that sent him to his knees but it was also simply a gust of wind and nothing more.

He then laughed as he reached out with both hands and suddenly a large green cloud appeared around him and then it kept growing and growing.

Alexandria quickly erected a barrier spell in the area around him, "Whatever you do don't breathe that stuff in okay. Also I think he's figured out that I'm playing a defensive game so."

Right after she had said that a hand poked out of the barrier and then a fireball was launched from it, which Alex took care of, but then from a different direction a lightning spell was coming at them. Mike then understood Hawk's plan. The cloud that was around him was dangerous for them but not him it seems so there was no way for them to advance; it also completely blocked their vision of him. Alexandria could take the time to dispel it but while she did so it was easy to see that they would then be hit with an attack spell. In a way this was an interesting stalemate that they had created for one and the other. What puzzled him was that there was very little reason for it, sure Alex wanted to keep the damage to a

minimum due to their cover but there had to be something else and then he clued in. "Adam I'll stay here and back her up you go help the others." Instantly Adam separated and Mike looked ahead, "As long as you can keep it up, I'm fine with this but on my mark drop the shield and cast a large gust of wind okay?"

Alex was totally focused on Hawk and his constant barrage of random attack spells coming at her so she did not answer him. Still it was clear that he had figured out that she had promised Iris to help her in whatever way she could with their next encounter with the dark knight, and in this case the help that she was giving her was time.

Iris had taken the lead and changed in as soon as the group had started to split. With her new long sword she enchanted it with a lighting spell and performed a horizontal slash against Alice, "Alice, is that really your name?"

It took little time for Alice to remove the lightning spell and to block the blow with her own sword, "You knowing my name or not make little difference to me, I just want you to suffer the same thing that happened to her." With a quick spark of lighting herself Alice pushed her back, as Iris moved away and prepared for another attack Alice touched the wall and then the material started to form around her.

Iris was not sure if she was upping her armor or if she was going to use it as a weapon again, thing is she knew that she was never going to know as her goal was to stop the spell before it finished. With an piercing attacked aimed at her right side, predictably Alice blocked, but this left her left side open for Iris to simply touch, and as she made contact the counter spell activated and the stone that was making its way around her body started to fall on the ground.

"So you plan on matching me using my style, pathetic." This time she used a gust of wind to push her back. While the spell did push her away it was only as much as Iris had wanted to as she aimed a quick lightning spell at Alice. Her comment was true in a way but it was also misleading. With the conversation that had happened during the night it was clear for the both of them that Anna had pointed to the issue of her using two blades when she had purposely looked at her hips, where her two swords were buckled. After thinking it over and seeing it in action recently it all made sense. In order to fight you needed a weapon and while you could cast while not using your hands there was a very small limit of spells that you had at your disposal in that scenario. By simply having one hand free a multitude of options opened up.

Rosa was still at the ready next to Anna, "So are we simply watching?"

Anna had a half smile on her face, "No, when the time comes we rush in to pin her down. Let's try and end this here."

The new style was doing wonders for Iris but it was new and she had very little practice with it, plus there was this new weapon to deal with as well. While she was matching Alice now, all those little things were starting to add up and she was starting to lose some ground. Still this was not over, Adam had recently joined the group behind her and Alice's partner was pinned down by the others. So that was one advantage that she had that Alice had little counters against. At this time Alice was coming at her with an overhead strike, Iris then used her free hand and sent a spell to the ground that she was standing on. Instantly, even without knowing the power behind it, Alice pulled back and that is where the others suddenly

jumped in.

Rosamia used her spear to try and trip up Alice, she moved around it but that left her little options to try and move around Anna that was suddenly right next to her. Alice tried to block with her own sword but she was not quick enough as the horizontal slash of Anna's, powered by the enchanted blade, cut through her armor and reached her mid section. By reflex her free hand made its way to her wound but she did not cry out in pain as that pain had been very little compared to the harm that she had felt in the past.

Seeing her unbalanced Rosa once again tried to trip her with her spear and this time she was successful. As Alice fell on the floor Anna rushed close in to pin her down and pressed her sword next to her neck.

With Anna on top of her and a blade so close there was little Alice could do, "Hey Hawk are you sleeping over there?"

From the green cloud they could all hear his voice, "Fiiine but you are the one that..."

He was cut off as Mike suddenly charged in at him, "Alexandria."

She did not know what he had planned but she also did not question it as she dropped the shield containing the cloud of poison and then casted a strong gust of wind.

As he moved in he launched the charge of his enchantment forward as well but the target was the closed window. He did not know if the shield would have stopped the blow or not but that detail matter little as when the window shattered the other task that he had asked took over as the gust of wind blew out the cloud in the only place it could go outside. Now with Hawk more of less visible he made his way to his target. That small detour gave Hawk enough time to pull out his

weapon and block the blow, but even then his weapon on only partially out of its scabbard and with the two weapons locked in Mike pressed in.

Hawk tried his best to counter but with the angle, weight and strength difference there was no way to match it. "Well I supposed I'm done here." He finished his line and instantly a spell took effect, Mike pushed in more and to his surprise his sword felt little resistance as it smashed into the bookcase. Having seen the spell recently he understood that Hawk had gone intangible and was making his way to the stairs that let up. "Alexandria."

"No worries I got him." She was preparing a spell that would immobilize him but then he turned around and then looked at her but pointed both hand openly at Mike's direction. "No you don't."

Then a large wave of fire erupted from his hands. Alexandria dropped the spell that she had been focusing on and then did everything she could to counter the fire wave. Mike moved back and away as quickly as he could but the wave was too large still the act of moving back gave her precious second to finish the spell to counter it. This action also gave more than enough time for him to make it to the stairs, "It's done Alice."

"Tsk." Alice was annoyed but there was little that she could do about it, still retreating in her position would not be easy. Already touching the book case a spell then took effect and a multitude of books then suddenly dropped from overhead. Rosamia pulled back but Anna did not, seeing this Rosa quickly casted a shield that appeared on top of her head. "Sorry you are not getting away."

This infuriated Alice, "This is stupid. This sword you have at my throat is a bluff and we both know it." A wicked smile then appeared on her

face, "But is that the same for me?" It's then that Anna saw that Alice's free hand made it way towards her midsection. Considering that the last time she used a point blank fireball spell there was no way for her to take any chances and she pulled back as quickly as she could.

When she did Alice smiled and poured more power in the spell which resulted in lightning bolts randomly going everywhere around the group. Anna was simply too close and got hit by the first one, Rosamia quickly moved her holy shield to cover Anna's mid section and while that helped for the other blows the first one had caused enough damage and without her armor to absorb any power of the blow to her mid section was now on fire.

Iris did her best to dispel the spell effects still going around, while Rosa made her way to Anna in order to protect and heal her. This left only Adam to chase after her as she too made it to the stairs but before she completely made her way to the door she stopped and pointed a finger at Iris. Adam instantly stopped his charge and tried to make his way between her and Iris too often he had seen quick last minute spells being cast like that to simply let it go. After taking a few steps, Iris motioned for him to stop. "Forget about that and go after her."

Adam was confused, a spell had been cast but there was no effect. Still seeing as his enemy was now making its way up the stairs he raced up after her again, but even while she was somewhat wounded, as he figured that Anna's blow had not been that deep, she did have a head start. Silently cursing not having his ability to speed up Adam put more strength in his legs the old fashion way and tried to catch up.

Hawk was already half way in the gate as he

motioned to Alice who had finally made her way up. "You need to hurry if you want to catch this ride." As she advanced he fully entered the gate. When she was almost at the gate she quickly turned around casted ice wall at the entrance to the second floor. "No attempt at an uninvited guest this time around."

Adam had to stop or he would slam into the ice wall, all he saw was a blurred black armored figure disappear in a purple glowing arch. "This is a problem that will need to be fixed."

He calmed himself as the rest of the team made its way up. As Alexandria removed the ice wall he then made his way to Iris, "I'm sorry but she got away." Once the wall was removed they saw that there was no longer any trace of the active gate spell. Frustrated they made their way down to assess the damage.

Now that the danger was gone Rosa once again reapplied a healing spell at Anna's wound to remove all effects that the spell had done. Pushing his current worries away Mike assesses the rest of the situation, all the fire was out but there were a lot of damaged books because of it, a window had been destroyed in the back and luckily all the people that had been present were still alive and unconscious and had all been moved in a safe corner. They had lost the book but also gained information on her ally which could be a lead in itself. He stopped his train of thought as Anna made her way toward him, "I'm fine, no worries."

He was about to respond but then Adam also made his way to them, "Sorry that I have to cancel your back and forth there but it seems that Jessica managed to patch things up with the Crusaders and they are coming this way. Do we want to be here when they do?"

As Mike wondered on that Rosamia stepped in.

"It should be fine, I mean they did see up go in but we need to hide that as Adam is right and it will cause issues." She pointed at the new bare mid section of Anna. Her skin was now healed up but the material had still been burned away and could not be replaced without having access to more material.

Mike looked at the people on the ground, it was easy to think that they could simply take a piece from their cloth and fix Anna's disguise but then that could create future questions. "Iris can you teleport her someplace else out of site and meet up with us later?"

Iris did not question but Adam did, "Why not all go, do we even need to be here anymore?"

"We do, I don't think anyone counted how many came in so two missing will probably not be an issue but if we are all missing, I don't see how Jessica can explain that one." Mike then gave Anna a quick kiss and then Iris took her away.

"Alexandria, if you can try and contact Jessica as we get close to know of a safe spot for us to go that would be handy. Also Rosamia..."

She simply nodded understanding her task as the Crusaders and Lady Jessica made their way in. The four then grouped around Rosa who then made her way to Jessica while most of the Crusaders made the rounds inside the library. "We put out the fire and moved the victims to the side. They are alive but need the attention of a member of the priesthood to confirm their situation." She then pointed to the broken window, "The window was also broken in order to help ventilate the smoke. We will go get more help and come back in order to repair this and also clean the rest of the area up." She then slowly turned to one the Crusader that was still around, "That is when the area is deemed safe."

The Crusader had nothing to say and simply nodded where as Jessica seemed lost in thought for a second and then suddenly answered Rosa. "Yes that sound good, please go now. I'll inform you when you can come back for the repairs. As always thank you for your timely help."

With that the four left the library and after a short while where able to duck in what looked like an empty corner between a few houses. Alexandria then grabbed on to Mike and Rosa's hand, "This should be good." Once Rosa grabbed on to Adam, she then casted the teleport spell.

They reappeared in a room that was mostly empty save for a large bed made for two, a large dresser and also a study table at the end of the room. As Alex motioned for them to move to the edge of the room, Anna and Iris then suddenly appeared where they had been. "This is Jessica's room. She told me to wait it out here until she could make it back." She then focused on a spell around them, "And now we should be able to talk normally without anyone hearing us outside."

"Okay I'll start this off seeing as we have time to kill, is there anything that can be done about those gates that they create. I mean it's really hurting us right now."

Alex did not disagree with Adam on that one, "We can for sure, but we need time to prepare and being behind does not help us with that."

Wanting to encourage the situation Rosa jumped in on the conversation, "On that note of the gates, is Hawk the one creating them? Does his mark match?"

"Sadly nope it does not." Alex then turned to Mike, "Which I guess means that there is a third player in this group."

"Seems like it." He then thought about it more, "About Hawk, how would you rate him as a caster?"

From what you told me in order to be competent you need to be in Astrum or with someone like Bernard in Calculus, where does he fit in?"

Alexandria took a moment before answering that one, "It's a bit hard to tell considering what little I have seen. Still if you are wondering if he is self thought, there is no way. With the spells that he is casting and how easily he's doing it to be self thought he would have blown himself up a long time ago. But you are also right in that he would need to have learned from someplace like what you mentioned, poison clouds are not in those types of libraries that are found everywhere." She then pause again but this time she looked a bit frustrated, "The issue I have with all that is with his skill level that I have seen, and I have to assume better, he would be known, especial seeing as he's human and I really don't know him at all. Now I'll admit that I was not the most sociable person while I was stuck growing up in Astrum but I did know who my competition was."

Anna wondered on that a bit more, "Is it possible that it's this third party that thought him? I mean when we last talked I got the impression that he was not acting alone and during that time it make little sense that the person he was referring too was Alice seeing as we were about to face off with Genevieve."

"You're probably right and that is what makes more sense but if that is the case it will make tracking down that last party that much harder."

Adam then suddenly remembered something and then turned to Iris, "Speaking of the unknown, what was that spell that she casted towards you during the end there?"

Iris was suddenly very uncomfortable and suddenly Alex jumped in, "It was a simple message spell, it's why I did not pay it any attention... mind

you I was busy at the time." She then turned to Iris as well, "Still what was the message?"

Now with all of them looking at her there was no choice but to answer, "It was nothing to talk about, just simple talk of she will get me next time and so on. The original message was more colorful but that all there was too it."

"Darn it, I was hoping for something else when Alex mentioned a message spell." Adam then looked at Mike, "I mean in a way we are out of lead now on where to go too next right?"

Rosamia was stunned by Adam acceptance of Iris obvious lie. She wondered if she should point it out but she saw that Anna gave a look to Alex so figured she would wait it out. Still in her mind he should have seen it.

Still with a minor confused look on her face Alex turned to Adam, "Well actually on that, while there was no way for me to simply track Alice now that I know about Hawk I could possibly find us a lead. Two mages of that power close to each other can give off a vibe of sorts." She then turned to Iris, "And of course I will need help with that, so you are volunteering obviously."

Rosa smirked, *'so that was the plan, normally she'd ask but this time she demanded.'*

Before Iris could confirm the door suddenly started to open and instantly all members made their way to the other side of the room in case it was not Jessica. Fortunately it was her and not someone else. As everyone relaxed as she closed the door behind her Alex warned her about the spell that was in place.

"That was quicker than expected, how did it turn out?"

Jessica gave Rosa a warm smile to try and lower the concern that she was obviously feeling. "It's all good actually. After a quick check everyone

is in perfect health and the only damage was more of less a fire. Now the Crusaders will investigate the cause but at that point the story will be that a rogue mage cause a commotion in order to steal a book, which will be reported to Astrum, and then we stepped in to take the fire out, which is all true."

She then gave them all a quick bow, "On that thanks for making sure that the situation was contained and also make sure that everyone was safe." She then turned to Rosa, "I'm assuming that you are the main cause of this?"

Rosamia nodded, "Yes, both me and Iris can still use a heal spell so we removed the poison from their bodies and moved them to a safe location away from the fighting. They were still unconscious but that helped us out."

Jessica trough about that one, she had been told about this from Catherine but with everything going on now she understood more how much of an issue it would be if others in Missa learned about this. "Well, thanks again." She then looked at everyone else, "I take it that things did not go as planned?"

Mike explained the situation as best as he could without going over the details of why the book was important. While he did that Alex was fidgeting with something after Rosamia had whispered something to her. When he was done Jessica chuckled a bit and then caught herself, "Oh I'm sorry I did not mean to be rude, it's just that it seems that your group is stuck in something big again. I supposed that Catherine was right again."

Adam shrugged, "Well this time it looked like there is no end of humanity, or removal of free will, or even an escalation of a large war. So it's not too bad this time around."

This time she did not hold back the chuckle, "You do live in a much different world then the rest of us if those are your criteria."

It's then that Rosa moved closer to her and had a serious look on her face. "Even so, and I know that I'm not in a position to ask of this, given the current situation if you need help, please let us know."

Jessica thought about it, "Hmm, unless you are able to return holy magic to how it was, then no there is nothing that you can help us with."

Instantly Rosa then turned to Alex and so did everyone else. She was a bit stunned and puzzled by the looks, "Look I know I know a lot but recreating that channel that was done to get everyone to cast again how they did before... it's simply not something I can do." She thought about it more, "Heck I don't think that it's something all of Astrum could do."

The answer was expected but still disappointing none the less, and with that Rosa turned once again to Jessica and then opened her hand to reveal a small circular sphere. "If a time does come where we could be of help, you can use this to let us know."

Alexandria jumped in to explain, "This is not like our pendants, so it can't be used to magically track you to us or vice versa. It's only one way and it's only linked to Rosamia pendent. So if anyone looks at it they will see that it's magical in nature and can be used to communicate with someone but will not be able to tell who as it's linked to a thing and not a person. In order to make it work simply think of Rosa, there should be a small glow and then relay the message."

The implications of taking this could backfire and Jessica knew this more than anyone else, still it was hard to say how things would turn out in

the future and with that she did take the sphere. "I do hope I never have to use it but you never know."

Rosamia smiled, "Thanks and I hope that you never have to use it as well." She then gave her a quick hug which was returned in kind.

With that Mike and the others stood, "Well I guess we need to head back to Astrum." He then turned to Jessica, "Thanks again for allowing this given your current situation and our track record." As Alex was grabbing on this his hand and Anna's she looked at him, "What are you talking about? What track record?"

Adam reached out to Iris and then to Rosa, "Yea you can play like you don't know but really no one is buying it."

"Pff, what do you know?" and as Jessica waved at them they disappeared in a blue glow.

Chapter 5

*I*t was late by the time Alexandria had finally made it back home, the update with Lithius had taken more time that she had thought. Or maybe it was simply the lack of sleep that had happened in the last little while that had drained her more. Still when she got home she knew that it was not the end of it, she made her way to Iris's room and opened the door only to see a very happy person inside.

"Look Alex, I'm finally able to do it."

Alexandria smiled and then sat on the bed, "That's actually really good considering that you only started to learn about it last night. See I told you that you could do it."

"I know I was just unsure considering the lack that I'm now noticing I have now."

"Yea but that's important too, as now you know what else you need to focus on..." She then paused and then suddenly turned serious. "So I have to ask, what was that message really about?"

"I take it that you will not let me keep this to myself?"

Alex slowly shook her head, "No I'm sorry I can't give you a pass on that one."

Iris knew that she could probably drag this out more but it really did not feel right to do so. "Okay but please promise me that you will not tell the others."

"Of course, you have my word."

Iris was suddenly doubtful, "Is this one of your 'you have my word that I will never sneak in someplace I'm not supposed to' type of word or..."

"Ahhh, Adam is poisoning you... I was right, I

need to keep you two separated somehow."

She was dodging as Iris had figured, still.
"Fine, she wants to challenge me alone, tomorrow in Newport early in the morning."

"Well there is no way we can let you do that."
Iris then cut her off, "I have too, words are not cutting it..."

"Iris it's a TRAP, you know it, I know it and everyone else in the group would know it."

"See I don't think it is not for her."

This was going to be harder then she had expected, "Fine okay maybe she see it that way, but I'm pretty sure that Hawk will not and then you have that other person. If they catch wind of this little battle they will show up. You saw what happened when she suddenly appeared that was not planned."

Iris was suddenly frustrated, "Look Alex I know that, I know all of that, but if thing go on like this the same result of last time will happened and I don't want to deal with that again. I need to do something different, and this one on one is that. Plus there is no way for sure to know if it is a trap, so this could be my only chance and now I can take her if she does attack I know it."

Her eyes were starting to water, "Iris... I can't... I just can't allow you to do this." Seeing as there was no way that she would budge Alex thought of an alternative, "Okay fine, I really will not tell the others, but please please please promise me that you will allow me to accompany you. You know that I can cloak myself so she will not know I'll be around, and I will be far enough as well, and I promise that I will only jump in if Hawk or someone else show up." By now there where small tears on her face, "But please please don't do this alone."

The last thing Iris wanted was to make Alex

cry, she had done so enough time already and so had she for that matter. So with tears in her eyes as well she reached out to her sister and gave her a hug, "Okay, together then."

Mike warped his arms around Anna who was looking at the window and gave her a quick kiss on the cheek. "Considering how late it is, I guess that you are worried about Iris?"

"Hmm, I just can't shake this feeling that she is about to do something really bad. I know that she has grown a lot since and would not simply do as she pleases, but this whole thing has her twisted and I'm not sure how clear she's thinking."

"We could intervene, but I'm thinking that you don't want to just do that as it may hamper the progress that she has show during the last fight."

She gave him a half smile, "See you are getting the hang of this."

"Only on a logical level, it's not as natural as it is with you. Still I do agree with you, and I would ask what you want to do about it but then if you knew that already... so that's a stupid question. Should we try and simply follow them?"

She nodded, "No you know as much as I do that if Alex does not want to be followed there is no way that we can. And yes I do think that Alex will be in on it, so really I can only hope that the both of them don't get too much over their heads."

"Well maybe there is something else that we can do... I mean we do normally find a solution of some sort when we put our heads together..." He then stopped and squinted to get a better view out the window. "What's that?" he then pointed out the window but by then it was obvious that it was a small sphere coming straight at them. Seeing as it was not slowing down Anna reached out to open

the window but she was too slow and the sphere crashed in and broke a portion of it.

Both being careful not to step on any broken glass they backed away and picked up the small sphere that was now on the ground.

"Should we break it, I think that is what we do when it does not simply activate." Anna simply nodded in confirmation and then he threw the sphere on the ground which instantly shattered. When it did a blue'ish smoke appeared and in it you could see Alex's face who was in tears.

"This is going to be one way so..." she then took a moment to calm herself down a bit, "Okay so, Iris is going to accept a one on one against Alice. I'll be around to make sure that no one jumps in... I promised Iris that I would not tell anyone about this but..." She suddenly wiped out some of the tears from her eyes, "But I just can't hold that one, I know she want to save Alice because what happed with Genevieve hurt her more then she lets on and she does not want that to happen again. I get that, I do but, I also don't want her to get more hurt trying to save her as well... Maybe that's mean of me or selfish but I just can't. So if you two can make it to Newport in the morning to maybe get a good breakfast and just happened to stumble on to something..." She then took a deep breath, "Anyways, I'll protect her as best as I can and hope that you two can figure out something. Also sorry about this..."

As the smoke cleared it was easy to see that Alex was once again crying more by the end of the message. Both Anna and Mike sat down and looked at each other. "Well, that can't simply be ignored."

"No it can't, so what do we do?"

There was a bit of frustration in Mike's voice, "How is it that you can ask that question but I

can't?"

Anna forced a smile, as after seeing that message there was no way that one would come naturally. "I point the way and you figure out how to get there... was that not the way it worked?"

"True, still this time I'm wondering who I'm more worried about. Iris's one on one or Alexandria. It's making it hard to figure out a path."

This time it was her that moved in and wrapped her arms around him, "Well as you said, let's put our heads together and figure it out."

Alexandria appeared with Iris on the top of a house in Newport, from what Iris had mentioned from the message given this was around the time that Alice would appear in order for the one on one to happen. The exact location was on the fringe of the town and currently she had teleported to the middle, which had been what they had agreed to.

"Well I'll stay here and cloak myself so that no one will be able to see or detect me, being this far away there should be no issues being detected from where you said the fight should take place."

Iris looked at where she was supposed to go, "This should be more then far enough with your magic, again if you can please don't intervene."

Alex hesitated but eventually nodded in agreement, "But if one of the other shows their faces..."

"Then come in blazing and cut them all down."

"You bet I will." She then paused and then gave her a hug and squeezed with all her strength. "I still say you should not do this, but if you are kick her butt."

Returning the hug Iris smiled, "Ideally I want to convince her not kick her butt, but yea if a fight

does happen I want to win for sure. That is assuming if she even shows up alone."

Breaking the hug Alexandria casually commented on that, "Actually she is already there and from the looks of it she is alone."

Iris was in a mix state of confusion and stunned at the same time, "How... I mean... When..." She then sighed deeply, "Oh never mind." She then thought of her destination and started casting a teleport spell, before she disappeared she managed one more quick smile and a nod to her sister.

"Yea I still say just kick her butt and be sure to come back." She then paused and looked around, "Not that I'm going to allow anything else to happen, sorry about that little sister." Then she saw something that puzzled her, "What are they doing here? I'm sure they will stay away but they are not really the couple I asked help from... which make me wonder." She then proceeded to cast a few spells around her and then essentially disappeared.

Iris showed up a block away from where she was supposed to meet up and slowly walked in the corridor that was created between two houses. At the end of this corridor you had Alice who was ready and very pleased from the looks of it.

"I'm stunned that you did not bring your friends."

Alice chuckled, "This fight is only going to be between me and you, if anyone intervene it will be your friend when you start begging for mercy after I give you the betting you deserve."

Iris was badly faking a surprised look on her face, "Wow, you sure are confident." Now serious she continued, "No one will intervene, this is you and me. Still I would rather not fight you at all and it's not because I think I'll lose but because I really

don't want to do this. I don't want to cause you more pain that you already suffered. I know you want revenge for what happened with Genevieve but we really did not have a choice, she left us none, with you it can be different if you want..."

"STOP IT! I don't want to talk, I have nothing to say to you and I don't want to hear what you want to say. Actions are what matters not words and in your actions you killed her, you killed the person that saved me. And now what you wish for us to hold hands and hug it out?!?" She then took out her blade and then with her other hand placed it on the wall of the house and then the spell took some of its material and started to cover part of her body. "This will only end in one way and that is with you on the ground bleeding to death, there IS no other way."

There was little Iris could do but to pull out her long sword only and left the short sword in its scabbard. This was going as Alex and she had figured it would, as much as she had hopped otherwise, and before pulling out her sword she casted a quick rune spell on her left free arm. The spell would be a small effect and would only activate if a specific condition triggered which could be useful later on.

This time around it was Alice that charged at her. From the looks of it she was using the small space that was created between the two houses in order to limit Iris's ability to dodge the sideward slash that she was charging at her with. Using her free hand she quickly touched her leg and then waited for the right time. When Alice started her attack Iris quickly jumped and, with the use of the magic spell casted on her legs, aimed herself at one of the walls and then used that to kick herself off in order to avoid the attack and also land right behind Alice. Alice instantly pivoted around with

an overhead attack, which Iris block with her sword and while she was at it touched the wall substance that was covering up Alice body in order to destroy the spell.

As the pieces fell to the ground Alice had a wicked grin and quickly grabbed the wrist of Iris hand that had been used to cast the counter spell. While preparing a shock that would electrocute Iris, Alice suddenly received a shock of herself as soon as she grabbed on forcing her to instantly let go.

Now free Iris backed away and as she did countered with a horizontal slash at Alice's mid section. She parried the blow but it was clear to see that the experience of this battle was starting to be less pleasant for her. Now that Iris had some distance from her Alice quickly casted a lightning spell that created a few bolts and aimed them her way.

Iris quickly planted her sword on the ground and casted a quick arcane shield around her to stop the spell from harming her. Once the shield was active she then kneeled down and touched the ground with her other hand. As the lightning connected with her shield a mud slide was making its way to Alice and as it got closer to her rose up and then formed a wall in front of her blocking her vision. Alice countered it but as it crumbled to the ground she then saw that a fireball spell was suddenly aimed at her. There was little that she could do but try to move away as much as possible as there was no time to counter it. But with the limited room there was no way to avoid the blast effect from it as it made contact with the ground.

From afar Rosamia and Adam were watching the fight take place, "Go Iris, that's it..."

Rosamia was simply stunned at the growth she was witnessing, "In such a small time she's come a long way in balancing melee and spells, it's really impressive."

"Sure, but given how quickly she picked up on everything when she started out I'm not too surprised."

Rosamia was very doubtful and did not hide it with her expression, "Oh, that's not the attitude you had last night when Anna and Mike gave use the news of this event."

"Of course not I was pissed, I mean really, to lie to us... to me like that. Shame on her, if she wanted a one on one then I would have happily obliged her. That said I would want front row seats to make sure nothing bad happened."

"Don't get me wrong I mean I care for her as much as the rest but I will admit that you and Alex go the extra mile when it comes to her."

It took him a while to answer, "Well, I mean, after giving it a lot of thought if I ever had a daughter I would like her to be just like her and I guess in the end I sort of treat her that way I guess."

That was not the answer she had expected, she had expected something like that but the implications of the statement. "Adam, you think about kids? I mean, not to go against this at all but considering your past actions and emotions I never expected you to think that far."

He thought about it too, "I know, I was stunned myself." He then turned to her with gazing look in his eyes. "I promised that I would change for you if you gave me time and I meant it." He then turned back that the fight, "I'm still not right at this time but, I want to get there... you know for us."

Rosamia simply did not know what to say and

because of that said nothing but did reach out to him with her hand which he grabbed right away. She had seen signs before and glimmers here and there but this for some reason felt like it was the first time where she truly believed that the darkness that he had in him was finally starting to let go. And once again she had the people around her to thank for helping with that and Adam himself as well for actually wanting to change from his former self. They continued to watch the fight but it was hard for her to hide the smile that she now had on her face.

It took a long while but Alexandria finally spotted Hawk, he was pretty much on the other side of the town where the one on one was happening but that did not mean much when you had magic at your disposal. Unfortunately he was not really hiding and was pretty much in the middle of the place which at this time in the morning meant bystanders. Now it was still early so it was not as populated as it could be, but it only really took one.

Alexandria suddenly appeared about two meters in front of him. "I knew it, I knew that there is no way that you would let them have a fair fight."

Hawk smiled at the accusation, "But I have yet to do anything, still I'm okay if you want to try and stop me before I do."

Instantly a quick bolt of lightning made it his way from her accusing finger, Alex had expected him to counter. But while he did start casting, he did not cast a counter but another spell. Before it could finish an arcane shield that had already been casted around him took the hit.

Alex was confused, "How? There was no way

for you to prepare for that ahead of time."

Now with the spell finished a poison smoky cloud appeared. "Yes how indeed?"

Alex quickly reacted by casting a barrier around him, while she could not let the smoke affect her she also could not let it get out of control and affect others that where now starting to wonder what was going on.

Once again the same situation happened as the last time but this time as Hawk was completely covered in the opaque poison cloud Alex was not the only target. As she focused all her attention on him she did no noticed that someone else had snuck up behind her. At the same time considering the magical spell that he had casted beforehand there had been little chance of her seeing him even if she had paid attention.

"...Sleep..."

The words carried magic with them and instantly Alex turned back to face this person that had suddenly appeared. She was panicked now; sure this new player suddenly appearing had partly to do with that but the main reason was that his sleep spell was powerful enough to break her defenses. She quickly shook her head to try and wake up as the effect started to take over. Already her eyes where drowsy so it was hard to focus on him but she was able to see that he was an old man and human on top of that. And with that level of strength she also knew that he was Council level, which was or should be impossible.

Already she had wasted too much time being stunned by this person. She blamed the sleep spell for that mistake and then started casting a teleport spell. It really did not matter where she showed up at this point as staying here meant death. Suddenly Hawk grabbed her from behind canceling the spell. Now there really was no time, and with

that Alex casted a large lightning spell with all of them as the target. Hawk simply watch as there was little he could do if he wanted to keep her pinned and Alex could only brace for the pain that was to come, which hopefully would remove the effects of the sleep spell, assuming she survived.

After a short while she saw that the pain never came as the man had somehow created a shield around them and the spell crashed on the ground. He then moved closer to her face and whispered to her, "The fact that you are still awake and able to cast a spell with that power confirms that I was right." There was a short pause and then the next word hit her like a ton of bricks, "Now, sleep." There was little that she could do, sure now the people around where starting to cause a commotion and the town guard would probably show up soon but even with their training from Astrum they would be no match for someone like him. Not that she would know as her world suddenly went dark.

"I know that we both agreed to this plan together where Adam and Rosa would cover Iris and that we would cover Alex just in case, but this is getting us nowhere it seems."

Mike had to agree with Anna. As soon as they had arrived they had started their search for her in order to provide backup, but without being able to use their communication pendant to get her location this task that they gave themselves proved to be much harder than expected. It would have been easy for them to contact her but if she was in hiding the communication attempt would instantly break her camouflage and depending on her situation that could be deadly.

Seeing as Anna was getting nothing from her

comment she figure that she would ask a question that he could probably answer instead while they kept looking. "Do you really think that she is in danger or do you simply want to make sure that she is okay after that last message that she sent?"

He had to think about that one, "Both, I think..."

She suddenly had a half smile, "I'm not arguing I want to protect her too, she has taken so much on herself and so much has happened to her..."

Mike then continued her train of thought, "And yet she keeps on smiling genuinely being happy and thankful."

"And that's what you really want to protect right?"

Suddenly he had a sad smile on his face, "It's more than that, I actually admire that about her more than anything. The sad part is, doing what we do, will we be able to keep protecting that?"

"I'm sure all of us together will find a way to do that and not just for her."

Then they both stopped to see a large lightning spell from the sky land a bit farther from where they were. They pulled out their sword, powered their enchantment and in a glowing red and green trail ran in the location that the bolt landed.

It took them very little time to get there and thankfully by now a lot of the townsfolk were running in the opposite direction, but as like anything not all of them were. Instantly Mike launched his red enchantment at Hawk who was now carrying Alex on his shoulder. The older man then stepped in the way and took the blast and with the magic shield he had around him took little to no damage. Mike ignored the man but instantly realized that they now had a face to their mysterious third person orchestrating whatever

was happening with Hawk and Alice. He left him to Anna as his target has Hawk.

Anna seeing that Mike's enchantment blast had no effect kept her on her sword to see if using it to cut would be a better option. She got close to the man and quickly slashed at him, funny enough he dodged the attack so it was a safe assumption that his shield would not block something that was going to hit him from up close. So with that she attacked again, her goal was simply to buy Mike time in order for him to get to Alex, and with that in mind she attacked him with a flurry of quick hits too keep him off balance and also unable to cast any spells.

"The rumors are true." after he said that a grin appeared, "So I'm assuming this is also true." and then with a quick wave of his hand fire spewed out of it but the target was not Anna but a civilian that had stayed around.

Anna cursed and ran in order to position herself to take the hit, given the spell type she knew that this was planned as there was more than enough time for her to do so, and even Anna knew of many other spells that would not have allowed for that. The spell hit her back and instantly ate through her armor and reached her skin. She was trying her best not to scream, as at this time she had figured out the real reason for the spell and its target as even she was not the real target. Without realizing it she was suddenly on her knees, but she had to hold it in.

"You are all a very impressive group, I will give you that."

There was no way for her to dodge but she tried anyways as another glop of fire was aimed at her. The dodge succeeded in changing its original target but it still landed on one of legs. At this point it felt like a hot poker was slowly burning

through the skin of her back and leg and making it burn inside as well. There was no way to hold it in as she screamed in pain.

Mike was making progress with Hawk and had finally succeeded in making him drop Alexandria and now as he slashed away, had succeeded as well in scoring a hit across Hawk's side of his stomach. As he moved up to push him back more with piercing motion, less Hawk took a hit to his chest, he suddenly stopped and for a split second and turned around as he heard Anna's scream. As soon as he did he saw his mistake and cursed himself for his action as during that pause Hawk had dropped on top of Alex and was suddenly casting a spell. As quick as he could Mike swung his sword to hit him and interrupt the spell but he was too slow and as they both disappeared in a red glow, his sword hit the ground.

"DAMIT!" Mike then charged at the old man who was laughing. As he got closer a large gust of wind pushed him back, he planted his sword in the ground to hold his position.

"You are a sore loser I see, oh well that's not my problem." He then pointed at a few civilian that where too afraid to have run away and powered a lightning spell. Mike had no choice but to try and run at them to push them away and in mid run the man's hand moved and targeted him. "I don't care for these people, but they do make it easier for me." The lightning spell hit him square on the chest and instantly Mike seized up and dropped on the ground. It took all he had to stay conscious but even that was a losing battle.

"Now... Arrrg!" The man screamed as suddenly a blade hit the side of his leg. As the blood started to drop you could see the instant anger on his face as he looked at Anna who was matching his death stare. "Die now then." The bolt that came from his

hand took little time to reach her and as it connected it took little time for Anna to fall on the ground.

With the two down, the man casted a teleport spell and disappeared.

Iris's battle had gone pretty favorably overall; while Alice had not been heavily wounded Iris has scored a lot of little hits against her and in Iris's case while her armor had taken a beating Alice had yet to draw blood. At this point in the fight Alice had enough of it all.

"This is impossible, just a few days ago I was your better, what magic are you using?"

As Iris countered another spell she answered her question, "No magic just a lot of hard work."

"IMPOSSIBLE!" At this point Alice mistakenly tried to get the better of her with a wide range of sword hits. While Iris block and dodged all of them she understood Alice's frustration as even she was surprised at how well this fight was going for her.

She figured that somewhere Alex was smiling and encouraging her on. Which made her very happy, sure losing a fight sucked, but the results of all the work that Alex had focused to help her figure out this new style, of using quick runes and spells to add to her arsenal during combat, made it all the more worthwhile. Alexandria had done so much for her on so many occasions and had sacrificed quite a lot but she never saw it that way. All she wanted was to help her friends reach whatever goal they wanted and be there with them during that journey and also at the end of it share in that happiness as that in turn made her happy. It was true that the Lights Templar save her but it was Alex that gave her a home, gave her access to knowledge and more importantly gave her

reassurance that she was not alone anymore and that she would be there for her. Iris owned every member of the group a lot but she owed everything to Alex, as if not for her being there for her right away during the first night that they had saved her she would have probably turned as Alice or even worse Genevieve instead of the person that she is now.

Alice was beginning to get desperate as Iris was still dodging all her blows, "Fine this should make you stop being able to run around." Instantly Iris stopped and tried to figure out what spell she was casting as it did not seem to be an attack spell. After a while she saw that she was right but it was too late to stop the spell, and then a shield was created around both of them trapping them in a small bubble of sorts. "Now you are mine."

Iris could not believe it as the maneuver was a crazy one. Sure trapping your target with you made some sense but the shield in question left them with so little space that it was like putting two people in a room that was around twelve feet by twelve. There was hardly any room to even swing a sword, so very quickly Iris dropped her long sword and pulled out her short sword in order to block the blow of Alice. She had mostly keep the blade there as suddenly using a long sword could cause unexpected issues in combat but now wondered if leaving it there could have other advantages. Alice was livid as once again her plan had failed. But now with this shield blocking physical and she assumed magical attacks Iris maneuvered her blade in order to pin Alice's against the shield.

Now in a stale mate with both not being able to use their weapons Alice focused on the only other weapon she had, "Fine magic it is." Having seen her cast a point blank spell Iris had no issues

understanding what she was planning on doing, so this left her little options as she casted a spell as well.

Alice's spell was instantly interrupted not by a counter spell but with a wound on her side. She looked down to see that Iris had casted a magical short blade that had cut the side of her armor and her skin. By letting go of the blade with her free hand it disappeared and then as she closed it again it reappeared but this time pressing next to her neck.

"Simply unfair." As Alice was once again convincing herself that this was an empty bluff, a large lightning bolt could be heard from afar. This instantly broke Iris concentration and the blade suddenly disappeared.

Alice started to laugh and that got Iris's attention that now had a very worried look on her face. "We knew that there was no way that you would come alone, actually we counted on it. While you where my target, you where never the real target."

The instant look of fear and worry on Iris's face brought satisfaction to Alice and with that she dropped the shield that surrounding the both of them. "So are you going to stay here and try and save me or run and save her?"

Iris did not answer that one as there was no choice, she focused on Alexandria's pendant and then after moving away from Alice, who was not pursuing her, teleported to her location.

She reappeared to see no trace of Alex but before she could question that she saw that Mike was on ground with his chest armor blown out with heavy burns and then Anna who was unconscious with massive burns on her leg and back. Iris made her way to Anna and started to heal her back and leg. It took a few application of

the heal spell to get her stable, due to it being only a fraction of what it was before, but she did manage to get her there.

She then made her way to Mike and started healing his chest after the first application which was barely enough he stopped her. "Forget about that, find Alexandria."

She did not question him and focused as much as she could on trying to find her sister. By instinct she once again reached out to the pendant and then she understood as she saw the thing on the ground with its golden chain necklace broken. *'Fine there are other ways to find her.'*

Using her magic she reached out and after a few minutes found her but then she suddenly disappeared.

"She's gone!" Instantly as she said it Iris's spell canceled and then she fell to her knees, "Nononono..."

'She is the most powerful mage out there, there is no way anyone can beat her. But the spell can't track her down anymore, and Alice mentioned that she was the target. Crap, because of me and my selfish demand for this stupid challenge. I'm so stupid, why did I not listen to her, why? I knew that I may get hurt and I was fine with that, but I'm not fine with this, why, why, why, WHY WHY!!!'

At that point Iris suddenly stood and started casting a spell. Mike saw that it was a teleport spell, having seen it many times over. But in his condition there was no way that he could stop her, he focused everything he had and reached out and grabbed her by the ankle of her boot. Thankfully it stopped her and as she looked down he hopped that she would register his last request before he finally passed out, "...Wait..."

She thought about it for a few seconds but could not understand why she should wait, and

with that once again started to recast the teleport spell but was stopped again with a familiar yell.

"IRIS!!!" it was Adam. Then she heard her name again "Iris!" It was Rosamia's voice.

She turned back and saw that the two of them were suddenly running in her direction. *'What are they doing here? Then again what are Anna and Mike doing here?'* With that question popping in her mind and the answered that followed Iris once again dropped to her knees, "Why did I not see it, of course she broke that stupid promise... I'm so stupid..." At that point tears were starting to fall.

"I have to go to her... She needs my help, she's helped me so many time... I need to help her back."

Rosamia went to Anna to continue to heal her wound and Adam went to Iris. "Iris? Iris, snap out of it... come on, tell me what happened."

Iris looked towards Adam face full of tears, "She's gone Adam, Alex is gone..."

"HEY! They just took her, we can find her and rescue her okay."

Suddenly Iris was even more worried, "The way the spell cut... I..."

This time Adam was shaking her a bit to get more of her attention, "HEY!! Don't even think that okay. I don't care what you think your spell tells you as it's wrong. You got me, it's WRONG!"

Anna was finally awake, "Rosa, go help Mike."

Rosamia hesitated for a second but then stood and moved to do what was asked. Anna slowly followed from behind. "Iris, Adam is right... The mage that took her had Hawk's help. And while Alex is strong this new person was stronger. And if that's the case don't you think that Alex herself could think of a way around that spell that you used to locate her?"

The idea that Alex could not find a way to do what Anna had mentioned was impossible for Iris

to believe. This realization seemed to calm Iris down but it only lasted for a moment as she once again stood up. "But if that person is as strong as you say then she needs me now..."

Adam then suddenly got her attention again, "Don't just go somewhere without me okay."

As Iris nodded she then heard Anna's voice, "Wait, just the two of you will not do it..."

Its then that Mike's voice could be heard, which surprised Rosamia a bit. "Iris, take Adam, Rosamia and Anna with you and go now."

"Wait! If we do that..." Rosamia protest where too late as Adam instantly grabbed Rosa and Anna reached out for Iris and then they all disappeared in a blue glow.

"This really hurts..."

Alexandria woke up to hear Hawk complaining about something. She had been quick enough to catch herself from moving and opening her eyes as she did, leaving it as she was still under the effect of the sleep spell. From what she could feel she was on the ground but a bit further then midway from her body it felt more like a wooden floored surface. With that she figured that maybe she was in a partially damaged or unfinished house of some sort. Currently she was only hearing Hawk and considering on how he was complaining and no one else was answering it was a safe bet that it was only the two of them.

Seeing as this was a good time, she started the first part of the teleport spell and that was to find a location, but sadly the spell was blocked for some reason. She assumed that it would not work but it would have been stupid not to try, plus this had been a good test as she had started to cast a spell but no alarms had gone off as Hawk has not

changed his attention to her.

Alexandria then realized that her pendant was gone. While it not that she could have used it as that would have blown her ruse of still sleeping but it was more that it removed the ability of Iris finding her quickly. While thinking of the different ways Alex wondered if those would be blocked too, it was a safe assumption so just in case she took a chance and slowly reached in to one of her side pockets. As Hawk continued to complain about finding something to bandage his wound, Alex assumed that her movements had gone unnoticed.

Currently she still had six little sphere that could be used; she grabbed one in her hand and started the process. Normally she would have used her own mark but pretty soon that could cause an issue. Whoever that mage was that had casted the sleep spell was really strong and you don't get that strong by being dumb or careless, so it was a safe assumption that he would eventually show up and with that another safe assumption that he would check for anything that was directly tied to her. Still with that she branded the sphere with something that Iris should be able to find, assuming she looked for it, that there was a good chance that this new mage did not know about.

When she finished with that she then heard a new voice suddenly appear.

"What happened to you?" From what she could tell, the new person was Alice.

"I could ask the same about you? Did your little revenge fight not go as planned?"

Alice was annoyed and angry with that comment, "I'll let that slide as I know you hate to deal with pain... but don't push me Hawk."

Hawk was a bit more agitated, "This is not a little pain. A little bit deeper or more to the side and he would have killed me and all because I was

carrying her."

"Well you where trying to kidnap her, what did you expect?"

"...Still... Help me with this and then I can help you with your own wounds."

The talking stopped after that and that was probably a good thing as it was getting harder and harder for Alex to no react. First from what Alice had mentioned Iris had probably won the fight, *'I'm so glad for you.'* Second, it seems that while Rosa and Adam had been tracking Iris that Anna and Mike had probably tried to track her. Part of her wished that they would have mentioned that part of their plan as because of it she maybe would not be in this position at this time. That said it's not that she had given them much chance to communicate it to her. Still she felt an odd feeling about the fact that Mike had been willing to kill a target in order to save her, it did not surprise her in the least but it did make her rethink her harming other humans when it came down to it. Putting the wonder of when she had started to think that way aside, she started to focus on something more pressing like getting out of this situation.

"That went well..." Time was up as the old mage had finally arrived.

"Speak for yourself."

"I'm sorry Hawk. There was no way to know that he would do that to you... Still don't worry too much about it you are more alive than both of them are at this point."

"Did you really kill them?"

Alex stopped everything and simply froze and impatiently waited for his answer, "He's left with a large wound in his chest and she's had her leg and back burned and was also electrocuted. Did I confirm their deaths, no, but in this world as it is

now I don't think they will be back on their feet for long."

Alice was not so sure on that one, "That priestess of theirs still seems to have access to holy magic, I would not be so sure to count them out at this point."

Alex knew for a fact that Rosa could still heal and so could Iris but it all depended on how quickly they got to them, this was really bad and then she mentally cursed at herself as she was not sure how still she had been while she heard this news.

"Hawk... did you recast the sleep spell as I told you when you arrived?"

"No I was busy dealing with all the blood coming out of my body and trying to find a way to stop that. Now that its resolve I was about to do that as you showed up." She could then hear footstep coming close to her. "But its fine she has not moved at all since I dropped her there."

The cat was about to be out of the bag soon, while she could still play sleeping there was a much better chance that she would simply end up like that eventually if she did nothing. As quickly as she could she rolled backward to put some distance and then moved in to a kneeling position.

Finally able to see she confirmed that she was in an abandoned house. The floor had patches of wood missing leaving about fifty percent still present, but oddly enough the walls and ceiling were all intact and windows had been sealed which had to have been done on purpose. At this time only the three of them were present and there was little reason to think that more would show, still already this was way too much for her to handle on her own.

"Fool, now this will be harder than it should be. Bind her down while I make sure that she can't

be tracked." With that Alex hoped that Iris had found her location as pretty soon she would simply disappear.

Hawk was the first to act and as always he casted a poison cloud about her. "Jezz do you cast those every time you get spooked, if so maybe you should change your name to another animal, of the sea type this time."

As the cloud made it way to her she moved back until she reached the back wall. "Funny, but if it works why change it? Also I would not try to get out or bust your way out, there is no way that you can do that with the magic that's on this place."

"I've heard that before..." Alex then put her hand on the wall and started the process as the cloud made its way closer. With Alice still at Hawk side and the other once busy with another spell this maybe her only time to try and break this. It did not take long for her to see that the spell was incredibly complex but at the same time very focused. Most would assume that the only way to removed spells like this was to cancel them out but what you could also do was to tweak them a bit, which often enough did the trick and was much quicker.

While she started the process and the older mage finished his spell he instantly reacted. "Alice cast the shield spell around her now!"

Alice obeyed and casted the spell but also made a quick comment after, "It's done but I can't do it again for a while."

While the others seemed puzzled by that Alex was also confused but for another reason. When the spell had finished it was like a bubble had suddenly appeared around her and her hand was no longer touching the wall but instead an invisible barrier. As she moved her focus to this shield she

saw that its function was to prevent magical spell from leaving or entering and also physical blows as well. Having a shield against arcane spells was trivial, physical was something that could be done but was advance and having both well that was like trying to recreate the holy shield of old but with arcane. It could be done but the drain and the skill level to do it was another level, even more so for someone like Alice.

It's then that the wonder started to simmer down as she realized that her feet was still connected to the actual ground and the more she learned about the spell the more she saw that there was a lot of holes in it making it somewhat easy to removed, well somewhat easy for her to remove.

"I had to cast it during my fight."

Hawk was even more puzzled, "Why?"

"I need to trap her." She then moved her hand next to the wound on her side, "It did not go as planned."

Alex had a smirk on her face; she was happy that she had figured out a way to deal with the shield but at the same time she figured that it had nothing to do with removing it considering the wound. He thought of Iris then disappeared as she suddenly realized something else, the poison cloud was moving at her and the shield was doing nothing about it.

"I guess it does not block air." very quickly she then casted a spell around her face that would remove the effects of the spell as it completely enveloped her. She could have removed the spell but then she figured that she would take a page from Hawk tactic, now inside the shield she could not see them but she was in a way protected and also they could not see her.

This was the perfect time for her to act. She

pulled out the sphere that she had already prepared and then poured in more information in it. This shield had been used on Iris so it would or could be used again; in case Alex was right and it was beyond Iris abilities to counter it she put enough information to give her a heads up. It was not complete but she was certain that Iris would figure out the rest. Once done she took the sphere and planted it in the ground so that it would not be visible.

"Are you okay in there?"

Hawk taunting was accurate, Alex's spell did allow her to breath in the poison but depending on the strength of the poison the shorter the time that spell would last. Knowing that she would run out of time soon, she casted two fireball and one ice spells on standby around her arm.

"I think that I may have over done it."

The old man was not convinced, "If you did then all this was for nothing and it matters very little if she is dead, but from what I has seen so far I don't think..."

He did not have time to finish as Alexandria popped the shield spell around her and then countered the poison cloud. As soon as she finished Alice charged at her but then stopped as she launched her two fire spells at her and then her ice spell in front of her to create a wall of ice. Normally Alexandria would have acted pretty confident especially as the other two seemed pretty stunned by her actions, but the stupid proud grin on the old man removed any of that.

The ice wall was not going to last and was probably going to be useless in terms of future defense but it did help to hide her for a while once again. She gained precious seconds so they had to be used properly. Escape was her main priority not combat so she quickly casted a quick parlor tick

spell and then while Hawk seemed to be casting something himself she went for an invisibility spell.

Hawk had thrown a fireball in order to destroy the wall, which it did, but as soon as it did she was suddenly nowhere to be found.

"Cute but that's not going to help you much, as we told you there is no escape."

When she did not respond the old man turn to him, "Flood the room a bit."

"That's not going to be easy..." He stopped as he saw the old man discomfort with the start of his gripping. "...As you wish." With that Hawk started to channel a spell that took a while but eventually manage to create a small flood on the floor that was about two centimeters.

It was not the biggest flood that Alex had seen but it had done the trick as the flow of water was showing where she was like a crude sonar effect. As a reaction Alice moved in her direction and pulled out her sword but then stopped as the water effect calmed itself and disappeared.

In order to counter her location being seen by the water Alex had casted a levitation spell and was now slowly moving herself back to one of the walls. While she did that she used her quick parlor trick spell to throw her voice across the room. "You don't seem to be into this Alice? Is your focus Iris only and if that's the case then why play with these people I can't see them having your back that much." It was a risk but focusing on Alice was her best bet, she knew nothing of Hawk and figured that nothing she said would affect the old man so it left only her.

"These people helped me and sure they may not have the same goal as me but as long as they keep helping me I don't see any harm in helping them back." At this point Hawk and the old man where holding back and Alice was still trying to

figure out where she was so this was perfect time to act out a bad plan and act like a stupid face person she knew well and push her buttons to give her more time.

"And how that going for you? I mean that one on one was very telling, will you be asking for their help next time?"

This make Alice very mad, "You little, you know that she got the upper hand because of what you did and that's the only reason she was able to keep up with me. Now that I know next time will be different and next time it will be her with a sword to the gut..."

Alice kept going but at this time Alex tuned her out as she had to focus on the spell that was around the house. With the information that she had gained earlier she focused all she could on modifying the spell enough to render its original intent useless. She did not know how much time had passed but eventually she managed to do it. She quickly opened her eyes to see Alice on the other side of the room and with the other two still where they were last, *'Good, now to get out of here.'*

"Alice, get ready..." before she could finished casting the spell, as once again even a blind teleport would be better then where she was, Alex then felt a giant gust of wind coming from the old man. The blow was strong enough that it knocked her head back to the wall and pinned her there for a few seconds. This effect canceled the invisibility spell and as soon as that happened Alice was on her with a blade at her throat. "Are you willing to take the chance that I'm bluffing? Hurting you would be a good way to hurt her."

"Hawk stay on guard she destroyed the spell."

"...That makes no sense, I don't even know how to so that... I mean do you?" He did not answer which made Alex wonder if he actually

could or not. Still with the blade next to her this was not the time to think about that, she was still floating so there was another move she could do and really she needed so little time.

She looked in Alice's eye, "I'm going to bet that Iris is right and think that you are not really who you say you are and will call your bluff." While an infuriating look started to appear in Alice's eye Alex casted an array of quick lightning spells and with the water still on the ground this made the spell even more effective.

Alice pulled back but in doing so was caught a few times by the spell that was generating little bolts everywhere. In order to help her out Hawk casted some defensive spells around him and her.

'Now where are you old man...Wait where is the old man?' Suddenly there was a bit of panic in Alex's mind as she had completely lost track of him. And then she really panicked as she felt a hand on her stomach. She was going to say something but then a large wave hit her like she had been punched by the strongest person she could imagine but not only did she feel it on her stomach but everywhere around it. This made her lose complete concentration and then she suddenly dropped in a fetal position.

"Alice, do the honors and knock the little lady out."

She could not see it but it was safe to assume that Alice would enjoy this task. *'So sorry guys, I tried my best...'* That was the last thought that popped in her head as she felt a heavy blow to her head.

As soon as they reappeared Anna dropped to her knees, teleportation did cause an effect on the body and after all this time it was something that

was easily forgotten, but with the wounds that she was still suffering from it all came rushing back to her. Rosamia instantly moved in front of her in order to protect her and then when they all realized that there was no one around she dropped her guard and focused on Anna. "In your condition you really should have stayed back."

It was hard to argue that and in a way they were lucky that there was no one around as she could have easily become a liability but with how people were feeling right now one of them had to be there in order to not make this bad situation worse.

"She's not here, and I can't find anything that she left behind."

"I can't sense anyone around besides us, but I'm sure she's okay Iris."

"... You can't know that Adam..."

With Iris once again starting to lose control Anna slowly made her way towards her and as she got close put both hands on her shoulders and focused her gaze directly in her eyes. "Iris, I know this will sound harsh but you need to focus. You are the best shot we have at finding her and we want to help you with that but in order to do so you need to put away your feelings of guilt and worry as they will not help you here at all." While she did get Iris's attention she was not getting through to her as much as she wanted. "I know what it's like to have someone you love be ripped away, you want to go to them as fast as you can and help them, more so in your case because of the situation but right now with the way you feel it's only helping you move away from her not closer." Finally something had clicked and she got her attention, "There is no body so this confirms it they need her for something, meaning we can find her. Also look around there was a battle here so

she was awake and if Alex was awake don't you think she would have found a way to leave something behind if she knew that she could not escape?"

With that Anna let Iris go and suddenly she was lost again but in a good way as she could see that she was thinking about what she had said, while she was doing that the others looked around and called out what they could.

"It seems like there were a few fireballs thrown around and the place looks like it was hit by a lot of lightning."

Adam then joined in and raised his foot of the ground, "The ground is also very wet."

Anna then saw something that she was sure that all the other had seen as well but let it go for now as Iris started to look frustrated.

"I just don't get it; I really don't see anything that she could have left behind. Nothing has her mark anywhere." She then stopped, "But then again if she left something with her mark they could have seen that. She would have thought of that and used something else." It took a few moments but then hope appeared in Iris, "Got it, she used my mark instead."

While she made her way to a corner and started to dig something out Rosa was confused by that last comment, "How can she use your mark? I mean I've heard that you could mimic it, so I guess that's what you mean?"

As Iris picked up a small sphere she wondered on how to answer Rosamia question, "Not really no, without explaining the how let just say that we can if need be leave each other's mark."

From what she had been told the idea of that was sacrilege to a mage but she let it go and instead focused on what Iris had found. "So I guess she left you a message after all."

Happy about this Iris instantly activated the sphere, "AAAArrrg!!" The pain was excruciating, like her head was about to explode. When she opened her eyes she saw that everyone was around her and that she was on her knees.

"Was it a trap after all?"

Iris was still reeling from the pain, "No Adam, it was left from her... it's just that it's not a message at all but information on a spell, and to clarify, information on how to destroy a spell in particular."

This made little sense to Anna and also the rest of them, "What spell can you tell?"

"From the looks of it I think it's a shield spell of some sort, it's not complete mind you and I could probably figure out the missing pieces..." She then looked at the sphere in her hands, "But why did you leave that behind?"

That was an important question, there was no way that Alex would leave that behind and nothing else if she did not think it was crucial for some reason. But why and what did it mean. Iris continued to look around to find any clues that she could, the others joined in as well safe for Anna who was looking only at Iris. It did not take her long so see that she was purposefully avoiding something.

"Iris, this is going to hurt but you need to face it. You saw it already and it's better to confirm it now then to let it play in your head over and over."

Iris knew what Anna was referring too so did everyone and with that they slowly made their way to the last thing out of place which was the blood on the ground.

Rosa reached out to Iris, "It's not necessarily hers."

Anna gave her a concerned look, "I'm not trying to be mean, your head is jumbled right now

I get that and I know you don't want more things to jumble it more. In reality it's the last thing you need but trust me you want to face this one and cross it off your list of things in your head."

Iris took a deep breath and then started to cast a spell, as it finished it looked like a large weigh had been lifted off her shoulders. "It's not hers, I don't know who it is but it's not hers." But then she started to tense up again, "I guess that means that they still have not hurt her yet, I mean she got captures so they will torture her right?"

"Don't do that to yourself as well, what happened to you will not necessarily happen to her."

"Key word on necessarily there, right Anna?" Iris instantly caught herself, "I'm sorry... it's just, I don't want her to go through that, I don't want anyone to go through that."

Rosamia thought about the situation more, "You know I think Anna right, if you think about it I think that they captured her because she can fill in what's missing."

Adam then caught on, "Right those books, sure they probably got the ones that we wanted to get back but Lithius did get some back so they don't have a complete collection."

Iris thought about it as well, "Okay so they got to Alex because they think that she will be able to give them the missing piece... I'm sure she probably could but I don't see her helping them."

Before she could continue that train of thought Anna jumped in, "Sure but at the same time they can't torture her as you are imagining, she needs her whit and mind clear in order to focus on what they need. Until they get what they want, they need her in one piece so that give us the time we need to find her." She then looked at her again directly in her eyes, "Okay?"

Iris slowly nodded, "Yea I understand."

Anna smiled, "Good, now is there anything you can think of to check around here before we head back?"

Iris took a deep breath and thought about it for a while but nothing came to mind. With that Anna had a little request, "If that is the case can you take a picture like Alex often did in the past so that we can see this place as it is now for future reference in case we need it?"

That was not a bad idea and with that Iris fidgeted around, "Come on where are you you little..." Finally she grabbed a small sphere from her backpack, "She said that I should keep one on me at all times even if I don't plan on using it as it could come in handy." As she recalled the argument she smiled a bit, *'I'll use everything I have but I'll find you as quick as I can okay.'*

She then turned to the others, "Unlike her I need everyone to leave so that I can do this properly."

They left her alone and exited the house.

"Ah crap!" Anna turned to Adam but suddenly Rosamia smiled a bit, "Don't worry I think it's just that now he's realized where we are." She then pointed at the distance and instantly Anna understood as well. "The destroyed Portal Tower, part of me is surprised that you just did not feel it."

Adam scratched his head, "I probably did, that house looked weird but for another reason. It's a staging place that was used when raids were done here and there. I probably did not clue in right away because I simply did not want to remember."

As they waited Rosamia continued to heal Anna's wounds, "You know I commented early that you should have stayed behind but now I'm glad that you did join after all."

"Hmm, there was little that could be done

about it. Iris had to go, and you Rosa were a for sure as well. Adam needed to go as well as we were in no shape to provide melee backup but at the same time there was a need for a clear head as well and both of us going was a stupid idea considering that it could still have been a trap."

"I guess but I'm still stunned that he did not join instead of you, considering how you hurt you where."

"Oh that, well, that's payback and punishment I guess." It was easy to see that neither Adam nor Rosa understood so she clarified, "You see during the fight he was one blow off from finishing Hawk and getting Alex back but then that other mage's plan kicked in and I screamed which got his attention and made him react in a stupid but predictable way."

Adam looked at Rosa, "Well, stupid sure but I'm sure I would do the same."

Anna shrugged, "Oh yes so would I but because of it we lost her and I still got hurt so what do you think will be playing in his head for a while?"

"So is that why you forced her to look at that blood, because you figured that it was not hers?"

Anna nodded, "I knew that she would do the same, play it out in her head and wonder how hurt she is, I mean thinking about what Iris told us about herself she was bound go there quicker than most. I figured that having that confirmation would help her believe that she was still unhurt, even if there is no way to know."

"We are really not doing so good on this one are we?"

Rosa suddenly glared at Adam, "Seriously?"

Anna smiled at her and his reaction, "No, no we are not, but we will pick ourselves up and finally get ahead, because that is what we do." She

raised her voice as she said the last part in order for Iris, who was coming out of the house, to be able to hear her.

Iris approached Anna and gave her the sphere, "Same as the others to activate it, I hope it helps."

Anna took it and nodded, "I'm sure it will. Now let's go get more information on that man as I'm sure that Mike must have something by now having asked Lithius. There is no way that someone like that is not known somehow."

Iris then took Anna's hand and Adam, who then took Rosa's. "And then we can focus our efforts on tracking her down and getting her back."

As Anna nodded in agreement Iris casted the teleport spell to bring them back to Astrum.

Chapter 6

Once again they had gathered in Alex and Iris's house while they waited for Mike to arrive. The mood was very different than any other time before, and all of them tried not too but mostly looked at Iris who was sitting on a chair fidgeting with her hands simply lost in thought. The only time she truly really reacted was when the door finally opened and Mike walked through.

He had removed his armor and was wearing a new brown shirt but even with that it was clear to see that his wound still needed healing.

Automatically Anna went to his side followed by Rosa. She showed him to the chair that she had been using while Rosamia focused on the wound some more.

"You really should not be moving, it looks like the chest wound reopened."

He quickly looked at it, "It only started on my way here, I did take one of those potions that we have and that with your earlier healing helped a lot."

Rosa suddenly cut him off, "Hmm, those things are good but considering the wound would not be enough."

As Anna looked concerned and Rosamia solely focused on him he saw that Iris was about ready to jump. In a normal situation her agitation could have been funny to see but considering what had just happened and her angry stare there was no room for smiles. "I take it that it did not go well on your end?"

Anna was about to reply but as she did Iris seemed more agitated and so Mike continued

before she could answer, "Tell you what, Anna you can fill me in later as I'm guessing that what you found will not change the outcome of what we are going to do next."

With the talks of a future plan of action Iris could not hold it in anymore, "Do you have anything?"

He nodded, "I do but, it's probably not what you expect." Before anyone could say more he continued, "I was able to talk to Lithius and as I described the person to him he had a confused and concerned look on his face and when I told him about Alexandria then all that dropped and was replaced with a serious gaze and part of me thinks that he was also scared somehow."

Rosa was stunned, "I know that he has emotions but to show such a wide range because of this man, it must be serious then."

He nodded in agreement, "Once I mentioned him the confusion about the mark that Alexandria had shown him vanished and he was instantly familiar to him. It seems that his name is Marek, he is a human that did something to get himself kicked out a long time ago from Astrum and as that was not enough he was later targeted to be killed by none other than Lithius."

"Well then I guess all the pieces are there and Lithius had it right after all, they are after someone in Astrum and that person is Lithius, I mean if someone was sent to kill me and obviously missed then obviously I would want to go against them eventually."

Mike sighed a bit at Adam's comment, part of him agreed and so did the others but part of him also thought that there was no way that it was all of it, as it was too simple for such a long wait. "Maybe, but you're right that it's the path that Lithius is on right now."

Iris then interrupted, "Then he knows how to find him and from there find Alex?" The look of uncertainty on Mike's face confused her and also angered her a bit. So much so that both her and Adam suddenly stood for a moment and pretty much at the same time yelled the same thing. "There is no way he would not help find her?"

The simultaneous outburst made them look at each other and then Adam looked at the rest who all had a bit of a small smile on their face. As he sat back down he scratched his head in a bit of frustration, "Oh come on now you all know I like the little munchkin, and so does Lithius so you can't tell me he's doing nothing."

"Your both right, he's not doing nothing. Actually he told me to let you all know that he would personally take care of this issue and focus all his attention on finding him. Once done he will contact us and so that both of us can then go to the location found to confront him."

This terrified Iris for some reason, "You mean to say that we need to wait it out until he finds something?"

Rosamia added to her question, "Is this person that strong?"

Mike turned to her, "There is only so much that Lithius wanted to talk about, I mean if the Council, Solanar, deemed this person needed to die and sent Lithius after him there is no way that he is a pushover. That said he did mentioned that this person was thought to be a potential to join the Council at one point so that does give you an indication of how good this person was at the time. Not to mention the fact that they somehow survived the encounter and made Lithius believed that he had somehow succeeded in his mission."

"But wait that makes no sense, Alex's father was the first human Council member she never

mentioned anything about this Marek guy."

"I don't know what to tell you about that one Iris, just what Lithius told me. As I pressed more he did not want to budge and give me more information, I can't say that this is new of him especially when it comes to Council information which this does seem to be about somehow."

Her disappointment was clear to everyone but at the same time she did not seemed too surprised by the explanation. "Still ... I just don't think that I can wait around for this one."

Mike and all the others as well understood where she was coming from, "While I agreed with Lithius to his face, in practice it's not something I'm going to ask you to do."

"So you thought of a plan after all?" Anna asked the question as it was on the others mind but personally she did not see it and that was confirmed by his hesitation.

"Not so much, I do think that Lithius will do all he can to find Marek. The issue I have is the assumption that he will be near Alexandria when he does find him. It seems odd but I think we should focus on finding her more so then him." He then looked at Iris, "And because of that I would ask you to do everything you can to find her. From the looks of it you will not have Lithius help, directly, and while we may not be of much use we are all going to help with anything you require but in a way it's all on you." He then paused for a bit and the next part did not seem to register to Iris when he said it, "I'm sorry but that's all I have."

As Iris was suddenly lost in thought Mike interrupted her and suddenly had a very stern look on his face. "Iris you need to promises me one thing, do everything you can but do not act once you find something, as I'm confident that you will soon." To make sure he made his point he repeated

himself, "You are not to go off on your own once you find anything that maybe her location, this person is strong and is not alone."

She had a disappointed look on her face but he knew that it was not because he had ordered her not to go off on her own but probably had more to do with the situation and the lack of help his information had added. "I'm fine with that, no worries..." As she stood up it looks like she had already been beat up, "Well I'm going to go upstairs I think there a few books that can help me find her." As she made her way up she added, "I'll let you know as soon as I find anything."

Rosa turned in the direction that she was a moment ago, "She's hurting pretty bad, this will be really hard for her."

Anna agreed with that, "It sure will." She then turned to Adam, "If you can stay here for the night I don't expect her to do anything crazy but just in case she needs someone."

Adam attention then suddenly broke from what he was thinking in his head, "Yea sure, you did not even need to ask."

Rosamia then nodded too, "I think I'll stay as well but I will leave and come and visit both of you later on in order to keep healing both of your wounds. It's probably best for now for both your bodies to adjust for a little while before I continue treatment, those wounds you both suffered where really bad."

Mike did not argue at all with her, "It pretty much felt like death actually and I think we were both pretty close to it had you not arrived in time."

Anna and Mike then helped each other up, "Thanks again for saving your lives Rosa, I'm very thankful for it."

"Think nothing of it."

"Now I think that we will go rest up as you

requested, if there is anything that happens... or does not happen let us know okay?"

"Sure." While Adam was a bit less responsive Rosa got the nuance in Anna's comment, "I will don't worry."

Alexandria suddenly woke up with a large headache, "Oh that still hurts."

"Look, it looks like sleeping beauty is up again."

Hawk's comment suddenly made everything rush back in Alex mind, and without thinking she tried to stand up only to knock her head on something as soon as she raised her head from the wooden small table she was lying on. "Son of a..."

"Now now what would your father think if he heard that language?"

This time Alex simply looked around and twisted her head. From the looks of it she was in what felt like a dungeon as everything was wall to wall stone. There were no windows and the only thing she could see was a staircase leading to a higher floor. Around the room she saw that there was a little table and chairs, where Alice and Hawk where currently sitting, and at the other end of the room you have what looked like a small lab of sorts.

It was hard to tell but it seemed that Alex was lying on a small table and after trying to move a bit more she saw that somehow most of her movements where prevented by a familial shield spell all around her pinning her to the table. "I think that in this particular case he would be fine with it." Currently her head was in pain and part of her was angry, she tried to focus on that as much as she could as there was another part of her that was scared out of her mind and there is no way

that she wanted to touch even a small part of that.

"Hmm you think so, oh well." The old man gazed at her which only sent a creepy feeling all across Alex's body especially with that odd smile that showed itself on his face. "It's funny how things turned out, I mean for her offspring to be our target."

Alex could not recall the last time she had felt as haunted as much as now. "What are you talking about?"

The old man then got closer to her and even with the knowledge of the shield present that action made her sink in to the table more in order to try and get away. "There is no way that you would recognize me but I will let you know that I am... the one that killed your mother."

Suddenly all the emotion of dread, fear, worry exploded all away to be replace with other-confusion at what he had just said, "What are you talking about!?! My mom died while I was young, it true, but by a disease in her genes that luckily I did not inherit when I was born. Not by a crazed kook like yourself."

The old man then suddenly stood strait and was acting suddenly more normal and yet a bit disappointed. "Pity it looks like you where never told, I had hoped to use that to keep you off balance but I suppose we will have to use the second plan then to do so."

Suddenly Alex wondered if she should have played along with his comment, no matter what there was no way that she would believe what this person was telling her over her father, but maybe that would be better than the alternatives that where suddenly popping in her mind. "What do you even want with me? There is no way that I'll help you, you know."

At that time it was Hawk that laughed, "What

make you think that we need your help?"

Comments like that only made her more scared of her current situation, "Well I'm alive for a reason right? And you allowed me to wake up so..."

"Hawk is right, if you think we need information from you for what we are planning then you are wrong. We already have all we need. That said you are what most would call the icing on the cake." Once again he got closer to her and once again it only creep her out more, "We have been watching you and with everything that has happened we have concluded that you have been modified somehow magically. We want to know how and then take it from you." He then moved back again, "Don't worry we don't think for a second that you will help us with that as well so while you were still out of it we took some of your blood." Alexandria was on the edge of completely losing it when she heard this and she assumed that it showed as he seemed to take pleasure from it as he continued. "I'm sure it will take time to analyze but eventually your secret will be figured out."

He then made his way to the stairs, "In the meantime one of these two will keep you company. Also don't worry I don't plan on taking my time with this."

Alexandria knew what he was talking about and assumed that he would find the essence that had modified them all as it was a part of them now. Thing is there was no way to remove it that she knew and what worried her more, if that was possible, was that deep in her mind she figured that this issue would not stop them from trying even if the attempt left her dead in the process.

She could barely move so that did not help, the crazy old man scared the crap out of her which was saying something, she could still cast from the

looks of it but could not teleport as the first part of the spell of finding a target location was blocked somehow again. Enemy wise she was overwhelmed so taking them on was impossible. They also took her blood which made her feel violated on top of scared, worried and at this point she was reaching the levels of terrified. Still after a while Alex did manage to calm down a bit by trying very very hard to focus on what she thought the others would do in her situation.

Currently it seemed that only Alice was around in the room she did not know when Hawk had left but at the same time she did not care. "So is killing Iris all you really want? I mean is it really going to give you anything?"

She knew that Alice could hear her but for some reason she was not answering. "Okay fine you kill her, then what? Have you thought of that?"

"... I think of nothing else, is that what you want to hear?"

"Not really no, I'm just wondering what you get out of it."

At this point Alice stood from her chair and made her way close enough for Alex to see her by using a more normal pose. "How many times have I said it, she killed my friend. Let me ask you this, if we were to kill one of you don't you think the others would retaliate? Actually don't even bother answering that, did your leader not try to kill Hawk for just kidnapping you, you're not dead yet and already he was willing to kill him off. How different is that compared to what I'm doing?"

There was a bit of frustration with that logic that Alex welcomed as it helped her think of something else than her current situation, "You don't get it we did not have a choice...I'm not sure what you were told but seeing as I'm not going anywhere and you are stuck here with me let me

tell you about your friend."

She took a deep breath and then started what she knew was going to be a long conversation, "Iris told me a bit about what happened with you and even then I can't image surviving that, but in doing so whatever person she was, was no longer there. With the powers that she had she attacked the orcs and it did not matter if they were warriors or non combatants."

"The orcs, you seriously think I give a care about their wellbeing considering what they helped do to us?"

Seeing the anger in her eyes Alex figured that her way to start this explanation was probably not a good one but she continued anyways, "Fine then what about all the human towns that she attacked, and cities and villages? Or all the teleportation circles that she destroyed in order for help not to arrive in order to save people that she had ordered to attack. Is doing exactly what had been done to her what your good friend was about when she helped you?"

There was a bit of a pause but before Alice could answer Alex continued, "She gave us no choice at all. Heck she even captured Mike, tortured him a bit and because she needed results quickly flooded him full of dark magic in order to get what she needed. You can't tell me that's not familiar to you?"

Now it was Alice that was frustrated, "But even with all that did you try to save her? No you lead her to her death instead as that was easier. The pain that she suffered you can't simply expect her to give that up."

"We tried so hard you have no idea but our backs were at the wall because of what she did, yes we did come up with a plan to stop her and that took everything we had to implement and being

there I still say that it only worked due to pure luck. But even then during that fight in that trap she managed to escape because of Iris no less and then the battle turned ugly very quickly and then..."

"You killed her." Alice had a cold stare and Alex could only smirk at it. "No the opposite, she was about to kill us all and there was nothing we could do. What saved us is Chaos, or as you probably know him more the lord of light, decided to come down from the top floor to see what was up. As soon as she saw him she flipped."

The look Alice gave her reminded her of her own when the old man had told her that he had killed her mother. "You don't understand the lord of light looked exactly like the lord of darkness, spitting image. How would you react if you saw that coming down those stairs right now?"

This seemed to convince her a bit but it was clear that she was still having issues with the idea, "If that is the case then should Iris not been affected as well?"

"That's a bit different Iris participated in the fight that killed him, she was there and so where we. That said when we first reached the top and saw that figure, which at the time we did not know it was actually him, we were all shocked Iris included. But Genevieve never did that, she never pulled her sword against him, never saw him die so I'm not surprise by her reaction and instantly Chaos created a shield bubble around her to trap her and also saving us all."

"And then you killed her?"

For as much as she could Alex shook her head, "No we debated what to do, sure that idea came up but in the end we were looking to see if there was a way to put her in stasis. But then Chaos was opposed to that idea and mentioned

that killing her would be simple but would have consequences. In the end that was the trap, he knew that we would ask about it and possibly he knew that there was a chance that she would react the way she did, that part is me assuming, but when she learned that by her death both dark and holy magic would end all around the world she ended her own life inside the shield."

Alice was wide eyed in shock, "... Your lying... there is no way that she would take her own life after going through all that... there is no way, you must have commanded it to do so."

"He was the avatar of the lord of light! Do you seriously think that we had the power to do that? The last command Mike gave was to put her in stasis but the avatar did nothing as she gladly accepted that this is how she would get her vengeance at a cost that had been prophesized. As for the avatar that's what he was waiting for and it all played perfectly in his hands, with that happening his old enemy would finally be dead and then he had someone to blame when he made his miraculous comeback to our world to give back what we had stolen, that being holy magic."

Alex then took a deep breath as Alice still seemed to process all this, "And that's what happened, we did not kill her, did we try yes, but she had to be stopped."

Alice then stood back, "...She was tortured, violated, and manipulated. Did she step over the line, maybe, but who stepped over the line for her? There was no fairness in the cards she was forced to play with, she was a victim!" She then pointed at Alex, "You say you had no choice, that your backs were against the wall, what choice did she have? How in control was she in the end and yet in the end it's an 'it was not us but him' excuse and you think that will sway me? Convince me to release

you or help you out for the better of people that did nothing when we needed help?" The anger and frustration was now back in her eyes, "WELL ANSWER ME!!"

This was pointless and frustrating for Alex as well, "Yell at me all you want but what DID YOU WANT US TO DO!?! Tell me how can we have saved her? I'm all ears?"

Alice then slowly made her way back to the chair, "What is the point; you never had any intention of saving her only stopping her by any means."

That answer was it, Alice was the only one present and Alex knew she had enough energy to stop her if need be and with that she twisted her hands and touched the shield and suddenly broke it. Quickly as she could she tried to sit up but as she did her still hurt head hit something else that sent waves of pain. Then a force once again pinned her to the table, as she realized that Alice had recasted the shield spell. She also now knew that in reality there was another shield around her forcing her to stay on the table. So in order to escape she needed to break the shield pinning her down and also the outer shield and somehow make it so whoever was with her at the time did not have time to recreate a new one to trap her.

As she mentally nursed the pain in her head Alex could hear Alice, "You are not going anywhere until he is done with you, and I'm am not going anywhere far from you as eventually she will come to you, if you are alive or dead."

Adam was looking at the time again, "It's been pretty much a day and she still has not come down for anything to eat."

Rosamia was currently making something to

that effect using their kitchen, which she saw was remarkably well stocked. "I know and with that." She then handed him a tray with a large glass of orange jus and two large egg sandwiches, "It's not the best but it's quick and will help give her some of what she need. Please make sure she eats it."

Adam took the tray and made his way upstairs. On the second floor there were three rooms, you had Alex and Iris rooms and the last room was used as the ladies room. He quickly poked his head in Iris's room but as he figured it's not where she had ended up. Making his way to Alex's room he saw that the door was ajar and that there was a mini stopper preventing it from fully closing, as he made his way in he made sure not to disturb that.

Stepping in he looked around and was pretty much not surprised at what he saw. Just like the rest of the house the place was full of books. There where books on the wall, books under the bed, around the bed and around the dresser. It did not stop there, to one side of the room there was a small lab but most beakers where on top of books. On the final other side you have a large desk but really there was only empty space for one large book to be opened and everything else was varying stacks of books. It was also there that he saw Iris who had passed out. "Make you wonder if she is collecting them more than anything."

It's then that he realized that he probably said that a bit too loud as Iris woke up, "And yet the knowledge in this room alone hold more than all the libraries that we have seen recently and yes I count Bernard's as well." She then turned to him, "I don't know where she is yet..."

Adam handed her the tray which she took but was confused by it, "I figured but you need to eat so here you go."

"Are you going to stay here until I'm done?"

"I don't want to, but if you make me I will."

She then put the tray on top of a stack of books, "I need to follow this first, then I'll eat..."

Adam sighed, "Come on Iris, don't do this..."

"What, don't try and save her!?" She then caught herself. "I'm sorry, it's just I'm frustrated..."

Adam then made his way to the bed and sat down, "I can see that, but I'm sure you have made progress."

"I've figured out that there is no way for me to find her directly so at this time I'm focusing on understanding the missing pieces of that spell that she left and also the spell that it would break. I'm thinking that if I can learn that then maybe I can find it... I'm not sure."

"Hey, hey, don't doubt yourself like that. That's progress if you ask me, sure it's not a solution yet but it's progress."

Iris looked at the ceiling, "But it's so frustrating and that angers me more..."

"Yea it will, and you know I'm good friends with anger and frustration, so use that to push yourself but at the same time don't let it control you okay. Because if you do then you will lose sight of what you're trying to do and that's not something you want to happen." During his worst moments it had cost him Rosa, which had been the reason why he had done everything in the first place. Last thing he wanted was for Iris to go down that road.

She took a deep breath and then reached for the plate of food. As she did he stood up, "I'll come back in one hour to pick it up. Focus on what you need to do and I'll keep bringing you food to make sure that you can keep going. Just promise me that you will eat it okay."

She nodded, "It's a deal... and Adam, thanks."

He smiled as he left, "Anytime."

Alex had no way to confirm but she assumed that at least a day had passed since her capture. Her mind was degrading fast and the situation really did not help that. They were not feeding her, nor were they given her any water and as worse as that was it was nothing compared to the shame she felt when she simply could not hold it in anymore. There was no holding back the tears on that one as her fluids leaked out, she had been so ashamed that she had used magic to remove the traces of it that she could feel. Eventually after going through all that she had passed out for a while only to suddenly wake up to see that the nightmare was real.

From the looks of it her current babysitter was Hawk. The only thing he did was stare at her, he was really good at it from what she could tell. Probably this skill was practiced waiting at that tower for all those years. Alex tried to look around but felt more frustrated by the lack of movement from the shield around her, that stupid shield that she could remove but then what? She new knew that she had to do something, pretty soon if this continued she wondered if she would be able to stand let alone cast a spell. She tried to move her hands and see what she could reach, from the looks of it her weapons where gone, not too surprising. Her armor had also been removed leaving her only her regular clothes that she wore under it. Suddenly she checked her pocket and then suddenly she thanked whoever was listening as they had left the spheres in them. Now she only had five of them but at least she could do something with those, but the question was what.

Alex knew that she needed to put some sort of

spell that would cause a distraction of sorts also some defense would be nice. Her mind was so muddled and nothing really came to mind. Something flashy, something easy to do that would activate when it broke... and then a spell came to mind, fireball. Now putting one of those inside one of the sphere would be tricky at best. She now knew the theory behind it down pat after spending enough time with Kilor but still this would be hard. Even harder as she had to do it and they needed to not know about it, so she needed to distract them while she tried and there were a few ways to do that.

With one hand she focused on the sphere and with the other she focused on the shield. Casting the fireball spell should alert them that she was casting a spell, but if she right away started to counteract the shield then as they looked that is all they should see. With that plan in mind she started it up, the fireball spell took to the sphere no problems and that was part of the problem as too much of the spell was jammed into it causing it fumble and break the sphere. This only left her with four more tries but considering how the first one had ended she figured that she would succeed with the others, at least she hoped. Also as she had figured Hawk stood up and due to that she started to pop the shield that had been pinning her down. It did not take long and it also took less time for him to reapply it.

"I see that you are still trying, I guess that's to be expected."

Trying to sound as defiant as she could Alex mustered some words to answer him, "Well I'm not just going to wait for that old loon to do what he wants. I have to tell you that he should fail but let's say that he does figure it out there is no way for him to share, so what is in it for you?"

"You think that my goal is power only?"

"Well it's not?"

Hawk smiled, "Well part of it is yes but that's not the only thing, as large part is me getting my vengeance as well and setting this world right."

"Raaaw... More vengeance, who hurt you?"

Hawk was a bit annoyed by the way she had trivialized his comments. "Well we are not as lucky as you and have a daddy on the Council while we grew up. Did you even have to pass the entrance test to stay in Astrum or was that simply skipped for you?"

Not really what Alex had expected but at this time anything to take her mind off things, "I'm pretty sure it was skipped but not because of my dad, I was simply that good that young from what I was told."

Hawk was stunned, "Wow, I must admit that I expected a silver spoon answer from you but that's more like a platinum one. You were simply that good, and you believed that? Did it never occur to you that maybe that is what they told you so that they would not look like the hypocrites that they are?"

Alex was now lost, which was an easy thing at this time. "What are you talking about? I was good at magic, Astrum is there to help those that are at a certain level in order to get to an even higher one so that in the end they can discover more of the craft."

Hawk hated hearing those words, "I've heard those words all my life when I was young. I had a good grasp of magic and never was I allowed getting into that floating city of yours, even if I did pass that test." He approached her more as he continued, "And you want to know why, because they had reached their human quota for that year and the one after and so on."

He then took a deep breath, "There is no way that you did not see how snobbish those elves are with us when it comes to magic. They hoard their knowledge and lord over us the fact that they will outlive us, our kids and their kids and so on. So in the end what is the point of teaching that many humans? The quest for the understanding of magic, sure that's their goal but we have no part in it... not that they will admit that and this is why I say that the whole place is full of hypocrites as the idea itself that they promote is simply false."

Alex did not really know what to say to all that, "Wow that's... impressive. I mean sure I get the frustration there, I've felt it too many time over but things are changing maybe it's time you look at it again."

"Lies, you say that they are changing but what's changed? Are they now allowing anyone in the city to learn?"

"Well no, but..."

He then cut her off, "Okay, okay... let say that you are lucky and they deem you worthy can you start to research any spell you wish? Let's say I have an affinity for the paranormal will they let me have access to all on the subject or will they let me figure out over time what they have probably already have figured out?"

"It's not that simple..." and then she herself stopped as it suddenly felt like she was about to give him the speech that she had heard a million times, *'It's like I'm arguing with my past self...'*

"Okay, yea I see your point and thought the same too for a long time. For a long while I hated that about the elves, but eventually I saw that it mattered little. For a long time I believed that Astrum was the place to learn anything and if you wanted to learn you needed to be there. But over the years I saw how wrong I was, had I stayed in

Astrum as a Council member I know that I would have less knowledge then I do now. It's still home and it's a great place to learn but it's not the end all be all, which is funny hearing me say this considering everything." She tried to look at him at best as she could, "In the end hate them all you want but it's their city and really it's their knowledge that they acquired. Will they share it, sure, but to think that it will be given to you on a silver platter..."

"You really are one of them now, still some of what you said made some sense." He pointed to the ceiling, "That old man that you hate so much is trying to fix all that, he got kicked out of that golden flying city of yours and spent all of his time after that teaching others. That's how I met him, after being rejected again for no reason, he took me under his wing and gave me the knowledge and he did that to all that was willing to learn. That is what it should be about."

Alex was very cautious, "I somehow don't think that's all there is to it?"

He smirked, "I understand why you think so, I mean you spent all your life around those elves so of course you would think that there is a catch of some sort or a test at the end of the tunnel." He then took a deep breath, "We are trying to create a new place for ourselves where any human that wants to learn can is that not good?"

"I am so confused, first you say vengeance so I'm not sure how that fits into that and then you have me right here... you seriously thing keeping me like this until your guy up there tries his hand at a spell that will probably kill me is the way you should build a new place for yourselves?"

He shrugged, "What choice do we have? In the past we have been attacked many time by Astrum, my master himself was attacked by one of the

Council members and your father. We need to defend ourselves and to do that we need more power... Should we not defend ourselves? Or just simply wait to be killed like good little humans?"

Alex was so done with him, "There is now way that what you say is true. The Council does not have a hit squad, now or in the past. Did it have to stop others that where causing an issue, sure, but when you start killing others with magic something has to be done. There are no records of anyone being hunted down for simply teaching others... I simply can't believe that."

Hawk turned and sat back down, "In the end I never really expected you to. All we want is for all this to stop and now we can make that happen, not that you will see it from the looks of it."

Alex was more exhausted now then when she had started. For a while there she wondered if she was going to know what the plan actually was but no, more vengeance and the target was still so very broad. She supposed that now it was safe to assume that elves where probably part of the equation for their plans. Suddenly she felt very tired as all this would matter little if she could not prepare herself. She then took a deep breath and took another sphere and tried again.

Hawk then stood up and recasted the shield spell, "You will never learn."

Suddenly more tired Alex managed a small smile of defiance, "Nope, not at all..." This time it has succeed, '*One down three to go.*'

Anna entered Alex and Iris's home and was greeted by a surprised Rosa and a less so surprised Adam.

"I was going to give you two an update at the end of the day, you did not have to come."

Anna nodded at Rosa, "Mike's gone to see Lithius so I figured I would stop by here myself and save you the trouble." She then pointed to the second floor, "Has she come down at all since yesterday?"

Rosa shook her head, "No she's been there for two days now, Adam brings her food that I prepare and stays with her for a bit while she eats and that's pretty much it." She then looked at him, "From what he told me she is trying hard to find her and the things she is doing makes sense to both of us but it's just not bearing any results sadly."

Adam then stood up and reached for the tray of food, "I was about to head up... I take it that you will want to go in my stead?"

Anna took the tray and smiled, "You read my mind."

As she made her way up he said a few words to her, "She doing her best okay."

As she heard the word Anna wondered if Adam had misinterpreted her visit, she had no doubt in her mind that Iris was doing all she could to find Alex. In many ways that was the reason for the visit. When she reached the door, even if it was opened, she gently gave it a small knock. "Mind if I come in?"

"Normally I would say yes, as I don't want to be disturbed as I'm close to something but I think I hit a bit of a snag."

Anna made her way in the room and then deposited the tray of food on the corner of the large desk that seemed to have room for that tray only. "Anything I can help with?"

"No I think I just need a break... ", Iris head then suddenly dropped low, "... I can't believe I just said that, I can't afford a break."

Anna suddenly took a deep breath, *'Yep it*

seems that I was right.' She then looked around and found another chair and took it and moved it next to Iris and then sat down next to her.

"You can take breaks you know."

This seemed to anger Iris, "How can I, she is trapped otherwise she would be here, and I'm suppose to what enjoy the scenery? I don't have the time to do that, I need to work at this, I need to find her."

Anna forcefully took Iris's hands, "You are doing the best that you can okay, I believe that, Mike believes that, we all believe that and I'm sure Alex does as well."

Iris was discouraged, "So If I'm doing the best that I can how come I have yet to find her. How come I feel like every second that passes by and I don't have her location all I can think of in the back of my head is that I'm failing her?" She then slowed down, "This is all my fault and I can't seem to fix it."

Anna slowly shook her head and then focused her gaze directly into her eyes, "Please believe me when I say that this is not your fault..."

Iris suddenly cut her off, "How can it not be, did I not convince her to agree to the one on one?"

"Sure you did, but did she not break her word and let us know about it? Did we not order Adam and Rosa to follow you and did both of us not try and follow Alex just in case as well? Was all this a bad plan, sure, totally agree and did you have a hand in it, of course but to say that it's all your fault? No, it's not."

Iris had no answer so Anna continued, "Are you the best person to find her, yes, are we putting a lot on your shoulders, yes, far too much actually and for that we are both deeply sorry."

"... Why are you apologizing? I mean you're right I am the person that can do this..."

"But you should not have to do it alone especially given the current situation and who is involved. That's not fair to you at all and that is our mistake and that's why I am apologizing for the both of us."

She then let go of her hands and then reached out and gave her a hug, "I'm not telling you to stop but I am saying that you should take a few moments for yourself. Look at the sky for a bit before you dive back down if you don't it will only be too easy to get lost in the dark waters."

She then pulled away, "Also, the fact that you have not found her at this time means nothing of your skill or ability. If you don't believe me on that, Lithius himself, which I'm sure you agree knows more about magic then you do, can't find his target as well. You are both going against someone that had years to plan this out. So don't beat yourself up for not finding the answer just yet okay."

Iris thought about everything, "I guess, I mean what you say make sense it does, but... I don't know..." Suddenly she had tears coming down her cheeks, "I just wish that she was here... I just wish that I had the answer..."

Anna once again reached out to her as Iris started to cry. After a while Iris slowly pulled back. "... Thanks... It's not that all this helped with this but..." She then looked at her, "Somehow it feels like it helped inside a little."

Anna gave her a half smile, "You know what might help a bit more?" She then looked at the plate of food.

Iris then nodded, "You think that Adam and Rosa have eaten yet?"

Anna slowly shrugged, "Not sure, but I know that I haven't so if you don't mind the company for a little while before you go back to this." She then once again looked at the tray, "Plus I think it's all

cold now so..."

Iris slowly stood up and reached for the place of food, "May as well..."

Alexandria really had no clue how much time had passed at this point, she was so tired now. In the end she had managed to load the four spheres with spells, two fireballs and also two ice spells. And every time she tried she also needed to put down that shield to mask her real intent and every time it had been recasted without given her time to do anything else. Plus the more and more time passed the slower and slower she got which helped nothing.

Currently Hawk was sitting at the table, waiting as he always did but then she thought she heard something else. Slowly she turned her head and then instantly froze as the old man came down the stairs with Alice following him from behind. *'Nononononon...I need more time, they need more time...'*

The old man inspected her for a while and again she felt herself trying to sink in more into the table that she had been stuck to this whole time. "I came down to let you know that I should be ready soon."

It was hard to talk but still she managed, "If you do this... you will kill me... there is no other outcome..."

He then smiled, "Well let hope for your sake that you are wrong and that I am better then you give me credit for." He then shrugged, "But you know if not then I'm happy that I came down to inform you as at least it will give you time to mentally say your goodbyes." She could not see it but she knew that as he turned around he had a smile on his face. "I'll see you tomorrow as I need

to fully prepare myself for this ritual."

As he left, Alex suddenly felt herself breathing pretty quickly. It was like no air was coming in her lungs at all, which was not the case but that's how it felt. She then pulled her head back and started to cry. There was no time left and while that hurt and scared her, she wondered if that was the reason why she was crying or if it was because the thought finally popped in her head that they were not going to make it in time.

Adam was about to greet Anna as she came in the house again but then he saw that Mike was also with her. Suddenly he was very worried for Iris, "Are you two sure about this? I know it's been another day but..."

Mike quickly turned to Anna and then back at Adam with a semi-confused look, "Hey what are you implying, that I'm here to go crack the whip or something?"

Rosamia sat next to Adam, "Your thinking too much about it Adam, I'm sure he's just here to see how she doing himself." She then looked at him, "Right?"

The way she said that made him think that she was waiting on a confirmation more so then her believing it. Once again he turned to Anna wondering and wanting a confirmation from her that just by being here he had not done anything wrong. Sadly all she provided was a bit of a small chuckle, "not you too?"

She gave him a half smile and then pushed him onward, "Go you silly fool, just make sure you make it clear to her."

Still clearly mentally wounded by the blow he made his way up and then Anna looked around fully expecting to perform the ritual of trying to

find a place to sit but then saw that this time it would not be needed. She made her way to one of the single seats that was already clear and then looked at the others, before she could say anything Adam beat her to it. "Okay so then you're sticking around waiting for him to come back down, and I had the wrong assumption because?"

She ignored him and looked to Rosa and then pointed around. Every book had been stack and now you had a bit of room to move around and also all the places that one could sit had been cleared. "I take it this is your doing? Nice job, I don't think I've ever seen this place like this."

Rosa nodded, "Well Adam helped as well, but yes it was becoming an issue and seeing as we were spending a lot of time here waiting I figured why not." She then looked at the piles, "I tried to organize them as much as I could but my understanding of arcane is very limited to what Alex showed me."

Anna reached out and picked up a book, she then quickly looked at Rosa to see if it was okay. "Go for it, for someone like you there should be no harm at all. Seeing as you can't read it there is no way for you to cast something by accident. Mind you none of the books here that I can tell are dangerous that way." And with that Anna opened the book and confirmed that Rosa was right, to her it was all gibberish.

Adam then took a deep breath, "Fine you want to ignore my comment by all means but by doing what you are doing you are only silently confirming it."

Anna had a small smile on her face and then it quickly disappeared, "We are all worried and we are all anxious, Iris more so due to the extra pressure that she is dealing with. That said he's no better." She then thought about it, "Actually he's

worse because right now he's lacking the discipline in order to simply wait until he is able to do something so he's going up there to try and help out."

Adam was still confused, "Wait so you mean to say that he's not going up there to push her or be all leader like but more force his help because he can't take it to be in the sidelines anymore?"

Anna simply nodded in confirmation with a smile on her face. Adam was suddenly very frustrated and then he turned to Rosa, "But you told me NOT to do that?" He then looked back at Anna, "I've wanted to do that since this watch started."

Anna shrugged, "I guess he beat you too it, also congratulation Adam on being more the adult this time around."

He was still frustrated, "No I don't like this one bit, not one bit at all."

Rosa grabbed his hand, "Sometime we need to swap our roles. It's a good thing."

Mike reached Alex's room where Iris was and then made his way in, "Hi..."

Iris turned around and then stopped for a moment, "Ah, I don't have her location yet, sorry."

It was easy for him to see that saying that out loud caused her some pain. "I know, it's not why I'm here... I just want to help however I can, that's all."

Once again Iris stopped, this was not going as she thought when she saw him come in. "Ah, Okay... well..." She then looked around the desk, "I'm not sure there is anything that you can help with actually..." She then turned back to him, "As I promised to you and the others if there was then I would ask." The look on his face was familiar to her but there was also guilt there mixed in with that disappointment.

He took a deep breath, "There has to be something..."

Once again Iris looked around and then saw the large map that she had been using for the last few days, "Maybe you can help me with a math problem?" Seeing as there was no way for him to understand what she was talking about she took out the map and unrolled it on the floor.

The map represented everything that they knew, the human side, the orc side and also the great desert that separates the two. On the map you had a bunch of 'X's around the town, cities and villages. Most of the map was covered in circles, some large and others small. They were pretty much everywhere and there were a lot of them.

"Those are where I know she is not for sure, as for the circles those are where I think she could be. Hence my math problem, there is no way to me too confirm all of those in the time I don't think we already have."

He looked at the map, "Mind if I ask why you think both those things about those places?"

There was a bit of hesitation, "...Well for those that I'm sure, I've kind of already checked them out." She was bracing herself to get chewed out as in doing so she had broken a promise that she had made and in a way made it look like she had learned nothing from what had happened. But to her surprise he said nothing about it.

"And the circle?"

"Well when I thought and used everything I could think of, or that I could use, and still could not find her I figured that I would focus my attention on what she left behind and that was the spell to undo a shield. Once that was figured out as it was incomplete I then focused on the spell it was supposed to counter and these are the

locations where I found similar spells active." She then sighed, "The issue is that I can't exactly tell the composition of the shield spell by its counter and so because of that I had to widen the net, which resulted in my current problem."

"...That is a lot of locations..." and then that's all he said, Iris waited a little while but all he did was pull up a chair and continued to silently think about the issue. Seeing as there was nothing else she turned around and continued her research on the counter to see if there was a way to limit the possible options more.

A long time passed but eventually he got her attention again. "You mentioned that you know for sure that she was not in those locations and that you used any way that you could to try and located her directly." Seeing as he had her attention again he continued, "I'm going to ignore the fact that you probably teleported on your own to those location, but how did you know for sure?"

Having forgotten about the possible lecture and now seeing as she was going to be able to dodge that one Iris quickly started to answer the question, "Well, it's hard to explain and I promised that I would not but I can say that a while back when you got captured yourself I was having issues at night..." It was clear that this was a bit hard to for her to go over but she continued anyways, "Because of that Alex came up with an idea to reassure me, at least that's why I think she proposed it, one of the end result of it is that I know where she is and she knows there I am pretty much at all times. It's not automatic, so we do need to focus on it but essentially it allows us to know of each other's presence and its range is pretty good. Once done this allowed me to feel..."

There was more hesitation and so Mike stopped her. "It's okay you can stop now, I get the

idea, thanks to sharing as much as you did with me."

Suddenly you could see that a thought popped in his head but from the looks of it he was chasing it down. "What? What is it?"

Realizing that he was stuck in his head, and how that annoyed Anna to no end, he then vocalized his current path. "With what you just said it filled in a lot of piece that I had missing. The way you reacted when she got captured. That's why the emotion was more intense, as the link was broken or temporarily cut and that's not a simple thing right?"

She nodded her head, "No it's not, heck I don't even know how it could happen... unless..."

She did not finish the thought and he had no intention of letting her as he continued with an information barrage, "The same thing occurred when you where at the location that she was held for a while, right. There you confirmed in a way that she was alive but the link was still cut. Lithius is also having a similar issue from the looks of it, somehow this Marek is able to block himself completely and I'm assuming he's doing the same for Alexandria. Which leaves the question how can that be done? Is there a spell that can block out all the ones you know and that link of yours?"

Iris was suddenly lost and had tones of questions but pushed them all aside and thought about it, "I can't think of one, assuming one exists..."

He then cut her off, "It does and you already ran into it." He then pulled out the sphere that she had created and then an image of the location next to the destroyed Portal Tower appeared. "That place must have had that spell in effect otherwise you would not have lost your connection while you were with us. It also is safe to assume that the

place that they are now has the same protection."

Now there was no way to put those questions aside, "How do you go from the shield problem on the map to this?"

"Hmm, by first going over everything that happened there with Anna for a whole day and asking every possible question I could think of and going over the possible scenarios of what happened and reasons why. Also by going over to Lithius and getting as much information I could as to why he could still not find his target given his vast knowledge or magic... what was the common link, when you told me that story it help connect a possibility."

She was stunned but as she looked at her map she was getting angry more than anything. "But why wait until now? And this path it's a much better one then the one I was on, was I wasting my time..." She then turned to him, "All this time I was fail..."

"Wait..." Anna had warned him about this, "Wait, don't finish that. First, you did not waste your time. There was a lot of good work done and the main thing I was doing all this time was trying to think of an alternative idea, not because your was bad but because I saw no answers. To make an analogy and to continue the explanation using it, your mountain was too high to climb in the time we have so I looked for another path in other to get to the other side. But the only reason I looked on the other side was because you gave me such a clear view of that mountain... Otherwise I would have started climbing." He then caught his breath and at the same time saw that she was calming down a bit, so he continued. "Now as to the why now part. That one is a bit harder to explain, first I needed to go over everything that had happened, that took time. The other thing is that you needed

time too."

He then took a deep breath, "Look, Anna briefly told me about what happened. Would you have been opened to me being here before that as you are now?"

That last comment was too much for her, "So in the end... it was my fault that we lost time with this?"

Mike was frustrated at himself, "I'm so bad at this, and she is so much better... That's not it, sure you needed time for that to happen, but I also needed time. After day one I wanted to barge in here and do this, but Anna stopped me because it was not the right time." He then looked at her, "And by that I mean for me not for you. I needed to go over everything by myself, I needed to poke at Lithius, even if he was not pleased about it, all those things needed to happen and once that was done I had no more roads to march on. At that point, I was ready." He gave her a small smile, "Also it turns out that at that point you were also ready, Anna knew that having seen the both of us and from there when we woke up this morning she told me that today was the day."

Iris then nodded, "Because we where both ready for different reasons."

"You needed to do what you needed to do, and for me the same, so that when our paths crossed then maybe we could see what we were missing and help each other out."

"It's like she planned for this to happen." She then looked at him with a confused look, "How?"

He instantly shrugged, "I have no clue at all, I've been trying to figure it out for years and I've simply come to the conclusion that it defies logic and that is that... Oh also that I should never question it, nothing ever good comes from that." He then was a bit puzzled himself, "I take it that you

think I'm on to something then as well?"

Iris nodded, "Yes, I mean that spell, whatever it is, has to be less common then the shield spell. In a way you're doing the same thing I am but you found a better spell then I did to track." Before he could comment she continued and had a sudden sad expression, "The issue with the idea is that it's a bit late for it. Your right in thinking that the spell or a variation of it has to be at that place but that spell should be long over by now."

Mike was not so sure about that but then suddenly he recalled something from the past, "True but I'm sure you checked that place out as much as you could, spells and all, if you think back I'm sure that there may be something that will jump out. Also it may not hurt to go take a look, Alexandria once said that the stronger the spell the more of an impression it leaves behind so you never know, as a spell like that can't be a small one."

Iris thought about it, "True and also true on the spell type still after all this time..." She then nodded and reached out for his hand, "Once way to find out." He then grabbed her hand, "Let's do this."

A lot of time had passed and Adam was getting very antsy, he looked at Anna who had simply spent all her time going from one book to another. "Look normally I would bring her something to eat. I still need to do that right?"

She did not look at him but continued to flip to the next page, "Nope, you wait just like the rest of us. If they are still up there and skip on food it's because they are on to something, if they are up there and they skip their meals because they are blocked..." She then looked up at him with a

glaring look. "Well then words will be exchanged."

As Anna then returned to the book Rosamia reached out to Adam, "Still there is no reason for us to not eat, help me prepare, I'm sure it will help."

In her head Anna was as antsy as Adam but she had done her part and with it done there was nothing to do but wait. They were both in place to help each other out, she just hoped that it would be enough. Suddenly something in the book shocked her for a little bit as there was a section that as she focused on it was suddenly understandable and it was not a little section but a large one. Seeing that reaction Rosa left Adam alone and made her way to her, "Something wrong?"

Anna was about to smile and ask Rosa if she could shed some light on this discovery but then all their attention turned to Mike who was racing down the stairs.

"Suite up everyone, we are a go."

"Iris figured out where she is?"

Mike nodded, "In a way Adam, yes. There are three possibilities and with that we are going to all of them."

"Should we go tell Lithius about this? He could be of help against that mage."

"Iris asked the same thing, she is currently telling him about everything and also telling him why he should not join us."

Rosamia was then confused by the answer to her questions and she was not the only one.

"What? I don't get it, you of all people know how strong he can be and Lithius would be an asset. Plus I'm sure that he too wants to help save Alex even if you did mention that his main target was Marek."

Before he could answer Anna cut in, "... You

think that it's a trap. Not us going there but us all leaving to go there."

Mike nodded in approval, "As I mentioned if one of us was the true target then there would be easier ways. Also if Alexandria was the target, then it's done and that can't be it otherwise Alice falls off the equation, which means that Alexandria is a means to an end only. And that end has to be someone here as everyone agreed too, so because of that here will be all Council members at full strength to deal with anything that could happen when all of us are all there."

Adam was a bit skeptical but was not going to completely disagree as it meant actually doing something. "You could still be wrong about that."

Again Mike nodded, "Sure and with that, the locations will be given to Lithius with instructions to go to them if he loses contact with Iris and there is no attack here."

Adam nodded, "Well I'm good." He then looked at the others and then at Rosa, "I'll go get our gear and come back."

Anna turned to Mike, "Let's do the same."

As they left Rosamia closed her eyes and took a deep breath, "Finally we can go save you, please stay safe until we arrive."

Alexandria opened her eyes, when she saw Hawk and the old mage come down she then realized that her time was up. She was not sure if the time he had said had actually passed but in this no food, no water, no real movement available situation she was in minutes seemed like hours and hours seemed like infinity. At the beginning of this she had figured that casting would be an issue as time went on and for that she had prepared some spells in four spheres, two fireball spells and

two ice ones. In order to do so she had also needed to destroy that shield around her too many times which had helped to drain her even more but allowed her at least an element of surprise which at the time seemed more important. The idea was to use the prepared spells for escaping and while that was still the intended goal it was not really the type of escape that she had originally thought of.

As quickly as she could she held one of the fireball sphere in her hand and closed it, as for the other hand she laid it on the flat of the table. Whatever plan he had figured there was only so many ways that he could execute it and because of that it created a window for her to act, no matter what there was no way that she could let him cast that ritual.

He positioned himself on her side, Hawk at her feet and Alice next to her head. "Well I hope you had enough time."

Alice then looked down at her, "Seems that she did not make it in time, such a shame for you. Still I'll make sure to send her to you."

'God, they intend to taunt me to death... make this end...'

The old mage got closer to her and then removed the outer shield, *'So far so good.'*

"I hope you don't mind the extra precaution." Alex was not sure what he was talking about but she did see him reach under the table she was lying on. The spell he casted made it so that the wood of the table would meld around her wrist and ankle, essentially binding her. *'I'm fine, I'm fine, this is unexpected but not a problem...'*

He then removed the shield around her and as soon as he did she wanted to move, twitch, something but she held it in. Right then Alice grabbed her by the shoulders and Hawk by her legs. *'Stop touching me... Stop it...'* As much as she

wanted not too she squirmed a bit and this reaction only seemed to widen the smile on his face.

"Say hi to your mother, as I'm sure I can transfer whatever is in you to me, you are correct in that I don't think you will live it out... I think it will be very painful, but it may go quick." He then slowly reached out to her stomach, "Part of me wonders if that bothers me or not..."

'Stop it, Stop it, don't touch me now or ever...' and with that thought she opened her hand and let the sphere drop to the ground. Instantly everyone recoiled back as the sphere cracked and the fireball spell activated and cause a small explosion on the ground knocking the table down. Her landing on the ground was not comfortable but there was no time to see if it hurt her or if the fireball spell caused them any damage. She then reached out and casted what was probably her last spell and that was a simple spell to destroy the components of the table to wood pieces, doing this also freed her from her bonds. At this point they were all moving closer to her and with that she reached out and broke another sphere, this time the ice one, creating a large dome around her with an opening in the front.

"I'll admit I'm impressed, but really where do you think you are going? Hawk, Alice get her out of there."

He was right there was no place for her to go, she knew that she did not have the energy left but she still tried to lock on to a place out of here and teleport out. Sadly just like before the spell failed at the first step. She then grabbed the last fireball sphere that she had, *'I really don't want to do this...'*

"... So... sorry... guys..."

The group reappeared in the sky above a large mountain. Iris suddenly had a large headache and had to close her eyes and take a moment. Before using the teleport spell she had casted floating spells on all of them so she could fully focus on quickly recovering.

Rosa tried to reach out to her, "Are you okay?"

She slowly nodded, "Yea, it's just that normally when we move around like this we help each other out, this time I could not do that and well it took a bit more out of me then planned."

Adam looked down at the mountain, "Well I think it was worth it." He then pointed below, "There is no way that is not the place."

Everyone looked at the mountain to see that a tower had been formed in. Mike looked at Iris, "Well looks like we got lucky on the first go."

Iris smiled, "Seems like it." From there she took out her short sword and casted a quick spell on it and then let it go. The sword was hovering for a while and then made its way to the ledge of mountain side that had been created in order to build an entrance to it. "Now seeing as it's probably not safe to simply drop down let see where we can go."

The sword made it to the ledge and then slowly moved forward, after about six feet in it suddenly dropped on the ground. "Well it's enough for us to land on." With that she casted a flying spell on herself and then dragged the others with her to the safe zone on the ledge.

"So does it cover the whole zone as we figured?"

Iris needed to think about that one before she answered Mike, "...It looks like it but it's hard to tell using magic. In so many ways it's like an anti-magic field that was found in the tower's first floor

but at the same time it's so much different from that in a good way because the tower one was way more sophisticated." She then took a deep breath, "Okay I'll remove the first layer but keep in mind that may alert them so..." She did not finish as everyone took out their weapons and tried to stand in as much of a defensive position as the ledge would allow.

Having found enough information on the spell due to the left over residue of it and other information she could find in Alex's private library she started the process, once again it took more out of her but after a while the shield dropped. She caught her breath and then reached down to pick up her sword, as she did her hand bumped into something and a clear ripple appeared. Adam quickly tested it out with his sword and another ripple appeared around the location that he had hit. "Looks like there's a shield around the place as well."

Iris gathered the energy she figured that she would need, "Well that explains why she left the spell as there no way that normally I could have removed this." After another wait, this time a bit longer, the shield spell also dropped. That one had really hit her as she suddenly felt a bit dizzy, Anna quickly grabbed her. "Are you okay?"

It did not take long for her to regain control, "Sure I'm fine it was just a lot quickly that's all..." She then paused and then a wide smile appeared on her face. "She's here... I know where she is."

Adam took the first step, "Well here we go to another tower." He then looked at Iris, "Up or down? Assuming there is a down."

"It's pretty low but down."

Mike thought about that, "Adam is right we have had our shares of towers and they take a while, Iris, I know I'm going to ask for a lot but can

you get us there directly?"

Iris chuckled a bit, "As soon as I found her I wanted to do just that but essentially it's asking me to teleport us to a location I know nothing about. While the new version of the spell make it sure that we will not appear in the middle of something, I can't really confirm what will be around us."

Mike was willing to take the risk and he also knew that Iris would as well, still it was a good point but also they may be running out of time. "Let's do it anyways, still is there any way to mitigate the possible risk?"

Iris extended her arms, "Grab on to me as much as you can leaving my arms free, I'll see what I can do but depending on how much room there is this maybe better than a full circle." As they all wrapped their arms around her and on each other Iris reached out, and then after a small smile she held back the tears and casted the spell.

Alexandria held the sphere next to her chest and was about to give it a good whack in order to break it but then stopped as the old man started to freak out.

"Hawk hurry!!! We don't have time anymore, the shield is down."

This puzzle Hawk, "What do you mean, how?"

This time he elevated his tone, "Don't question me and get it DONE!"

He turned to Alice, "Drop the thing and I'll grab her."

Alex was freaking out herself, if the shield was down than it could only mean one thing. Suddenly she heard a voice in her head. That voice gave her so much hope that somehow it made her cry tears of joy. *'Can you give me a location?'*

'...Six meters from my location...'

Suddenly she felt a surge of strength, Alex still could not cast but she felt confident that she could move but then the ice around her rapidly melted and then she saw the hands of Hawk reaching out to her once again. Alex was about to throw her fireball spell at him but then she heard the sounds of swords being taking out and a voice that made her once again so very happy to hear.

"Don't you EVER touch my sister AGAIN!!!"

Iris was livid, as she pointed her sword at them. She saw her sister but her condition gave her pause, her lips where cracked, she seemed smaller and the condition of her clothes where very telling. Thankful the others acted as soon as she had yelled out to them.

"Iris, get her out. Anna with me, Adam and Rosamia you have Alice and Hawk."

Iris dove to grab Alex and pulled her backward. There were so happy to see each other and Iris wanted to take her as far away as possible but Alex suddenly tried to fight back a bit. "No... we need to stay..." Her voice was so cracked, this frustrated Iris. She did not want to listen to her but there was no way that she could disobey her command not after everything that happened. She moved Alex back to a chair and a table that was to the side of one of the walls and then quickly dropped her backpack and joined in with the others. "Hey Alice, I'm still your target right?"

Alice had not waited for the invitation but Rosamia had constantly blocked her from moving at her, but as soon as Iris had taunted her she moved away and joined Adam to fight Hawk. Alice could not have wished for a better outcome.

As far as Mike was concerned the plan had been to use the element of surprise and stall their targets and then get out once Alexandria was

secure, for some reason that plan had change but there was no way to know why at this time. The only thing to focus on was the how. Quickly he focused all his rage that he had bottled up and then used it on the enchantment, it took no time for the blade to glow pink as he continued his charge are Marek with Anna's light green glow right next to him.

Marek tried to move back but they were too fast as they slashed away at him. He was able to dodge Mike's blow to his side but in doing so left him open to Anna's slash to his leg. Marek had not prepared for this but had casted a few armor spells around him in case the ritual when badly, he thanked those spells as they protected him from losing his leg. But the enchantment was more powerful than expected and still with the spell active a large cut appeared. "I will make you scream again for that."

There was no response from his taunt as the both of them danced around him trying to kill him.

Hawk was also not having a good time with this, he had casted his poison cloud but the both of them had simply jumped in it while holding their breath. Typically this meant very little as he would avoid his attackers and pretty soon the spell would take effect. The issue was that these two were really fast, especially that ex-crusader with his twin blades. Seeing as it would take too much effort to keep the spell going and block his attacks he broke his spell and took a different route.

"I can't believe you stood by and did nothing as they did that to her only to get to me."

Alice was more surprised that she was surprised.

"Put your vengeance aside for a second and think, you... you allowed her to be captured and tortured... after what happened to you, me and

Genevieve how can you be okay with that?"

That comment made her pause for a moment, normally Iris would have hoped that she could have used that moment and possibly get to her but there was none of that at that time. All that she had in her head was the rage, anger and Alex's face. And with that she used that moment instead to attack her with all she had.

Alex was looking at everything happening, part of her was guilty as she knew that the plan was to run away and that this conflict was less the ideal but there was no way that they could leave this place just yet. She looked around to see if there was anything she could do to help, but that sudden surge was quickly leaving her. Then she looked down at the pack that Iris had dropped and then a sudden realization came to her. Quicker then she realized he grabbed the pack and reached inside to pull out a wineskin that was full of water. She opened it and poured the water on her lips, the liquid felt so good. She then drank gulps of it and she swore that it was the best water she had ever tasted. After nearly emptying it she stopped and took a few breaths and as she did held the container in her hand next to her chest like it was the most precious thing that she needed to defend at all cost.

Suddenly she felt a gust of wind and then she looked up to see Mike and Anna being pushed back by the old man. They planted their sword on the ground to hold steady but then the old man focused the spell on them directly essentially pinning them there. Suddenly Alex was full of rage, *'Old man I'll make you pay for what you did.'* The issue with that was how. She then felt something else in her hand other then the wineskin and that was a small sphere. She reluctantly put the container down and then stood up. As the old man

approached the two she could see that they where about to disengage in order to avoid whatever spell he was about to cast on top of them. Thankfully they all had forgotten about her and now she could do something about that.

"Don't you dare touch them!" She threw the sphere at the ceiling on top of his head. Now she knew that it would not kill him at that range as there was very little power in those spheres but it would buy them a few seconds as he had to react and that was all Anna and Mike needed. Quickly as they could they both took a step and pierced forward, once again the armor took most of the hit but the blades still reached his skin and with that they both let their enchantments go. Marek had seconds; he knew full well that his armor spells would not hold against a combine attack like that and with that he pulled out an enchanted weapon that he always carried with him after his first brush with death.

The explosion of the enchantment hit and sent him flying back to the wall and then on the ground. All his armor spells where gone and he was very bloodied but he was alive, which shocked Mike, Anna and Alexandria more than it did him. He did not have too much time as they paused and tried to figure out how he was still alive, this was an enchantment made to hurt and kill dragons after all so a mere human should have been killed. He quickly casted the shield spell around him, which would by him more time, and then he teleported away in a red glow.

The explosion had caused a quick sees fire for a few moments due to the destruction that it had done and also the now gone old man that had survived it. But then suddenly fear appeared in Hawk's head. "Alice, we go now..." He did not wait and quickly disappeared himself in a red glow as

well as Adam slashed at him.

Iris pointed her sword at Alice, "You can't take us all."

Alice was furious but she also knew that they would not try to kill her, so she took her time and teleported away as well. None of them moved in to try and stop her and when she was gone they instantly all turned around and made their way to Alexandria.

Iris was the first to drop her sword and reach out and wrap her arms around her sister, "I'm so so sorry." Alex warped her arms around her as well, "its okay, I'm alright now."

Everyone let them have their reunion as they all shared the large weight that had now been removed with Alex not being captured anymore. Iris eventually let go but still held her hand.

"So what's the reason why we stayed and fight?" Adam looked to Mike, "That was the plan right?"

Mike nodded in approval but it was Alex that answered that question. "That's on me but before I explain, Iris can you make sure we are secure?" As she did what was asked Alex with her other hand drank some more water and waited before continuing. "While I was out they took some of my blood and I don't know how much, I do know we need to find it if we can."

Anna saw that Iris was holding on to her hand with a stronger grip after that comment but she figured the reason was different then her own worries. "Now I'm going on a limb here but I'm assuming that this is a bad thing due to what happened to all of us right?"

"Yes, essentially with an untainted sample in the hands of a knowledgeable mage they could see the modifications that occurred to us. From there they could try to remove it, transfer it, or simply to

poke more on it to understand it more."

Adam was confused, "So this thing that happened to us did not simply give us more life? I mean I knew that our magic was better as well but I thought that was gone now, with you as the exception."

After drinking some more and then seeing that the container was empty Alex gave it a disappointing look. "We will not age as others, and for that to happen our whole body needed to change and that affected everything in us. As for our magic, we humans were given access to holy magic at varying levels. As I said before this process amplified those levels, but the reason why it's gone is not that the levels have gone down it's because holy magic is simply gone..." She then looked at Rosa, Iris and then at Adam, "For the most part."

Now Rosamia was very concerned, she took out her own water container and gave it to Alex who immediately switched it out for the empty one. While she drank some more Rosa gave a quick worried glance at Adam. "Given the fact that life transfer spells have existed for a while how does it make this situation different then trying to steal it from an elf? I mean I guess the question is why is this more worrisome for some reason?"

Alex nodded, "You are right if longer life was the only factor then really it's of little concern but the thing is, as Adam said, it's not just that. Look at me, sure I could cast a little holy as well but it also amplified my arcane somehow and that is still there. I'm not too worried about elves but certain other humans, like that old man, could jump at the chance if they learn about it."

Mike thought out loud, "Well that's not something we needed, so ideally we need to try and keep the details a secret as much as possible,

assuming that is something that can be done I mean a few people know the details already right?"

Alex wondered on that, "I don't think we need to worry about it as much as I'm making it out to be. Lithius and some of the dwarves, Kilor in particular, probably know more than anyone else, but those don't matter as much if at all. Catherine and Jessica know that we can still heal and I'm sure that Chaos partly mentioned the reason why, but to go from thinking that can be transferred over only to gain a fraction of a healing spell and possibly a shield is a lot of effort for possibly little gain." She then took a moment to get some strength back before continuing, "Now my bonus so to speak is really what needs to stay under wraps as that will attract a larger group of people that would take the chance, as much as it saddens me to say about my fellow mages. So again let's not worry too much about it, as Rosa said, we were already targets in a way... it's just let try and make us less appealing ones."

Mike agreed with her logic, "Looking at it that way, it's less worrisome but if possible let find if anything that was leftover in this tower just in case."

Alex suddenly slumped, "We are in a tower... with lots of stairs..."

Adam chuckled at that one as his hatred of towers was well known, "If you want..." He then turned around and pointed at his back. Alex smiled at that, "Thank Adam, really, but just in case, seeing as you can still track, it may be better for you not to have me on your back."

Mike then made his way in front of her then bent down, "Makes sense, so because of that Adam and Anna will take point with Iris behind them and Rosamia and me will take the back. Anna's and my enchantment are theoretically the same so taking

me out will make little difference." The plan made sense and with that Alex got on Mike's back and the climb of the tower started.

After a while they had run into no other person, there had been some traps here and there but they were pretty minor and mostly where present as a trigger to warn the others of intruders more than hurt. This lack of defense was assumed because of the high level of protections that had been placed outside, still eventually and near the top they ran into what looked like a very familiar setting.

Anna turned to the others, "This is almost the same as what we saw at Bernard's tower." Iris checked it out more, "It's more than that, the look, architecture and active spells are the same too."

"Bet Bernard would not like to learn that one, but it also means that these people have really been planning."

Mike tilted his head, "Should we investigate?"

Alex slowly nodded her head, "No, Adam right, this was made as a stage for them to practice, let keep going."

The next level up was an open floor with a large table and chairs and from the looks of it seemed to be a regular dining room. Still as they made their way up Anna smelled something funny she quickly turned to Adam to confirm. "Yea I smell it too, something is burning."

This puzzled Iris, "But there is nothing there and I don't see anything magical here." She then pulled out her sword and moved into the room, it did not take long for her blade to hit something that was not visible. She looked at Alex who was suddenly worried, "Be careful, there is no telling what that old mad put in place."

While Iris focused, Adam and Anna stood next to her in a defensive stands. Eventually the dining

room motif disappeared and was replaced with a wall and a door much like what the previous floor had. With the illusion now gone they could now see a bit of smoke coming from under the door. Iris tried to hurry but at the same time needed to be careful as she had already ran into many counters while removing the illusion spell. Even more time passed but eventually she was confident and reached for the door. From the feel of it the door was not warm so reached for the handle and opened it.

Once opened more smoke escaped but with the fire mostly focused on a specific book case it was more than manageable but it was still growing and needed immediate attention. Quickly Iris magically snuffed out the flames without entering the room. As everyone waved the smoke around Alex smirked, "Now the fun part begins."

Iris suddenly knew what Alex was talking about as the whole room was protected. With her discouraged look Alex tried to encourage her. "Don't worry just get us in so that we can look around for now." Iris then took a deep breath and focused on the task at hand. Again it took a while but with the fire now out, they seemed to have the time to do so. She then walked in and mentioned to the other that they could too. "Just don't touch anything..."

As they looked around the room was pretty basic, you had a large book shelf that was mostly now burned, followed by others that was in a better condition. The middle had a small table that looked to be used for research and on the other end you had a small lab. Alex pointed at the lab and Mike made his way there. There you had a few tubes of blood, some beakers and a lot of notes on a spell of some sort. Alex looked at it more, "Yep that would have killed me..." She let out a small

sigh and then looked at Iris, "Can you destroy all of this?"

Iris made her way but then also saw that two pendants were also present plus a few other things from Alex. Understanding her hesitation Alex reiterated her request, "Get rid of it all. I'll have to let the others know that the pendant will need to change, thankfully ours is not in the pile so that is less work. Same goes for the gear, now that it could be known what magic I have on it I'll have to create new ones."

While Iris did what was told Adam pointed at everything else, "What will we do with all this? I don't think incinerating it will be the answer."

Anna answered that one, "Well at this time I think it safe to say that Astrum is safe for now, we could contact Lithius I'm sure he will want to know about this place as well considering the connection." There was a confused look on Alex's face so Anna explained, "From the looks of it the old man is called Marek. Lithius was charged to take care of him in the past because of things that he had done." She then paused for a bit but figured she would continue as she knew that Alex would want to know, but wondered if now was the right time for it. "This person was also on the list to join the Council at the time." Instantly Mike felt Alex tighten her grip on him as Anna gave her the news.

Alex said nothing for a while and when it looked like Iris was almost done she finally commented, "Well in that case we can let him deal with this." She then turned to the others, "Also I'm reeeeeeally hungry and I want a bath and so many other things..."

Even Adam knew that she had dodged the comment in a way but as with the others he did nothing and then Iris made her way back to them. "Well I'm done and I have no objections following

that plan." With Alex simply resting her head on Mike back he figured that he would give the order. "Let's contact Lithius then and when he gets here then we can take our leave and give Alexandria the much needed rest she needs."

It took some time as Lithius did not come alone, as he was accompanied by Kilor and Theral one of the other elf on the Council. Once they were all updated, the Lights Templar made their way back to Astrum.

A few days passed and Mike and Anna where making their way to Alex's house when they passed Iris. "What bring you here? Lithius is still going over the materials that were found so we don't have any news."

Anna shook her head, "No this has nothing to do with that, it's more about what Rosa told us and also what we saw when Alex was rescued." Mike then looked at Iris, "How is she right now?"

"She's fine, while Rosa did warn her about eating too much that was ignored and there was a small issue, but after she was fine. I'm on my way to get more supplies actually..." She then stopped as the look on their faces was of one that was not buying it, Iris then took a moment and then tried again. "She was captures for a few days and she is very strong so maybe she is able to bounce back that fast. I mean right now she's the same Alex I know. I did ask and she keeps telling me that it's alright now that she's back home..." Now the look on their faces was one of concern, in a way she was making it worse and part of her knew why. She then sighed heavily, "...I may not want to admit it but I wonder as well, I know I do, but maybe with more time..."

"They are currently hurt and they lost a base

of operation but we all know that this has been going for a while so much so that this is probably not even a setback for them. Their next strike will probably be their full one and we will need all our focus in order to get ahead."

Iris knew that he was not trying to be cruel about this but part of her still hurt. Its then that Anna reached out, "Hey, don't worry, your right Alex is strong it will all be fine." Iris forced a smile and nodded, "...Is it okay if I leave it off to you?" Anna gave her a warm smile, "Perfectly fine, you have done more than enough already with the burden that you had to put up with during the last few days."

"It was not all a burden, I mean I needed to do something so; still I get your point... I think that I'll go visit Rosa and Adam for a while before I go get those supplies." She then started to leave them as they turned and made their way to their house. A part of Iris was worried but another part was not. Those two had already dealt with a lot of personal issues so Alex would be in good hands.

When they knocked on the door it took a long while for Alex to answer and let them in, "Sorry about that I was just moving some books around. Rosa cleaned up and certain things are in the proper order but others not so much." She then turned to them, "I also have nothing from Lithius so..."

It's then that Alexandria froze as Mike move next to her and then wrapped his arms around her, "We are so sorry for what happened to you. I am so sorry that I was not able to stop him."

Alex was lost, "... Wha, What are you talking? It's not your fault that happened."

Its then that Anna joined in as well and from there they tightened their hold her a bit more. Once again she felt trapped and could not move

but this was different then the last time, so much different, still it did bring back the memories that she was trying to lock away.

"Guys I'm fine, it's all good."

"We are so very sorry that our idea failed you, please forgive us."

"... but ... there is nothing to ... forgive... there was nothing else that you could do..." She then swallowed her words, "Really I'll be fine..." Then she felt tears running down her cheeks, she buried her face in their chests to hide it but they would not stop. "...Why,why,why!!!"

Alex then lifted her head, "I know it was only for a few days, which is nothing compared to her or what happened to you, but being trapped without being able to move." She was now in full tears, "Then when I had to self-desecrate myself I just felt so low..." She then lowered her head, "But the worst I think is when the end came and I was about to do whatever I needed to do to make sure his plan failed... while I was scared part of me, was..."

She stopped but then Anna urged her to continue, "It's alright, say it even if you don't feel that way now or even if you still do."

"... part of me was sad and angry with both of you that you had not made it in time..." Alex could not hold it back anymore, "But I know that's crazy, I love you both and I know you love me back." She then took a moment to be able to continue, "Still knowing that... I ... I'm so sorry too guys... how could I think that?"

They both had a sad forced smile, "its okay to think that, it really is and it's even more of a reason for us to apologize." They both closed their eyes, "So please with that, please accept our apology."

Alexandria then forcefully freed her arms and

then wrapped them around both of them, "Of course I will..."

It took a while but eventually the emotions started to return to normal and Alex and Anna were now sitting on the couch while Mike offered them both something to drink. Alexandria was a bit lost in thought as she looked at her cup of hot chocolate, "I told myself I did not want to talk about it because I wanted to put a brave face for Iris, as there is no way that this was easy on her. But I guess in the end I was simply lying to myself as I did not want to face my ugly thoughts."

Anna thought about that, "Hmm, maybe but don't necessarily think that your reasons to reassure Iris was purely for that."

Mike then agreed, "It makes sense that part of you would never want her to see you like that, you know it would hurt her too much so it probably made it that more easier to convince yourself." He then shrugged a bit, "And I know a fair deal about that."

Anna then had a half smile, "He's practically a master..." When the attempt at humor failed they saw that once again she was in deep thought.

"... I think that maybe I'm running away from something else as well." She had both of their full attention after a comment like that and it did not surprise her at all and that reassurance made her smile. "This has to do with my mom, it seems that maybe I've been lied too." She then closed her eyes for a bit and then took a deep breath and then turned to Mike, "Can I ask you a favor?"

"Of course, whatever you need."

"Can we get everyone together and meet up with Lithius, there is a question I need to ask him and while personal it's probably going to be best if everyone is present to hear it and its answer."

Mike wondered but was not going to argue, "If

you are sure, I'll make the arrangement for tomorrow morning."

Once again she looked at her cup of hot chocolate, "Yea I'm sure, and tomorrow sound good."

Suddenly she quickly raised her head, "Wait, where is Iris in all this? She should have been back by now..." She then looked at both of them, "I mean I'm starting to get hungry again."

They both chuckled and both felt relived, there was still a while to go but she would be fine.

Chapter 7

Alexandria and the others entered the Council room, out of habit she continued to her old spot and stood there as the others waited where they had been told too last time they had been in the room. There was a chuckle from Adam and simple smiles from the others as they all saw what she had done. Standing there in the old room Alex also smiled a bit, it had not changed since the last time. The room still had no windows and save for the stone guardians and the large sphere in the middle there was nothing else in it.

"So do you miss it?"

Alex turned to Rosamia, "I don't know, I guess part of me does as for a long time this is what I was aiming for. But even if part of me does miss it, this still does not feel where I belong."

Before she could elaborate Lithius came in and made his way to where Solanar used to be, he made no comment on Alex's current position.

"Thank you for meeting me here, we are still in the process of going over what you found at the tower and I told the others that if they found something to immediately come and get me and this location made it easier to do so." Lithius showed very little emotions as most elves that had lived a long time, not so much with the younger ones as Alex had experienced, but this time she could see that his attention was elsewhere. "Now Mike mentioned that it had to do with your parents, but what do you wish to know that you don't already?"

Alex looked at the others and she saw two small nods of encouragement from Anna and Mike and with that she took a deep breath to clear her

mind and started to answer his question. "I was told that this Marek was a candidate to be in the Council, which would mean that in theory he would have been first and not my dad. Now as much as I would like to know more about that, in reality I simply want to confirm something that was said while I was captured." While the others on her team, excluding Anna and Mike, were confused at her statement Lithius was not, instead he was very focused on her and also on the next words that came out of her mouth. "I want to know what really happened to my mom and you're the only person I trust to tell me the truth."

Lithius did not immediately answer but his shoulders did slump like a new weight had just been placed on them. This more than anything worried Alex, "Oh no, so you're saying that what he said was true after all?"

Iris then suddenly jumped in, "What do you mean? Your mother died due to illness." That statement simply shocked Rosamia as she could not remember the last person that had died from an illness, especially back then from a family that should have been able to afford any cure that the Order could have given.

Alex slowly nodded, "I thought so to, but while he had me his first taunt was the fact that I was the daughter of the mother he had killed. I did not want to believe it at the time but..." She then looked at Anna and Mike, "Recently I confronted an ugliness inside of me that I wanted to ignore and that led me to wonder about this one. If I'm really honest I always wondered on it, even with the reason that had been given, as to why she could not be healed with holy magic. That said I always told myself that I had no reason to question it, but now I wonder if I simply never wanted to question it as I simply did not want to believe that my father

had lied to me about this."

She then looked at Lithius with sad eyes, "So why did he lie?"

Lithius thought about it for a long time, "...Yes he did lie and so did I about this, but at the time you were barley two years old and when you were older things got complicated and then your own life, as you must admit, also got very complicated. The right time never occurred for Richard to tell you as it was never his plan not to."

Alex slowly nodded, "Hmm, well I know that now is also not the right time and while I do understand that, I must insist. I want to know, please tell me."

"You are correct, now is not a good time, but I will oblige you none the less. Also this and your other question are linked so this will help clear out everything."

He took a deep breath and started his story.

"We must deal with this Solanar as he has become a problem that cannot be ignored now."

The topic had been debated for days but with the new evidence that had been found an emergency meeting had been called and the decision had been made with a majority vote by the members of the Council. Solanar hated these moments and while it had not been the first, he wished that it would be the last.

"I agree with the decision made." With that he turned to Lithius, "Can I leave the matter in your hands to clean up?" Before he could answer Solanar added a condition to the mission, "Assuming the others agree as well, if there is no resistance when you find him bring him back here for questioning... maybe there is a point of view that we simply do not know or have yet to see for

his actions."

There was a quick mumbling between the other members at this new stipulation but it took no time for Taeral to confirm, "We all agree with this condition, there is no need for bloodshed then that path should always be considered."

Solanar nodded at those wise words, "Excellent, then with that..." He then stopped as Taeral made a motion to speak once again.

"Should we also not discuss the matter of the empty spot in the Council? I know that your plan was to include a human and we all agreed with the idea and reasons for it but no other human but Marek passed the tests leaving no other candidate. Should we refocus our efforts on our own race once again and try again next time?"

This was not something Solanar wanted to do, while it was true that only Marek had passed and was clearly no longer a candidate he did not want to put an elf in the position at this time. If that was done the next opportunity would be hundreds of years from now which could derail his plans. "I do agree that there are currently no other human candidate, but I would like to resolve this matter first before we move to this. Once this is concluded then we can look to see if this process had any cause in this incident as if it did then this matter would need to be discussed in further details."

Taeral instantly agreed, "Very true, I apologize for bringing it up." and with that the meeting was adjourned leaving Lithius to start his new duty.

A few days had passed and currently Lithius was at the main library in Astrum going over a few details for his next attempt at finding Marek. So far his search had returned nothing conclusive and maybe that growing frustration was what had made him change his research location to the library for a change of pace from his private room.

Hours had passed and he noticed that a human had been looking at the piles of books that had formed around his table. It could be that this man needed one of them for his own research but did not want to ask given his position in Astrum, still he had been moving around his location for the past little while which had started to annoy him a bit.

"Can I help you?"

The man was normal height and had brown hair and a clean full beard and as soon as Lithius had asked the question a warm smile appeared on his face. "Actually, and maybe this is presumptuous of me, but I was thinking that maybe I could be of assistance to you." Before Lithius could scoff at the idea he continued, "Given the books that you have around the table I'm assuming that you are looking for someone? I'm not snooping or anything it's just that I find it an interesting coincidence that most of these books are the ones that I recently returned myself due to a side project that I invested a lot of time in, and so because of that it made me wonder."

"Did you find who you were looking for?"

The man scratched his beard, "Well thankfully she has not gone missing yet. I'm a father of a young daughter, she one year and half old now, and recently both my wife and myself had moments where she simply disappeared. We did not think anything of it but there was this one time where I was helping her with one of her shield spells and after a while when we looked around we saw that somehow our little adventurer had found a way out of the shield which should have been impossible."

Lithius was wary as to where this was going. "I hope to assume that you do not think that she was able to break the spell at that age?"

The man chuckled, "No, no..." he then thought about it for a second, "Well I must admit that I did wonder that for a split second but that's impossible, no we assumed that there was a crack in the shield spell and that somehow our little one found it out of pure luck."

Lithius was relieved, too many times he had seem human boast about their abilities or of those of their children as he thought of those moments the man continued his tale. "It's at that point that I suddenly became a very worried parent as it seems that she is already making it a habit of moving around, and so I fear that a day may come where I need to find her magically. Over protective I know but something I needed to research none the less."

Going over the books that were on his table this last comment made him wonder, "Parenting aside, these spells are very advanced and many are very specific on ways to counter trying not to be found. Are you planning on having that many issues in the future with your daughter?"

The man then chuckled, "Oh dear I hope not, no that level of research is an issue I have that I tend to go overboard when a new learning experience comes around, you never know what could come in handy and also I enjoy the learning and discovery aspect of it. I mean was this place not built for just that?"

Given his current task and what the man had just said gave Lithius a bit of a pause, "Hmm, indeed."

The man then bowed his head, "Well I'm sorry it seems that I may have bored you with a family story there, I must apologize as it's something that I have been doing quite a bit in the last year and a half. I shall leave you to your work and I am sorry that I have taken up your time."

As the man turned Lithius looked at the books

in front of him, he had originally come here for a change of pace so why not continue with this experiment. "Wait, what if I told you that I'm looking for someone that does not want to be found and after going over everything here and more that he still cannot be found. What would be your next step?"

The man then made his way back to the table and this time took a seat and thought about the question that had been asked. After a long while the man looked at the books on the table and then back at Lithius, "Personally I found that these books all had a big weakness in common, it assumes that you know, or have an idea, on a general location where the person is hiding and so this creates a blank spot for the caster, as his target could be in a location that he did not think about and so the spells will never reveal him."

This had been the same conclusion that Lithius had come to as well but then the man asked a question that caught him of guard. "Given your abilities and that I am assuming that you still have not found your target it makes me wonder if this person is truly hiding."

"Given his current situation he has too."

The person in front of him was not convinced, "Does he? Has he made no moves other then hiding and trying not to be found?"

There was no way that Lithius could give him the details but he was right in thinking that Marek had not been hiding only, if he had then he would not have such as a harsh sentence on him. "I can tell you that he has been in contact with others."

"Hmm, then I would focus my search on towns, villages and cities more so then forests, caves and mountains."

"Why do you say this?"

"A person trying to not be found will avoid

everyone as much as possible, sometime this cannot be done but assuming that this person is capable of hiding himself from the regular means of location magic then it assumes a certain level of skill, skill that would allow him to survive without others. If that is a good assumption then the question comes up of why be in contact with others then? Contact with others means that this person has another priority more important than hiding."

Marek must know that with the crimes he has done that the Council would be after him, it had been assumed that his priority would be to hid but it was true that the crimes still continued. This gave Lithius much to think about.

"I must thank you for your help after all..." he then paused for a second, "What is your name by the way, I don't recall you introducing yourself."

Instantly the man was humiliated at his own actions, "I am terribly sorry, my name is Richard. I've been in Astrum for many years now, also my wife that I mentioned is named Johanna and my little one is Alexandria." He then caught himself, "I think I may have gone overboard there, I apologize again."

The name of Johanna and shield spells was actually familiar to Lithius as the Council was thinking about using her research for something else, but this Richard person was unknown to him which made him wonder. "Can I ask you an unrelated question?"

When Richard nodded in agreement he continued, "What is arcane magic to you?"

The question caught him totally of guard and once again he took his time before he answered. "That is a difficult question to answer; to me it's something that fascinates me as it allows us to do wondrous things and while a great deal of us uses it every day there is so much that we don't know or

understand and yet it's everywhere and more or less accessible to all. By nature, I'm a very curious person and its constant puzzles and challenges associated with it always keep me interested and wondering what next new thing I will encounter from it." He then thought about it more and then smiled, "I'm sorry maybe that's not the answer you where looking for, but it's how I feel about it."

"It's not a bad answer, no worries and thank you for indulging in my curiosity." Richard then stood and bowed again, "The pleasure was all mine." having no other questions the man then left leaving Lithius to think about many other things.

Later that night Solanar paid Lithius a visit at his private study, "How is your progress?"

Currently Lithius was looking at a few papers, "I should have his location very shortly."

Solanar then sat down, "That was quicker than expected."

Lithius nodded, "Yes, but the credit does not go solely to me." He then passed the papers he had in his hands to Solanar, "This human helped me out."

Solanar looked at the record sheet of this human, "Hmm, now I know that you would not share the details of your mission to anyone outside of the Council so I will not ask how this human helped you but I will ask why you are so fascinated."

"His record is amazing and yet he is unknown, I also read many papers that he produced and they ranged from very good to excellent on new theories or new details and applications on well known spells. What truly fascinates me is from the looks of it be it advance or simple seems to make little difference to him. I also wonder if that is why he has been so unknown in a way."

Reading the list of papers produced, Solanar

slowly nodded. "Many times the attention is put on something that has a grander impact or simply impressed a large amount of people, these results would not achieve those goals." He then put the papers down, "But in the end grand and impressive is not our only goal here." Solanar was curious as well, "Where do you plan to go with this?"

"Hmm, this person is qualified to be a candidate or at least be tested and yet his name was never mentioned. I wish to learn why that is and depending on that answer wish to ask for permission to ask for his help with this task."

Solanar instantly took a very deep breath, "I advice heavy caution with this plan of yours, we still don't know the reasons for Marek's actions and brining in someone like him could indirectly and unknowing help his cause."

"True, but it could also help your cause as well. I know that you want a human in the ranks of the Council as I can see your reasoning that our current path has become too ridged as the centuries have passed. Today I had an interesting experience that only served to strengthen that and also part of me hopes that given this unfortunate circumstance that something good can come of it."

Solanar thought about it as he was right about what he had said, but also he had demonstrated something else that pleased him. The task had been given to Lithius on purpose and Solanar now was very curious to see where this new path would lead him and possibly the others in the long run. "I give you permission to disclose what you think is necessary and follow with your plan. But be warned that you will share equal blame if an issue would happen because of this."

Lithius understood the consequences. "Thank you, I will keep that in mind as I move forward with the task given."

The next day Richard was in Lithius private office. "Do you need more help with this missing person?"

"No, actually I had a few personal questions that I wanted to ask you."

"By all means ask away."

He did not seem bothered at all by the prospect which was a good first step. "You have heard about the open position on the Council correct?"

"Yes I have, and I had the intension of trying but then my wife gave me the news and we both feared that the timing of it could be an issue."

A small frown appeared on Lithius, "And so you abandoned your goals and possible future here for your daughter?"

He quickly disagreed with that, "No I did not. As mentioned yesterday, magic is everywhere and while being here helps my research, and while I'm sure that being a part of the Council would also help this, it is in no way is a mandatory thing in order for me to learn and discover."

Now Lithius was truly puzzled, "True it's not but it does allow many opportunities... still it makes me wonder what a position on the Council means to you given your comment?"

Richard had to take a moment on this one as he wanted to make sure his answer did not cause any disrespect. "A position on the Council to me would be a large responsibility and great honor but more importantly it would allow me a way to give back to this city that has helped me and many others in the past and also in the future. It's true that the position does also come with access to much knowledge and power and while that cannot be ignored it also can't be the driving factor for seeking it. As I fear that that type of motivation

would only results in a selfish and empty journey."

His answers where so different then Marek's, somehow he needed to convince him to apply to the empty seat for the Council as something told him that this is the exact person that Solanar had been looking for. But then Richard asked a question that not only shifted Lithius train of thought but also left him worried.

"You're going after the mage Marek? That's who you where trying to find right?"

Without showing any of his internal concerns he answered with a question of his own, "Why do you think that?"

Richard stroked his beard, "Well I started to wonder about whom you could possibly be looking for and eventually I gave up on the idea as the list was starting to get too large. But when you asked those Council questions it shrank that list considerably; also add to that the fact that Marek has not been seen in Astrum for a while now it made it a bit obvious."

The logic was sound, but it was clear that Lithius had made a misstep with his actions. "What do you know of the situation?"

"Not much, just that he is gone. I never meet him in person and from what I know the only reason his name is known is because it seems that he passed the Council test and is now a candidate. When someone like that suddenly disappears people do start talking even if they know nothing of them." He then paused, "I know that I may be overstepping my bounds but if I can help I want to."

There was no reason for his help as Lithius was sure that he could handle a human mage even with Marek's capabilities, but rumors was not something that the Council had put a lot of weight on. Secrecy was a part of the test but at some

point, especially when a candidate was chosen, things would get known. Assuming this mission goes as expected and not as hoped then Marek will never come back and a new candidate will need to be chosen, human or elf, which will cause a discussion on what happened. The real truth would probably never be revealed but something would and if an elf was chosen, how would that be looked at by the human portion of Astrum? Solanar had been right in pausing the discussions for later as there were many more factors to take in after this situation was resolved.

Still that problem was for later and now Lithius had an issue with the matter of Richard having figured it out, even if he did deny it there was no way that he would believe him. Then a thought popped in his head, *'If a human was also present during the fight with Marek assuming it goes that way, especially a human as Richard who has no connection to us more so then anyone else, it could give us more options in order to deal with the situation afterwards.'*

"Your help could be used, but before I go in the details I must ask you not to talk about any of this to anyone else until you are told that you can. Can you do this?" The hesitation he saw on Richard confused Lithius as he had expected him to readily accept.

"...I'm sorry about this but I need an exception to that rule." Very quickly he explained himself before Lithius could answer, "Assuming I am correct, if the help I am to give you can put me in a life or death situation then I need to explain something to my wife. Pass that no one will know and the same will go for her. And also knowing that it's a possibility I still wish to help if I can, but I simply can't do that without her knowing." He then lowered his head a bit, "Again I am sorry."

This meeting was not going as planned at all but even with this request what did it accomplish by not telling him anything versus the benefit of other options being available in the future. "I am willing to accept your condition and with that I assume that we have an agreement." Then when Richard did readily agree he reached out for a stack of paper and handed it to him.

"We are looking for Marek, you are correct. For a while it has been discovered that thefts of books had been happening a lot of late, and recently it was discovered that artifacts or power have also been disappearing. When it as found out that Marek had use his candidature to be able to take those things he was instantly removed, but when the time came to get the items back he disappeared."

Lithius took a bit of a pause, "Now while those actions are grave it's the next ones that were discovered that worsen his sentence. As you probably know books, items and other supplies come and go from Astrum via many means. It's obvious to figure out that the more important the item the more protected the mode of transportation is, that said during his candidature it seems that Marek learned of a few of those means and has been attacking them. Again while this offence is serious it is still not the reason for his sentence as that falls unto his means of attacking. We have discovered that he is using people that fail to get into Astrum in the promise of giving them power that we would not if they follow him. We have also figured out that his recruitment also extends to children or what you call teenagers."

He then focused his gaze on Richard, "With those actions we have no choice but to find him and stop him. That is the task I have been given, if you still wish to help know that you would

accompany me in a mission that will probably involve killing him. Now I have been told that if he comes in quietly that I should do so."

Given the lengths that this person had already passed there was no way that he would simply give up. Richard looked at the pile of papers and saw that it contained the informational evidence of what Lithius had just told him about and also a quick biography on Marek. From the looks of it the Council had captured humans as young as twelve that had participated in one form or another during the attacks. It was also seen that in order to prevent them from being led directly back to him a spell was put on them to shield his location, while that made him curious on the spell used the whole thing also disgusted Richard.

He thought about it for a longer while but eventually he raised his head, "If you will have me I wish to accompany in order to help with your mission, however it ends... He needs to be stopped somehow."

Lithius slowly nodded, "He does, we would rather not go to those measures but there are little options left. There are only a few possible locations left due to the help that you already gave me and so I should have the place he is hiding before the end of the day. My plan was to leave tomorrow morning, as I want to face him as open as I can in order to not provoke him but at the same time would like to limit the potential people that could be involved given the locations left."

"That sounds good, when or where should I meet you in order to accompany you?"

"I will send you a communication with the information when the time comes." Seeing the gloomy look on Richard face Lithius had to ask, "Are you sure wish to do so?"

Slowly Richard nodded and then stood up,

"Yes I do, I'm not looking forward to it, but if there is no other way then my non participation will not change the outcome, but if I do maybe I can help this already bad situation somehow and that makes it worth trying."

Lithius also stood and then showed him to the door, "Let us hope that is the case."

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The next morning Lithius was waiting at the teleportation circle that was mysteriously missing the typical guards that were normally present. It had not taken long for Richard to show up after the message had been sent. The issue that had Lithius worried was that he was not alone.

Immediately they both bowed their heads as they got close and the long hair blond woman started taking, "I know that you gave him permission, and I thank you for that, but I cannot simply stand by and let him go in this situation without me accompanying him. I truly apologize for my rude behaviors and rash actions." She then looked up and had a sheepish smile, "That said I am really good in defense spells and can be of service."

This was really not going as planned, Lithius wondered if Solanar would chastise him or simply laugh at him given how things had turned out. The simplest answer to this situation was to turn them both away, but doing so still did not help the reasoning he had come up with when he had told him about the situation. But this extra person while capable would still be his responsibility if he did accept.

"I take it that you are Johanna?"

Now standing she nodded, "I am."

"I also take it that your daughter is in safe hands currently?"

There was no hesitation, "Of course."

There was no hiding the fact that he was not happy about the situation but also he was pressed for time as Marek could move at anytime. Lithius then stepped in the teleportation circle, "Fine... Our destination is Navis, once we get there follow my lead."

They both nodded in agreement and then joined in on the teleport spell to get them to the Navis teleportation circle.

Once they arrived, Lithius made his way down the street that even at this time was busy but thankfully nowhere near congested.

"It's been a while since we have been here."

Richard agreed with that, "Well we have been busy with Alexandria and all that, plus let's not forget about your research."

Johanna was stunned, "My research, what about yours? I've see you, you know, when you are rocking little Alex to sleep you read your books out loud to her... but those aren't children stories you read her."

He quickly shrugged, "Bah, it's nothing at that age it's only about hearing not about the content, that said should you really be casting that particular stone my way?"

She acted insulted, "What are you implying?"

Lithius was suddenly worried about this child of theirs but also for other reasons, "Need I remind you why you are both here? And do I really need to tell you that we have already been discovered?"

Johanna instantly replied and was a bit embarrass, "Why yes, but I thought that was part of the plan?"

Now Lithius was confused and he did not hide it, "What plan?"

Richard then let out a quick chuckle, "Ah you see I did not have time to tell him about it..."

Johanna wanted to slap him for that one but she held it in, "I will apologize then as I figured that you knew. We figured that we would be spotted no matter what we did and because of that thought that we would play at having our guard down by having this fake verbal spat. Eventually they would come at us by the logic of us not taking them seriously or them simply thinking that they had the upper hand."

Richard then continued, "Once taken down I figured that maybe we could figure out his exact location, I'm assuming that you don't have that at this time."

He now understood the plan and it was a good one, reckless but typical of humans, still he was correct on the location aspect of it. "Ah, then it is I that will apologize, please continue while I lead on."

Johanna nervously looked at Lithius, "Just to clarify most if not all of the things that we say are not true at all... well maybe the part that he reads her magic books while she falls asleep but nothing else."

"Ah now, that hurts..." and so they fake bickering continued but as Lithius wondered if it was truly all made up, he lead them to less and less populated sections of the city. A short time after that they suddenly all stopped as it seemed that the plan had taken effect.

Three mages appeared in front of them, "You are making this very easy."

Johanna did not miss a beat and then planted her hand on the ground, as she touched it a wave appeared in front of the three knocking them all in the stomach. The blow quickly canceled their spells. "You took the words out of my mouth." She then looked at Richard, "Was that enough time?"

He simply smiled and then concluded his own spell. Three fist size balls of air made it to their

target and hit them squared on the chest. The mages did their best but after that hit they quickly fell on the ground unconscious.

Lithius was impressed, "A solid shield spell to knock them up and a strong force of air to the solar plexus in order to knock them out. I am impressed."

Richard bowed in respect, "Many thanks."

"Ah Hun, while I'm equally happy about the praise maybe we should hurry it up and tie them up before they wake up."

"Oh, yes, indeed."

It did not take long for them to tie them up and move them to a even less visible location, as they did so Lithius put them under a sleep spell to giving them even more time. When that was all done he picked one of them at random and kneeled in front of him and then put his hand on his face. Johanna got close to Richard, "What is he doing? Do you know?"

Richard hesitated, "I'm assuming he is removing the block on their memories in order to find his location. I'm figuring that a person like Marek never really intended them to return but to simply stall or harm us in some way." He then thought about it more, "Still I looked into it and after everything I could not find a spell that did that, block your memory that you would forget permanently, there always seems to be a way to magically undo it but it may take time so..."

He stopped his pondering as Lithius finished whatever he was doing, "You are correct, in theory the spell that he is using simply speed up and targets the process that a person forgets over time. Like trying to remember what you did on your first birthday. It's not perfect as some people have a better time remembering but most simply forget. The longer the time the spell has to work the more

the memory is pushed, so for the ones that had been captured the memory was very deep." He then stood, "Not so much with these it seems." He then looked at both of them, "This will be your last chance, I know where to find him and will be going there directly."

Johanna was the first to speak, "No worries we are both with you on this until the very end. Lead the way." He nodded at the couple and then made his way to the location that he had pulled from the mages head.

Eventually he led them to a section near the docks of the city and then where most of the storehouse where. "It should be the one up ahead, be on guard."

He did not have to say it as even from where they where they could see that there was one particular store house that had large rock creatures around it was accompanied by mages as well. "I will take care the mages, if you can, please take care the golems."

They were going to answer but already they were attacked by fireballs being launches at them, Johanna erected an arcane shield to protect them and then pulled out her staff to prepared herself to fight the four golems that where now approaching them. Richard put his dagger away, "I'll take half of them and then you take the others?"

She nodded, "Sound fair."

He quickly casted a quick bolt of energy at two of them to get their attention, as they landed it had then indented effect of drawing their attention leaving the others for his wife to deal with.

Johanna prepared herself as she waited for the golems to approach. Their slowness gave her all the time she needed and when they finally got close enough she took her staff and in a trust maneuver hit the golem in the chest. The blow did

very little but then suddenly energy formed at the tip of the staff and then a fist size silo pierced through the chest of the golem. As it fell to piece on the ground Johanna spun around and used the momentum in an overhead attack on the other approaching golem. The staff was already magically extended using a force shield around itself at the tip causing it to double in size and also drastically increasing its strength and diameter. The blow landed hard on the head of the creature shattering it causing the whole thing to start to crumble to pieces.

She then looked at Richard who was simply dodging the blows of the golems. "This is not the time to study honey."

"Tsk, tsk, there is always time to learn something new. Still I must say I'm not impressed by these constructions at all." He then slapped his empty hand on the side of one the creature and then did the same thing on the other. It only took seconds for the magic transferred to take effect and for the two to fall into little pieces. "They are too easily shattered by a deconstruction spell."

Now with their targets done they joined up and looked at Lithius who appeared to have stopped his advance as the three mages prepared a series of spells to throw at him. "He should be fine right?" Johanna shrugged, "I would think so."

Before they could question it more, Lithius used his feet to mark the ground around him and with his hands started to prepare something else. Richard was stunned, "Is he casting two spells at once?"

Johanna looked more closely, "In a way yes but not really, it seems that he prepared the first spell that took longer with his hands and then used his feet to cast the quicker one, once done he continued with the slower. Wait, he casted an

arcane shield that quickly with his feet?!?"

They could simply look to see the fireballs thrown at him by the attacking mages be deflected by the shield, which seemed strong enough to protect him from a few more blows. Then his slower spell took effect and he disappeared only to reappear next to the mages. His sudden appearance surprised all of them giving him the time to power his fist with lighting magic and hit each of them with a blow to the chest. As they fell, he once again disappeared to reappear where he had started. They both ran to him, "That was amazing, was that a teleport spell?"

He shook his head, "No it's a lower version of the spell that allows you to go to a place where you can see but once there you only have a few second before the spell take you back to where you started. It's foolhardy to use against an enemy as it put you in melee against them but if used correctly against an unprepared foe it can be very useful."

While Richard was lost in thought Johanna took his hand to get him out of it, "Well I'm impressed." She then looked at the warehouse, "I take it that he is in there?"

Lithius nodded, "From what I saw yes. Again please be careful there are a lot of strong magic protecting this place."

"A strong shield against arcane, another against detection and many others from the looks of it." Richard slowly nodded, "Your right Johanna, I see them as well, I guess he has been here a while in order to prepare as much as he has."

Lithius got close to the door, "Even more reasons to be on guard." He quickly stopped to remove some protections spell that had been put on the door itself and then entered.

The inside was as would be expected from a warehouse, which surprised all of them for some

reason. At the entrance you had a few empty caravans deeper in you had tones of crates. Some large ones by themselves and many other stacked on top of each and the other. What was more surprising was the figure at the end, who was simply standing and waiting.

"I'm surprised that you did not come alone, I expected only one of you to come. Did you think me that much of a challenge?"

"They chose to help me with this task given the crimes that you have committed Merak."

The man slowly nodded his head, "I'm still not convinced as I'm stunned that you even told them about me and what I was doing."

Johanna then jumped in, "Why do this at all?"

He seemed disappointed, "You don't understand the amount of power they hide from us humans. I've seen it with my own eye and I simply could not take it. It's like they make sure that we always stay many steps below them so that they can keep their superiority."

"Is that what you preach to all that come to you? While at the same time lording over them yourself and abusing them with your magic?"

Now he was frustrated, "I need the power you see, to protect us from them if need be. Once we are on equal footing then things will be different."

Richard simply thought that this was rubbish, "Power without understanding its source is no power at all and in the end simply is something that wields you and not the other way around."

"You both know nothing, knowledge and understanding how to cast the spell give you all you need and in turn this give you control and then the power needed. Without it you are simply at the mercy of others already with power. When I was finally invited to the Council, I thought as you both did but then my eyes were then opened at the

large gap between the two races. You should be on my side instead of his as there could come a time where they could get bored of us and simply cast us all out. Then what would you do?"

"... Simply stupid..." Johanna slowly nodded her head, "What would we do, we would move and then continue our own research. How does being kicked out of Astrum strip us of our magic? But even then, even if they somehow had a spell to do just that, more humans would be born and then it would continue from there. As my husband once said, magic is everywhere and we all have access to it poor or rich, human or elven nothing will change that."

Richard nodded in approval, "It's true and I know that deep down you know it too. I also assume that deep down all this is simply an excuse, a fear that you yell to all to try and justify your own quest for power. This never had anything to do with inequality as you have already proven with your own actions on how you wield the power that you already have at your hands."

Marek was done with these two, "Lithius it seems that you have found some perfect sheep to follow you."

While Lithius disagreed with the comparison he did agree they were perfect in a way. Still that was not the matter at hand, "I was ordered to give you a chance to bring you back to Astrum assuming you came willingly and peacefully."

Marek chuckled, "That was never going to happen." As he said the words the large creates exploded and large golems appeared from inside of them, all in all there were six on each side.

Lithius did not take his eyes off Marek, "Can you two handle the golems again while I deal with him." Their answer was confirmed as each took a side and started casting.

Johanna once again focused on a variation of a shield spell on the tip of her staff and went on the attack, while Richard focused on the deconstruction spell as his primary weapon.

Lithius slowly approached his target. It was safe to assume that Marek had many armor spells around himself and he figured that he would assume the same. This is why he was not surprise when he saw his foot move on the ground, which activated a spell that took the broken fragments of the crates and flung them at him. His armor would protect him from energy but not physical, so as a defense Lithius used the ground and erected a wall that covered all but his front.

As the wall took the hits he prepared another spell. By making himself an easy target it was easy to figure out Marek next move as he threw a fireball spell at him. Before it could connect Lithius suddenly disappeared and then once again reappeared in next to him. He had figured that he had yet to see this one which allowed him this opening. Like the last time he threw a flurry of punched but this time did not bother with any attack spells. The first one hit his side and once it connected a spell did activated as it removed some of his magical armor that was put on him. Now understanding his goal, Marek dodged the other blow but was not quick enough to dodge the final one and more of his armor was destroyed. Now furious Marek casted a fire cone at Lithius but as the cone spewed its fire at his location Lithius instantly disappeared only to return to his previous one next to his now melted walls.

Richard was avoiding as best as he could the attacks of the golems and was very happy for their largeness as it prevented too many consecutive attacks on his smaller form. Able to reach another target he casted the deconstruction spell but as he

did a surprise appeared as when the rocks crumbled to pieces they left behind a small human. Richard suddenly realized what had happened.

"Johanna!!! Don't attack them..."

She heard her husband yell but it was too late and she smashed into another target but this time blood could be seen in the middle of the target. "There are people inside some of these things!" This frustrated her to no end, to think that a mage from Astrum would go that far. She quickly put away her staff and followed Richard method to disabled the golems. There was no way to know if they could be saved this way but they had a better chance then what she had been doing.

Lithius had to glance at what was happening behind him and there was no way to hide the shock of it. "How could you?"

Marek shrugged, "It was simple really, they wanted to learn how to cast a shell around their bodies and I simply obliged them. What they did not know is that if they took it too far it would affect their minds making them very malleable to magical commands."

Lithius was disgusted, "I cannot believe at the mistake that we made with you."

Marek pulled out a golden curved dagger, "Let's add it to the list of mistakes then as no shield that you have will protect you from this."

"While I recognize the poison dagger that you stole from Astrum, I fail to see how you will reach me with it."

While Lithius commented Marek was casting a spell and as he finished he quickly looked up at him. "A growing list of mistakes it seems. You showed me this spell too many times already so let me use that against you." He then disappeared, Lithius was impressed that he had been able to cast the spell only after seeing it twice at most but

then this had been one of the qualities that had been the focus of his candidature for Council member. Lithius prepared himself, and when Marek appeared next to him he grabbed his wrist that was instantly moving at his side in order to stab him with the dagger. Lithius twisted around and flipped Marek who landed flat on the ground, with little time to spare he used Marek confusion to fling the dagger far away from their location and then cast a full disenchant spell around him removing what left over armor he had. Before anything else could be done Marek instantly moved back to his starting position still prone on the ground.

Marek was furious but as he stood up Lithius erected a cage of lighting around him preventing his movement as much as possible. "It's like Richard said, you may be able to cast the spell and learn it quick but you don't seem to truly understand it and its weaknesses."

It's then that Richard and Johanna made their way to him, "It seems that of the full set of golems only three of them had actual people in them." Johanna felt so ashamed at her actions but continued the update that Richard had started, "Of which one of them is dead."

Lithius slowly nodded his head, "Do not blame yourself on that one, the fault lies with Marek and myself." He then turned to Marek, "And now to finish my task."

As Lithius started to cast a spell one of the persons that had been in the golem started to move and picked up a weapon that was close by. "...Defend the master... at all cost..." It started slowly but then the person started to sprint at Lithius direction. Johanna instantly reacted and used her staff to trip the person stopping his advance this also cause him to drop his weapon

that flung in her direction. She used her leg to deflect it aside but as she did she felt a sharp stab on the side of it, it seemed that she had miscalculated the angle and that the blade had nicked her a bit.

While she looked not too worried about the small scratch Lithius eyes where wide open, "NO!!!" This reaction scared Richard who instantly when to his wife, she was about to reassure them that it was okay but then suddenly she felt very woozy and very cold. As she started to drop to the ground Richard caught her and lowered her gently, he knew this was not good. "It's okay, It's going to be okay... I'll analyze the issue with magic and I'm sure Lithius can find a way around this, I mean he's an elven Council member not a mage like myself that dabbles around with anything he fancies." He then put his hand on the side of her face, it felt so cold, "...Don't worry okay..."

Johanna did not know what was going on, but did know that it was not good and that pretty soon it would all go dark. "...Take good care of our daughter okay, and tell her that I loved her very much..."

Tears where blocking Richard's vision, "Hey, hey don't say stuff like that you will be there with me thru it all okay." He started to cast the spell but it never materialized as he just could not focus. He then looked to his side and saw that Lithius was doing what he could not, "You can save her right?"

Lithius took a deep slow breath, "The dagger's magic only takes a scratch, and the poison in it is fatal..."

Richard instantly took his wife in his arms and hugged her with as much strength as he could. "Hon, wake up... Alex will want to see you when you get back." He paused to try and catch his breath as there was no way he could breath from

his nose so much that he was crying. "Come on Johanna, my sweet beautiful Johanna... Please wake up."

The raw emotions of Richard hurt Lithius and he had to turn away, his wife was dead and she had died saving him. He then looked at the lightning cage which had disappeared and Marek who was dashing to a portal that had been created.

Lithius did not waste the any time and raised his hand and instantly closed it making a fist, as he did the gate collapsed leaving Marek stunned. "How did you?"

"No more..." where the only words that Lithius said as he threw a fireball at Marek. From the looks of it Marek tried to move away but there was no time as the spell activated and a large explosion occurred. When the dust settled there was no Marek left and a large part of the floor had melted away from the shear heat of the spell.

It was finally over.

"Afterwards I reported everything that had happened to the Council, there were many questions and many concerns but in the end, with Richard's approval, the matter was mostly buried. News came out that Marek had betrayed us resulting in his expulsion, and that because of this a retest would occur for the Council position which everyone that had previously applied reapplied with the addition of you father. It's then that he rose to the top and got his candidature to finally get his full status as first human to join the Council."

When Lithius finished his story all eyes turned to Alexandria who had tears coming down her face but was saying nothing as Iris and Rosamia held her hands.

Once again Lithius felt the guilt rushing back. "I'm am sorry Alexandria, at the time I thought that I could take on Marek with no problems and protect your parents and my ego cost you a parent. Also please don't blame your father's decision for not telling you it was not a decision he made easily but felt that it would be for the best."

Its then that Alexandria whispered a comment, "...I don't understand the reason why he did that..."

"There was no Marek for you to take vengeance on, or so we thought that the time, but there could be the possibility that you would still seek vengeance on the situation. There were also the concerns about the reason behind what had happened..." He then slowly shook his head, "In the end he simply wanted you to live a life without this burden free of it all, he knew that this is what your mother would have wanted as well."

There was a moment of distraction that occurred within Iris as Lithius explained the situation more and as that happen she loosen her grip on Alex's hand. Alex then took that moment to wipe her tears away and think more about it. There was so much that was racing in her head, so many questions that had been asked in the past but dodged for whatever reasons that suddenly felt explained. "So I guess that explain your friendship with my dad then?"

Lithius nodded, "Yes and no, I will not hide the fact that I did feel guilty about what had happened but your father was a great man. He never held it against me nor did he blame anything on us for his and your loss. It did hurt him deeply and in a way the path to the Council helped him focus his efforts to help with that, there was also you that helped without realizing it to fill the pain that he felt. Those actions were of a great man, who I

realized was honored to call friend. So yes it is a part of the explanation but not the main reason for it."

She slowly nodded, "Okay...And, I guess that's why he never wanted me to join when he went on other trips?"

"Yes that is the main reason behind it; both of us had learned a big lesson and felt very protective of you. Considering how things turned out maybe a bit too overprotective but that was a large part of the reason for it." He then paused, "That said some mission where too dangerous. One of his last one that cause you a lot of grief did not end well which only reaffirmed his decision. He had been misinformed on something and escorted some people that had helped him to a town of Xiphias during a very bad time; he punished himself for that one for a while and eventually got over it somehow but again more reason for him to keep you safe."

Before Alex could ask another questions Adam wondered on something, "Wait, Xiphias? When was this?"

Lithius was somewhat confused but answered anyways, "Ah, years ago when the Crusaders held guard in front of the Portal Tower, why do you ask?"

Rosamia was very curious about that one as well, "Do you know the place?"

Adam thought about it and it did not look like a happy memory, "You could say that. It was one of the places that were deemed sacrificial by the Crusaders as they heard of an attack that had been planned on the place. They had evacuated all of the people but some had stubbornly wanted to stay. I was against it but was sent off on another mission, it's when that mission concluded that I saw why they had ordered us not to help those

that had stayed around. It was not a happy moment and only served to continue on my own dark path..." He then stopped and after a little while continued, "Anyways, what was weird about that as well was that the town was saved in the end. Sure the Crusaders that had been sent there had disobeyed orders and intervened but the main reason was because of two sell-swords that had showed up recently. I did not make the connection before but..." He then looked at Anna and Mike, "There was a mention of the two wearing red capes, and so what were you two up to during that time?"

While they both thought about it everyone turned to Lithius who instantly had a reaction to Adam's question. "How could I have missed it? That is why he got over it, and also why he never lifted a finger when you started your adventures..."

Alexandria was baffled, "What?!?"

Lithius calmed himself down, "You see when you first went out to explore the attacks on the traveling lanes, Richard wanted to use spells to make sure that you would be fine. He knew that he should not but it was hard for him to do so as he talked to me of it nonstop, but then you sent your first report and then everything dropped. When I asked him about it he only replied that you were in good hands." He then looked at Anna and Mike, "You were the ones that helped in out on that last mission correct?"

They really did not know what to answer, "We did travel with someone and we did go to Xiphias to help out against a large attack during that time..."

Adam chuckled, "Even back then, my god..."

Anna slowly nodded her head, "While that is all true, the mage that we were with was called William not Richard."

Lithius let out a small chuckle and

Alexandria understood why, "Why oh why did I not catch that when you mentioned the name. William was the name my father used when he traveled around. Remember when I met you there where parts that I did not want to say about me due to my position; it was the same with him." She then laughed a bit, "You two actually adventured with my dad."

Mike thought about it, "Well he did seem to have a lot of secrets, which I understand why now."

Anna smirked at him, "I told you back then not to worry too much about it."

Mike shrugged, "I know now never to question you, but back then..." He did not finish his comment and instead turned to Alex, "Your father was a good man, he got lost in books just like you do and he helped us quite a bit as we were just starting out back then."

Anna suddenly remembered something from that time and had a warm smile on her face, "In the end when we said our goodbyes he mentioned to me that there was a person that he wanted us to meet, I'm sure he meant you. So I guess in the end he did get his wish."

Alex smiled as well, "I guess so..." Then suddenly confusion took her, "Wait! Does that mean that they are the only reason why he let me continue on my own?"

Lithius quickly nodded, "I would assume so, again given your report he probably saw that they had not changed in character too much since last he had seen them, and he knew what they were capable and given those red capes they could not be mistaken for any other Crimsons."

Alexandria was a bit frustrated, "I'm not sure how I feel about that..." She then lowered her head, "I'm not sure how I feel about a lot of things now."

There was a bit of a dreary look that came over her then, "It's been a bit hard with everything that's happened recently."

Anna then looked at her, "Still with all that and everything that you have learned, do you have regrets? Do you feel any less love for him? Would you change who you are now?"

There was little hesitation on Alex's part, "No, not what so ever. My father loved me with everything he had and I loved him just as much."

Lithius stood after hearing that, '*In good hands indeed.*' "I will take my leave now, if there are other question let me know but otherwise..."

Alex understood more now what this really meant to him, "Thanks for telling me."

He nodded and then left the room.

There was a bit of a silence as most of the attention was focused on Alex save for Mike who was suddenly thinking about something and Adam who also seemed to have an agenda. "Hey Iris, can I talk to you for a second?"

Iris looked at Alex and was still a bit lost in her head, she was about to refuse his request but then Anna jumped in, "it's okay go with him, we will stay with her."

Adam suddenly grabbed her hand, "See, all good now there is no need to worry, instead help me with a little something." She let herself be dragged off by Adam and was followed by a very suspicious Rosa.

Now that they were alone, Anna turned to Mike but made her way next to Alex as she did. "You are hiding something."

"Not really, it's just that I keep thinking that we have it wrong."

Alex suddenly snapped out of it, "What do you mean?"

He tried to organize his thoughts, "Alice is

after Iris, Hawk is following Marek as many before him did or so it seems, but what is Marek planning?"

Anna then understood, "You are still not on board with Lithius in thinking that a particular person is the target. I guess it's safe to assume that he now thinks that he is the target considering what happened between the two of them."

Alex thought about it too, "He did seem to have a large hatred against the elves in general when he talked about it to me." She then looked at Anna and then at Mike, "It didn't feel like it was targeted."

Things added up but at the same time they did not. Still the look on his face was very familiar to Anna, "Follow your own plan and trust yourself, and you know that I will just as much as you do for me."

Those words seemed to convince him and then he approached Alexandria, "Once again I'm sorry."

Those words made her smile for some reason, "What can you do, you two would be lost without me."

This made him chuckle a bit, "Alexandria, I have a favor to ask."

Chapter 8

*I*t was now very late that same day and finally Alexandria walked in her home. Iris suddenly lifted her head from the books that she was looking from that where sprawled all over the table in front of the still open couches. "That took longer than expected?"

Alex removed her knee long boots, "I didn't expect it to but there were a lot of things to make sure of so, you know how it goes."

This confused Iris, "Wait did they ask you to do something for them?"

She made her way to the long couch that Iris was currently sitting on, "Yeeeeeep, that they did."

Iris noticed the smile on Alex's face when she had said it, "Not what I expected but it seems that you were okay with it."

She slowly nodded, "With everything that happened to me recently and news I just got, well let just say that a dose of normalcy goes a long way to help deal with everything on the spot."

"So once again, right thing right time with them, seems they both have a knack for that."

Alex then stretch out and turned around, she now lying on the couch and her head was now on Iris's lap. While this was not too odd for Alex it was sudden, "What are you doing?"

Alex then got a bit more comfortable, "Just for a little while." After a few minutes she then looked up, "by the way what are you researching?"

"Something that Adam asked about, it got me curious."

"Now I'm curious, what would he want to know about arcane magic?"

Iris smiled a bit, "Well if you are curious then tell me yours and I'll tell you mine."

She thought about that one but it did not take her long to come to a decision, "Hmm, I don't think that I should. I mean it may not matter soon but for now its best if it's not wildly known."

"So it's something that you should not have done then?"

"Probably, maybe... again normal request right?"

Again her comment made her smile and given Adam's last outburst maybe it was best that she did not know about. It took a while but then Alex once again looked up at her. "This is a bit weird."

"How so..."

"This place, its home I know that but with all the books away it's different somehow and somehow I'm okay with that."

For some reason Iris was suddenly mildly worried, "You're not thinking of getting rid of them right?"

"Pfff, heck no... But I am thinking of maybe a bigger place?"

Iris simply shrugged at that one, "What's the point of that, you're only going to fill it up more anyways. I mean you would need to create a separate space for it all in order for more actual room to matter."

With that Alex suddenly twisted and went on her side, "Hmm, Interesting..."

It's then that Iris put her hand on Alex's head and moved her long blond hair away. "I know that I should not ask this, but are you going to be okay?"

Alex did not have to see the concern look on Iris's face as it was in her voice as well, she took a moment to think about it and then let out a small sigh. "Hmm, yea I will. I just need some time to sort it all. Again I still love my father no matter

what, that has not changed. I do find it odd that now I know the reason why he let me go all those years ago and did not force me to come back. I also now know the answer to my question as to why Lithius and my dad were so close and I also have the answer to what truly happened to my mom. Mind you I'm still not sure about that one. It was so long ago and now knowing about it with me being who I am now..." She paused a bit, "It's odd, I feel sad about it and I want Marek to pay for what he did but other than that... I'm just not sure how I should feel about it."

"Hmm, well maybe that's a good thing. Indifference, in a way, is not always bad. I'm sure that her actions did not change how you feel about her as well and other than Marek needing justice for what he did why should you feel different about it all? Personally I find your reaction very brave and inspiring. I mean you could be angry about it all and seek your own vengeance on Marek, in a way I think that's what he wanted from you originally. But you did not give in to that so, yes I see that as inspiring."

Alex chuckled a bit, "Thanks, truly, but I think that maybe you're thinking of someone else now. Like Alice?"

"No, well maybe sure, but I was mostly thinking about myself. I was so angry about everything for a while and Adam helped a lot with that and eventually it lessens, but that took years and here you are already there."

"I don't think that you are being too fair to yourself, I mean what you went through for that long, well I can't even imagine. But even then you confronted those demons, literally in your case, and while that's something Alice can't do anymore she also let it consume her which you never did. I think that's pretty inspiring too."

This made Iris pause again as that is the second time she thought about a different way to approach her next time she would. "Hmm, thanks..."

Alexandria suddenly moved a bit and got a bit more comfortable, "Thanks to you as well, also thanks for coming to my rescue with the others and for finding me in time. I don't think I've said it yet."

Iris smiled, "It's alright, I'm just happy that we were able to make it in time."

"As long as we are together everything is good." After a while Iris noticed that somehow Alex had fallen asleep, she then looked around and chuckled, "Well that's something... Oh well, rest up while you can I get the feeling it's going to get interesting soon."

A few days passed and Iris was in one of the school training ground that she had reserved for herself. She had studies all she could but in order to practically test this out she would need more room than their place allowed. After a long while she had finally succeeded in using the spell in questions. She was suddenly happy, "Now the hard part..."

It's then that she noticed that a small sphere was making her way towards her; it was like it was slowly floating to her and the closer it got the slower it moved. "Who would be sending me a message like this?" She then reached out to it and as soon as she made contact the face of Alice showed. "I'm done waiting; these two are taking far too long. Meet me in Xiphias tomorrow, let's finish this just the two of us."

Instinctively Iris reach out for her pendant and was about to reach out to Alex, who was currently

with Lithius and the other mages and dwarves trying to find Marek who had gone in hiding once again, but she decided otherwise. "Anna, I think we need to talk..."

After giving her the message Anna and Mike had a different priority then giving Iris any comments on how she should proceed. Given the last challenge she was now very opened to different possibilities. Instead they had asked to gather everyone in the Council room with Lithius and Kilor as well and explained the whole thing.

Once everyone had gathered Adam was the obvious first person to comment, "You can't tell me that you are planning on going right?"

Iris was not sure what to answer him, and everyone else, especially Alex. "Well no I don't want to blindly go obviously but at the same time I don't think that it should be ignored."

Adam was now pleading, "Irisss...."

While she understood what Adam was trying to tell her, Iris was more focused on Alex who did not seem to know how to react. There did not seem to be any anger or disappointment but she could see that she was struggling to agree with the idea.

Before anyone else could comment Mike then spoke up. "Iris is right we can't ignore it." All eyes were now on him, some with curiosity and others with discouragement. "That said I don't agree that Iris should go."

Iris was suddenly lost, "What? Who else? If it's anyone else, she is probably going to leave."

"Maybe you're right and maybe you're wrong."

Lithius then understood, "You're thinking that Marek will attack tomorrow and that she is a decoy to splinter our forces. Iris is strong magically and having her away would help out Marek." Kilor nodded in agreement, "This may be why we still can't find him, if he's preparing for his final push. I

mean Alex did mention that they were already ready and did not need anything." He then looked at Mike, "Still, who did you plan on sending to meet her?"

Mike turned to Anna, "I was thinking that both of us would go. I Mean against Marek with all you around there is little that we can add."

Rosa did not agree with that at all, "We keep telling you that your contributions in leading this group is more than you think, you both need to stop downplaying that."

Anna nodded, "We know Rosa, but in this case it's the right thing to do."

Adam was quick to object, "Of course you would agree with his plan..." Anna gave him a look and was about to reply but he did not let her, "Anyways with both of you gone who will lead?"

Anna let it go as she figured the next think that Mike was going to say would truly drive him mad and with that Mike looked at Alex, "Alexandria will lead the team while we are both dealing with Alice."

"WHAT!?!?" both Adam and Alex could not believe. Adam quickly backed up a bit, "I mean would Rosa not be better... no offence Alex."

She was not so sure about that one but Alex had to admit that she did have concerns about it. But Mike ignored all of that, "Nope, in this case it needs to be Alexandria." He then looked at her, "Don't worry just follow what you think is right and everything will be okay."

Anna then looked at Iris, "That aside, are you okay with all this?"

Iris wanted to disagree but then she saw Alex, while she was nervous about her new position she did seem happy about the outcome in a way.

"Hmm, I guess I'll leave her in your hand then."

Mike was happy to hear that, "Good because I

do have a favor to ask, as I would like you to teleport us there and then come back here quick to assist the others. I know that this is a hard request but Alexandria will need to stay here and..."

They never made anything easy, "Sure, I'll follow the plan."

Lithius then added to it, "Assuming that we are all right in this, we will not be able to bring you back here as we should all be busy. Because of this I will send word to someone that should be able to help you come back after your task is done."

"Thanks that would be much appreciated."

Kilor then turned to Lithius, "I'll call Helram and his crew, and if this thing is tomorrow then he should be able to make it in time. I mean the more help the better right?"

There was no way to disagree, "That would be appreciated, after about twenty years of planning this cannot be a simple thing. With that I will alert the guards of Astrum and also re-order the sentinels to inform me of any minor change that they see outside and inside the city."

Adam was suddenly lost, "Seems everyone has something to do, and what should we do?"

Alexandria then suddenly put both hand on her hips, "We will prepare as much as we can."

He gazed at her, "You know they are still here and you're only in charge when they leave right?"

She mockingly smiled at him, "Just getting you prepared that's all."

Adam then put his hand on his head, "Oh so much fear and concern for the next day... I'll go gear up now and make sure everything is on the up and up."

As he started to leave so did the others and eventually only Alex, Anna and Mike remained. "So are you really sure about this?"

Mike chuckled, "And here I thought that bossing Adam around would be all the convincing that you would need?"

There was a small wicked grin that appeared, "Well that will be fun but..."

"Don't worry, everything is prepared right? If she not a decoy then we come back and see what happens next. If it goes to plan then if the worse case happens then you should know first so you should be the one to react and give the order on what to do next."

Anna then approached her, "Also this may help give you some closure, what do you want to do?"

Alex was puzzled by that one, "Are you sure you should be telling me that, I mean that man did kill my mom in a way."

She nodded, "Sure and you're right in most cases that would be the worst advice to give but in your case, seeing as how you are acting now, I think that if you don't do what you think is right then that will be the worse situation for you in the future as you may always wonder what if I did not listen to that and instead did whatever."

Alex suddenly understood the double edge that they had given her, "I see so act as I think I should right... not the type of therapy I expected..."

Mike shrugged, "'Follow your heart and you're regrets will be few'; you have a good heart Alexandria just listen to it and you will be fine."

Anna smiled, "It's been a while since I heard that."

"Well it is part of our creed right?"

Alexandria nodded at that one, "It is... Okay I'll do this and I'll make everyone proud my mom and dad included."

"I don't think you need to worry about that one at all Alex."

It was the next day and Iris suddenly arrived at Xiphias with Anna and Mike, "You're sure about this right?"

Mike nodded, "We are, now all we need to do is wait for her to arrive..." Then they heard a familiar yell from afar, it was Alice and she was complaining about something. When they realized who it was they quickly both looked at Iris. She took a deep breath, "I'm fine, no worries. I'll head back now." She then looked at both of them, "I know I don't need to say this but try to help her if you can."

Anna nodded, "We will Iris, will do the best that we can."

Then suddenly she stopped and remembered something, she then reached in to her belt pouch and then took out two small orbs and handed them over. "I almost forgot Alex prepared these for you two. They are two ice magic spells, essentially hold it in your hand and think of how you wish the ice to take shape and then smash the orb at the location you want it to happen. Keep in mind that they are weak spells so it may not form the complete image in your mind if it's too big or complex."

Both Mike and Anna took an orb for themselves, "I'm sure these will be handy somehow."

Iris nodded "I know I said to help her if you can but also do take care she is pretty strong."

They only smiled back at her and nodded their heads, she then looked behind them, it was clear that she was still a reluctant at the idea of heading back but she then started to cast the teleport spell and in a few moments disappeared leaving the two alone.

Once done they could hear another loud yell

from behind, "You think you're the first one to attack us little lady? Well guess what you're not, and maybe back then we needed help but now it's different."

Mike could hardly believe it, "Ian is still alive?" Anna chuckled as the old man had caused a lot of trouble for the both of them back then, "I'm not surprised by that, still we should hurry if we want to keep it that way."

Alice signed deeply as these people had been very annoying. Already they had setup a perimeter with wooden barriers around her. You had a bunch of archers aimed at her and somehow the other villagers were already coming back with extra supplies to help if they needed more arrows or if the fight suddenly went close spears to switch out their weapons. The placement was also interesting, the barriers were there to protect the side and front, essentially protecting the houses and also the small boats in the back. On Alice side the only thing you had was the supply houses from the looks of it. Sure it would be bad if something happened to them but in terms of protecting life this was a solid plan and had been quickly implemented.

Still in the end there was little that they could do against her if she really wanted to, "Just shut up old man, you are only the bait, just stay in your corner and wait there okay..." While the old man was now shouting obscenities at her as a response a small smile appeared on her face, "She's here..."

That comment also made the old man and the people that he had rallied wonder and they all looked to the side where two figures emerged with blades already drawn and flowing blue capes. Ian was stunned and then very happy, "Oh you're going to get it now, guys it's them, their back to help us again."

While everyone was overjoyed by their old saviors coming back after so long at the right time, Alice was anything but. "Why?! Why is it you two? Was she too afraid?"

Anna and Mike placed themselves between Alice and the barricade that the villages had erected. "Nope, if not for us she would be here, but the thing is you have been used and we are tired of being a step behind so we are not playing that game anymore. Still there is no reason for us to fight if you don't want too. We are here to help you if you wish; the choice is yours... not theirs."

The constant cheering and the fact that once again things had not gone as planned for her was too much for Alice as anger took her over. She raised her hand and a small ball of flame started to appear. Instantly Anna used the orb that had been given and thought of a wall as she threw it behind her. The fireball spell launched and as Anna had figured the target was not them but the people behind them, luckily the ice wall that had appeared took the hit and was mostly standing after the blow.

"You attack villagers! Why?" Anna was furious but not as much as Alice, "Please that spell was just to warn them and nothing else, if I wanted them dead that wall would have done nothing to stop me." She then took out her sword, "And I hope that she gave you more tricks because if you think that you two can stop me then you are underestimating my abilities."

A large gust of wind was suddenly blasted at them, as the strength intensified both Anna and Mike planted their sword on the ground in order to not be blown away. As Alice then powered another spell Mike turned to Anna, "Probably best if you start it off."

Anna then raised her sword and aimed a blast

in Alice's direction, as Anna was blown backward the blasts made its way to Alice forcing her to cancel both spells and erect a small arcane shield to her side as she tried to dodge the blow. The blast had been deflected and landed on one of the storage houses damaging it, but it also left Alice off balance and ill prepared for Mike's charge.

It took very little time from him to get to her but she had enough time to raise her sword and block his blow. In her position with both swords locked in he pressed down and put most of his weight behind it. With strength alone she was no match, but strength was just one of her weapons. Quickly she used her free hand and with sparks now appearing between her fingers she tried to grab on to his wrist holding his sword. Seeing as he had stayed in this position for too long Mike quickly disengaged, as he did a smirked appear on her face and the sparks around her hand grew.

It's then that she felt a large pain on her side, as she looked away Alice saw that Anna was now behind her. Anna had hit her with the back of her blade, being single edge the blow would not harm her as much but still the enchantment was still active and the way it was glowing around the blade it would intensify its natural properties. So its edge would cut anything and the blunt would hit that much harder, from what she saw even with her armor it was safe to say that a rib or two had been bruised. As a follow up Anna quickly gave a low roundhouse kick and with Alice still being unbalanced she fell on the ground.

Alice needed to get her away so that she could regain her footing and with that she launched a spell that created small bolts of lightning at her direction. Anna jumped backward and Alice smiled as it would do very little, but then her smile disappeared quickly as Mike then made his way

between Anna and the spell and then planted his sword on the ground and let the enchantment flow. The result was a large eruption that sent large chunks of ground, dirt and rocks up in the air forcing the lightning to hit it.

"How are you doing this?" While the result was not what had been expected it still gave her time to stand up, still she did need for both of them to get away from her. With that she powered up a strong fire spell. Mike instantly grabbed the orb and then quickly threw it at her feet. As she was about to move forward to throw the spell a large ice wall suddenly appeared in front of her blocking her forward movement and disrupting her fire spell in the process, this also resulted in knocking her head on the ice wall.

Anna ran around and struck again with the back of her blade but this time on the knee of Alice. "ARRRGGG...." She then tumbled to the ground, but still willing to fight she empowered her blade with lightning and then swung at Anna. Anna dodged the blow easily but then all of Alice's focus was on her leaving her open for Mike to take the butt of his sword hilt and knock it against Alice sword hand. The blow left her in pain and forced her to drop her sword.

"This is why you always do one on ones, you get easily unbalanced when you need to fight multiple people at once."

Anna then moved forward as well, "Plus your spells are strong, you are strong, but also very limited to what they thought you and from the looks of it they thought you very little. I don't know if that was because they had no time or it's just what they wanted but after so many fights it left you in a position to be very predictable and easily countered."

There was still a lot of hatred in her eyes but it

did not stop Mike, "You have been right all along, we don't want to kill you, still. But we will not let you hurt Iris or any others in the team, also we will stop you if you try and hurt innocent people, even if Iris is convinced that you would never do that."

Anna then put her sword away, "Look we don't exactly know what is happening in Astrum right now, we do know that something is as otherwise Iris would have shown up in order to try and convince you again. I've already put my weapon away, if you want to talk we can, if you want to curse at us, by all means go for it get it out. I don't expect that we will ever be friend, it would be great if we could be but its fine if that never happens, what does need to happen is that this needs to stop."

Alice slowly grabbed her sword on the ground and moved herself away from the both of them. This action frustrated Mike a bit, "I sure that you can still muster spells that could destroy us if we are off guard but that's not going to happen, this fight is over. Even if you do go away you are in no shape to take Iris down so it would only mean your death which I'm assuming is something you don't want."

Anna then reached out with an open hand, "Please don't do this, I know that you have been hurt, abused and tortured and I'm sure that you also realized that the people that have recently helped you out are simply using you because you are too smart to not know that. So with all that I can see that it's hard to believe but all we want is to help you live your life however you wish, again with us in your life or with you never seeing us ever again it's all your choice just let us help you get there."

Alice had had enough speeches, "You CAN'T help me!!! You don't understand anything, about

how I feel or about anything about me at all. She is my target and NOTHING will change that." As quickly as she could she then casted a teleport spell and disappeared.

"Well I'm pretty sure that she's not going to Astrum directly." He then turned to Anna, "Also I don't think that we were able to do much at all."

Anna also felt Mike's frustration, "I'm sure your right, as for the other part we needed to try." She then looked where Alice was a few seconds ago, "She does not want anyone's help it seems, everything is on Iris and Iris alone." Suddenly Anna was a bit worried, "Now as Iris is, I'm pretty sure that she could win against her but it does make me wonder..."

Mike understood where she was going with her train of thought, "Will she fight her next time?"

She quickly nodded, "Pretty much, and that really has me worried." She then took a deep breath, "Well all we can do right now is wait."

He moved next to her, "I wonder how much time whoever Lithius contacted in order to get us back to Newport will take?"

Seeing his mind already start to worry and think about scenarios that he did not have enough information to start worrying about, Anna grabbed his hand to break him out of it, "Well while we wait, we should explain to Ian what actually happened here and also check to make sure no one was hurt."

Bad arguments with Ian from the past suddenly flooded Mike's mind, "I suppose we must."

Anna gave him a half smile, "Yes, we must."

Iris appeared next to Alex, "Mission accomplished, did anything happen over here as

Alice is already there."

Adam pointed at the horizon, "You could say that..."

She then finally looked around Lithius, Taeral, Kilor, Alex, Rosa and Adam where all at the edge of Astrum. She then looked to where Adam had indicted and saw that three large gates had opened up in the distance and from them golems marched out. What was surprising and very troubling was that already there were hundreds of golems making their way to the edge of the footing from where Astrum hovered next too, and there was no sign pointing to an end to it.

It was not what Iris had expected but it was still a sight to see, "That's something..."

"I'll say, now I'm glad I brought the whole crew with me." Everyone quickly looked back to see Helram show up and make his way next to Kilor and Lithius, "So what's the plan? As I'm thinking that you just won't let them march in like that."

Lithius thought about it, "Well while even if they completely fill the area around they still will not be able to reach this floating city." He then focused his attention on Helram, "Still I would rather not have them sitting by next to our city like that so we do need to stop them."

Taeral then cleared his throat, "In that case I will take guards and mages and head down to intercept them. While the shield around the city helps us it also limits the spells that can be casted from in here to out there, so we don't have much choice. Might I suggest that while we deal with the golems already here that you deal with the gates?"

Lithius nodded in approval, "A wise plan. While we figure out how to do so we will help with some cover fire." He then looked at Helram once again, "Still I'm sure that they could use help down there."

He then took out his large double axe, "That's fine with us." He then turned around and made his way to the teleportation circle where the rest of his brethren where.

Adam looked at Alex, "So acting leader, what about us?"

She quickly went over some possibilities but overall it did not take her too long, "Adam and Rosa you go and help the dwarves and Taeral's crew out."

Iris then suddenly started to move with the other two, "I'll go as well." Alexandria quickly reached out, "No! You stay with me." Her quick command surprised everyone in the group. Iris was puzzled but did not question it, still seeing her reaction Alex then calmed down and explained, "Sorry about that it came out a bit too harsh then it should have been, it's just that Iris needs to stay around me for now... in case something happens."

Adam was puzzled, "That's smells more like one of their plans..." Rosa then reached out to him, "If that is the case then let stop with the questions as there is already more than enough to deal with at this time." He wanted to argue about it but then figured he would drop it, still seeing as Iris was not going to be around him it did cause an issue considering what his target was much to his annoyance. "Fine, but then can you put something on these to help out." He then pulled out his swords.

Iris wondered about that, elemental spells would help but only very little against rock. "I'm not sure I have anything that could help with that. Hmm, maybe..." Lithius then walked over, "I can only put this on one of your swords as the temporary enchantment will allow you to cut through nearly anything, scabbard included." Adam was thrilled, "By all means, please do. How

long will it last?" Once Lithius casted the spell, Adam's sword had a faint sparkle around it, "Longer then this fight and if not then we have a much bigger problem on our hands." Adam quickly nodded in thanks and then made his way with Rosa to the teleportation circle with everyone else.

Iris looked back, "I'm going to have to learn that one soon I guess." Alexandria shrugged, "It should be fairly easy, it's just going be cumbersome mind you if its power is strong like that all the time." She then focused her attention on Lithius, "Still all that is later, now we have these to deal with."

There was a quick nod, "Yes, lets clear a path for those that will be going on the ground first then we can focus on those gates." As Taeral had mentioned there was no way to do a direct attack spell from the inside to the outside as the shield around the city would stop it but it did not mean that they could not affect the outside. All three of them started casting a spell and the clouds outside the city then grew and darkened, after a while lightning bolts dropped down instantly destroying the golems that it touched. All in all about fifty golems had been destroyed by their first volley. Lithius was then suddenly concerned, "Keep in mind that in helping me with this you may unintentionally hurt someone if Marek still is using people inside some of his golems."

Alex continued to focus on the spell, "I know, I'm not thrilled about it and currently I'm playing the odds and secretly hoping really very hard that given these numbers he did not bother with that, but still, I know."

Lithius took a moment to acknowledge the growth and maturity level of this new Alexandria that her experiences had changed her into. She would have made a great addition to the old

Council and then new one. Putting those thought aside he then focused his attention on something else, "They are starting to make their way in position to repel the golems, we should use this time to go to the gates and see about getting rid of them."

Iris looked at the two, "Ready when you are..." as she started to cast the teleport spell she then stopped as Lithius had a sudden look of horror and worry on his face. It did not help that this also freaked out Alex as well, "Lithius!! What's wrong?" He simply turned to Alex but as he did she too then saw it, the shield around the city was dropping. Somehow someone had been able to remove the spell.

"Marek, this has to be his doing but how?" Lithius wondered but even with the books that he had captured there was still too much information missing Alexandria had mentioned that they had told her that everything had been completed but still this made little sense to him.

"Is there any way that we can recast the spell?"

Lithius looked at Iris, "No there is no way, as the process would take days."

Iris understood and took out her blade, "Well assuming that you are is still the target it should be easy for him to get to you now." Alex wondered about that and soon enough she did not have too anymore, "Both of you grab on to me now!" It was not a request but an order and there was a large urgency in her voice. Both Iris and Lithius were puzzled but still reached out to grab a one of her shoulder as she then casted a teleport spell and whisked them away.

Adam and Rosa reached their position, "Not

sure how fair all this is, Taeral and his people are dealing with one gates golems, Helram has another with his crew and just the both of us hold the last one."

"Well we do have a reputation, plus in this way it's pretty hard to tell which golems came out from where." As Adam approached the first golem Rosa was a bit worried at his actions. A quick smile appeared on his face as his sword sliced through the stone like it was nothing, the attack had been to the mid section and after the blow the first golem fell. "This is perfect." He then aimed his sites on the one next to him and this time sliced the arm off as it was trying to attack him.

Rosa made her way next to him and casted her shield to help deflect the blows, "Keep in mind Lithius story, there could be people in there."

Without concern Adam slashed the waist of another, "You don't need to worry about that as there is no one in these things."

She quickly used her shield to push at an incoming golem at its chest and sent it backwards landing on another, "How can you be so sure?"

"It's simple, if his plans was to put some humans to slow us down then that lighting barrage would have shown it. But the main reason why I don't think Marek would have thought about it is in him mind I don't see him thinking that elves would hesitate to kill humans in this situation so there would be very little point in doing it." He then slashed the wrist of a golem attack that he had just dodged, "So don't worry about it and cut lose if you want to, I plan doing that."

His logic made sense from Marek's perspective and as she saw him get out all that pent up aggression of being able to do nothing for the past while, Rosa wondered on what she could do herself. It's then that she saw that while the

golems where plentiful, some of them where better made then others and in some cases some were really worn out. She called her holy shield to her arm and then moved at one of those. She had its attention and it then tried to punch her but their slowness made them too easy dodge, as she did so she also lowered herself and swung her arm with the shield at the back of the golem leg. When the shield connected its knee cracked in pieces and the golem fell to the ground shortly after. Rosa then moved back to Adam, "Interesting... I'll aim for the better one and you aim for the others."

Rosa smirked, "Given their numbers I don't think you need to do that, just do what you do best and I'll keep you covered and assist as much as I can."

Adam smiled, "No way that I can lose then..." He then made his way to a group of them a few feet away with Rosa right next to him.

Lithius did not have to ask where they were as they repapered in the small room holding the large sphere that held the city afloat and powered its shield. He also did not have to ask why she had moved them here as he saw Marek and Hawk next to the sphere. "How did you get here and how did you know about this place?"

Marek did not answer as he instantly reached out for the sphere. Lithius was going to do something but in the time he had there was nothing he could do, still he was able to glance at Alexandria who also did nothing as well but did have a smirk on her face. This made him wonder on what she had done as it was the only explanation for her calmness given the situation, which also reassured him.

No one moved as Marek was about to touch

the sphere but then was stopped by a shield around it, before he could comment a large jolt then jumped from the shield to his hand. He quickly pulled it back and then aimed his gaze full of hatred at Alexandria, "You did this!"

Alexandria slowly shook her head, "After hearing everything he never believed that Lithius was the target of all this, and with Anna's insistence and my help let just say that we protected this place a bit more then what was already present. It's not perfect but we all figured that it would do the trick to give us enough time to stop you and this plan of yours."

Marek was not pleased but this setback would not stop him, "Smart as you think as you are, you where pretty stupid when we captured you." He then smirked with that creepy grin that she hated, "Heck you even gave us the information on how to break the shield around the city."

"What! I did no such thing..." She then stopped and then it clicked, "The shield that was around me all the time, that why you keep recasting it. You learned how to cast a similar version of the shield spell that was around the city but you never knew how to destroy it."

This time it was Hawk that answered, "Why bother when you would give us the answer so easily."

Alex was so ashamed, "I'm so sorry Lithius, I didn't connect the dots on that one."

The pieces were all connecting but there were still some things that made little sense to him. "Let talk about that later, instead I'm more wondering on what the plan is here, if you know of this place then you must know it's purpose and the cause of destroying it."

Marek was suddenly very proud of himself, "Of course and you are right it was hard to figure out

this secret but once I did I devoted everything I had to this plan. Once this is gone the city will go with it. How many elves will be killed as a result and how much of your advantage will be lost. Once done then I can truly step in and reach my goal." He then sneered at Lithius, "Call it a way to level the playing field if you will."

Lithius did not hide his anger, "MADNESS!! While doing so will kill a lot of us and destroy a lot that we have worked for it will never put you in a position where you can take over. You are a fool to think that will be the case."

Alexandria whispered to Iris, "You keep the sphere safe and back us up okay?" Iris said nothing but nodded in confirmation. Now that was no longer a factor the question on Alex's mind was Marek or Hawk?

Marek stepped away from the sphere, "I guess I'll have to deal with this later and will have to focus my attention on you first. Hawk, keep the little girls busy?"

He pulled out his rapier, "I'll do what I can." He then moved to the side and Alex followed suit.

She slowly shook her head, "Why do this at all? He's going to kill thousands with this and all it will do is put more targets on you. If you still believe that he's planning on creating this magical paradise that everyone can learn everything how is doing this going to help that?"

"This place is a sham and everyone needs to see that, once they realize it then they will have to understand that our way is the better alternative and that can only be done by destroying it." He then proceeded in, once again, casting his poison cloud around her.

Alexandria signed deeply, "Fine let's do this the hard way." She simply waved her hand at the cloud and it instantly dissipated. He then aimed a

bolt of lightning at her, in defense she raised her hand and opened her palm and accepted the spell. As it hit she closed her hand and the spell traveled around her hand and to her arm and then she swung her arm down and opened it and threw the spell. As the spell damaged the ground she looked back at Hawk, "Anything else you wish to try?"

Hawk was angry and pulled out his rapier, "Magic is not the only way."

While Alexandria did take the time to redo her armor she had not taken any on weapons, instead she focused her efforts on a spell similar to how her mother used a shield spell to enhance her staff. Now she did not have a staff on her but there was no real reason why it was needed in the first place. The only thing that was needed was to cast a physical shield spell, typically those would be time consuming and very draining but if used in a way to wrap it around itself in a two centimeter diameter it took very little time and effort.

As she focused on the magically created staff she dodged his first piercing attack, but it took him no time to follow up with a horizontal slash and for extra pepper he also enchanted the blade with a lighting spell. Thankfully Alex had finished the spell in time and used her new staff to block the blow, as an extra perk, seeing as the staff was essentially made of nothing the lighting spell around his weapon did nothing. His frustration created an opening for her, and the many sessions that she had with Rosa kicked in as Alex suddenly flipped her staff upwards and scored a hit under his chin. Seeing as he was now unbalanced she grabbed the staff with both hands and then jabbed it forward right in his chest. When he doubled over, she casted a wind spell that sent him flying back against the wall, the one, two and three combo once over forced Hawk to drop on the

ground.

Alexandria slowly approached him, "It's sad really but I'm guessing that you learned most of your spells from him? Constantly waiting for him to simply give you another one to learn, never really picking up a book yourself and understanding what's inside of it and how you can use it. If that is your idea of a good alternative, you can keep it." She then moved aside, "Still I'm guessing these are simply words to you, so I'll let your very own teacher prove my point to you." She then pointed to Marek, "Looks how he's fighting, do you know any of these spells? Has he told you about any of them? Is he even using any that he's shown you?"

In truth Hawk had never really seen his master really fight, the first time had to be when they had captured Alex and during that time he only used a sleep spell and that intense fire that he had conjured. The fire spell had been new to him but given all this time spent at the tower he simply took it as something that had been missed.

Marek then moved to the other side as did Lithius, "This will not be as easy as the last time elf." Marek suddenly disappeared and reappeared next to Lithius and with his fists tried to connect with his body. None of his attacks connected but before he would be sent back to his original position Marek then conjured a blob of hot fire between his hands and threw it at the elf.

Lithius did not try to move away as the fire spell landed on him. It burned some of his clothes but did not make a mark on his body. "You may have learned, but you still have issues understanding." Using the same spell as he had, Lithius appeared to the side of his target then he quickly created a quick fog spell around his face which took Marek off balance. While it took no time

for him to dispel the fog, it did allow Lithius to stick a blow to Marek removing some of his shields around him.

When Lithius returned to his position he was mildly surprise as a cage of lighting encircled him. "Taunt me all you want but in the end I'll show you by beating you at your own game. I've spent years planning for this."

Lithius ripped up some of his clothes and then threw it at the bars around him. When contact was made the material was instantly destroyed but after the discharge the bars that it made contact with also disappeared. "Truly that last comment saddens me, all those years and all those unknown attacks and you never once really understood how anything worked. In then end I'm impressed that you where able to get this far as your overall competence if really lacking."

"More insults from the high and mighty elves, well let's see how you deal with this?" Marek then touched the wall and then a rather large golem formed. When completed it moved to Lithius who while surprised at the quickness of its composition was still not impressed. When it got close he simply reached out to it and casted a decomposition spell but once completed the golem did not shatter. This moment of surprise cost Lithius as a fist of rock connected with his face. Marek laughed, "Oh this is perfect, let my upgraded golem made of the land that you are trying to protect pummel you to death."

Hawk was confused at what was happening, so many things that he had never seen his master cast and yet. But there was no way that they could be right; there must have been a reason why he was never shown. He needed to know and he would know once this was all over. Without anyone realizing it he put his hand on the ground and

casted a spell. As soon as he did Alex looked down, "Crap..."

It was too late as the spell traveled underground towards the pillar that held the sphere, Iris then suddenly stepped between it and the pillar and planted her sword in the way and casted a counter spell to stop it.

Alexandria then looked back at Iris, "Switch..." Iris instantly moved forward as Alex made her way back to the pillar and instantly began working on some more safety measure.

This gave Hawk time to pick up his weapon and go on the defensive as Iris slowly approached him. "You never intended to help her did you? The only thing you wanted from her was how she could help you along in this mission of yours, her wants and needs never factored in. And once you had what you wanted you sent her off and used her as a decoy."

All that seemed to do very little to him, "What of it? We saw that she was strong and could be of use so we used her. In the end if you would have followed the plan then she would have gotten what she had wanted, a fight with you. Was she going to win, at that point we did not care."

Iris was furious, "Even more reasons for her to be angry and vengeful." She then charged in at him with such speed that it took everything he had to block the blow. Suddenly he wished that he was still fighting Alexandria.

Mike stood up happy to see some horses in the distance, "I think our rides here." Anna joined in next to him, "Looks like and it's seems that he's not alone."

It only took a few minutes for Bernard to arrive with a few other of what they assumed where his

students from his tower. "I got word from Lithius that you would need a way back to Astrum. Is it true? Is the place under attack?" He then paused and suddenly had a shameful look on his face, "And did I indirectly help out in this attack plan?"

Even Mike knew to be a bit delicate with this one, "Seeing as we have heard nothing from anyone in our group it's a safe assumption. As for your involvement I don't think you should blame yourself for it." Not wanting to risk it he quickly looked over at Anna who willingly and safely continued for him, "He's right, from what we understand this has been twenty years in the making and really that book was probably simply a pebble in it workings. But if you still feel that guilty about it then join us as I'm sure the help will be appreciated."

There was a small nod, "I was hoping you would say that and because of it brought some of my strongest and brightest student." They all then dismounted and guided the horses in the town, once they were taken care of he then once again turned to them. "Where do you think the attack is taking place specifically?"

Mike was unsure how to answer, "I would assume Astrum itself or its base. While Newport is close it's still an hour away by foot and that feels too far for me for some reason." But then he was stumped a bit as there was no way that Bernard new of the new teleportation spell. "That said why ask? Can you teleport us directly at its base or at Astrum directly?"

"Its base I cannot do, but Astrum directly I can. Given my position I was given way to do so." He then communicated the extra step to the spell to his students, "Remember that once used this will probably be no longer available as the structure of the spell will be changes once it's told

that it was given to others. Still I will take responsibility for this." As the students reached out to Mike and Anna they all started to cast the teleportation spell.

They reappeared at the Astrum teleportation circle only to be encircled by a lot more guards than normal. Once they saw Bernard and the other two they slowly relaxed, "What's happened?"

One of the guard answered Bernard, "The shield around the city has dropped so we are all on high alert. Also the city base is being attacked by a massive wave of golems coming from gates. A large team is currently there holding them off."

This all did not sound good at all to Mike, "Where is Lithius or Alexandria?"

The guard slowly shook his head, "I don't know, last report we got was that they teleported somewhere but gave no orders or commands as they left."

Both Anna and Mike knew what that probably meant and given where its location was there was little they could do about that one. "Thanks for the information." He then turned to Bernard, "Let's head to the edge and see what this attack is all about."

As they made their way there Bernard could hardly believe it, "To think that someone was able to bring down the shield, never in the history of Astrum has that ever happened."

Finally making it there and looking below Mike wondered if an attack like this was also something else that had never happened. "This looks pretty bad. They are holding their own but..." Anna looked further down, "The gates, they are still coming out of them. That has to be stopped."

Bernard then pointed below, "There I can see master Taeral, that should be a good place to go first." Suddenly Bernard and one other student

casted a floating spell on Mike and Anna and then, as the others, casted a flying spell. "Hold on to us this way should get us down quicker."

Reaching Taeral took little time as expected and when he saw Bernard with a few others it was easy to see that he welcomed the help. "It's good that you are here, I need you to lead this defense while I go see about Lithius and why those gates are still not closed." Bernard instantly nodded in approval and then gave orders to his student after taking a quick look at the environment around him. When he was satisfied Taeral readied a teleport spell that Mike stopped, "Wait, Lithius is currently busy in a place that only he can go to. I think it would be best to focus your attention on those gates."

Taeral was very skeptical, "Only he know about it and yet you do and not I?"

Mike suddenly looked evasive, "Ah...Occupational hazard?"

Taeral was not buying the excuse, "More like a nosy ex-Council member I'm thinking." He took a deep breath, "Let's put that aside for now and focus on the target that you suggested." He then called over two other elves and left Mike and Anna as they could be of no help for the task to come.

"Let's head to Adam and Rosa, I think I saw them on the other side." Mike followed her as they tried to reach their team members but the path there was not as easy as they would have hoped. Along the way they helped other clear a path and when they made it to the dwarves Helram practically had to order them leave if they could go and release their priestess to help with the wounded. Given the current situation there was no way that the two could argue.

Finally making it there they saw that they were overrun but somehow managing to still hold the

line. They both powered they enchantments as much as they could and cleared a way to them.

"It's about time!" Adam was clearly weary from the fighting but he still continued on. The two made their way around him creating more space around Rosa. "I hope that you at least got her."

Mike backed him up and slashed away at a few golems, "Sadly no we had to let her go."

"Terrific, it's another one of those plans then."

Anna then turned to Rosa, "The dwarves and many other need your help."

Rosamia understood and so did Adam as he quickly looked back, but to everyone surprise he did not object. Once again his growth made her happy. "I'll come back as soon as I can."

As she left Adam yelled back so that she could hear over all the battle noise, "Forget about that, just make sure to stay safe."

Iris was locked in with Hawk, she had miscalculated his speed and that had enabled him to block her charge. As she swore that this would be her final mistake in this fight, in order to push her back Hawk enchanted his blade with electricity. Iris pulled back and as she did Hawk continued his efforts to push her away with a wind spell. Instead of countering it Iris ducked low and moved to her left while avoiding most of the spells effect that way she also swung her sword sideways and with its flat hit Hawk's knee. There was a loud crack and while Hawk yelled obstinacies with her other hand Iris casted a small ice spell to cover the ground, which resulted in Hawk losing his balance and falling on the damaged knee.

In a vain attempt to push her away again he pierced his enchanted blade forward. In order to dodge the blow Iris leaned backward and as she

did casted out a small magical sword and trust forward at Hawk hand. The blade went in deep so much so that with the healing at the level that it was he would probably never hold a sword in that hand again. Hawks screamed in pain but no one cared, as a final blow Iris took her sword hilt and bashed it to the side of his head. Somehow Hawk was still conscious after the blow but with blood from his hand, side of his head and shattered knee he would not be doing anything else in this fight.

Iris quickly bandaged his hand so that he would not bleed to death and then stood guard to make sure that he would do nothing and also try to be at the ready in case she could help the others.

Alexandria had no clue how much time had passed since she had started working on updating the defense of the pillar and the sphere. Finally with her task done she stood up and looked around. Iris had taken care of Hawk, Lithius was busy with three golems and then you had Marek who was suddenly grinning at her once again.

"Now that the elf is busy I figured that I would deal with my original plan but then I remembered that you where still around..." He then looked at Hawk, who tried to call out to him but Marek ignored him, "Useless... simply useless, just like you where at that tower." Suddenly frustrated he once again looked at Alex, "I suggest you leave now while I'm still allowing you the chance to do so."

"Tell you what, I will move, but before I do that let me show you a little trick." She suddenly snapped her fingers and then suddenly the pillar and the sphere disappeared. While Marek was wide eyed Alex confidently taunted him, "You have spent a good many years thinking of a way to do this and I'm here to tell you that you will not accomplish your goal and all your efforts will be wasted. Try as hard as you like you will not be able to find the

sphere." She then glared at him, "You caused something important to be taken from me, so it's only fair I return the favor. Also that's for my mom."

Marek was furious, "WHAT DID YOU DO!?!!" He then started to cast a very large fire spell, "It's a trick... it must be." and then he instantly threw it where the pillar had been. Alex prepared two ice spells, one in each hand. "You idiot, it's not invisible and now your spell is aimed at Iris and Hawk, your own student."

Hawk tried to move but there was no way that he could, Iris looked down at him. "Stop worrying, he may not care if you die or not but I'm not about to let you die like that." With that she erected an arcane shield to block the spell. While it did just that, she once again turned to Hawk who was mumbling, "...but why?"

Iris felt pity for him but not enough to not push him more. "You are to him as Alice is to you, congratulations on this new discovery."

She did not listen or bothered to check if there was any reaction as Lithius joined next to her. He looked a bit battered but he would be okay. "Should we help Alex out?"

Lithius slowly nodded, "No, he still has an ace up his sleeve that she does not know about. While I prepare for it I want you to prepare to move her away from him as fast as possible when I give you the word." Iris was curious about this ace but instead of questioning it she did as she was told.

"WHERE DID YOU PUT IT?" Marek was furious and launched a fireball at Alex. She had prepared for that and used one of her ice spells to counter it, it did not stop there as right after a lightning bolt was also aimed at her. As she had done with Hawk she took the hand that had countered the fireball and caught the spell and with a wave of her arm

deflected it backward. The move had stung more then when she had done it before but it had been quicker then to counter the spell.

"Then deal with this!" Instantly waves of bolts of lightning were aimed at her and on top of that Marek tapped his foot on the ground causing a shockwave on the ground to proceed in her direction. Alexandria ran forward and then jumped to avoid the shockwave, as for the bolts she used her other ice spell to created a ice shield around her that got hit by the multiple hits of lighting.

She had initially aimed to land on him but Marek had moved away and then she landed low on the ground. Marek took this as an advantage to him and covered his hand and part of his arm in flames and proceeded to try and hit Alex from above. The move surprised her as she had assumed that he would have moved back to put some distance and cast another spell, but the crazed look in his eyes told her that he was clearly not thinking strait. While surprised it did not stop her from properly defending herself as she covered her arm in ice and then used it to block the blow and also used his momentum to flip him over on the ground.

When he landed she instantly took her other hand and punched him square in his stomach and while the fist lingered she removed what shields he had left. In a vain attempt to move her away with his hand Marek reached out and pulled on her long hair. This time it was Alex that was furious, "I told you old man, don't you dare touch me ever again!" With the hand that was closer to him she created claws made of ice around her fingers and then reached for his face and ripped out its side.

"ARRRRRRRGG!!!... YOU LITTLE WITCH... YOU WILL PAY!!!.. I will kill you and everyone else that you care about because of what you did..." The

treats continued as he let her go and then blasted her with a wind spell to push her back. Alex let the spell move her away as he slowly moved backward. The hit had ripped a large part of his face off and damaged one of his eye so much that he would never see from it ever again.

Alexandria then stood and created a long ice lance and pointed it close right under his chin. Marek felt the cold of the spell and understood its meaning, "Do it, take vengeance for your mother that I killed. Come on!" As he taunted her he slowly reach out for something behind him.

Alex looked at this beaten old man and then paused for a moment, "No... I won't. A, you did not kill my mother one of your followers that you abused did and B, killing you as an act of vengeance is not what my mother would want." She then pulled the ice spear away and with her other arm waved it at him creating a gust of wind that sent him flying back banging him against the wall. "Instead I will take you in and give you the Council where you will face your punishment for your crimes of theft, abuse of magic, stealing of magic, abuse of people, unwilling transmutation of people, brainwashing, and also the deaths and indirect death of many people including my mom."

"Hahahahaha, you are a fool..." Marek laugh was mad but it did not faze Alex at all but then she heard Lithius from the back. "Now Iris..."

Iris then suddenly appeared next to Alex and then in a few seconds later repapered back to where she was before with Alex as well. Alex was surprise and very confused, "So this is what you where studying..." And then she stopped but so did everyone else.

Marek now held a dagger in his hand. "I should kill you now while you can't do anything, but even this artifact has limits." Still he took the

time and pointed it at Alex, "You are my new target little girl, I will make sure that you have the worst kind of existence for the rest of your life..."

He then stopped as Lithius appear next to him, "But how?"

Lithius did not move as Marek slowly moved backwards, "Time should be stopped for you and everyone with this in hand." He then looked back at where Lithius had been standing and where he was now and chuckled. "Now who's the fool, by the time I finish this line you will head back to where you where and that will give me time to teleport out of here, impressive elf but..."

He then slowed his taunts and he saw Lithius slowly move closer to him, Marek was now wide eyed, and suddenly very afraid. "But, but the spell should have moved you back..."

Lithius grabbed the arm that was holding the dagger, "I did not use that spell as I teleported next to you instead." As he held his arm Lithius casted a fire spell that burn off Marek hand to the bone. Once again Marek cried in pain but due to the spells effect of the dagger only Lihtius heard his screams.

He then let go and as Marek fell to the ground, dagger as well, Lithius aimed a concentrated beam of flame at his chest. "I Lithius of the Council of Astrum give you your overdue sentence Marek and it is death."

Suddenly time continued for everyone else. "...But why did you hide that from me?" Alexandria finished her comment but then felt a weird presence. She then heard Hawk scream from behind, "MASTER!!!!"

Somehow Lithius and Marek had moved and now Marek had a skeleton for a hand and a large hole in his chest. "How did you do that? When did you do that?"

Before he could answer Marek moved his head a bit towards Lithius, "...This... is... not... over..."

"Hmm, ominous parting word Marek but parting words only." He then took a quick look at his now dead body. "My old friend, her death has been avenged for you even if you never said it or requested it." He then picked up the dagger on the ground and then moved to Alexandria and Iris.

"This is an old artifact that had been stolen and replaced. It allows the user to speed up considerably making the world around him stop. This is how he escaped the first time. I figured that it was he that had stolen it when Mike had told me what happened when they blasted him with their enchantments, it was the only explanation to how he had survived something like that. To counter it, while you fought him, I casted the spell on myself knowing that you would eventually push him to use it."

Alexandria was pretty impressed, "That's a pretty nifty spell."

He nodded, "It is but not nearly as impressive as what you did there." He then pointed at where the pillar had been.

Suddenly Alex smiled, "Oh I nearly forgot about that." She then proceeded to move closer to Hawk, "You have seen enough for now, so ... sleep." He was in no condition to stop her spell and in seconds he feel unconscious.

"Now that that's done with." She then snapped her fingers again then the pillar and the sphere instantly returned. Iris was curious about this, "So obviously not an invisibility spell, so you teleported it elsewhere?"

"No there was no way that I could do that. After looking more into it I learned that the sphere powers everything and takes in power from around but its connection to the pillar is actually very

important to that process. But it's a magical connection not a physical one, so with that I move the pillar and the sphere in a pocket dimension but still keep the magical link to it. This ensured that he would not be able to reach it easily but seeing as it was still tied he could have followed that link to the pocket dimension making it simple to find... if you knew what to look for."

As Iris processed the explanation Lithius did not want to let it go just yet. "Still this is not a field that I knew you studied in. Also considering what you did, I have many questions as from the looks of it you were able to overcome some difficulties that we have had in the past with that type of spell."

Alex nodded, "Yea, this is a new side project that was started because of a comment that was given to me recently."

Iris suddenly felt targeted, "Wait! This is because of that space comment I mentioned... seriously?"

Alex shrugged, "Meh, I guess I'm putting more into it then I should as I had been tinkering with it for something else but you gave me the idea of making it bigger." She then looked at Lithius, "And if you want the details of it, when we have time I'll be glad to let you know about it, I actually have another idea that you could potentially use it for..."

She then got cut off as Mike's face suddenly showed up from the pendant, "I'm sorry Alexandria but judging from what is happening out here I'm assuming that your situation has changed."

Given Marek's last words they were all concerned, "He's stopped for good and so is Hawk why, what's happening?"

"I think that you better have a look for yourself, but let just say that something is happening to all the leftover golems, it seems that

they are merging together."

Alexandria turned to Lithius, "A spell on death?"

Lithius wondered on that, "I would not put it passed him." He then grabbed his body, "Iris if you please, can you take Hawk as we teleport back to the edge?"

Iris once again did as told and they all moved to the edge where they had been before Alexandria had moved them and what they saw stunned all of them as now the golem was about the same height as Astrum.

Taeral then ran next to Lithius, "Finally you have returned. I was able to close the gates but it seems that too many where let through and not enough got destroyed."

Lithius turned to some other elves that where now around him and pointed at Marek and Hawk, "Please destroy this body immediately and lock this person up so that he cannot escape." He then looked at the giant creature that had finally finished forming in front of them. It was so high that from the ground his chest would arrive at the height that Astrum was continuously floating on. As for it weight, there was no way for him to even take a guess at how heavy it was as it was so massive.

"Normal spell will have no effect on something like this." As he looked around Iris continued to look at the golem who was about to take its first step. "I'm pretty sure that between all of us we can smash it..." They did not know if that was all that she had to say on the matter as everything stopped as finally it took the first step and everyone felt the large crash and rumble as it did. Because of its height that one step alone made it nearly reach Astrum, the damage on the ground level was also extreme as everyone that had been fighting this

whole time needed to escape as far as they could.

Alexandria turned to Lithius, "We don't have much time."

As an answer he pointed below, when everyone looked down they saw a tiny, well it looked tiny compared to its target, red and green blast making its way to the giant foot. They all waited to see how much damage it would do as it would be a good benchmark for them to figure out how much power would be needed in their attack spells, which none of them really thought that anything but everything they could manage would be enough. Still they looked on and suddenly the two bolts fizzled as like they where nothing as they only got close to the construct. Alexandria sighed deeply, "You have to be kidding me, he equipped that thing with a magic barrier spell powerful enough for that?"

Taeral analyzed the situation, "We have little time as when it takes its next steps those hands will be able to reach us. Also whatever we plan to do that barrier will impede our progress."

Alex nodded and then grabbed on to Iris, "Fine, we will take care of the barrier, Lithius you deal with the construct. From what I know there are a lot of spells that can be used to do a large amount of damage but it will also destroy the area around, so there is only one spell that I know that is powerful but also pin point and that's pretty much what we need." She then questioningly looked at him, "Unless you know of anything else?"

"I do but we don't have the time for those so, you are probably correct in your assumption." He then nodded, "Go and when you are ready I'll put everything I have behind it." Alexandria casted a flying spell and then lifted herself and Iris up.

"You do realize that as soon as you get us close to that thing that you're flying spell will

probably drop right?" Alexandria had a wide mischievous smile on her face that did not help give Iris any comfort what so ever. "Just prepare the spell, as you are right the field will probably affect this spell as well. Once we start dropping then you can catch me."

Iris was very worried, "Sure but you are taking a gamble that there is no secondary field of armor inside that original field. He did seem to enjoy doing that from what you told me you know."

Truthfully that thought had not occurred to Alex but it was too late now as they had made it above the back of the golem and she was already flying down. As expected the field around it disrupted the flying spell and then they both started to fall. Due to Iris comment she had, as a last minute change, moved her angle a bit so that when the flying spell would drop that their momentum would take them strait on to the golem back. Which, if Iris was right, should help them break their fall and possibly grapple on something as they fell, that was assuming that there was not a trap that would explode or shock them as they made contact.

Alexandria enjoyed the fall while she could and then tried to move her arms and legs to deal with the incoming impact, but before she could feel that she felt arms wrap around her waist and then a small tug as she stopped falling. "I know that time is not on our side but..."

Alex then smirked, "I know, now fly me close to that thing." It took little time and soon she was able to touch the stone on its back. As a little test she tried a decomposition spell and while that created a three foot by tree foot deep hole, compare to the rest of the body it was barley a mosquito bite. She used the hole to sit in it and alleviate some of the weight on Iris, once positioned she

reached out to the complete structure. It took no time for a smile to appear on her face but then it quickly disappeared. "The construct is pretty basic all things considered, probably because of its size, so our plan should work. The only issue is that the field is a dual field with a lot of redundancy.

Basically we need to get rid of both at the same time. In a way that's its real and only defense."

Iris did not understand what the problem was, "We are two after all, it should be fine. I'm assuming that you can reach one of them here and I'll need to go to where the other one is?"

"You got it, as you said I should be okay for the top one so you need to hug its body and fly low and get the lower one. If you go around the waist you should be okay."

Knowing that there was little time Iris flew to her destination, and then heard something being yelled by Alex, "Be careful, if that thing moves again."

Suddenly she understood what she was saying, if it moved one step and she stayed where she was then she would probably hit the field and that would scramble her flying spell. Iris suddenly flew faster and after what felt like a long time finally reached her destination. Iris looked up and saw a waving Alex, she took that as a sign that she was ready and so started to cast the spell as well. It took no time to find the field that she had told her about but it would take a large amount of power to disrupt it, more than she had assumed. Iris buckled down and focused on the spell. But then suddenly the thing started to move, she needed her hands to cast the spell so she could not grapple on. All she could do was to finish the spell and hope that there was enough time. She closed her eyes and focused on the last of the spell and then let it go. A quick smile appeared as the spell

hit and the field started to fall, but then as it took it's step she saw that the field would not fall quick enough as suddenly she started to drop from the sky.

As she fell there was little that she could do, Iris prepared to cast the floating spell as it would stop her fall but she needed to be out of the field that was dropping fast before she could do that. Unfortunately from the looks of how quickly she was hurtling towards the ground it did not seem like she had that time. From the distance she thought that she could hear someone yell her name but before she could turn to look and see who it was she then felt a large gust of wind move her away which was enough to get her out of the field effect. She instantly let the floating spell take its affect and as she stabilized she saw that she was now about forty feet from the ground. She then heard Alexandria voice, "And you say that my tactics leave you uneasy?" Alex then put her hand around her waist again and then guided her to where the others of their team were.

"Well I have you as a role model so..." Alex instantly looked down, "Hey now..." Iris chuckled as Alex safely landed and the ground.

"You know, if you ever do this again you need to communicate more, we had no clue what was going on the whole time... heck we still don't." Alex smirked at Adam, "Oh so you expect me to do this again?"

Adam was then interrupted as the sky turned black as night. "What now?"

Alexandria then waved her arms away, "Now we all move as far as we can." They all started to run away, with the dwarves that had joined up with them. Mike quickly looked at Alex, "What's going to happen now?"

"Well as you know as well there are a lot of

spell that can take care of this, I mean you remember the chunk of mountain that disappeared?" It was not a pleasant memory but he did remember, "That can't be used here, otherwise all of us are dead."

Alexandria nodded, "Precisely but that does leave one spell that is all about power and is pin point and that is the evaluation spell. I'm not sure if you remember this one but a long time ago I talked about a spell that would be used to measure ones power on a purely magical level, that's the spell that will be used. Basically the goal is to call down and hold as much lighting from the sky, eventually that gets stored up in a medium glyph circle and then you start building another and another until you can't anymore. Then you concentrate all that on one target. In the end the amount of circles determines a power level." She then stopped and pointed up. "We should be far enough now, check it out, I mean it's not every day that you will see this from the person that is probably at the highest level now that Solanar is gone."

From where they where they could not see Lithius but they could see the lighting coming down from the sky and crashing at the glyph circles that where now floating high above his head. Currently you had five of them ready and from the looks of it a sixed one was being prepared. But by now the golem was reaching with his hand to smash down on the city. Mike nervously looked on as the sixed circle was now completing and then suddenly all six got closer to each other and then angled themselves to be pointed at the golem chest. When the spell launched it was too much for them to look at and everyone turned their head away. They all heard a large crash as what they assumed was the lighting reaching its target. Then

a few seconds later a large shockwave could be felt on the ground. With the assumption that the thing had fallen they opened their eyes again. What they saw surprised them all as the golem had a large giant hole in the middle of its chest and the shockwave that they had felt was not it falling to the ground but it taking a step back because of the force of the hit.

Adam looked on, "Sooo what now?" Rosa wondered that too, "Can it be casted again, for the looks of it, it may be enough."

As the clouds turned back to normal Alex shook her head, "There is no way that he can, not just yet."

That comment did not surprise Mike too much but he was still confused about something, "Can Taeral not do the spell as well? He should be next to Lithius correct?"

There was instant hesitation in Alex, which was an answer in itself. "Not really, I mean sure he's there with him but Taeral specialty is not power. I think he mustered three circles only; I last tested at four a long time ago. Being on the Council does not mean all the members were present due to an abundance of power."

That was understandable but they needed something as that golem would regain it's footing soon and continue its attack. Helram then pointed at the golems knee, "If you are at four then that should be enough to blow that knee out. That should do it or at the least give us more time to figure out something else."

She wanted to argue but she saw very little choice, it's then that she felt a hand on her shoulder. "Don't worry sis, I know this will leave you empty, at least I'm assuming that is why you are hesitating. I'll take over in case something else happens while you regain your strength." She then

gave her a confident smile, "Now cut loose and show everyone how powerful you really are now."

Alexandria took a deep breath, "Okay, Okay, it's in your hands now." She then looked around, "I suggest that you all move back as well just in case." As they did she powered the spell and once again the sky turned back.

Lithius was still catching his breath as Taeral moved closer to him, when they saw that there was a change in the environments sky they quickly looked down. "It looks like Miss Alexandria will attempt to slow it down more."

Lithius wondered on that, they had not bothered to measure her current power after the change that occurred. "Taeral, I think that after you see the result of this we will have to have a little chat about something." The elf was curious, "I was planning on doing that due to the events that occurred and where you had disappeared too considering that they knew where you where but not I, is there something more to this?"

Lithius nodded as Alexandria had reached five circles, "You could say that..." Taeral was impressed but there was no concern as that was not too surprising, "It seems that she has reached her late father's levels impressive."

Alexandria was focusing all her attention on the spell and the golem. The thing had regain its footing and she knew that he was about to move again. With the effect that it had she had to wait until it was done with that before she let the spell go, which was fine with her because while now having reached her father's level she knew that she could push it further.

The foot landed and the ground shook, during that time Alex solely focused on holding the spell, when the effect where over she continued the buildup.

Suddenly Taeral eyes where wide in shock, "Six... but that is impossible. The way the spell is designed the measurements are accurate, and while a person with a lot of growth can modify those results for the better, no one has ever been able to jump two levels." He then turned to Lithius, "Yes a talk will be appreciated."

These results shocked Lithius less than probably anyone that saw it. Given all the spells that she had casted in the resent past at its speed and power she had to have more power than before. There was a time where this level of power in her hand would have worried him a lot, but after everything that had happened and her actions against Marek this was not a concern that he had anymore. Still it made him wonder on something that would need to be looked into later.

Alex had reached her limit and she then aimed the spell at the creature knee, "Stay away from my HOME!!!"

The large bolts of lightning where then let go and once again everyone had to turn away. They heard a familiar crash as the spell hit the target and then the ground shook with more intensity. So much so that they had to suddenly brace themselves otherwise they would fall to the ground.

Alexandria was out of breath, "Oh for god sakes you have got to be kidding me." The creature knee had been blown up and the large crash had been its weight landing on the ground. While that should have been enough to topple the whole thing, as a last minute action, it had reached out and grabbed on to Astrum edge to hold its balance with its other leg and arm.

She slowly turned her head towards Iris, "I'm sorry, I tried my best but I guess it's up to you and the others now." Iris chuckled, "You do realize that your best was six, right?" Alex chuckled as well

and had a large smile on her face, "Yea, I do. Also I think I could have pushed it more had I not spent so much stamina beforehand."

Iris smiled at her, "Save that surprise for next time." She then turned to the others, "Given the large crash of before it's probably best if everyone moved back even more." Then she stopped in front of Anna and Mike and casted a floating spell on the both of them, "As for you two, I need your help with something." She casted a flying spell on herself and then reached out a hand to both of them who grabbed it immediately. They wanted to ask what her plan was but they saw that she was flying in the direction of the other and not the golem, so they waited.

Getting near their location they could see that Bernard and a few others had joined in and where casting spells at the things arm. The tricky part was not to cast anything that could cause a large impact at the writs or around there as the hand was firmly holding a large chunk of Astrum that they had no interest in having it being pulled out.

She floated next to them, "Guys I have a plan. I'll go and dislodge the arm closer to the elbow that should minimize the damage and also unhook him. When that happens if you can push him back I think gravity will do the rest." Taeral turned to Lithius who nodded, "That sounds good, Taeral and I will handle that last part."

Bernard then waved at her, "Anything we can do?" She quickly nodded, "Yes, do as much rubble as possible. You will understand why when I start."

She then flew away and deposited the two around the elbow. "You should be safe here as this thing large enough and it's not like it can move or let go." They both agreed, "Sure but what do you want us to do?"

"Same thing I told Bernard, as much rubble as

possible. I figure both your enchantments can help pull out large chunks." She then casted another spell on the both of them, "When the time is right simply jump on the other side and after a quick small drop the spell should activate to more slowly drop you down. Mind you I should be able to pick you up again by then so don't worry." Anna smiled, "There was never any." Iris nodded and then flew upwards and then started to cast another spell.

Anna looked at Mike as she powered her green enchantment, "Ready to do some carving?" The red enchantment suddenly glowed as well, "Why not." They then proceeded to slash around the elbow using the enchantment. The idea was to use it to go in deep and then release some of its power at the tip causing a small explosion at that location. For more impact they each took a side and then moved inwards. As pieces of stone started to drop they suddenly stopped and then moved upwards and then continued past the both of them to finally stop once they reached Iris. Who from the looks of it was collecting all the pieces and then merging them together in one large chunk.

Taeral prepared the spell with Lithius as he looked onwards, "That is fantastic control, she is even grabbing all the pieces that Bernard's team is creating with their spells." Lithius nodded, "Yes it seems that recently she has been focusing a lot of efforts on her arcane magic and with Alexandria as a mentor there is no doubt in my mind that she will become a great mage someday. Still there must be another part in her plan as I don't think that will be enough."

As the rock Iris was building grew and grew in size she also looked at the other hand. So far as it did not move they had all the time in the world but as soon as it started to their time was going to be up. In reality she was pretty sure that this would

work but it all really depended on how much time it would give her. A few more minutes passed and finally it started to move, from the looks of it the target was the other side of the edge of Astrum where Bernard and the others were now casting their spells from. She looked down, "Times up guys."

Anna and Mike looked up and gave a quick confirmation to Iris, before they jumped they unloaded everything they had at the target and then made the leap. When the spell kicked in and they were slowly starting to fall to the ground Iris casted the next spell that would hopefully do the trick.

Taeral nodded in approval, "I understand now, she is using the weight spell and reversing it. Instead of lowering the weight by a large percentage she is augmenting it. Very good use of simple spells." His approval of her action made Lithius happy, Taeral was considered the master teacher in Astrum while he always had concerns and issues about Alexandria this did not seem to cross over to her sister.

Iris was done and the other hand was moving closer so she had to act before it could grab itself again. With a wave of both her hands she swung downwards and the large chunk quickly moved down to where Anna and Mike had caused as much damage as they could. It took no time to reach the target and as it impacted a large crash could be heard as stone suddenly collided with heavier stone. She figured that gravity would do the rest but just in case Iris magically pushed downward as her large bolder cracked the elbow in two.

Now that it was no longer connected, Lithius and Taeral focused their energy on the head of the golem and pushed it back. The plan worked and as

the golem was being pushed backward it desperately tried to grab on using his other hand but it was too slow and was unable to reach the edge as it continued to fall backwards on the ground.

It took little time for it to fall and when it did the damage it took created a cascading effect around its already damaged parts. When it was finally flat on the ground it started to crumble more until the magic that was holding it together no longer could and then broke which cause the large creature to suddenly break apart.

Iris flew to Anna and Mike and then made their way to where the other where. It was hard to see with all derbies in the air around them but they were all lying on the ground, safe. Iris landed letting the two go and then made her way to Alexandria. "It's finally over. I don't think there are other plans after that one."

Alex had a smile on her face and was about to answer her but then suddenly Iris froze and tensed up. Alex looked around her and then was suddenly depressed, "Now you show up?"

Alice waved her hand back which caused Iris to suddenly be thrown away from the others and closer to her. Alexandria reached out in a panic, "Don't you dare Alice."

Iris shook off the sudden landing and then slowly stood up. She then raised her hand at the others that where all suddenly running in her directly to help. "It's all right, I have this, and there is no need to worry."

Alice chuckled, "Are you sure about that? I maybe hurt still but there is no way that you are running at full power as well in order to back up that confident statement."

Iris did not comment on her statement but slowly advance towards Alice and while she did

this she also unfastened her belt buckle that held both her swords. Anna watched as the swords dropped to the ground, "I was afraid of this..." Alex started to yell, "Iris what are you doing?!?"

Alice was wondering the same thing but before she could ask Iris interrupted her. "I think that if you can I would suggest that you cast a shield around us, otherwise I'm sure that this battle will be interrupted pretty soon." Alice did not want to play her game but she also saw that now the whole crew was running in their direction with Alex and Adam in the front. She used as much energy as she could but still kept plenty for the fight that was to come and created a shield around the both of them that was about twenty feet in diameter. Alexandria and Adam were finally getting close but then they felt a force stop them. She banged on the shield, "Iris! IRIS!?!"

"What game are you playing? Do you seriously plan on fighting me weaponless?" Alice then took out her sword but kept it only at the ready, as this could be a trick of some sort but the look that Iris had in her eyes told her otherwise.

"No games, but also no more fighting, but I do plan on ending this." She then slowed down, "You know with everything that happened I think that I get it, but I'm sorry to say that it did take me a while."

This pissed off Alice, "Not another one, they too said they understood but they really understood nothing. This is not the fight I want, now pick up your weapon and FIGHT ME!!"

Iris slowly shook her head, "Nope, I will not raise a weapon against you nor a spell. If you want to mow me down for that then so be it, but if you can wait just a bit until I explain myself, as Alexandria can't pop this shield so we should have the time."

Alex suddenly turned back to Mike, "What is she doing?" She then banged on the shield again, "Stupid me, I should have never casted that spell." Mike then pulled out his sword and then hit the ground at an angle where the blade would be the other side, but underground. "It is only a dome after all..."

Alex was suddenly thrilled and then put both her hands on the ground, she reached in as much as she could and casted the spell to create a hole from their side to the other. She was happy as she felt the spell flow out but as she opened her eyes panic set in again as less than a foot deep had been uncovered. "It's not enough, I need more..." Helram then moved next to her and showed her a small seed, "Let me try, I think I can create a hole big enough for one of you to pass." Alexandria started to breath normal again, "Oh thank you thank you thank you." She got out of the way and let Helram do his thing as he put the seed in the small hole that she had started and started chanting.

Alice looked at what they were doing and then turned to Iris, "If you want your words final words to be trying to convince me then fine, you have until they are done with whoever they are doing. When that happens I'll take this sword and pierce you with it ending all of this."

Iris nodded, "I'm okay with that and I do get it. I get the anger and frustration. You had a shitty hand dealt to you and there was nothing you could do about it. There was no escape and it was torture after torture day in day out. Then you get to a point where you simply want it to end, but there is no escape leaving only one. Finally you see a glimmer, Genevieve, but even she is taken from you and again you can't do anything about it. Finally you have freedom but only to learn that no

one came for you, that the glimmer is dead and that you have nothing left. So now that there is nothing left you figure to go against those that did this to you and her, to make them pay but even then you can't do that as they are all dead." Iris then paused for a bit, "Well I suppose that there are still some Dark Clerics around, but the lord of darkness is dead, all their bases have been destroyed so who is left?"

Iris then extended her arms to each side and was now wide open, "Then you learn of me, that people came for me, that I was saved, and that I was even a part of the group that helped kill the glimmer that saved your life in that dark dark pit." Iris then looked directly in the eyes of Alice, "So then I become all the injustice that happened to you, I become the target of your hatred and anger that you feel deep inside of yourself. Once I'm gone then that link can finally be broken for you even if I never had anything to do about most of it."

Alice was now visibly angry, "You still see it as you have no connection in all this?"

The seed that Helram was using was doing the trick but it was going way too slow for Alex. She then walked over to Adam and then started to undo his armor. "Hey what are you doing..." It was rare but he had seen Alex be serious and angry at the same time and this is the look that she had right now. "That hole will be small, so get rid of the excess baggage and when you can squeeze your way in to stop HER!"

Adam proceeded to help Alex get rid of his armor, "By her you mean Alice right?" She did not answer that but continued to remove the binding of his armor.

Anna then stood next to Rosa, "I think you should do the same, if anything you should be the next one to go in after Adam." Understanding the

reasoning Rosa proceeded to remove her breastplate.

"Sure I have a connection with Genevieve but that's where it ends and you know this too. Still all that betrayal, the feeling of being discarded by everyone it's too much right, it fills you with anger and injustice that you need to act, you need to do something. Every day it keep growing and growing as you think about it." She then had a sad smile on her face, "But the thing is taking all that anger on me will do nothing, you will still feel like you got robbed by life and those around you."

Alice was now yelling at her, "AND YOUR SUGGESTION THEN!?!"

Iris took a deep breath as she knew the next part would be hard. "Sadly there is nothing to do anymore and the only thing you can do is... to let it go" This answer was not appreciated by Alice but before she could yell at her more Iris quickly continued. "As I said the ones that did this to you are dead, you can't kill them again and even if you could that crap still happened and you can't change that at all. You did not have a choice back then and all you could do is simply survive, but now, you have a choice and what are you doing with it? You're letting it consume you." She then pleaded at her, "Think back to that time where you where together, I'm sure that at one point you told yourself what you would do if you ever got out of that hell, so you are free now and did you do it?"

Alice was unsure of herself, which was good but could also mean many things. "...But Genevieve... and you can't just think that I'll forget..."

Iris cut in, "No, I don't expect you to forget, nor should you try. It's a part of you now and you need to figure out how to live with that. As for Genevieve, when I first saw her she was so lost

that there was nothing to do. You don't want to believe that, then fine don't, but no matter what you think I don't think that she ever wanted vengeance from her death." Iris then started to cry, "All she ever wanted was freedom from the darkness that was inside of her, darkness that got put in her against her will, darkness that eventually took her over." Iris then raised her head to face Alice, "And I'm so sorry that I did not see that and that we could do nothing to help her out, and for that I will take any punishment you think is just."

Helram then moved away, "It's small but it's done." Adam then dived in the small trench that had been created to go on the other side of the shield, he could also feel Alex push him from behind. "Get your ass in there..."

Alice gripped her sword tightly and her jaw was completely clenched, tears were also coming out of her anger filled eyes. "I HATE YOU!!!"

As Adam raced over Alice pulled back her blade and thrust forward. As she had said, Iris did not move nor did she cast a spell to stop it. She did close her eyes as she felt Alice's blade pierce her stomach and then dig in deeper. She could also hear Adam and Alex screaming her name at the top of their lungs but it all felt so slow and far away to her.

Adam finally reached Iris and caught her as she was falling to the ground. Alice then looked at the both of them, "I have killed Iris of the lights templar, she who help kill my good friend. I told you this was the only way this would end." She then let her hand from the sword hilt go, which surprised Adam as she could have twisted it causing even more damage or even simply removing the weapon probably would have been enough to do that. A bit confused he slowly put her

on the ground and held the sword in place.

Alice then took a few steps back and then snapped her fingers and then suddenly the shield disappeared. "May we never see each other ever again." She then disappeared using a teleportation spell.

Rosa and Alex were the first to get to Iris, Rosa instantly put her hands on the wound and started casting. Tears were streaming down Alex's face, "You can save her right?"

Rosamia did not answer her as she was not sure that she could. "Alex try and keep her awake and if you can make her drink those potions." Alex instantly nodded, "Sure sure..." She reached in her belt pouch and pulled out a small tube. "Iris, Iris, stay with us okay. Rosa is going to patch you up." From the looks of it Iris was still conscious but was breathing very heavily. Its then that Alex placed the open tube next to Iris lips, "Drink this it will help, I made it myself so there is no way that it will fail."

Rosa was glad that Iris took the healing potion but the reality of the situation is that it would do little. She looked to Adam, who by her guess also knew this. "Adam, when I tell you to, pull out the sword." She then turned to Iris, "Iris I know I'm going to ask a lot from you, but you need to help me with this, can you do that?"

She did not answer but it looked like she nodded in agreement. There was very little choice or time to confirm if that was true or it's was just something that Rosamia was convincing herself that she had seen. "Okay then, Alex take both her hands and place them on her chest and hold them there for her." Once that was done Rosa once again turned to Iris, "Now just focus on healing the area that your hands are on and nothing else. I'll take care of the rest."

They all waited in silence to see if Iris hand would react and eventually there was a faint glow that appeared around them. Rosamia was very happy, given their current power a wound this deep would be hard to deal with on its own but if you had to deal with the shock of it as well it would be near impossible. By now everyone was around them but far enough to give them enough room if they needed it. From the corner of her eye she could see that Mike and Anna were communicating with someone but there was no time to focus on that now. She then looked at Adam, "Adam on my mark."

Adam gripped the blade and waited. "...Now..." Instantly as he pulled out the blade blood came gushing out of Iris and splattered on all of them. Iris tried to scream but there was nothing that came out of her opened mouth. Adam threw the blade away and then kneeled down in order to hold Iris down and Alex was simply stuck in the position that she had already been in. Rosa put as much pressure as she could and then focused everything she had on healing the main parts that where the most damaged. Due to the new limit she had to cast in burst that focused on specific sections and then moved on to the next and so on. The bleeding stopped but there was so much internal damage that Rosa could not let up, at some point Iris finally lost cautiousness and while that freaked out Alex more there was nothing Rosa could say to her as she needed all the focus she had in order to try and save Iris.

Lithius was with Taeral with a few guards as they were both putting the final touches on the cell that they had placed Hawk in. Suddenly the face of Mike and Anna appeared coming from the pendant

that he wore that was linked to Council members only. "Sorry to bother you Lithius, I asked Helram for his help to contact you. Iris is badly hurt and Alexandria is out of power. Rosamia is doing her best to help her but maybe there is some assistance that you can help us with in order to save her?"

Taeral looked at Lithius, "Go I will finish this by myself. I too would hate to see the effects that possibly losing her sister would have on her." Lithius silently thanked Taeral with a nod and then shortly after disappeared.

Days had passed since the stabbing, it was early in the morning but not that early as Alexandria opened Iris's door to her room, "Are you still sleeping?"

Iris forcefully moved herself into a sitting position in her bed, Alex quickly rushed in to help her. "You know when you enter and say that it forces the issue in a way." Alex smirked, "Hmm, you would think but you can sleep pretty soundly sometime and you don't wake up when I ask."

She wondered on that one, "I always assumed..."

"Yea well, not so much. Anyways I figured that I would check up on you as I'll be leaving soon seeing as Taeral should show up in about half an hour."

"You know you don't have to go..." Alexandria quickly disagreed, "Every time I'm here and he show up for one of your personal sessions, I get a lecture... No I'm not interested."

There was a chuckle from Iris but it stopped quickly due to a stabbing pain. "Well I'm happy that he's taken the time to do this as I'm learning so much from him."

Alexandria took a deep breath, "Well he is the beast teacher that Astrum ever had so, you should feel that way. Still I wonder why he suddenly started to do that."

Iris shrugged, "When I asked he simply replied that wanted me to have a more thorough understanding of the arcane arts." She stopped as Alex had a sudden annoyed look on her face. "You mean that he figured that I would not be thorough enough to properly teach you?"

Iris paused, "I don't... think he said that..." quickly she figured that she would change the subject, "Anyways, I take it that you are off to see Lithius?"

Alexandria let it go, "There is still tones of time before we meet up but yes, that's where I'm going."

Iris smiled, "It's almost like you joined the Council again."

"In a way, but it's only to help out bring the shield back on. He was right when he mentioned that it would take days to bring back up." She then hesitated a bit, "It also did not help that we applied some suggestions that we both had on how to improve it. But hey after today that should all be done..." She then paused, "Then again there is that other thing that I wanted to go over with him." Alex then looked at Iris, "Still you can't move anyways so I may as well keep busy and help out fix the damage right?"

"Nothing wrong with that..." She then tried to move a bit, "As for me being stuck here, that should not be an issue soon. Rosamia told me that she would help with my rehabilitation starting tomorrow, so I should be back on my feet soon."

Alex took a seat next to her and rested her head on Iris's shoulder. "I'm glad, given time Rosa mentioned that you would make a full recovery. That said you better not do something stupid like

that again okay." This had been an ongoing thing with Alex and her and there was no point to explain it all again. "I won't I promise."

Alexandria took a deep breath, "Good, because we have a long life and we both need to live it okay." There was a long pause but eventually Alexandria broke the silence. "Can I ask a very personal question?"

Iris hesitated for a bit more because she could not figure out what she was about to ask, "Sure?"

"Back when you where talking to Alice you mentioned that she was finally free now and asked if she had done what she had promised herself if she ever got out." Alex then looked up to Iris, "Did you?"

A sad smile then appeared on her face, "All I wanted was to go home... but I also knew that there was no home anymore. My parents were dead and my best friend was killed in front of me, so that was not an option for me."

"Hmm, I'm sorry..."

Iris then got Alex's attention, "But like I told you before, then you gave me a home which I never thought I would have after going through that. So in a way I did do what I promised myself just not how I thought."

Alexandria wondered on that, "Do, you, want to do that?"

Iris was somewhat afraid, like she had given Alex a piece of information and Alex was suddenly going to do something crazy with it. "What do you mean by that...? You're not thinking of going back in time are you?"

Alex then sat up strait, "No, no, no, no... Nothing like that. I'm not sure that can be done even, well maybe with that time spell that allows you to see the future, hmm..." She then quickly shook the idea out of her head, "What I mean is

that I could cast a spell on you that would allow you to essentially be there as you remember it. Remember the spell that Lithius told us that Marek used in order to make sure that the people he used would forget, well I looked into it and that spell was really a perversion of the actual spell that helps you remember. He just twisted it, nor overly surprised by that mind you."

Iris thought about it, "So I would close my eyes and see the memory clearly?"

Alex nodded, "Something like that."

It took a while, but then Iris slowly nodded her head, "...Okay, what should I do?"

Alexandria smiled, "Just think about what memory you want to experience again and I'll help you do that." She then quickly added, "Ah in order to do this I'll also experience it if you are okay with that." Iris smiled, "That's fine."

Alex then put her index finger on Iris forehead and casted the spell.

Everything was dark for Iris but then suddenly she was in her parent's home back in Vestis. They were at a table enjoying breakfast together as they always did before the morning chores. What was odd about all this is that she was not only seeing it, it was like she was there watching it all as a ghost floating around them. Alexandria was next to her, "My own spin on the original spell." She looked back at her mom and dad, they were exactly like she remembered. Tears then blurred her vision, "I never thought that I would see them like this again." She then turned to her sister with a smile on her face. "Thanks Alex for giving me this."

Alexandria wiped her eyes as she closed the door to their house, as she looked up she saw that both Mike and Anna were coming her way. "If you

are here to see Iris, you may have to make it quick as Taeral should be here soon."

They were both concerned when they saw her face, "Are you okay? It looks like you where crying?"

Alex nodded, "Yea something I showed Iris." She then cheered up, "She was so cute when she was young, you should see it."

They did not know the details but let it go as it did not feel like something bad had happened. "That sound like everything is still okay, then to answer your other comment. We are actually here to see you Alexandria."

That puzzled her a bit, "Oh, well let's go someplace else to talk then, I still have plenty of time before I have to meet up with Lithius." They made their way to one of the small parks that Astrum had, there was not a lot of people around so they had their pick of tables to use as they sat down.

"So what do you want to ask?"

Anna quickly looked at Mike and then at Alex, "Well we noticed that you have been extra busy of late..."

Alex nodded, "Iris said the same thing this morning, as I told her, the shield, something else and so on. Plus when Iris is better I'm assuming we will be leaving so I may as well help now that I can while I'm around right?"

Mike nodded, "Sure but don't overdo it as well." Anna nodded as well, "Take some time for yourself as well."

Suddenly Alex figured what this was all about she then looked at Anna with a puzzled expression. "I thought that you could always tell if I was okay or not, not just with me but everyone in the group it seems?"

Anna smiled, "It's not exactly how that works

and it's not fool proof, sometimes it good to actually hear the words." This was so un-Anna like for Alex so she then turned and gave Mike a questioning gaze, "This is you more than her right?"

He suddenly felt a bit uncomfortable, "Well like she said..." Alex then cut him off and then again looked at Anna, "You do know right?"

She slowly nodded and as she did Alex once again looked at Mike with bewildered look on her face, "And you did not take her word?"

Suddenly a small smirk appeared on Anna's face. "No, he did not and so we are here." Seeing as he was uncomfortable enough Anna pulled back a bit, "Still as mentioned earlier it's always good to hear it from the person."

Alex sat back and smiled, "So am I feeling okay, hmm, I guess the answer is still yes, or I'm getting there. So many things happened that I'm still going over a lot of it."

Mike nodded, "Sure, I'm just worried that you were just moving it all to the side and not taking any time to think about it."

She thought about that one, "Hmm, well maybe I'm doing that a bit but not to the extent that you just mentioned. I'm using these distractions if you will to put a pause on it all but I do take time to deal with it all a piece at a time."

Anna reached out and grabbed Alex hand, "That's fine, there is nothing wrong with that."

Alexandria felt the warmth of her hand, "I'm realizing that I'm not the same that my views are changing a lot. I now understand why the elves don't share their knowledge and that frustrated me to no end before but now I see the wisdom behind it." She then looked at both of them, "Also I think I understand the both of you more too." With both of them with puzzled looks she continued her

explanation, "When we started this, there was no issues killing orcs but you were the first to hold us back on that when the time came. Also like Rosa and Adam I had heavy reservation about killing my own kind, where it seems that you two had no problems with that. But that's not actually what it was about right? As it's not about race but more about sometime seeing someone do something so bad that there are little options left, be it an orc or a human. My past self just could not understand that one and now I think I get it."

Anna wondered on that one, "We heard from Iris that you did not kill Marek when you had the chance, is that what made you think about all that?" When Alex nodded in agreement she quickly added, "And you are okay with your decision?"

Again she nodded, "I am, like I said, it's not what my mom would have wanted and while I see that it was necessary to do, it's still an action that I do want to question and would rather not have to do if I can." She then looked at Anna and wanted to ask something but held back.

Suddenly Anna blurred out an answer, "I think you did the right thing back there. Don't get me wrong it's what he deserved but not by your hands. So yes, I do think you did the right thing. Also you should always question it, always, when you stop then you should worry."

Alex was amazed, "Wow, you sure you can't read minds." She then looked at Mike, "And you still did not believe her?!?" They both suddenly laughed at his expense. Alex then stopped, "Still thanks for answering the question I never asked. I mean a lot." She then suddenly crossed both arms, "So do I pass the test?"

He was still playful about it but he did have an apologetic tone in his answer none the less. "I'm convinced, sorry that I doubted."

Alexandria then smiled, "Well I can't speak for questioning Anna's intuition but don't ever stop on my account."

He then smiled himself, "Thanks and I won't."

She then wondered about something, "Was that the only thing you wanted to talk about or was there more?"

There was a sudden playful look on Mike's face, which made Anna wonder. "Is now really the best time?"

Alexandria was instantly interested, "No no no, never stop those as well. I like those ideas as they always force me to understand something new in trying to fulfill the crazy request. It make Taeral go nuts when he finally hears about it, Lithius has fun with them as well."

Anna did not think those where the right reasons behind it but she stood back as he explained his idea to her.

Eventually Alex realized the current time and stopped analyzing what Mike has asked about. "Shot I have to go... I'm sure he will not mind as I'm not going to be that late." She quickly stood and ran away, "I'll swing by later to talk more about this okay." They both waved back and soon enough she was gone.

Seeing as it was the both of them she once again teased him, "Soooo?"

He shrugged, "She seems fine, and you where right, I'm sorry I questioned it."

"I'll be fine, no worries. I'll just be expecting a nice dinner and possibly something else later." She then had a half smile on her face, "You know otherwise how can I know if you're sincere or not?"

He then leaned in and gave her a small kiss, "But did Alexandria not say that you simply just know."

She quickly poked him on his arm, "You of all

people know better."

He smiled back, "I do and no worries I'll make sure to convince you without a shadow of a doubt." He then looked back to where Alexandria had run off to, "Still I am happy to hear it from her, I hope you don't mind."

She slowly nodded, "I don't as it's nice to know as well."

He then chuckled, "It seems that both Iris and Alexandria are changing a lot and thankfully I think for the better even considering what they both had to go through."

She smiled as well, "And that's a good thing. There are so many things that will happen in our lives, some good and some bad, and those experiences will constantly be changing us as they make us understand ourselves better. When we take it like that then those experiences only serve to make us stronger in the end. It's when we ignore them or simply focus on blaming those experiences that things take a turn for the worst." She then turned to him, "And those two are nowhere near doing that."

She then lead in and gave him a kiss, she then pulled back and suddenly had a bit of a coy smile on her face, "Now about that dinner?"

Mike laughed and so did she, he then stood up and held out his hand, "Then let me escort you to the finest establishment in Astrum that I can find."

She took his hand and stood as well, "Sound wonderful." She then leaned into him a bit more, "But you sense of direction lacks when it come to this, so I have the perfect place in mind."

He simply smiled and let her lead the way.

Epilogue

Iris's journal

A lot more time has passed since I got hurt and now with Rosamia help I'm pretty much back to normal. I still feel stiff, but it seems that it's because I've been out of it for a while now or so I was told by the others. Given all that we are still in Astrum, Alexandria practically begged us all to stay longer in order for her to finish her work with Lithius. This last project is taking a very long time to conclude and due to the nature of it she is pretty much forced not to tell me what she is up too. So essentially that means that it's something for the Council and also something Lithius does not want us to know about. Personally I'm okay with that, we have intruded in his business far too much already and I can understand more why there are certain things he does not want to share with us or others for that matter.

In exchange for the time Alex has agreed to help me with Adam's request in teaching him a certain spell, mind you I'm pretty sure that she would have done it anyways. At the start of it I was pretty sure that there would be no way for him to even learn this thing and Alex thought the same too. I think that's why she went the extra mile and somehow was able to reduce the complexity of the spell so much that he was able to learn it step by step without killing himself in the process, something that Rosamia is very thankful for. How she accomplished that before would have been impossible for me to understand but with Taeral constant teaching I'm starting to see how she goes about it.

He's been a great help to me as well, I've

learned so many things and so quickly too. He makes it so easy for me to understand, probably the best teacher I've ever had. I've told him so in order to thank him for everything he's done but he simply said that his expertise was only shown because he had a student that truly wanted to learn. I was honored by the comment, and when I told Alex she was very proud of me. Before I thought that holy was so simple compare to arcane but now I have to say that they are about the same. Given where I want to go that's truly something I'm happy about.

I have to admit that these last few weeks have been great for both of us and it's also helped others in the group learn new skills and be ready for the next time. Given how this started and ended the any extra oomph that we can bring cannot be a bad thing.

Looking back it hard to imagine how things got bad so quickly. When Alex got captured I was so lost and afraid, I really did not know what to do. I know I needed to find her but the way to do that was very dark for some reason. Thankfully I have some very good friend that helped me out with that, even when I did not think I needed their help. Plus you then had all that with her mom and that old mage and also Alice... It was so many things all at the same time and it seemed like it would never end for a while, but at the same time there was no real way to ignore or avoid it. Eventually Marek would have attacked Astrum and Alice would have come after me.

Still we weathered it out. Sure we were bruised and battered for it but somehow we managed to survive. It's changed us for sure mind you but because of that it's also forced us to take more moments together to talk about our past and our concerns. All that helped us understand each

other better and also reflect more on the decisions that we have made recently.

This adventure has been a really long one and I still question a lot about it, but I also accept the me that it turned me into and the me that I see becoming because of it. And because of that that, even with everything that has happened, I'm grateful.

