

# **Lights Templar**

## **Book IV**



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**by**  
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Dedicated to Anna  
My light in the darkness



## *Prologue*

### **Iris's Journal**

*I*t's now been a total of two years since the plan went into action and while it's been hard, it was also well worth it. The original goal was to help with the damages that the war and also what happened with the avatar of darkness, or should I say the God of Order. Now while there is not much that we can do about one third of the population disappearing, we have been able to resolve the other issues that these events have caused.

Currently everyone everywhere is in a home. For most, those homes belong to them and they also have a way to support their families. In theory, given time, those families are able to grow once again in an environment that they feel secure. Looking back it has really taken many years to get back to a world where the day to day of people did not have anything to do with war or its effects. It took a lot of effort and resources from every group but we have made it. When we all realized that we had finally reached that point we took a moment to congratulate ourselves.

Unfortunately getting to where we are now also made us realize of another problem that we had not anticipated on happening. At this time this new power that was formed supplies resources to fridge towns and also cities in some cases. Some of these resources are in the form of bodies for specific

work that needs to be preformed but others are in the form of materials and food, which is where the problem comes in. From what I have been made to understand these materials and food should be provided by the kingdoms that they belong to and we should not have to step in. But seeing as we are, some of the kingdoms have decided to keep the resources for themselves. Why give it away when someone else will do it for you, seem to be the mentality being followed.

Now after much research and also some poking around in order to determine how long we had to resolve this issue we stumbled on the possibility of a bigger resource issue, where as there would be a general lack of assuming we grow past the population values that we had previously. Finding a solution to these issues is where we currently are and also were we are currently stuck on.

Two ideas have been given. The Order and the Crusaders think that we should instate a sort of control group to make sure that the resources that kingdoms have is properly spent instead of being hoarded. The issues of the future resources could resolved itself if things are properly managed. No one in the group completely disagrees with the idea, there are obvious issues with it but there could be ways around it as to not make this so intrusive.

The problems come in with the second solution that was proposed by us and the Council where we suggested that we first find an alternate source of resources if possible. While again, no one had issues with the idea, the Order and Crusaders where against the proposed location for this alternate source. The original idea was that the main portal would be once again opened and communication with the orcs would start up in



order to see if a trade could be made in place.

Normally a disagreement like this would be broken by the fifth party, which in this case it would be the Crimsons. It was a surprise to everyone when this did not happen as Julia mentioned she would need more time in order to come to a decision.

Curious about this I've asked Julia why this was the case. She told me that at this time she simply couldn't completely get behind any of the proposed solutions. With the Orders plan, she has issues believing that the groups that would help control the resources could stay totally impartial for a long period of times. And with the Lights Templar plan, she agrees that cementing potential future resources would be the way to go but that dealing with the orcs would cause a big problem for her Crimsons. Currently the issue of succession has resolved itself. A lot of new people have joined which caused the push that she needed but a lot of those new people are not in a position to simply forgive the orcs for what they have done to them. Going ahead with this Julia thinks that they would see it as an act of betrayal, which is something that she can't afford to happen at this time. While that helped my curiosity, I found it very unfortunate that I could not come up with any ideas to help her.

Personally I'm okay with any of the decisions. I don't believe that the kingdoms should hoard any resources, I mean they are there for the people in a way not really for themselves so I see no issues of reminding them of that. At the same time knowing that there is a plan for future resources first is also a good way to go as it helps us deal with the hoarding problem without publically going to war with the kingdoms as we remind them of what they need to do.

Thing is this has been the topic of conversation for the last two weeks and still no movement can be made, which bring us to another question of how long can Julia hold out before she is forced to make a decision that she may not want to? I wish that there was a way that I could help her and I know I'm not the only one that thinks that way.

## *Chapter 1*

*M*ike was gazing at the horizon atop the Ancient Tower, which was currently being used as the headquarters for this organization that they had started with the Crimson, Crusaders, Council and the Order two years ago. He was so completely lost in thought that he did not even realize that Anna had made her way behind him. He only turned to face her when he felt her arms wrap around him.

Anna smiled at him, "I take it that the meeting that will happen in the next little while was the topic that had you lost so much?"

Mike nodded, "Yea, I'm still trying to figure out something so that Julia agrees with us but I still can't see it."

She moved to his side, "Well I do understand why she is doing what she is doing. Also I know that she want to agree with us but can't." Anna took a moment to think about it, "Should we drop it? I mean it's not like the Orders plan of action is bad."

He shook his head, "No I don't want to. Having ongoing communication with the Orcs is a good thing. I'm sure that it will not be an easy thing but look were we are at this time, do we want to jeopardize this by some unknown event from across the desert that could happen? If we open the communication then that helps us maybe know about things like this ahead of time. Plus, as you mentioned many years ago, it helps us cement something between our races that is not war. The pretext used is resources which should not be too surprising for all parties, but allows for much more in the future once we have that base foundation."

Anna sighed, "I know, I did suggest it after all."

But when we talked about it and when it was figured out that now would be the best time to bring it up, I never realized that it would cause so much issue for my dear friend and that's something I would like to avoid if at all possible."

"I know, I'm thinking the same thing."

It's at the time that Alexandria walked up the stairs; it looked like she was looking for someone and when she saw Mike it then looked like she had found it. "There you are, I was about to use a tracking spell to find you if this continued." She approached both of them, "So after much research I think that I can do what you asked but it will be very limited... very limited."

Mike was shocked, "Wait... how? You said that you maybe you could figure out it but it would take years to do so."

Alexandria slowly bobbed her head, "That's still not wrong actually, it will still take me years for the full spell if not more. But I may be able to use just a small portion of it... It could yield results that you where looking for, but there is no guarantee that what I have will work or if I'll be able to cast it properly, but I'm confident that I can try it out at this time. I figured that I would let you know before the meeting assuming it goes as the previous ones."

While Mike thought about what Alex had said, Anna glanced at both of them. "I'm lost? What did you ask her to try and how are you going to do it?"

Mike gave a small chuckle, "I was told by Alexandria to keep everyone in the dark about it, so unless she allows me to say anything I really can't say." His smile disappeared and his mood changed to a more serious and sad look, "I'm sorry about that."

Anna gave him a half smile, she figured that was fair considering what she had kept secret

about Rosamia a few years back. She turned to Alex, "Anything I should know about?"

Alexandria thought about it, "Essentially he asked me if there was anything that I could do to help out with Julia's situation. Now something was figured out, but I was not sure if I could do it at the time. What I want to do is to keep a secret as much as possible, when I know for sure then I'll share, but even then that will only be with the people inside our group and no one else."

Anna thought about what she had mentioned, clearly whatever she was planning on doing was not a little thing. She gave both of them a light smile, "It's alright, I'm just curious but I can wait if you think that's the best way to go." She then paused for a moment, "Hum speaking of going I think it's time that I head out with Adam and Iris."

Mike reach out and kiss her before she left, "Do take care."

She shrugged, "It's just a simple transport of goods for the Council members here, I don't expect any issues at all." She then turned to Alex, "I am curious as to why they simply did not teleport them here mind you, I mean it's not a long ride from Newport to here but would using the spell not still be the best way?"

Alexandria took a lecturing pose, "Theoretically you are correct, but after poking at the mission and the contents that you are delivering that's not actually the case. Essentially yes the content could be teleported but as soon as you do their potency will be affected by the spell as it reacts to it in a bad way due to its volatility. The contents are also very expensive and very rare so I can also understand why it was asked that you handle the transport as well."

Anna had a sour look, "Is there anything that we should know about these contents while we

manually transport them?"

Alexandria waved Anna's worries away, "No, no, no. There are no worries at all if you manually transport it. Heck you could even drop the cargo a few times and it would do nothing... I don't recommend doing that but it's more than safe still."

Still a bit concerned she turned around to face Mike, "Well on that note, I will be off. Good luck to you."

Mike shrugged, "I think that you will need the luck more then I will. Personally I fully expect the meeting to go as planned and that will be nowhere, mind you we will know if this is the last meeting that this can happen before someone is forced to make a decision." He gave Anna a half smile himself, "So as you said on that note, good luck and return safely. We will talk more about it when you come back." With that they all left the top of the tower.

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An hour had passed and the dreaded meeting had just started. The meetings were held by the heads that had been nominated by every organization. Currently they meet once every week in order to talk, updated all other parties on what is going on and also figure out the next plan of action if something needs to be resolved. Originally this meeting was held every day but as time moved on and also as things turned for the better there was less and less reason to do so.

The meeting room took the entire top floor of the Ancient Tower. While there where maps all along the walls mixed in with bookcases filled with notes and events that had taken place over the last few years, the room was fairly empty of major furniture. The focus was all in the middle where

you could find five desks arranged in a semi circle. The desks would have enough room for two people, one of them being the representative and the other was for an optional attaché that could be present. The main representative solely directed their function.

Currently for the Council Lithius was sitting alone at his appointed desk that was to the near left of Mike. Sometimes Alexandria had shown up as his second but those were rare occasions and were mostly during the beginning. To the further left Julia of the Crimson could be found. She looked very weary and was also alone. In the case of Julia she had never invited anyone to sit by her side. To Mike's close right you had the General of the Crusaders and his lieutenant, who sometimes explained the battle plans that he and the General had come up with for certain situations. And last to the further right you had Catherine of the High Order and her assistant who as always was preparing himself to write the notes of the meeting. To Mike's knowledge the assistant had never said a word during any of the meetings and his only duty seemed to be that of scribe.

This left Mike in between representing the Lights Templar with Rosamia by his side. Originally he had hoped that Anna would have taken that position but that had been vetoed by Catherine when this all had began. He obliged her because he knew that Anna would have hated these meetings and also letting her have her way helped with the first steps as back then things were a bit more volatile. In the end Rosamia had been a great person to have at his side as she was invaluable in helping all this work out as she knew how to better navigate the turbulent waters that came with dealing with the Order and Crusaders.

These meetings were not formal and no one

ultimately was the head of the group so anyone could start when they wanted to. In the last year that had meant that the Priestess of the High Order would probably be the first to have the floor.

Currently Catherine's gaze was fixed on Julia. "I'm I to assume that you have yet to make a decision on which of the proposed plans you will support?"

Julia nodded in agreement, before she could explain Catherine cut her off and continued with a lecturing tone. "Young lady, I realize and this decision has put you in a difficult position and I do sympathize with that especially given the few years that we have worked together. That said, it's been two weeks already and whichever plan gets approved there is a lot of work that will need to be done in order to make sure that we succeed."

She glanced at Lithius for a second and then returned to Julia, "Now I've already spoken to the head representative of the Council and he seems to agree with me that we should vote to force you to make a decision at this meeting." She pause for a moment with a look of mild compassion, "I hope you understand that I truly don't want to do this but we have given you ample time and during this time you have not come back with anything new as to discuss the matter more."

Julia was mildly stunned. Her reaction was not caused at the fact that Catherine was going to force her to make a decision, as she had expected that and had been for-warned by the General before the meeting in private, but more because she had called her 'young lady' which was odd considering that she was about the same age as Julia. Before Julia could respond she was once again cut off but this time by Mike, which made her wonder how she was supposed to share her mind if she was constantly being cut off. Still in



this case she made no moves to stop it as while she had made a decision on the subject she still did not want to voice it if she did not have too.

Seeing as Julia did not mind Mike voiced his proposal. "Now I certainly don't speak for Julia on this matter but some information came to me about an hour ago that maybe of some help with this situation. I don't have the full picture yet but I should in a few days, once I do then I'll communicate it with Julia and then at the next meeting she can voice her decision."

Before Catherine voiced her opinion Mike continued, "This will allow her a bit more time and more information to make a better choice for her faction. Given the help that the Crimsons have given in the past this is the least that we owe them, at the same time this give a clear deadline in order for us to move on and action this issue."

While Julia had no clue what information Mike was talking about she was not going to object to the proposed plan. "If the other members are okay with his plan then I will agree with it as well. It was never my intention to waste so much time on this nor do I want to waste much more."

She then looked at Mike direction and then back to Catherine, "But given the Lights Templar's information in the past, I think it would be in my best interest to wait until I hear from him and then give you my decision next week... assuming that the majority of the group is okay with that."

Catherine looked around, it had taken a fair bit of convincing to get Lithius on her side to force the issue but now that it would have to simply wait another week she did not think that he would support her anymore. She let a mild sigh escape, "I suppose that we can wait until then, but we will need a decision at that time."

Julia had a mock smile on her face, they had

all gotten use to working with the High Order priestess and had all realized that she was a good person deep down. It was just that when she made her mind on something and you were at odds with her, that good person seemed buried very very deep.

Having that piece of work being moved to next time, the High Order priestess moved on to the next matter at hand. As she opened her mouth the door to the meeting room opened up and a Crusader soldier barged in.

Catherine was stunned and then instantly that vanished and was replaced by anger. "SOLDIER, don't you see that you are interrupting important business here?"

The soldier just froze in place, while the priests by themselves had nothing to do with the Crusader branch and could not order them around they were still a part of the Order and the Order was ultimately controlled by the member of the High Order.

The General mildly chuckled at the soldier's obvious discomfort, "On behalf of my subordinate I will apologize for his interruption, as he is following my orders. He has been told to report to me, no matter where I am or what I'm doing if something of high importance should happen." He then turned to the Soldier, "Report!"

The nameless soldier instantly when at attention and started his report, "A large group was spotted heading towards the farming village of Ager."

Mike was curious as there was nothing overly odd about this. Ager was the main primary source for all food supplies, in the recent years after the first attack that had been stopped a lot of others had made other attempts to damage or control the town. "What does this large group consist of,

Bandits or something else?"

The soldier managed to turn in Mike direction if only to try and avoid the evil glares that he was still getting from Catherine. "The group purely consists of ex-Crusaders and Crimson and their numbers are in the forties."

This shocked almost everyone minus Lithius who only seems more puzzled by the situation. The General was slowly nodding his head, "Are you sure that they are ex-Crusaders they were not that many before hand and we have done a good job of catching up with those."

Julia suddenly added, "I also would like this confirmed, we had had problem with Crimson that have left in the past but there should no longer be that many."

The soldier glanced at both and felt a bit of cold sweat on the back of his neck. "I'm just reporting what was mentioned. The group was identified as Crimson and Crusaders..."

Mike gave the soldier a small smile and then cut in, "Well if that is the case than I think that we should investigate this right now." He then turned to Rosamia, "Please contact Alexandria and tell her to meet us at the entrance of the tower."

Mike then stood up, "So you mentioned that they were heading to Ager, any mentioned as to when they should get there?"

The soldier relaxed a bit having moved on to another question to which he had a better answer to, "Yes they should reach the town in about one hour." This puzzled Mike as they really should not have gotten that close without being detected.

A large cough could be heard coming from Catherine, "Pardon me but don't you think that this should be a matter for the General and or Julia to deal with. I mean we are dealing with Crimson and ex-Crusaders after all, would they

not be better to deal with this?"

"You heard what they both said, It should be impossible that there are that many ex-Crusaders and Crimson like this. So at best this is a normal group that figured that by dressing up as Crusaders and Crimson that they would create a bigger impact of some sort, if that is the case then we can quickly deal with it. If it's something else then are we not the best group to deal with other things?"

The General cleared his throat, "Aren't we thinking a bit much about ourselves..."

As Rosamia stood and joined Mike, he smiled and shrugged. "Maybe sure, but at the same time given our history and the enemies that we have faced I think that it's a bit warranted." He then paused, "Still it's very possible that we are also facing a force then can even overpower us, if that is the case then us going first will put you in a better position as you will be better prepared."

Mike then made his way to the not so secret back door to the room to head down the tower at a quicker pace. Already the other were preparing a team to go to the location was well, that being said Mike had every intention of getting there first. There was something odd about this one but he could not put his finger on why he thought that.

Rosamia broke him out of his thoughts with the same question that he was asking himself. "Why jump on this mission like this? I agree that it's odd but it is possible."

They continued the walk down for a bit more before he answered, "I'm not sure why, I just feel like it for some reason." Not letting go of his serious tone he reached out for his pendent, "Anna?"

A few seconds after a small version of her face showed up, "What's up? Things are normal over

here." She stopped her report as she saw his face, "What happened?"

Mike explained the situation as they continued their way down the tower. Anna took a moment to think it over, "Typically your gut feelings mean bad news, I can ask Iris and we can join you right away if you want."

This time it was Mike that needed a moment, while he knew that something was up it just as easily could be that the group they were heading for was a distraction and maybe Anna's team was the true target or something else. "No stay on your mission, but as soon as you can have Iris lock on my location via the pendent and make your way to me... assuming we are not back ourselves."

Anna nodded, "Alright we will try and finish this up fast then. Please be safe while I'm not around."

He smiled as her, "I will and I love you too."

As he terminated the communication Rosamia was more worried, she had seen him like this before as well and when it happened it typically meant extremes. Meaning that the end results were a joke or a very hard battle, she wondered which one today would bring. They finally finished their trek down the tower and met up with Alexandria.

She looked at both of them with a large smile, "You know I was in the middle of something important but at the same time I think that I could use a good distraction." Her smile then faded away as she realized the mood of both of her dear friends. "Hmm that bad eh, okay where do you need me to take us?"

Both Mike and Rosamia smiled at her comment, Alexandria had no clue where they were headed and what they were about to face but she would join up and lend her support without fail.

Mike suddenly felt very lucky to be around

people like this on a day-to-day basis. He quickly explained the situation. "In the end I would like it if you could teleport us as closed as you can to Ager but still being outside of the town if possible."

Alexandria almost wanted to laugh at that one, typically that would be impossible or at the very least very dangerous. But ever since they had their life energy restored and added to their life span, spells and their known limits were very different for all six of them. She grabbed their hands, "Just give me a moment to locate a proper target and I'll get us there no problem."

Rosamia assumed it took her maybe a total of thirty seconds before Alexandria started casting her spell and after that they disappeared only to reappear in large field about twenty minutes walk from Ager. As she looked around she noticed that something was coming from their backs. "That can't be them can it?"

Alexandria focused on a sight spell to get a better look, her wide-eyed reaction answered Rosamia's question. "From what you said it seems like it is. I count about fifty of them mind you and it seems to be an even split of Crusaders and Crimson." She turned the spell off and then turned to Mike and Rosa, "But that's not all there is also a person in a black armor leading the charge."

Mike had a curious look, "Wait, person? Can't you get more details then that with your spell?"

Alexandria was a bit frustrated, "Yea about that, remember that magic effect on the Impregnable Tower where you could not see clearly with magic. Well it seems that this person has the same effect on her... or it, for all I know."

After that comment the frustration and worry was shared by all, someone strong enough to block Alexandria's spell was not going to be an easy

target. Mike looked around and there was no cover, they were basically in a flat field. At this time it would be safe to say that the three of them had already been spotted by the incoming attack squad as well.

Alexandria powered a few lightning instant spells around her ready to be sent to her targets at just a thought, Rosamia casted protective shields that would make normal projectiles useless against them.

Due to the lack of information that they had there was not much of anything else they could do, at least now they were protected from regular things and only had to focus on the irregular. As they got closer the black knight held back as his troops continued to move forward. It's then that Mike gave his friends what he considered a very weak battle plan. "When this start I'll head to the black knight and you two take care of the others, meet up with me when you are done."

When they reached shouting distant Mike took out his sword and pointed it at them, "Explain your goal here, or we may be forced to stop you."

It's then that they heard a woman's laugh come from the dark knight, when she stopped she addressed her men. "It seems that the God still favors us, here before us is our target and we did not even have to kill a few innocent to drag them out of that tower."

Minor chuckles could be heard from the crowd, as they died down she continued but this time she addressed Mike. "Our goal oh leader of the Lights Templar is your destruction, simple as that. We will take what you have built here and destroy it. You choose a chaotic path so that's what I'll give you."

Alexandria knew that a fight was seconds away but she wanted to see if she could sneak in a

minor jab. "You seem pretty confident considering what we have already done, why do you think that you're going to end up any different?"

Still full of confidence the dark knight took out her two small swords, "Hahaha, that's simple little mage. I know I will be different because it's been prophesized." She pointed one of her blades forward, "ATTACK..."

The attacking Crusader obviously used magic to speed up their actions. Now with all of them having the ability to use holy magic after the decision that had been made all the Lights Templar did the same. What surprised the three members was that the Crimson also seemed to be able to do the same thing.

As planned Mike charged in the middle and tried to quickly make his way to the dark knight that was simply waiting in the back of her small army. Her men tried to stop him obviously but were not doing such a good job of it. While everyone had the advantage of magical speed it seemed that none of them had been properly trained on how to use it more effectively as they had been by Adam and Iris. As he blocked and dodged the sword swings that were coming at him he also saw that while these people had training it was nowhere near Crimson or Crusader level. Which made him conclude that these were not ex-Crusader and Crimson as they had believed but people that had been armored to look like them.

Rosamia took the right section as Alexandria took the left. Rosa conjured holy bolts all around her, as she had done during that fight with the daemon, and sent them flying randomly to the left and right of her. The minor shock and burns that the bolts would do on the targets would be nowhere near lethal but it would hurt enough to discourage them of trying to flank her from the



sides. Which allowed her to focus on the front; she attacked them using her holy spear spell. Now with better control over the spell she could charge it at a much faster rate and also control how much damage it would cause on its target. Their goal was not to kill if possible and given the skill level of these people that was something that could be arranged. Every time she could she let the spear spell go and this sent a few flying knocking them onto others, those that were the targets of the spell never stood back up as they were knocked unconscious by the blow.

Mike had finally made his way through her men and was now charging at her. All the while he hoped that her comment about their defeat being prophesized was just her mad rambling and not because of certain spell that he knew others could cast that could in fact tell them about the possible future.

He thrust his sword at her chest and she blocked it with her right short sword. From the corner of his eye he could see that she was counterattacking with her left short sword trying to aim at his mid section. He quickly changed his footing and flipped his blade in order to counter with an upward arc swing, as the two sword connected he then tried to tackle her in order cancel the other attack coming from her right blade. The tackle force her to move backward, as she did Mike tried to hit her with a horizontal swing which she deflected with her two sword but as she stopped his attack she then push his blade with hers upwards in an effort to create an opening in his front.

It was a good counter to his attack but it was not a hit that he would let her have. He used the momentum created and kicked her to her side, with the armor she had the move caused no pain

at all but it did force her to move and once again reposition herself. Whoever this person was, she was much better trained than any of the men she led.

Before going into the battle Alexandria had powered her reinforced staff, courtesy of Julia, with a lightning spell. Essentially a jolt of electricity would make it to anything that it would make contact with and in this particular case there were a lot of targets. Alexandria focused purely on defense, she blocked as many incoming attacks as she could with her staff, which caused the soldiers to drop to the ground instantly, and when that was not an option she moved out of the way. This whole situation reminded her of all the training that Julia had given her during the last few years, she was fully prepared for a melee encounter such as this but the same could not be said for the soldiers that were all dropping like flies around her.

What worried Alexandria the most was the amount of magical energy that the dark knight was emanating from her presence alone. She knew of a few that reached those levels, the first that she had met was Solanar and the second was a dragon. She saw from the corner of her eye that Mike was holding his own but that only meant that she was toying with him. How much time did he have before she got serious? Alexandria doubled her efforts so that she could go help him out as soon as she could.

Mike had managed to avoid or block all of her attacks, so far she had scored no actual hits but at the same time neither did he. What was more frustrating was that he was getting a bit winded by the fight, which was expected but she showed no signs at all. While she was not currently wearing a full plate of armor she did have more than he did and also from what he saw of her build she did not

seem to be the muscular type. Physically she looked like should be more akin to Iris in strength and overall build, but somehow she was getting passed those limits. Again he managed to force her to reposition herself but this time she did not immediately counterattack, he went on the defensive and prayed that this fight would not go over his head.

"I'll give you credit you are as good and they said but I think it's time that I teach you a few things about your current situation." She then powered her blades with dark energy.

He had been told that dark clerics could do such a thing; the main goal was not to let the weapon touch you as the energy could then travel from the blade to your body. Considering that back and forth avoiding a hit from the blades would be easy, but she knew that as well this made him worry.

She charged at him with her right sword but it was very slow so he moved out of the way. With the left she aimed for his side, which he blocked with his sword and then he realized his mistake. As soon as the two swords hit the dark energy made its way from her sword to his and then to his hand and arm. The pain that he felt was excruciating and he wondered how his whole arm had not gotten numb.

Triumphant she stepped back and laughed, "You have no clue how vulnerable you six are now to the dark energy. Mind you I wonder if you ever realized what really happened went both come into contact with each other..."

Mike cut her off by charging his blade with a pink glow and doing an overhead slash at her. Seeing as her other blade was still enchanted she blocked the move with both her swords as he expected the dark energy once again traveled to his

body causing him a lot of pain, but he pressed on and using the enchantment, the dwarven crafted weapon and his own strength he managed to break both of her blades.

"Well that was impressive but you must be in a world of hurt. Still you think I needed those cheap weapons to attack you?"

She reached out her hand and then black swirling mist enveloped it forming the shape of a sword. After a few second it's solidified and she then had a large smile on her face. It's at that point that the expression changed to annoyance as her blade suddenly disappeared from her hand. She turned to see Rosamia using an energy transfer spell to siphon off the magic of the blade. "There are two spells that you people have that annoy me to no end and that is one of them. I think that I'll finish you off first, and get rid of it."

Alexandria saw her powering a spell and she also saw Rosa using the magic that she had just stolen to create a shield as she got close, after having finished dealing with the soldiers as well, she figured that now would be a perfect time to strike. She launched all five instant lighting spells at her target. She assumed that the dark knight would have created a shield block the attack but what she did left Alexandria slack-jawed. "Wait you countered the spell with arcane magic... You're the same as Iris!"

As soon as Alex has said her name the dark knight dark eye bleed dark energy, also her whole body was now enveloped in a dark mist. "*Don't you dare* compare me to that insolent whelp."

Obviously Alexandria had gotten her attention but now she had no clue how she would attack her, arcane of dark energy? Alexandria powered a holy shield spell as strong as she could only to see that a large cone of dark energy was heading her

way. The cone was as big as she was; she silently prayed that the shield would hold. While she had learned how to cast them she had not mastered the art of powering it up with more energy after it had been casted like Rosa and Iris.

When the spell connected the energy protecting her was rapidly dwindling and after a few second the shield itself was starting to break. Alexandria casted another quick low energy shield around her as the first shield broke and the left over dark energy enveloped her body and sent her on the ground with a massive amount of internal pain. Had it not been for the second shield she would be unconscious for sure and if not for the first, dead.

Things were escalating way too quickly for Mike. The abilities that this lady was using was more than dark cleric and more like someone else, which he reminded himself was impossible or was it? The lord of light or Chaos had found a way around, it was that what they were facing here? He yelled as he prepared another charge at this new enemy, "Rosamia take Alexandria and leave NOW!"

Rosamia was already on her way to Alex in order to try and heal her wounds as she got to her Alexandria mumbled. "I guess... I hit a nerve there... I'll be fine in a minute but now I have to wonder how you are able to hold that much dark magic when you steal it without causing you so much pain? Just being in contact with it hurt like heck. Anyways round two, assuming we both ignore his..." Alex was then cut off as she saw what had appeared behind Rosa.

The charge that Mike had performed missed, as soon as he had gotten close to her she just vanished. He had time to turn his head and see her reappear in the back of Rosamia.

The dark knight had powered another shadow

blade and jabbed it forward. The blade went through Rosamia chest and then the dark energy dissipated in her body. Rosamia fell on top of Alexandria bleeding very badly. The lady knight then looked at Alexandria, "I will not let you leave so quickly and to answer your other question she was cheating that's why she never felt the pain."

Before she could continue she saw that Mike was once again charging at her but this time the move surprised her.

In his mind Mike was cursing himself, *'All this time she could teleport, that's how the soldiers got so close without us seeing them... and now Rosamia is paying the price for our ignorance.'* As he charged at her he dropped his weapon on the ground and reach out to grab her in a full body tackle.

The move had succeeded in surprising her and connected which sent both of them on the ground. He quickly moved on top of her and grabbed one of her arms and with his other hand punched her in the gaps of her armor. While her head was covered by a helm her face was clear so he then head but her on her face, causing her to cry out a small scream of pain as he broke her nose.

His attacks only served to infuriate her, "So now I can't teleport and attack like I did? You're a fool and now suffer for it!" Dark energy traveled from her and instantly went into Mike as he was purposely holding on to her due to the grapple.

Waves of energy flowed into him causing a lot of pain, somehow during that time it was now her that was on top of him and she was the one holding on to him. He screamed in pain as she feed him more energy then he then passed out.

Out for the count she stood up and made her way to the last remaining member. Who seemed to be desperately trying to heal her friend with tears running down her face. "As I was going to say, the

dark and light or Chaos and Order really don't mix well at all normally, and you people are now saturated with Chaos. That spell that she does protect her from the effects but at the same time it's also a good thing that she re-channels it because after a while..." She pointed to Mike's body, "That would happened."

She took a step closer to Alexandria who had stopped healing her friend that was still bleeding but not as much as before, "So, what now little mage?"

Alexandria had no clue what to do, Rosa was still in critical condition and Mike was out of the picture. She had to pray that she could hold out until help arrived, in order to do so she casted an anti-magic shield around her. The spell still depleted her a lot but she still had enough to fight, but then something unexpected happened.

The dark knight shook her head, "And that would be the second spell that I hate that you people know."

She then stopped and closed her eyes for a second and then made her way to Mike and crouched to grab his still unconscious body. "Well I guess the fun is over, seems I don't have the time to finish you two off. Still I got what I came for so my plans will move ahead."

Before Alexandria could do anything both her and Mike disappeared as she had used another teleport spell.

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Anna was looking ahead impatiently, her team was still in the wagon holding the supplies for Lithius. After Mike's message they had used magic to speed up the horse but that's as much as they could do especially with the magically sensitive components

that they were transporting. She figured that they still have about one hour before they reached the tower's protected grounds, a small sigh escaped lips.

Adam chuckled, "Just take Iris and go, you have been like this since you got the news. I swear you two really hate to be separated it's a wonder you both survived the many mission apart for the last few years."

She smiled at him, "For most of those missions we were actively doing something and that helped out. Still are you sure? What if you get attacked?"

Iris laughed at that comment as Adam had a displeased look on his face, "Seriously you think that I can't take them on? Well if that is the case I think that we are close enough that I could last out long enough for the tower patrol defense guards to come to my location. So please just go, I think I want to be alone now."

Anna nodded her head and gave him a small smile, after all this time she knew the act well and she also knew that he was worried as well.

She turned as Iris grabbed her hand, "Alright, hold on I'll lock on to Mike's location using the pendent..."

Iris then stopped and then had a puzzled and worried look on her face, "Hmm, not to alarm you but I can't find his location anymore." before any of the other two could ask she continued, "Okay I found Alex and Rosa, I'll teleport us there first."

In a second they were gone and now Adam was left alone and after that piece of news he tried to urge the horses to go faster.

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Anna and Iris appeared in a field, they could see that there were a lot of soldiers on the ground, they



could also see a crying Alexandria hands full of blood glowing golden on top of a bleeding Rosamia. They rushed to her.

"... Iris quick...\*sniff\*... my heal spell is barely keeping he alive."

Anna examined Rosamia, already the wound was now closing as Iris preformed a more powerful healing spell. While they all could cast holy magic they did have different limits with certain spells. With the blood that she had lost Rosa would still need a lot of rest but she would recover from the near fatal wound.

Anna continued to look around and then she saw it on the ground. She moved to it and picked Mike's sword. "Alex, what happened here? What did you face off against and where is Mike?"

Alex moved away to give Iris room to help Rosa, she was still sobbing as she tried to answer Anna's questions. "We don't know her name as she did not give it... but she was so powerful, she was also like Iris able to cast both arcane and holy... well dark in her case."

She took a moment to wipe her face and stopped as she noticed that her hands were still covered in Rosa's blood. "... Ah... I... She overpowered us. There was nothing we could do. I'm so sorry Anna but she took him as she teleported away."

Anna was feeling a mix of emotions right now. There were so many questions to ask but all she wanted to do was scream it all out. She took a moment and held it in, Alexandria was very shaken up and if Anna reacted to how she felt right now she knew that it would have a negative impact on Alex. "It's alright Alex, it's going to be okay. Iris is healing Rosa as we speak and as for Mike there are many soldiers lying around that will probably have a clue as to where she took him."

As brave of a face as she could muster Anna looked at Alex, "We will get him back somehow." Alexandria nodded and started to calm down.

Anna then looked and moved away as that had been her time limit; already tears were forming and drooping down her cheeks. She could still feel some left over warmth from his sword hilt that she was now holding, '*Please, Please, Please stay alive long enough for me to rescue you.*'

## *Chapter 2*

Anna was standing on top of the tower gazing at the horizon. She had Mike's sword strapped to her side and her own blade at her back. Two months had passed since his disappearance and as time passed she had more and more difficulty focusing on her inner protective thoughts in order to power her sword's enchantment. In the case of Mike's sword enchantment the key to powering it was rage and anger, something that was very easy to focus on at this present moment.

She let a silent sigh escape her, "Two months and still nothing... Normally I would ask you if I acted foolishly."

Anna thought about that question for some time and then smirked. Considering the resources that they had access to, it would have been stupid not to use them for the search to get more information. That decision had not been foolish at all. What was, she concluded, was her current decisions. She nodded her head slowly, resigning to what she had just realized. "Well there is only one way to fix that I guess."

It's then that movement could be heard from behind, "Did you come up with something?"

Anna turned to see Alexandria who had just walked up the stairs leading to the top. "I guess you could say that. I just figured out that I've been acting a bit stupid in the last few weeks."

With a doubtful look on Alexandria's face, she faced Anna. "I'm not sure why you think that?" Before Anna could cut in she continued trying to sound as reassuring as she possibly could. "It's true that we have not learned much from anyone

that we have captured so far, and it's also true that we still don't have any good leads on where she might be holding him. But there is nothing that you can do about that, I mean going off on our own with no direction is probably the worst thing that you could do."

She stopped as Anna gave her a small smile as she heard her last comment. "Worst as it is, you do realize that if the positions would have been reversed that's what he would have done and here I am just sitting here waiting. That is a very hard thing for me to deal with."

Alexandria broke eye contact, "Mike's a pretty logical person, I'm sure he would have done the same thing..."

Anna wanted to laugh out loud there is no way that would have happened. "You seriously think that, truly?"

"... Well...Maybe your right but I still don't think that means that you have been acting stupid."

Anna smiled at her friend, "Let me explain that a bit. True asking for everyone's help was the right move. Because of that we have been able to search a lot of places at once. It's just that now things seem to have stopped, we seem to be stuck in the same pattern and I've just been expecting that. He keeps saying that when it comes to my gut feelings he will always side with that, because for some reason even if it makes no sense it seems to be the right way for us to go."

She then turned to the horizon again, "As true as that maybe, because of everything, it's been hard for me to hear what my inner self has been telling me and the more I ignore it the more uncomfortable with myself I am. That's where the stupid part comes in." She turned to Alex, "I've done all I can here and there does not seem to be

anything else I can do. The nights have been very long and the last few weeks something has been telling me that I need to go, and I've ignored that for too long."

Alexandria was confused, sad and a bit angry, not at Anna and what she was saying but at herself. "I am so sorry that I was not strong enough to stop what happened, you know that right?"

She then felt Anna wrap her arms around her, while the gesture did let her know that Anna understood it also made her feel very small. Here was one of her best friends whose husband had been kidnapped and here she was taking the time to console her about her worries, when she could not even begin to imagine how emotionally conflicted Anna was really feeling right now.

Alex admired her, because she knew that she would not be able to act that way herself. But it also made her feel very small and shameful all the while. 'True as that maybe there is a way to fix that', she took a deep breath broke the warm hug and then looked at Anna. "Thanks, and again I'm sorry, you have so much going on right now in your head that I should deal with my own issues. On that note, let's focus on you. You mentioned you wanted to go, do you have a destination?"

Anna thought about how much Alex had grown in the last few years, she did not know her father at all but she knew that he would be very proud of her. She then took a moment to think about the question she had asked her. Normally she would say what needs to be done and he would figure a way to do it, she figured that she would have to grow as well. "Hmm, that's the issue I guess I know I need to go but I don't know where. I also know that we are missing something but I don't know what."

She used Alex and a sounding board and went

over what had been discussed many times over. "Ever since his capture we have been steadily attacked, nothing large but very constant. Sometime she also made an appearance, but the only thing we know for sure now is that we are dealing with a short haired red head with pitch dark eyes. We are assuming that she must have a base here as all these men that keep attacking us are fresh and have no supplies. The Council has also reported that they can't sense any portal magic being used so that removes a lot of possibilities."

Alexandria interrupted her, "True that they have not detected anything but that's not one hundred percent sure. There are other ways to transport people then teleportation and a portal, look at the dwarves. If something similar to that was used then the Council would not detect it."

She then thought about her own comment, "That being said I'm pretty sure that if someone else had visited the dwarves they probably would have told us when we updated them on the situation. I also don't see how anyone else could have taught her about it but them as it is very ancient knowledge."

"Hmm, okay that's interesting. Anything you can tell me about her eyes, I mean that can't be natural right? Could it be that something old is controlling her and giving her that knowledge?"

"I talked it over with Rosamia on that one, she thinks that her eyes are dark because of the amount of dark power that she had within her. Like when Rosamia's eye was glowing golden when she had the constructs presence inside of her. Now with that we asked ourselves if that meant that the dark lord was also not dead somehow as that's how we can see that she would have that much of his power. After confirming it with everyone we

could, all signs point that he is truly dead." She shook her head, "So that explains the eyes but not where the power came from."

Anna felt a bit hopeless after that, for a while there she thought there was finally something that they could grab on to. "There must be something, I know it, I feel it..."

Alexandria looked at the position of the sun as it was starting to set, "Well right now, I don't think there is anything that we can do about that, plus we need to get to that meeting soon." She then gave her a faint smile, "But afterward there maybe something that we can do. I don't want to talk about it here but it has to do with what Mike asked me to look into and it took a lot more time then I wanted but I think that I can do it in a way that it will help you."

Anna looked at Alexandria face, with news like this Alex would have normally been very happy and would have told her at the very start about this. So whatever had been planned between the two of them must have been very big if she was hesitant about it. Then something else occurred to her, "Wait you said 'we' for the meeting. Are you joining?"

Alexandria now had a mischievous smile on her face, "I am. I forced myself as Lithius's optional attaché for today. I think he's hiding something from me and after some magical scrying I've noticed that he has been visited often by members of the Order most of them working for Miss High Order priestess. If something is going to happen today then I want to hear it with my own ears."

This bit of news only served to make Anna feel worse. Since Mike was gone she had taken his place as representative with Rosamia. After only a few months of it she was already tired of those meetings, sure she understood the importance of

them but it was just not for her. "Great, I know she means well but Catherine definitely has her own agenda. Well in any case let see what she has in store for us and then talk more about that favor that he asked you about."

As they made their way down Alexandria wondered if she had done the right thing about telling her about that favor. She put it out of her mind and decided to focus on the now, she too wondered what Catherine was planning this time.

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Catherine needed to be very careful on how she was going to approach this. The result of the meeting was already pre-determined, most of the time this is how things went. The meeting itself was a formality to make it official and public. Sometimes clever and resourceful people could change the course of these events, and while Catherine knew that she was in the presence of such people this time it would not be the case. Still the last thing that she wanted was to indirectly insult the people that had gathered. She would probably be the last person to admit it out loud but after the work that they had done she did respect all of them, but there was a duty to perform and that had to come before emotions that's how it worked. She just hoped that they would not hold it against her for too long.

Everyone was now present; there was even an extra with Alexandria, which probably meant that everyone had a clue that something was going to happen today. Still resolute about her task Catherine started, "If no one minds let's start with the attack logs that occurred this week." She then motioned to the General to continue who in turned looked at his lieutenant.



The lieutenant grabbed a piece of paper, "So far we have had two attacks on Agre, the farming town. Three attacks on Capio, the city in charge of protecting and distributing the food goods. One attack on Calculs, the trading city and one attack on Navis, the main city of transport. Making for an overall total of seven attacks this week."

As his lieutenant finished his report the General continued, "So far all cities and towns have been attacked at least once, we have noticed that there is a heavy focus on Capio and Agre. It is assumed that this is the case as they are trying to focus their efforts on our ongoing primary food source." He took a bit of a small pause, "While their numbers are few, their attacks are constant and at the same time they are sending a message, which is that no one is safe."

As Catherine looked around she saw that everyone agreed with the General's assessment, which was not a surprise this had been going on for the last month. She took that moment to start her plan, "Thank you General. Now given our current state of events I would like to propose a change in tactic. Over the last years working with all of you, you have thought me that sometimes action is better than democracy. Currently the people are afraid and we must act in order for daily life to resume normally. And so I would like to create a task force that would hunt down these people that have joined up with this mysterious woman and stop them before they are able to proceed with their plans."

Alexandria looked at Lithius, this is what those talks were about and of course he would agree with it but it also meant something else. While she knew that he could tell that she was angry with him, Lithius was stoic. Alex turned to Anna, who currently had her eyes closed in deep

thought, she also looked very angry.

While it was assumed that Anna would be the first to comment it was in fact Julia that jumped in, "How do you plan on doing this? We still have no clue on where they are operating from."

The General nodded at her comment, "That is true but we have learned something interesting from all the people that we have captured. They all seem to share this same ideal that their lot has been cursed and the reason being is due to the powers that are currently in control."

Rosamia turned away from Anna and gave a confused look at the General. "But wait that makes no sense, I mean have we not made it clear that this is what we are here for? To give people a second chance."

With Alexandria still giving the look to Lithius, he answered Rosamia question, "I was asked to investigate into this and it seems that in a roundabout way we helped cause this. We have been focusing most, if not all, our efforts on the ones affected by the wars and that lost everything due to attacks. That still left a group of people that had not been affected but were still in a bad position in their current cities. Also we have ignored the issues with the current kingdoms and the current pressures that they are creating on their common people. While we did offer a second chance to anyone, priority was given to someone who had lost over someone that already had. Even if their situation was bad, it was still not as bad as not having a home. It would seem that in the end those types of people in those situations have been the main recruiting force for this mystery knight."

Julia was now getting a better picture and turned to Catherine, "Okay so we have a profile that can be used but we have to be careful as this could easily turn in to a witch hunt type of thing

due to the profile in question being very vague. Also how do you plan on getting the large cities and kingdoms approvals to just go in and deal with the ones that have been confirmed to be associated with this dark knight?"

Catherine nodded in approval, "You raise great points, for the jurisdiction problem it's actually easier then you think. The people being targeted are often seen as a drain to the kingdoms or cities that they live in. Now, personally, I don't agree with that but they do. So if we come in and remove those people I see them just turning the other way and letting us do it. In a way this has already been done once by the Lights Templar when they moved about fifty to sixty people from Capio to Denuo, while the reasoning will be much different the end result will be the same."

She then took a pause before continuing in order to properly phrase her next statement, "As for the witch hunt issue I could not agree more with you which is why I think that control of this task force should not be shared as it may shift and move around this profile once we agree on its clear meaning."

Raising her head, Anna looked at Catherine with grim look. "This task force that you are suggesting will take a lot of our free resources especially if we want to keep doing our day to day programs. Would it not mean that other priorities would need to be set aside?"

Again Catherine choose her words carefully, whatever Anna was thinking it would still not change the fact that this would happen due to the votes that she knew she already had. Still she would rather not make an enemy out of her if it could be helped. "Yes you are correct most of the resources for this would come from the same ones that are being used to try and find Mike and more

information on this new enemy. That being said I am not suggesting that we outright stop looking. In a way we could be in a better position to look around the larger cities and kingdoms if we go in with the pretext of removing their more unsavory people that are currently living there."

Catherine had a bit of a pleading look on her face, "This could be a good thing in order to find him."

Anna was not convinced but considering her conversation with Alex a little while ago it mattered very little and in a way it helped free her from her duties here. Still they did not all do this in order to just let it go and let the Order take control all over again. Anna gave a quick look at everyone that were all looking at her to see how she would react. She thought about it for a little while longer and then gave Catherine her famous half smile. "Fine, I agree."

This stunned mostly everyone but Alexandria who had an idea where this was headed. Before anyone commented on her approval Anna continued to talk, "You're right we are constantly being attacked once again and while this time it's not a large army an attack is still an attack and it needs to be dealt with. A special task force sound like a good idea but I agree with Julia that we still need to be very careful on how it gets executed. Because of that I would vote to nominate Julia of the Crimsons to lead this task force due to the already neutral positions that the Crimsons hold across all towns, cities and kingdoms."

Catherine was flabbergasted, this situation had not occurred to her as she had not assumed that Anna would have reacted this way. She turned to Lithius for support, "But the Crusaders have a bigger pool of resources and contacts with all those places, does the Council not think that they would

be better suited for leading this task force."

All eyes were on Lithius who took very little time to answer, "Not necessarily and while the Council did agree with this course of action no support was given as to who would lead it. With that said, the Councils support the creation of this task force and that Julia of the Crimsones should lead it."

Anna quickly added, "The Lights Templar also supports this decision."

Catherine simply looked at Julia, there was no way that she was going to refuse and all that was needed are three votes. She chuckled mildly at the situation, a group of clever and resourceful people indeed.

Julia took in this new situation that she had found herself in and looked at the General and also at the High Order priestess. "I will agree to lead this force to the best of my abilities. With that I hope that I can count on the help of the General as a second to help lead." The General gladly nodded in approval.

She then turned to Anna but before she could start Anna just shook her head from side to side and cut her off. "While this task force is in order there will be very little need for these meetings in order to agree on future events. Because of that I will be leaving this position empty or to another Lights Templar member if they decide to stay here." She turned to Julia with a weak smile, "It's high time I go look for him myself, the world and all this will have to wait or continue on without me as I need to do this."

Rosamia turned to Anna and asked the question that everyone was thinking, "When do you plan on leaving?"

Anna thought about it and looked to Alex for a few seconds, "There are a few things in still need to

discuss it seems but I figure that I'll be going sometime tomorrow morning or midday at worst." She then looked at everyone else, "If something comes up I can always be contact via our team's pendent so there is no reason for anyone to try and stop me."

Surprisingly it was Catherine that answered her comment, "I don't think anyone here would even try to stop you as I think we all understand why you need to do this." She then gave Anna a genuine warm smile, "I truly hope that you find him as quickly as possible."

Anna nodded, "I hope so too."

The meeting quickly finished after that and most of the attention by everyone was given to Julia for details on how she would like to proceed. This was the perfect time for Anna to excuse herself and leave the meeting room, as she left she saw that two other quickly followed her. Rosamia was the first to catch up to her, "So where are we going?"

"That all depends." She turned to Alexandria that was now next to her as well.

Alex thought about it for a second, "My room is probably the most shielded place here right now so there, we may as well invite the others at this point. The idea was to keep this close but pretty soon the cat will be out of the bag so we may as well."

Anna turned to Rosamia concerned, "Are you sure about this? What I said back there was a bit of a lie, I don't plan on returning until I find him so if you do follow me you will be leaving this behind... probably."

As they headed to Alex's room Rosa shrugged, "I figured but the way I see it both of you have sacrificed so much for my request, which was completed I might add. I mean everything else is a

bonus the way I look at it, also this is way more important." She paused for a bit and smiled, "and I'm sure Adam will see it that way too."

Anna chuckled at that, "Suuure he will... Actually I really do agree with you that he will. Plus I'm also sure that there is no way that we can leave Iris behind." She turned to Alex, "With the assumption that you are following as well?"

Alexandria opened the door to her room and let them in, "Did we all not agree way back when that you would all be lost without me? As for Iris, well I pity the person that tries to convince her not to join on this."

It took a little while but the others finally made it to her room, they took a seat around at the large circular table. As they all looked around they realized that Alexandria room in the tower was small, or to be more accurate it looked small. Every wall was occupied with bookshelves and there were book everywhere. There were only three other sections in her room, the bed, a small crafting table and the circular table, everything else was books.

Adam ignored the clutter and turned to Anna, "So I take it that we are finally going after him ourselves, do we have any clues as to where to start?"

Anna turned the question to Alexandria who hesitated for a bit before starting. "There may be a way to get information on this. Before any of this happened Mike asked me if I made any headway in the look in the future spell that the dwarves were using."

Rosamia was confused, "How could you it's not like you have the spell with you right?"

Alexandria avoided eye contact and looked a bit uncomfortable answering the question, Iris had a small chuckle at her expense and answered for

her. "While we were researching we were also copying certain spells of interest, the type of spells that we had no hope of learning in the time that we had."

Adam laughed out loud at that one, "So you were able to steal spells from them without them knowing?"

Alexandria shook her head, "Not really, more like they let me go with them."

With a puzzled look Iris tuned to Alex, "I have to agree with that too but how did Mike know about it I thought that the idea was not to tell anyone? Plus, I don't want to belittle your power and intelligence but there is no way that you can cast that spell... is there?"

"First I'm not sure how he knew, because I was following what we had agreed and did not mention it to anyone. It's one of the reasons why I shielded this room so much, so that no one would be able to know actually."

Anna cut in, "After so many years I've stopped asking how he just seems to know. He did try and explain his system as he calls it but it's not something I would encourage anyone to do. But more importantly are you able to cast it, because if you are I'm sure that will give us the hint we need."

Alexandria was a bit wary to answer. "At the start of this when Mike and myself talked about it we figured that we would try it on something that mattered but would at the same time hold little impact."

Anna nodded finally having the missing piece, "It was to help Julia make a decision, depending on what you saw it could help her or not. Either way the choice was still hers."

Alex smiled and continued, "Exactly. At that time I thought that maybe I was in a position to try to cast the spell. There was really no guarantee."



Her mood turned somber, "With what happen when she attacked us I took the initiative and contacted Kilor for help. Being the dwarf in charge of the knowledge of the dwarves for their history and spells I figured that he would be the best person to contact."

Adam then cut in, "You mean he's the dwarf that you thought you could convince more easily for help you cast a spell that you stole from them, right?"

Alex looked at him with a sour look, "...Partly but not the total reason." She shook her head slightly and continued, "After some convincing and a lot of work we were able to create a mini version of the original spell. At this time I know I can cast it for sure, what I'm not sure on is what it will show us, for how long and if it will show anything at all."

She turned to Anna with a sad look on her face, "I'm sorry that's all I can do."

Anna was holding back the tears, for some reason she knew that this was going to be the break that she was waiting for. "Please, do not be sorry about anything. I get it, there are no guarantee but for some reason I know you will pull it off. I just know it."

Anna stood and reached out for Alex and wrapped her arms around her and whispered, "Thank you so very much."

Iris looked at the Alexandria reaction and took in her explanation, something felt off from what she had said and how Alex was reacting.

When Anna sat back down Alexandria turned to everyone, "I'll need a few hours but I want to try and cast the spell latter today. I also want to do it in the Impregnable Tower's second floor, both Iris and I can use a teleport spell to get us there as the marks are still good for all of us. The reason for

that is that I would still like to not alert anyone that I can do anything like this and I know that the tower will help me hide that as no one can pass thought its defenses. Assuming we get anything useful then we can come back here, grab some supplies and go where we need to go."

When she finished Adam was the first to stand, "Okay, I need to go finish up some things and I'll start packing and wait until you are ready."

Anna followed after him, "We should probably all do the same." They all agreed and left with the exception of Iris.

She looked at Alexandria, "What's really going on with that spell? The sister I know would be jumping in joy being able to cast a spell like this and currently you seemed hesitant and careful. It's not like you at all."

Alexandria chuckled a bit, "I know. I think that the only reason Anna has not noticed, because she would have been the first one to ask about it normally, is because of the situation. The spell is exactly what I said there is nothing hidden about it."

Iris was still not convinced and was also not letting it go. Alex took a deep breath and continued, "*Fine...* If you must know, I'm acting this way because I'm scared... There I said it."

Iris was shaking her head in disbelief, "That's... never been an issue before, what's changed?"

Alex rubbed her forehead, "Well first you have that spell that that I used to close that small portal that almost killed me. Then you had my lack of knowledge on those enchantments that unknowingly hurt both Mike and Anna. This was then followed by the life transfer spell that resulted in the death of my father in order to save Rosamia... I don't really have a good track record when it

comes to these unknown spells."

Alex's mood then turned gloomy again, "I know this spell will work but what if it show her something she does not want to see..." As tears started to stream down her cheeks she continued, "What if I hurt someone I care for again with one of my spells, I don't want to do that again Iris."

Iris wrapped her arms around her sister, this was one of those times were she wished that she had Anna skill to say the right thing to help but nothing came to her still she tried anyways. "No matter what she sees there is no way that she will blame for it, you know that as much as I do. Now will it cause her pain, we don't know that at this time but assuming it does then we can be there for her. In the end I think that you were right to bring this up and whatever happens it will be worth it I'm sure."

Alex smiled, "Thanks... Hmm, again I need to be consoled this is becoming a habit that I need to break."

Iris shrugged, "Did you not say it yourself? Considering all that you have done for everyone this gives us a chance to return the favor, there is nothing wrong with that." After that they both smiled and started with the preparation for the spell.

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It took a few hours before they were able to use the teleport spell to make to the Impregnable Tower's second floor. As they appeared they noticed that things were as they had last seen them, the same white stones lined the walls and you also had the stairs that lead up to where the rest of the life energy ball that was left over. The room was still this large circular completely empty place.

Adam looked around and felt uncomfortable,

"Why is it that when we start these adventures, or in this case rescue, we always seem to start at a place I really don't like."

As she placed herself in the middle of the room Alexandria looked back, "Now I'm curious, is there a place that you would be okay with and does it exist?"

Adam was a bit flustered by her question, "I'm sure there is... not that I can think of it at this time."

Rosamia chuckle a bit, "But this is the place that you first told me you love me, does that not mean anything?"

Adam scratched his head as he was feeling very trapped right now, before he could come up with something she continued. "It is also the place where you almost died as well so I'll let you off on that one."

Adam shook his head as he saw that Rosa had a coy smile on her face, this group was a real mine field from him. Looking for a way to change the subject he looked at what Iris was doing.

Currently she was placing three small glowing 'X' on the ground. They were arranged in semi circle pattern with Alexandria being the middle point about thirty feet away. He then turned to Alex, "So do we need to do anything for this spell? Like hold hands or something, most of your spell seems to need contact."

Alexandria shook her head, "Nope not for this one, but there is something that you will need to do. In order for the spell to hopefully focus on what we want to see you will have to keep thinking of something in your head. Actually if you can think about only two things the future and Mike that would be for the best, thinking of anything else may actually harm the spells affect."

Rosamia then cut in having thought of what

she had just said, "If I understand correctly would it not be better if we leave while you perform this spell?"

Iris answered her question while she motioned for them to move at the marked location, "Yes and no, the way it was explained if there are more people that think about the same thing the better the result. So really it's a bit of a double edge."

Alexandria continued the explanation, "Still just in case we have marked specific spots were we think it will still help the spell but not harm it too much in case someone slips."

She then turned to Adam who quickly commented and looked at Anna, "Hey now, I'll admit that I'll poke fun and maybe do my fair share of bad comments but I would never..."

Anna raised one hand to motion for him to stop, "Don't worry Adam, I know. I'm sure Alex just mentioned it because even if no one wants to it's still pretty easy to slip up considering we are dealing with thoughts."

Alex nodded her head as Anna had hit the reason right on the mark, Anna looked at the spots that Iris had marked and there was one missing. She turned to her, "Where should I stand?"

She then felt Alexandria hand take hers and pull her back close to where she was a few seconds ago. "You will be next to me. While I'll be casting the spell you will be its main source of direction." Understanding the reasoning, which made perfect sense to her, Anna placed herself in front of Alex and tried to focus her mind on what she had been told.

"Okay, again the future and Mike." After re-explaining what needed to be focused on Alexandria started casting the spell.

Words that only one other present could understand were being said, as Alexandria

continued the room started to be covered in a deep fog. They could still see each other but only just barely. As she continued with a few complex gestures the fog above Alex and Anna intensified. When Alex had finished casting the spell, Anna was the only one close enough to hear what Alex was whispering. "...Please don't let me be right..." Then Alex's eyes went wide open, "Oh crap... no..."

Before she could explain her somewhat terrified looked that only Anna could see, a picture started to form above their heads where the fog was the thickest.

The environment was oddly familiar but at the same time not. It seems that the location shown was a forest clearing next to a small farming village with clay houses.

The spell then focused on Adam who was fighting another man who was clad in similar dark armor that she had been described as wearing also with dark black eyes. As the spell focused more they could not only see that the other person was somehow Mike but they could also hear what was being said as they fought each other.

"I'll do this so she does not have too." The Adam being shown then speed up and launched a furious attack on Mike.

Before anyone could comment on what they were seeing the scenery then quickly changed. While the place was still the same it was now Anna that was fighting Mike, in the distance you could see that Adam was on the ground being healed by Rosa. Anna attacked him with his own sword that was glowing pink, she was furious and at the same time in a lot of pain. It was easy to see that she did not want to fight this fight.

She yelled at him, "You keep saying that no matter what you will hear my voice, well prove it... *Come back to me, NOW!*" As she said it she thrust

the sword she was using forward at his side, he countered by moving to the side and trying to slash her from behind. Anna quickly swung the sword back in order to block his move. They both reposition themselves, Anna was facing him shaking her head and then she mumbled something they all could not hear.

While she was doing so Mike charged at her. She had seen this charge a thousand times and over the years they had noticed that there were a few ways to avoid it and also counterattack, of all people Anna knew them all. When he got to the right spot she moved away, the timing had to be when he had enough momentum that stopping would leave him more opened then continuing to charge forward. The next step was to wait for the right time to get close and strike.

The sword's glow went from pink to red as the rage fuelling it was being replaced by another emotion. But while its power went down the strike was true.

Everyone eyes went wide as they all looked at the picture of Anna, using Mike's sword that had been left behind, piercing through his stomach. As a final blow the enchantment low effect released and created an explosion blast that formed a large whole where his stomach was. Mike fell instantly to the ground dead, Anna dropped to her knees crying.

The scene then pulled back and showed that Iris and Alexandria where close and were fighting their mysterious enemy. When Anna had performed the victory blow all three of them stopped fighting. The women had a stunned look on her face, "I can't believe you actually did that, I must say that I never expected it. Well that will change things a bit."

They then heard a small echoing laughter

coming from her as the image disappeared and the fog started to dissipate. It only took a few second for the room to return to normal with all five of them just standing there still in shock.

Alexandria was the first to react, her lips were trembling and she tried to reach out to Anna.

Anna had closed her eyes as tears were running down her face. She was in mental anguish right now nothing was making sense. Before Alex could reach her she turned, tried to wipe the tears off her face and started to walk to the stairs leading to the third floor of the tower. "...Please, I... need some time..."

While Adam watched Anna walk up the stairs he grabbed Rosa in a protective hug. Iris then reached out to Alexandria who was shaking her head, "No, no, no, no, no..."

"You did not cause this Alex, it's..."

Alex cut Iris off and looked at her with a terrified and sad look on her face, "But I did at the end a thought popped in my head for the spell not to cause more harm than good and looked what it showed us."

Before Iris could consol her Adam looked at her, "Well then maybe this is a good thing. I mean now that we know we can change it right? Is that not what you people tell me we specialize in, changing people known outcome."

Alex still with a sad look on her eyes, "And you think that she will see it that way, could you if it was you and Rosa?"

Adam nodded his head, "No I know that I would not see it that way at all. I would be pissed to the high heavens, but she is not me so that's good and when she comes down and if she does not see it that way then you can tell her." It was not much but Alex would have to accept it and hope that he was right.



It took at least one hour before anyone in the group could say anything out loud. Adam finally having enough broke the silence, "You know maybe some go check on her?"

Iris sitting next to Alex turned to him, "Are you volunteering?"

"Ah, no but..." Rosamia then stood up, "I'll go, Adam is right we should check to make sure she is okay." As she made her way to the stairs they all heard footsteps coming down.

Anna had swollen eye from the all the crying that she had done and while it had stopped she was still understandably and clearly a bit shaken by what had been shown.

She addressed everyone as she made her way slowly to Alexandria. "Let's all teleport home and get ready for tomorrow. I know where we need to go now so let focus on that and see how we can get there as fast as we can to try and stop this."

Iris made her way to Adam and Rosamia and grabbed both of them, without hesitating she cast the spell and all three disappear leaving the Alex and Anna together to hopefully heal each other.

Anna grabbed Alex's hand. "For now let focus on the fact that I know where to look for him, as for the other thing that we saw... We have another chance at the dice it seems so let's roll them in a way that will beat the odds, okay?"

Alex realized that Adam had been right; she also saw how strong Anna really was and understood more why Mike relied on her without question. "Alright, let's do that and know that I'll do anything I can to make sure it does not happen."

A small smile appeared on Anna lips, "I know you will, so because of that stop blaming yourself okay. You manage to do the impossible and give me what I needed; the rest of the information is up

to me to deal with and not your fault."

A small smile then appeared on Alexandria's face, so very strong she thought. "Alright I will, 'Never give up, no matter the odds?'"

A small chuckle escaped Anna lips as she remembered familiar creed that they had come up with a long time ago, "And 'Follow you heart and your regrets will be few'..."

Alexandria nodded in agreement "It's time to go fight and beat the odds again, reaching out for the impossible as you shown us that we should." Anna nodded in agreement as well, as Alexandria casted her teleport spell leaving the tower empty once again.

## Chapter 3

Anna was preparing her pack as someone knocked at the door to their room.

"It's open." Julia opened the door and walked in. The room itself was the same as all the others, circular using the tower bricks as walls. Inside to the left they had a bigger bed then most as they were two, normally. To the right you have a couch that seated two with a small table and two other large chairs that Julia's knew from past experience were very comfortable. To the edge of the room you had two small study desks linked together with some bookshelves around them. One of the desk was clean and the other had clutter on it, as Julia took a closer look she realized that the clutter had been there for a while as it was gathering dust. She tilted her head a bit and closed her eyes. *'You kept it the same as before he got captured. I knew you were in pain but I did not realize how much and also why did you keep this to yourself?'*

Julia thought was broken as she heard Anna, "...Is there something you wanted? I'm leaving early in the morning so now is the time."

Julia gave her a weak smile, "Did you get any news, or a location? I'm just wondering if you have an actual destination."

At that question Anna stopped her packing, paused for a moment and turned to Julia. "I know where to find him, or I should say I know where I will find him now."

Julia was puzzled, this was good but the way she had said it if felt so sad. "That's great news, where is it?" Again Anna took a moment before answering, before she could come up with

something Julia broke her inner thought process. "What are you not telling, you know that you can trust me right? I mean after everything."

Anna smiled at her friend, "I'm sorry that's not the issue here at all. I know that I can trust you with my life. But I also know of the task that you are in charge of, in no small part because of me, and I'm not sure that burdening you with this will help. Plus there is also the issue of this mystery attacker that is always ahead of us, we don't know how she is getting her information. Is it by willing people in our ranks or are people unknowingly helping her by using her magic."

She paused for a moment and had a sad look in her eyes, "I'm sorry Julia, I really am but there is too much on the line for me plus with the destination in question I just can't risk it. I hope that you understand."

Julia shrugged and gave Anna a small smile, "It's alright I get it, it's just one of those right. Still if you need my help, even with everything going on, please let me know."

Anna nodded, "I will, and also if you can, keep us up to date if there is a big change in the situation. We may still be able to help, indirectly probably but you never know."

"I will, so is there anything that you can tell me about this?"

Again Anna stopped to think about it, there was information that she had that could be helpful to Julia and pretty soon it would not matter if others knew or not. "He's a live, but... he could be helping her. So keep that in mind if you plan on strengthening your defenses as she may know your weak points. That's all I can say."

Julia was stunned, "I...how can you be so calm, I mean you just told me that Mike could be a traitor somehow. What's really going on here?"

Anna eye were staring to water, she closed them as quick as she realized it. *'I will not cry over this again, every fiber of my being is telling me there more to this then what Alex's spell showed us. I just have to wait and see and not overreact to what I was shown.'* She opened her eye again and now they showed determination. "I'm sorry Julia but I can't say more for many reasons. What I can say is that we are all leaving very early in the morning in hopes to avoid as much attention as possible. Also I will find him and bring him back."

Julia warped her arms around her dear friend, "I know you will, you of all people will find a way. Still... anything you need let me know okay." Anna just smiled and hugged her back.

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The sun had not fully come up and the group members were all at the teleportation circle that had been built in front of the tower. These circles would help mages move around easily to pre-set locations at a great distance. They were all in a circle holding hand as Alexandria prepared the spell. Anna looked around and saw no one, still if she did not see them she hoped that this ruse would buy them a little time as they had no intention of going to any set location.

They disappeared and reappeared about four hours away from Calculus in the middle of nowhere very close to the mountains. Adam turned on his tracking spell and asked the question that was on everyone mind. "Okay so where are we going? You seem to have a clear location in mind but don't want to share, now that we are away from, well anything, can you tell us?"

Anna nodded and smiled, "Yes I can. The vision showed us a battle and I know where that is.

It's the first little town that we encountered in the orc section of the world. Remember that farming village where we first encountered giants?"

Iris was a bit clueless on where she was talking about, "I take it this was before me?"

Anna agreed, "Yes this was when we all first jumped in the portal and the stop that we did before we met that orc leader before K'azugg who then lead us to the place that you were originally held captive."

Rosamia had a puzzled look, "I think the rest of us now all remember the place, but how do you plan on getting there? I'm guessing a portal is out of the question, and going across the desert would probably take us a long time due to the climate."

Alexandria then stepped up to answer the question, "That's the part that we talked about in private once we left the Impregnable Tower. Essentially we will cross using the mountains, the desert is out of the question as you mentioned and so is a portal so that was the only way that we could think of that would be less time consuming, private and also allow us to avoid that climate."

Adam though about it, "Okay that explains why you told us to pack warm items for this trip but the way you both chose will not be easy and would it still not be a better option to just do a lot of teleport spells, or god forbid, use a flying spell to move us across the desert?"

This time it was Iris that answered his comment, "Even with the power we have now, doing that would leave us both drained for a while. That desert is very big." She then turned to Alex, "Still you are planning on using magic here and there to help with the crossing right?"

Alexandria happily nodded, "Oh yes, very much so. Still it will be small 'ports and maybe small amount of flying. Enough to help get us

across quick and give us time to also replenish ourselves even in those harsh conditions."

As they all convinced themselves that they had to do this, Anna took a moment to look at all of them. "Thanks everyone for doing this, I know it's not going to be easy but I think it's the best way..."

She then focused on Adam that seemed preoccupied with something else. "What are you seeing Adam?"

He took a moment longer and then answered her, "Because of the secrecy as soon as we got here I turned on a tracking spell and something far just came into my range. Orcs, six of them it seems."

Everyone instantly casted a tracking spell to see what Adam had mentioned, with the exception of Iris the other soon realized that the range where this was happening was outside of what their version of the spell could pick up. Iris focused a bit longer then turned to Anna to give her an updated. "We need to hurry to their location, seems that now there are only five orcs left. From what I'm guessing they are being attacked by humans." She then turned to Adam so that he could confirm.

He simply smiled and nodded, he was very proud of his little protégé. Understanding the situation Anna pointed at three of their members, "Iris seeing as you see them can you take Adam and Rosa to their location and keep them alive until I get there?"

Iris nodded and grabbed both Adam and Rosa's hands. As she casted the spell Adam slowly nodded his head, "Off I go saving orcs from humans, I can already hear my past self screaming in my ear."

Alexandria approached Anna, "As soon as she gets there I'll be able to get her location and we can head there too."

As she was about to grab Anna's hand she

stopped her. "Before we do there is something that I would like to ask you. It seems that I've been indirectly nominated to lead the team, which is fine, but considering what is at stake would you be able to stay close and watch my back in case something happens?"

She tried to lower her tone so that she would sound less serious with her request but given Alexandria's somber reaction she did not think that she had managed it all that well. "Anna I'm pretty sure that everyone on the team would have your back if you asked. Now I'm not really sure why you picked me over Rosa, but if that is what you wish then I'll stay as close as I can."

Anna gave her a light smile, "The reason I picked you over Rosa is because you are extremely intelligent and also you have experience dealing with certain types of consequences due to personal actions. Given the result of that spell I can't think of someone better to have my back."

Alexandria broke eye contact and looked at the ground near her feet. Basically Anna was telling her she was afraid that she may make a bad call due to the situation that she was facing and for some reason she thought that she would be the best person to talk her out of it if need be. Just a few hours ago Alex was being consoled by Iris because of all the traumatic things that she had to live with due to decisions that she had made in the past. While Alex could now understand why Anna had chosen her she had to wonder if she was up to the task. Alex raised her head and looked at her, "I understand what you are saying but I'm still trying to emotionally deal with those and the truth of the matter is that the last resent spell really did not help."

Before Anna could interrupt Alexandria gave her a small smile and continued, "That being said,



if you still want me by your side knowing this then I'll gladly give it my all."

Anna then grabbed Alex's hand, "Your all will be more than enough, thanks."

Alex nodded and switched her mood to her more jovial self, "Okay now let go see Adam face twitch as he saves those orcs." After the teleportation spell was cast they disappear from their current location.

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As soon as the three arrived at the location with Iris's spell Adam charged in. She had teleported them right next to the battle. Currently the five orcs were trying to defend themselves against nine humans. Now Adam knew firsthand how tough orcs were but these humans were humans that had joined up with this new enemy of theirs and somehow this woman was able to give them all powers that rivaled most Crusaders. Not wanting to take any chances in case they had a hidden surprise he shouted at the others. "Iris, join me on the attack, Rosa keep those orcs safe." As he said it he had a quick lapse due to what he had just told Rosa to do, he put his old training out of his head and focused on the enemy in front.

The first order of business was to try not to kill these people, more training out the window for him. He twisted the way he held his blades to be able to attack with the flat of them easier, then he powered up his natural strength with holy magic. This way he would still have to be careful not to bludgeon them to death but that was easier than the alternative. Two of the three attackers in front of him charged at him, everyone was also magically speeding up so it pretty much nullified the effects of the spell. The other advantage that

Adam had was the sheer clumsiness of the charge, so far that had been the one constant advantage that they always had against her troops as they all lacked experience.

As the first one got close, Adam ducked the forward blade that was aimed at him. For a counter attack he aimed one of his blades to the attacked kneecaps, he heard a crack and then a cry in pain and then the enemy dropped to the ground. For the second, Adam had to stand up and then with his other blade and his magical strength he easily blocked the blow coming at him. When their swords locked Adam twisted around his new target and with his other blade hit him in the back of the head, after hearing another crack he moved to his next target.

This new enemy acted differently than the others and was more on the defense at this point in time. Adam ran to him and then took a forward stab at him with his blade, as expected and as he had hoped Adam's target moved away to avoid the blow. Adam then swung around with his other blade in an overhead swing attack. The attacker surprised Adam as he once again moved away, Adam had hoped that he would have blocked it and with his new strength the blow would have been a debilitating one even with the block. He then guessed that not all of her troops lacked experience after all.

Being able to cast both arcane and holy Iris had no issues in situation like this; she powered both her blades with a small lighting enchantment and charged in. As she got close the three in front of her tried to move away to avoid getting hit, but she did not have to make contact in order for the spell to jump from her blades to their armor and that was something they all saw as one of them got electrocuted and fell to the ground. It's at that

point that her two remaining attackers split up, one of them tried to get her attention while the other seemed to be looking for something. Iris tried to figure out he was looking for as she moved around her current enemies constant swings. As he got closer and closer to hitting her, she realized that she would need to deal with this persistent attacker before anything else.

Having been forced to change her plans Iris focused everything on his attack patterns, from the way his feet and shoulders where placed his next attack would be a horizontal swing from the left. Knowing this she used her left sword and aimed for his weapon in an upward slash in order to block the move. This action also had two side effects, the first would be that it knocked his off balance but more importantly it would also allow contact with her weapon to his. Instantly a lightning shock traveled from her blade's enchantment to his metal blade then to his body, he fell to the ground after.

Now that she could finally focus on her last target in front she realized what he was looking for. It seems that this next person had sheathed his sword and found a nearby branch that he was now using as a makeshift club. Iris nodded in approval; this would allow him to block her attack as the wood would not conduct the electricity generated by her spell. Still as clever as it was it would still be a futile move as she swung both blades in his direction and ordered the enchantments to leave her blades and arc in his direction. With his speed enhanced he surprisingly was able to dodge one but not the other. She reapplied the spell on both blades and checked to see how the others were faring; when she saw what Rosamia was doing a dumfounded look appeared on her face.

Iris tried to understand but clearly she was missing something. Rosamia had casted a dome

like holy shield that covered the orcs and herself inside. It seems that she had put enough power in it to stop the enemy's physical attacks for a while as they were still unable to break the shield. So far that would have been the normal approach to take, what was odd was what Rosamia was currently doing.

She was standing in front of the enemies, still pounding at her shield, but with one arm stretch out in front of her with a hand that seemed to be holding something invisible. With her other hand she grabbed something and pulled back, as she did a glowing arrow appeared. When it was now clear that Rosamia had casted a holy arrow spell everyone, including Iris, stood still for a moment. Iris figured that they were wondering the same thing as she was, which was what was the purpose of firing an arrow behind the shield? They figured that they would get their answer soon as Rosamia let the arrow go.

It traveled at great speed at one of the enemy targets and then the dumbfounded looks returned as the arrow simply passed though the shield as it was never there hitting its target knocking him out instantly as it sent him flying to the ground.

Quickly as she could Rosamia made the movement to grab an invisible string and pulled back again in order for the spell to generate another magic arrow. At this point her two left over targets started to move away but it made no difference as she fired her second shot and then the third.

After that there was only one target left and that was the enemy that Adam was still attacking, it seemed that he had finally found an opponent with skill. As good as he was compared to his comrades now all laying on the ground it took all his effort to try and match Adam. Rosamia felt a

sorry for him as she fired another arrow and let it fly hitting him in back, knocking the last enemy on the ground.

As Rosamia dropped the shield around her Iris approached her with stunned look. "What the heck was that and how come you never showed me?"

Rosamia chuckled a bit, "This is the first time I've use it in actual combat and I've only been able to do it recently. Besides the obvious change in the holy shield spell you also need a good deal of archery skills, thankfully during the last year I've been close to a lot of good instructors which allowed me to put it all together like I just did." She then smiled at her, "Don't worry I'll show you when we have time."

Iris had a devious look and was staring at Rosa, "You know you just created a situation where the enemy has little to no chance at fighting back but where as you have... that's a pretty evil tactic there." Rosamia was starting to feel a bit uncomfortable, she had realized this herself when she had thought of it and while she did not take any enjoyment in crushing her opponents she did see that sometimes it was necessary in order to protect those you cared about, and that was the main driving force behind it.

Adam slowly nodded his head, "Stop teasing her Iris, you're just bummed out because you're not the one that thought about it."

Iris had a blank look on her face as she looked at both of them. "Well Yaaa... Why wouldn't I be?"

After that comment Alexandria and Anna suddenly arrived at their location. Anna looked around it seems that they had missed most of the action due to their conversation. Still from what she saw the five orcs where still alive, they were in a defensive position with their weapons raised but made no actions. If she had to guess they were

trying to figure out their current situation and what their next steps should be. Anna looked at Adam, "Have you found out anything?"

Adam scratched his head lightly, "Well the ones that attacked them were part of her group, which is not too surprising. How they knew that the orcs would be here we have no clue and for the orcs..."

He was cut off as a flash of light appeared from the direction that Iris was and then a small explosion, the orcs instantly pointed their weapons in the direction that explosion had occurred.

As for the others they turned to see Iris coming back to rejoin the group while whipping some of the dirt off herself. "Well that did not work out at all." Rosamia could not hold back a small laugh as Iris had not waited and had tried out the new maneuver while Adam was explaining the situation. Anna not knowing what all this was about could still take an educated guess that Iris's impatient nature had won out the mental debate again. Over the recent years she had learned to temper that nature a bit but there were still times were it would pop back up again. None of the others minded and had stopped commenting on it as they saw it as a healthy thing overall for her own growth, just as long as she did not run off to fight a dragon like she had done in the past.

Anna then turned to Adam, "As you were saying."

Adam cleared his throat, "Well now we have also just learned that if Iris casts a holy arrow spell that we should all stand behind her."

Instantly Iris objected, "*Heyyyyyy!*"

Adam ignored her protests and continued, "As for the orcs they are alive and it's probably best if you question them and not me."

Rosamia glared at him, "You know that with

the language spell they can understand everything we say and your being a little bit rude. After all this time you don't still see them as the enemies do you?"

He shrugged at her question and then pointed at them, "Look at them; I'm sure they still see us as the enemy so why shouldn't I?"

Anna let out a heavy sigh, in a way he was right but at the same time they all had to figure out a way past that in order to move on. She slowly approached the orcs in a calm and slow manner. "First, just to make sure, can you understand us?"

One of the orcs nodded his head to confirm. Anna stopped advancing and positioned herself in as much as a non treating manner as she could considering that she was still armed. "Good, then if you wish you can lower your weapons none of us will mean you any harm. But I hope you understand that we do have questions. The first being what are you doing here and how did you even get here in the first place?"

While the other orcs stayed on alert one of them did lower his weapon and took a step forward. "My name is Murag, and our group was ordered by K'azugg to come here and find you people..." He then stopped for a moment, Anna was pretty good at reading the expressions off people and while these people were of a different race she swore that she thought that Murag was currently feeling shameful for some reason. Before she could say anything Murag continued as he forced the words out of his mouth, "And ask for your help."

While the Lights Templar looked at each other with curious glares the orc representative continued but this time talked in a more normal manner. "We are currently under heavy attack. The situation is currently bad enough for the current leaders of our tribes to agree with K'azugg's plan to

send a team to ask for your help."

It's not that Anna did not believe him but she could not understand why K'azugg had proposed something like that. While they did not have a bad relationship with the orc even she would be forced to admit that it was rocky at best. "What do you need help with?"

"We have been asked to bring your group back to help fight our enemies. K'azugg mentioned that if you did this that you would be paying back the debt that is owed."

Adam was livid, "*What are you talking about!* We owe him nothing." Rosa quickly moved close to Adam and motioned for him to calm down which he did but only mildly.

Anna realized that Adam felt insulted, and she understood why as she felt a bit of it too. K'azugg and his people had been essential in protecting them against the Avatar's forces while they attacked him and it's true that he lost people in the process but the agreement was mutually beneficial as the Avatar had already sent a large force to destroy a large army that the orcs had created in order to defend their lands and people. No, something felt wrong about this, but then she remembered how K'azugg had acted when he had dealt with Mike during that time. From what he had told her he had manipulated his people's emotions in order to help steer their energy in a more proper course. She wondered if something like this was happening again. "Assuming that we agree how would we get to your homeland? Did K'azugg assume that we would open a portal?"

With the way that Murag reacted from her commented they all saw that he clearly disagreed with her. "There is a tunnel path that will be used that connects us. It was dug in a long time ago but it was found again and made serviceable. This is



how we got here and how we will go back. The tunnel will take us a few days to traverse though but it will take us there in one piece."

Anna tapped her forehead with her index finger and looked at Alexandria. She quickly understood the message and without having the orcs see she casted a spell.

Seconds later Anna could hear her in her head along with everyone else in the group, Adam being the most in the forefront. 'You are not seriously considering this right? I mean don't we already have a mission on our hands?'

Anna did not appreciate what he was about to imply but somehow managed to keep that to herself.

'I'm with Adam, I'm not sure we should do this'. Everyone was surprised to hear this coming from Iris.

Seeing the shock left everyone speechless she explained her reasoning, 'Look I have not issues helping orcs that are villagers or innocent bystanders, I'm all for that but I'm not sure how comfortable I am fighting with them side by side. Sure during the Avatar fight it was one thing to put all that aside, but in this case I'm not sure that I can. I mean they are the people that killed my parents and kidnapped me to be tortured by the dark clerics. You people saved me and in the case of Alex gave me a new family, and I'm eternally grateful for that but.'

Anna was not sure what to think after that, what Iris said was true and in a way this was the same for Rosamia and Adam as well in some fashion. Suddenly she wondered if her idea of the resource plan that she had worked on with Mike would have worked at all if even the people in her own group felt this way. There was not much time to debate this over as the orcs were starting to

wonder what was going on. Even given how they felt Anna knew that this was the path to take. 'I'm sorry everyone but I'm going to accept. Given that, I don't plan on necessarily following K'azugg plan once we meet up with him but I do want to hear him out. That we do owe him.'

Already she could feel Adam's anger and a bit of disappointment. This situation almost made her laugh a bit as it was almost the same when she had suggested going through the portal all those years ago. All of which reminded her of something else, *'The idea is to keep everyone busy with tasks that bring us closer to the main goal'*.

After thinking that Anna was sure that there was no way that a smile had not appeared on her face, she was sure that he would be laughing right now if he ever heard what she was about to say. 'Alright everyone here is the plan. We accept their offer, which helps us find an easy way to get to the location we want to anyways. At the same time we need to hear them out, we barley have any information on what is going on over here. The vision shows us that somehow this new person is connected to the orc land or will be, so maybe they know of something we don't and getting that information will be easier with K'azugg.'

It's at that point that Alexandria chimed in, 'Come on guys, she's right about this and you all know it. If nothing else we need to know about this tunnel that they are talking about and were it leads.'

Adam shrugged, 'On that I agree completely.'

The spell was then terminated and Anna looked at the group of orcs. "I've decided we will accompany you to see K'azugg so that he can explain the situation. Then we will see if we can help after all or not. Sound fair?"

The orcs lowered their weapons and Murag

nodded in approval. "Our job is to bring you to him what gets done or what happens afterwards is his business." Clearly these orcs were as happy about this arrangement as Adam and Iris but that did not matter with her final goal in mind.

The entrance to the tunnel was about one hour from where the battle had taken place. The entrance was at the base of one of the mountains and was very well hidden. At the start things were a bit cramped as the tunnel entrance was very small but eventually, as they marched ahead, it grew in size by quite a bit. Currently they were able to walk four of them side by side. The way the tunnel was made reminded her of the ones that are used by dwarves.

It was assumed that they had been built by them during the original battle with the dragons in order for them to move around without being killed or attacked from the skies. While they never really asked them if that was the case or not once you where in one and had seen their handy work it was hardly worth asking.

During the first day Murag explained their current situation. I seemed that they were attacked by nearly everyone, humans, giants, ogres, goblin and even orcs. The attacks had started about a few months ago only to escalate during the last month. At the start they where lead by the same person that had captured Mike and were using similar guerilla tactics of attacks as was happening in the human land. But now during the escalation they were able to capture Cagan and that is where things took a turn for the worst.

Cagan is mostly populated by elders and families, it's purely a civilian place. As soon as they took it over they essentially took the orc race families hostage. From that point on if the orcs defended an attack nothing happened but if they

attacked or retaliated then random family members would be killed.

After hearing the news Anna realized why K'azugg had sent people to ask for their help what she was not so clear on is how they could help out. It was obvious that any attack by anyone to liberate Cagan would have dire consequences so figuring out a plan would be interesting at best and could also have fatal consequences for potential communication between the races. There were still days before they reached the other side so Anna figured that she would take her own advice and take it a step at a time.

Two days had passed and nothing much had changed. Everyone walked as much as they could and slept as little as possible. The mood was mostly tense as the orcs were always on guard which in turn provoked the Lights Templar at varying degrees.

In order to get some distance Adam volunteered every day to scout up ahead, Iris stayed next to him as much as she could in order to give herself time to think. They both had their tracking spell up just in case but they did not really expect anything, she turned to him. "So I've been meaning to ask, what's your position going to be? I mean assuming that we get asked to help save their captured city."

Adam was still looking ahead but still answered her, "As much as I hate to say it, I'll probably help because I know that Anna will want to even given her current circumstance and then Alex will join in and finally Rosa will be convinced to join as well." He then turned to her, "And at that point I lost any option."

Iris had to chuckle at that, "It does not mean that you are in love that you have to follow her without options you know."

That statement was comical to Adam, "HA you would think that but in this case there is no option. She knows it I know it, heck I knew it when they describe the situation. Still what's your position on this?"

Iris sighed heavily, "I don't want my past to control my future, all of you taught me that and how important that is. I guess that when the time comes I hope that I'll act in a way that will make you all proud. I don't want to have regrets but I also don't want to betray my own feelings..."

Adam smiled at her, "I will tell you this, never fear about us not being proud of you okay. I think that there is..." He suddenly stopped and looked ahead.

Iris did the same and then shifted the tracking spell around, when she was sure of it she turned to Adam, "There are humans ahead... and ogres. How does that make sense?"

Adam had no clue but he figured that he was going to find out. "Go warn the others to catch up with us, I'll scout ahead and figure out what is going on." He noticed that she was not moving, "Don't worry I won't jump the gun, now go." They then separated.

It took about a few minutes for Iris to warn everyone else and another few minutes for Adam to join back after his scouting. "It seems that that the human and ogres are picking away at the tunnel to seal it up again. From the looks of it they are about half done if we deal with it now there should be no issues to continue."

Anna looked at the orcs to see if they would offer any information, when none came she gave her orders. "Adam, Iris you both take point. Alex and I will be your backup. Rosa stay on defense for our guest and also for us if need be." Everyone agreed and charge ahead.

Iris headed for the humans with her magically enhanced lighting swords and Adam took on the ogres. All in all there were six humans and four ogres. The humans where slow to react which was great for Iris, she moved around two of them that were still dropping their pick axes in order to take out their weapons. In a blink of an eye she touched both of them with her blades and electrocuted both of them, as they fell she continued to face the others.

The ogres where not on the protected list last that Adam heard so he went all out. With magic speed and strength he jumped on his target and severed an arm of the first attacking ogre with one of his blade, as it screamed in pain he stabbed it with his other blade in the abdomen. Quickly he pulled out both blades and blocked the incoming punch from another ogre.

Anna and Alex followed behind and as the forward vanguards cleared the way they both saw something they never thought they would see again. Anna quickly rushed in, "*Iris* look out!"

Iris barely had time to block the first hit with one of her blade from the one of the attackers that she had dispatched only seconds ago. Her eyes went wide as she realized what was going on and also when she saw the blade of the other aimed at her mid section. There was no way that she could stop it as it cut in the in the less protected section of her half plate and dung in deep in her body. She did not want to but her eye closed as she felt the blade reach in deeper and then it suddenly stopped.

She opened her eyes to see that Anna's red glowing blade had decapitated the target and it was now turning into sand crumbling on the ground. Anna spun around and cut the arm off of the other close attacker that Iris had managed to block. She

then moved ahead to take her place to confront the other humans. "Alex, help her to Rosa and then back us up. Adam and I will hold the line." Quickly Alex casted a minor healing spell to help Iris move back to Rosa.

Anna quickly looked at Adam; it seems that he too had realized the current situation that once again they were fighting reborns. Two the four humans charged at her, it's then that Anna realized that while they had the reborn powers of near invulnerability caused by the super healing they did not have the speed magic enchantment.

She met their charge with one of her own, with her magic speed enhancing her base abilities they never had time to react as she severed the first one's right leg off and ran past the other to decapitate him from behind with an overhead swing. There were two humans left and she knew that she needed to hurry to help out Adam as soon as she could. He had dispatched one ogre but the other three where now on him at full swing and with their reborn powers there was no way that even he would have an easy time of it in the limited environment that they were currently in.

As he dodged and blocked their attacks Adam wondered what they had gotten themselves into this time. He also wondered how there was anyone alive powerful enough to be able to create reborns in the first place. These questions would all have wait as these three targets where relentless, still Adam was nowhere near discouraged with the help of what Rosamia had shown him he could easily take them on.

When one of the ogres moved in front of the others to try and grab Adam in a bear hug Adams let lose a general area cleansing spell or energy transfer spell now that they all knew more about it. The reborn magic that was in the ogres transferred

to Adam and temporarily left them normal until the spell could repower itself.

Adam then took that stolen energy and cast it on his blades; they instantly started to burn with a black flame. As quickly as he could he impaled his first blade in the still charging ogre stomach and released the flame magic that was on his blade. This resulted in a magic blast that ripped the ogre in half. As the parts fell on the ground they turned to large chunks of sand. All reborns were essentially magical golems that housed the mind of the person or thing. Once destroyed the spirit of the person would simply return to whatever afterlife they had come from.

With only two left Adam took his other flaming sword and charged at another ogre, he successfully scored a hit on the beast's chest and once again release the magic in its created body. Only one to go but in dispatching the second target Adam had left himself wide open to his attacks. Just as the ogre was about to smash him with a loose rock that he had picked up Adam saw him suddenly stop as the last ogre had been encased in a large block of ice. Alexandria ran next to him, "Looks like I made it back just in time."

Adam smiled, "Look like."

By that time Anna had finished off the two last humans. Iris was back on her feet courtesy of Rosa's healing and all enemies had been destroyed with the exception of the one that she had severed the leg of when he had charged at her. Anna quickly marched to him and grabbed him by the collar of his armor and pointed her red glowing sword at his neck. Already his bleeding had stopped and his leg was starting to regrow using the base materials from the tunnel's ground. "Tell me who made it possible for you to live again, *now!*"



The man laughed. Her treats meant little to him as when his body was destroyed a new one could be rebuilt, it would just take time and magic. "You will all fall to her will, she has targeted you and with the power she..." He then stopped talking as his body then quickly turned to harden sand and was already starting to break apart.

Anna let go as his body deteriorated. "Seems that she pulled the plug on the spell that was powering him, I guess that she did not want him to tell us something that we needed to know."

Alexandria approached everyone else, "But now that we have stumbled on this we know a bit more than before and also that this is now bigger than a rescue mission."

Anna could not disagree with Alex but she now grew more worried. If she was the same person that had captured Mike and she had enough power to create reborns and sustain their bodies it would make it that much harder to rescue him and try to avoid the results of that Alexandria's spell had showed them.

## Chapter 4

Anna was in front of Murag and his other orcs that were still with him, "Did you know about this? Reborns change everything you know that right?"

Murag shrugged it all off, "They are just a different type of enemy nothing more. Still this is the first that I have seen since their first appearance and disappearance a few years back." His laissez-faire attitude stunned her, she hoped that he was lying to her and holding back information otherwise she wondered if the orcs would make it out alive.

They were still traveling through the tunnel, supplies were getting low but they only needed to last a few more days until they made it to the other side, or so they were told. Ever since the attack both orcs and Lights Templar group stayed close to each other but at the same time kept enough distance so that they would barely be in earshot of each other.

As Anna returned Adam smirked, "So any new information from them?" Clearly he was not expecting any and that was confirmed as Anna sat down with the rest of them and simply nodded from side to side.

Iris turned to Anna, "Are you really thinking that she is her? I mean sure she was said to be powerful but there are limits right?"

Adam agreed with that, "About that, Alex, is it possible for some to get that powerful?"

Alexandria thought about it for a moment, "I don't know. I mean we are assuming that she can create an army. It's possible that it's just a

handful, and if that is the case then yea, I think it would be taxing for her but from what I saw of her she could do it." She turned to Rosa, "You where there too, do you agree?"

Rosamia frowned a bit, "I think that you are right but really I'm not sure."

Iris nodded, "Okay well I guess we still need to figure out how she got so much power as well, you know in case there are others, any clues on that?"

As both Rosa and Alex looked at each other with blank stares Adam turned to Anna who seemed deep in thought. "What are your thoughts on this matter? Do you agree with them as well?"

Anna took a moment to try and put the final pieces in her head and see the big picture but it still felt wrong, she then sighed deeply. "I do and I don't. Something does not make sense but still I think that she can create way more reborns for some reason."

Rosamia was puzzled by that, "Why do you think so?"

Anna shrugged, "This is going to make little sense but that is what his system is telling me and also my gut feeling agrees."

Now it was Alexandria that was wondering on something, "That's twice that you have mentioned this system, care to explain I'm curious as to how it works."

Anna chuckled, "I don't think I want to try and explain it all but I can explain the part that I'm using. The first part is simple and obvious, take all the pieces that you know and put those together as much as you can. The second part is where it gets interesting; obviously you will have gaps because of the missing pieces so you fill them in."

Adam had issues believing what she was saying, "You have to be kidding me right? So you mean to say that the system is one big guess?"

Anna shook her head, "No not really. I guess the way to explain it would be you take what you have and look at the other pieces and see how they possibly connect to each other with the knowledge that you have or things that you know from others. It's hard to explain but in a way it's like knowing that if you see a sequence of numbers that go from one to two to something and then four, then the something has to or should be three."

Alexandria then chuckled a bit, "You know the way you explain it, it reminds me of a numbers puzzle that certain mages play in order to pass the time."

Rosamia was still confused, "If that is the case then why do you think that she is more powerful than we thought?"

Anna gathered her thoughts, "Okay, let's do this out loud and then maybe you will understand what I'm trying to explain. First we know that she is human and that she wields a lot of dark magic, way more than any dark cleric. She also seems to have a lot of old forgotten knowledge from the way that she explained the transfer spell and also the effect from us being in contact with dark magic without protection. But where did she get all that power and knowledge?"

Iris nodded, "That's the question I was just asking but how do you connect the dots when we don't have that much knowledge on dark magic?"

"When that happens you switch it around with a proxy of sorts that you have knowledge on."

Iris was still confused, "A proxy? Like what?"

It's then that Anna smiled, "Why the lord of light of course." When she saw that they all had confused looks on their faces she continued to explain. "Let's say that a human showed up one day with massive amount of holy power and could do things that no one could and had knowledge

that no one had since the time when the dwarves were first created. How would that be possible?"

Alexandria blinked for a few seconds and then lowered her head in mild shame, "Oh crap how did we miss that?" Everyone save for Anna looked at her to explain what she meant, she raised her head and then looked at the others. "I'll just say one word and it will be clear for you as well, rebirth."

Then Rosamia's eyes went wide, "You don't mean that you are assuming that she somehow stumbled onto a version of the rebirth spell but for the lord of darkness and is now a living Avatar... That, make no sense right? I mean why would Order share its power from what we saw he was all about control."

Anna nodded, "That's the part I'm having issues with but something tells me that I'm on the right track with this."

Alexandria thought about it more and then recalled something that this dark knight lady has said. "When we went against her I taunted her asking why she thought that she would be able to do to us what everyone had failed to do and then she said, 'I know I will be different because it's been prophesized'. I agree with you, I don't see that the lord of darkness, Order, would share his power but what if all he saw was defeat? I mean he must be able to cast the spell to see the possible futures so what if most, if not all, futures told him that he would be defeated?"

Anna was sure that this was the missing piece, "That's got to be it Alex. If he had a no win situation then he would devise a plan in order to make sure that he could continue on somehow and now that we know that the rebirth spell is something that can be done for the lord of light, Chaos, then why not for him? It makes perfect sense."

Iris nodded, "That seems to all make sense but how was she picked? I mean can we figure that part out?"

Anna nodded, "No I don't think so, that one we will have to wait and then maybe we can figure it out before it's too late."

Adam had a serious look on his face, "So it seems that we all agree that she is the equivalent of the avatar of darkness. If that is the case how do we take on something like that when the last time we only succeed because we got lucky?"

Anna sighed, "I don't know. But I do know that we will need the orcs help again and that somehow we should warn Julia as things may escalate faster than anyone thinks." Iris then cut in, "Well updating Julia should be easy."

This time it was Anna's turn to be confused, "You mean via Lithius and a communication spell?"

Iris smiled back at her, "Well I guess we could do that but instead why not just use these?" She pointed to the pendent that they all wore. "Before we left it seems that she had a talk with you while you were packing. Now I'm not sure what was said but afterword she came to me very concerned and asked if it was possible to stay in touch for more private issues."

She had a bit of a worried look, "I'll admit that maybe I should have asked if it was okay but there was very little time before we planned to leave and well she is a friend to me as well so I did not want to turn her down. That's okay right?"

Anna had a large smile on her face, "Yes that's extremely okay with me, thanks Iris." Anna had reservations giving the news to the Council and then to Julia given that they could be wrong but now that she could give it to her directly it was a different matter. "Well because of that, I'll take first

watch and update Julia while I'm at it. We better all get some rest so that we can keep on this forced march and make it out of this tunnel as soon as we can." It was hard for any of them to disagree plus with this potential new information they all had things to think about.

A few more days passes and finally they had reached the end, overall they had met up with only one patrol which made everyone wonder why there were so few considering the task of blocking the tunnel up again. The closer they got to light at the end of the tunnel the more worried Adam got. His tracking was picking up about thirty orcs, when this was mentioned to everyone the orcs in the group cheered up. When told they could be potential enemies, Murag laughed it off and mentioned that a large group like that had to be friendly well at least to them. Before Adam could continue to worry about his future situation a large familiar voice could be heard from the edge of the tunnel. "It sure took you long enough did you stop to rest along the way?" Anna signed as she recognized K'azugg patronizing voice.

The orcs that was with them rushed ahead and continued on, Murag stayed briefly to deliver his report. "We have brought them to you, now they are your responsibility. We will take a short break to resupply and then head out to meet up with our leader."

After hearing this K'azugg nodded and waved him away, he then turned to his guests. "It took you so long that I had to setup a command tent, also that's where I'm taking you right now. I don't have the time for you to rest again, you can do that while you head to the next target."

He turned and started to head to the command tent without even giving them time to say anything. The group followed somewhat

annoyed by the welcome, as they looked around they saw that this was a simple attack force that had made camp in front of the tunnel at the base of the mountain. They only had made some simple defense of wooden pikes in order to slow down charging enemies but nothing more. The only structure they could see was the command tent that K'azugg had mentioned and that itself seemed hastily put up.

The only piece of furniture in the tent was a high table with a few maps on it. The tent itself would cover about ten people standing. K'azugg made his way on the other side of the table in order to face the humans. He took a moment to go over who was there and a surprised look appeared, "Where is the annoying one that is always asking for help in killing his own kind?"

Anna was angry at that comment but also realized that this is how K'azugg communicated with them and that was by pushing their buttons as much as he could. She calmed down but still had a scornful tone when she answered him, "He was captured by the same she that is now attacking you. As for the 'killing his own kind' is that not what you want us to help you with as well from what we heard?"

K'azugg did not seem happy at all about her response; it made her wonder what part annoyed him more. "I sent men to go and find you in order to help us out, while you will be fighting orcs they will not be the main part of the enemy's forces. Still this makes me wonder if there was any point in making you come here, if she is powerful enough to capture one of you then you may not be up to the task at hand."

Trying to calm the tension Alexandria jumped in the conversation, "Do you know anything about her from your side?"



K'azugg signed deeply, "Generally no we don't have any particular information, on a personal matter that is different?"

This surprised Alex and also everyone else, "So you have been dealing with other humans besides us?"

He chuckled at her comment, "No, you people are about as much as I can stomach unless they are at the end of my weapon. I know her from a long time ago when I was asked to bring her to the dark cleric. While I was mostly charged with defense this was one of those special missions that fell on my lap."

Iris took a step forward and looked at K'azugg directly in his eye, "What do you mean by bring her to the dark cleric?"

He crossed his arms, "I would think that you of all people would know what I meant."

Iris suddenly screamed at him, "HOW MANY DID YOU TAKE?" She then hit the table with her fist and pointed at him and continued with a scornful tone, "And you better answer me truthfully with this next one, where you part of the group that captured me or do you know who did seeing as that is the sort of thing you did."

With his arms still crossed trying not to react to this little human woman that was moments away from taking her blades at him, K'azugg answered her in as much as a neutral voice as he could manage trying to hide his own anger. "I think there where a handful at best and the groups that did it varied every time so no I was not the one that was ordered to go where you lived, killed everyone around you and bring you back to the dark cleric."

This time it was his tone that rose as his anger started to build up more. "And before you take your high and mighty act against me little girl remember that at the time *your* people were

already attacking us and killing our civilian. So when given a potential dangerous target, we reacted in whatever means we could and would do so again as I'm sure your people would as well."

This conversation was quickly getting out of hand. Anna approached Iris and put her hand on her shoulder in a sign to tell her to calm down. Anna tried to lower the aggression a bit unfortunately she needed to stay on the topic not just for Iris's sake. "You mentioned that they were important targets, did you ever figure out or were told why besides the standard lines?"

K'azugg took a deep breath, "It hardly mattered at the time, as you said we were told that they would be important targets in order for us to win this war in the future. Mind you seeing as the war was a sham in the first place it does make me question why do it at all."

A certain part of what he had said nagged at Alexandria, "When you say 'in the future' is that something you added or something you were told?"

He shrugged, "It's something that we were told as some of us question the use of capturing little kids but those were reassured that those kids would be important in the future battles."

Alexandria sighed heavily after hearing that, "I think I now have another piece of that puzzle now." She looked up to Rosamia, "We were wrong, Iris was never captured in order to forcefully turn her into a dark cleric she was being broken in order to be a candidate for the spell."

Rosa nodded in approval, "Oh my god your right, that makes sense. We had to pass trials to prove ourselves for the spell as that's how Chaos worked but Order would pick his chosen person and groom them to be what he wanted."

Iris was looking back and forth between the two of them, "So you mean to say that I could have

been the one picked to do what she is doing if you guys had not saved me?"

Alexandria nodded, "Seems like it yea. With the rush to go in enemy territory to get you with a risk of them learning what was really going on, followed by flooding you with dark energy in order to control and break you easily with his own hands and with all this talk of wining some future war. It seems to all fit."

While everyone was having this moment of understanding K'azugg who had regain his normal composure shook his head, "What does that all matter now anyways?"

Anna turned to him with a weak smile, "It matters a lot actually and I don't know how someone like you does not see that. Anyways, going back more on the original topic what do you want us to do unless you think that we are too weak now as you mentioned before."

K'azugg pointed to a city on the map, "Originally I wanted you to help with the situation with Cagan but things have changed. A plan was figured out to free Cagan on our own, but there is an issue." He then pointed to what look like a small village on the map. This village was next to a forest that was next to the mountainside. "We have learned that she has a main force in the mountains where the giants are. Our spies have seen that a force is preparing to leave that place. We are assuming that when we free Cagan that the village will be destroyed; we want you to stop that from happening. Normally we would use our own forces but most will be needed for Cagan and other places plus it seems that she and a new player will be leading this force."

It's then that his mood turned somber, "Given her power it was decided that we could spare no more orc lives to try and save the orcs that were

unwilling to move from the village." He then looked at Anna, "What I wanted you to do is to meet up with her and stop her or at least stall her until the force are done with Cagan and then we can head out to crush one of her main camps."

Anna looked at the spot that K'azugg had pointed out for the village. That was the place that had been shown in the spell and that was the place where she would meet up with him again and...

"That new player you mentioned can you confirm that he is a male and is clad in a black armor?"

The orc was surprised that she knew this as he had only recently gotten that information.

"That's actually all we seem to know. How do you know that?"

Anna gave him a mock smile, "Now look how is asking questions." She shook her head and tried to bottle her current emotions. "Look we will do what you want and we will fight her with everything we have, giving you time to free Cagan without having to deal with possible reinforcement." She then looked at Iris and then turned back to K'azugg. "In exchange you will do your best to find *any* information on those people that you took and give it to us. They're our people and we should do what we can to get them back."

K'azugg nodded, "That should be easy enough to do." He then pointed outside, "Now I know how you all like to rest so I've prepared transportation to take you to the village. You will also be resupplied for the trip. Once you get there the men that are taking you there will be ordered to stay and protect the village, not that they have a chance if you fall or flee but those men have stubborn families there and it seems to be a trait that they share as well." As they left he whispered to them, "Good luck."

Anna seemed to be the only one that had

heard it. She turned her head to take one last look at him before she left with the others, "Good luck to you as well."

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The transport prepared was two wagons pulled by those cow and bull type animals, one of the wagons held the Lights Templar and the other a very small number of orcs. From what they were told they would reach this little village in about one day and a half. Most of the trip so far had been spent in silence there was a lot for everyone to think about.

Rosamia looked Anna who was now dealing with the potential of facing the future that was shown to them, Iris was now concerned and confused about everything that she had just been told and Alex just seemed lost in thought. Rosa figured that she was trying to solve this somehow but this was a big problem to solve, she knew what they were going through as she had done the same when she had been host to the construct two years back. In the end what had helped her was her friends, she almost wanted to chuckle at the situation of forgetting something that important.

As if reading her mind Adam cleared his throat, "So chances are that we will be facing this woman again, considering that we are assuming she has the power she has and that this new player will be who we think it is, should we not talk about a plan? I mean can we even stop something like that?"

Alex signed deeply, "That's the questions I've been asking myself and well there might be a way but it's costly."

Immediately even without knowing the details Rosamia knew what that meant, "It's another life consuming spell right?"

Alexandria slowly nodded to confirm, "It is but that's not the only part that is costly about. Essentially it's a spell that was used by the dwarves against the original Avatar, it worked as in it hurt him pretty bad but you need to create a circle and you also need a few people to power it. The goal is not to drain one person life so multiple are used. We would need a minimum of four to cast it leaving one to stall in order to perform the spell."

Adam wondered on if that would be useful at all considering their numbers. "Is there a way for the spell to miss?"

Iris with a sad look on her face answered him, "No, I know the spell she is talking about as I helped transcribe it. The circle you use to cast the spell act as a homing device, the spell will not miss." She then turned to Anna, "But is that really the way we want to go?"

They had fought real hard to get their lives back and more and to so quickly use it up again felt wrong, but there was also another reason why Anna did not like the idea. "No we need to figure out something else. I know this will sound selfish but hear me out; our primary goal is to try and save that village and Mike. At this time she is of little concern and yes I know how stupid that sound as I say it, but this fight that we are going in is not our fight to the death with her... it's not the right time yet."

Adam was curious, "And you base this on what?"

She smiled back at him, "I base it on the fact that Rosamia and Alexandria are still alive right now. I mean think about it, she captured him and left. That could mean two things, she does not have the power we think she does or she is holding back for some reason and I think it's the later so

we should use that somehow if we do go against her."

Iris liked that idea, "Okay then, I have a stupid plan. I want to talk to her, knowing what we know I want to confirm it and see if I can reach her somehow."

Alex's eyes went wide in surprise. "Ah need I remind you of how she almost killed me with just the mention of your name." She was then very worried, "I'm not a fan of this plan of your. I mean I'm all for trying to find a way to stop her without killing her, I'm actually a hundred percent behind that, but I don't think that you talking to her is going to go over all that well."

Iris was hesitant, "I... figure that you're right but... I still want to try."

Anna understood Iris's motivation, they all did. "If you want to do this then I think it's worth it." Anna was very proud of Iris's action but because of it a plan appeared in her head and she did not like it. "Okay so when the time comes, Iris, backed up by Alex and Rosa, you try and talk to her to stall or stop her." She then turned to Adam, "We will deal with the extra person that she has with her. The first step will be to confirm that it is Mike, if it's not then we will deal with it."

Rosamia with a concerned look turned to Anna, "And if it is him?"

Anna broke eye contact, looked at the floor of the wagon and after a few moments she raised her head. "...Then we deal with it."

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It all felt very odd for most of them as they arrived at the small farming village. The village itself had not changed much since the many years that they had first been here. Rosamia marveled at how

much had changed for them and what they had done since then. "You know this feels odd a bit."

Adam turned around, their escort were already being greeted by their families and explanation were being made or at least that is what he assumed as he saw their disgusted faces on some of them. He figured this made sense, to a lot of them in those small place the humans had attacked them with no mercy and now to being told that humans would be your final defense. Adam was the last one that would argue their reaction as his would be the same. "Personally I think I would have rather re-visited this place in a way that they would see us as orcs like the last time. I think it would be easier on everyone."

Anna wanted to disagree but it was hard to, still she saw it as progress. Last time once they saw humans they chased them out with whatever they could find, now at least they were willing to tolerated them it seemed. "No hiding this time. Alexandria, could you please go and scout out the enemies location and numbers? Try and find out as much as you can."

As she casted an invisibility spell and left, Adam turned to Anna. "Whaaat? Why are you sending her out? I thought tracking was my thing." Iris gave him a bit of a curious stair and he continued his statement, "My thing and Iris's that is."

Anna shook her head in disbelief she was wondering if that comment was meant to lighten the mood or if Adam had in fact taken mild offence. "I sent her because while I have no fears that you would have gotten the same information as she will, I do believe that she has the best chance of not being seen by miss potential Avatar."

Adam did not seem overly convinced but he did drop the matter, "Okay so what now?" Anna



turned to Iris, "Assuming that there may be reborns that we need to trap why not start off by creating some pit for them to fall into. Besides that we have to wait until Alex comes back."

It only took about half an hour before Iris had created the mentioned pits and for Alexandria to return. Alexandria did not seem too encouraged as she gave her report, "There are two giants and about fifty goblins. She is also present and in the back as always, also he is there just like the spell foretold. I tried every spell I could think of and I saw no controlling magic on him of any kind, he is radiating more magic than you about as much as she is so I don't really know what that means." She looked at Anna, "I'm sorry but if we can do anything for him I think that our best bet is to confront her not him."

Anna nodded and did her best to ignore the obvious question everyone had, "Any reborns in that troop?"

Alex nodded her head, "Nope not a single one. The other thing I need to mention is that they will be arriving way faster than planned. We have about one hour before they march out of the forest."

This worried Anna, there was just not enough time to change anything. "Okay we stick with the plan. Adam and I aim for Mike and you three go after her. Before that Alexandria can you create an opening for us? Ideally we need to down those giants as fast as we can."

She nodded, "Sure I can do that but because of the size and their size I can't aim for both the giants and the troop without potentially harming Mike."

Iris then jumped in, "Rosamia and I will take care of the left over giant as we head to her location." Rosamia nodded in agreement.

Still not happy about being in this particular moment Anna approved the overall plan, "Alright, well lets all get ready then. I'll update the orcs on what is coming and on what is planned. Hopefully that will let them prepare better in case there are some enemies that pass through our line."

The wait had been agonizing, Alexandria had prepared her five instant spells and Rosamia had casted all the defensive spells that would possibly help out but after that all they could do was wait and question what would happen next.

The giants were the first thing that came into view with their heads and upper torso poking from the top of the forest trees. Alexandria took that cue to start her spell up. She waited until the giants had finally exited the forest and also when she could also see a few goblins at their feet. She release the meteor spell that launched three six feet in diameter flaming rocks.

The first of which had targeted one of the giant. Being a medium sized boulder for him, the giant tried to grab it to potentially throw it back at them. His actions stunned Alex as she knew that it would only serve to hurt him, as she thought that the giant grabbed onto the flaming bolder and as soon as contact occur it exploded destroying his hands and a good portion of his arms. As he screamed in agony she aimed the second at him directly to finish him off and the last one on the army of goblins that were trying desperately to fan out in order to avoid the rampaging hurt giant and the flaming rock coming at them.

With the help of the giant that was now on the ground and the spell Anna figured that Alexandria had managed to cut down the attacking force by more than half assuming that the final numbers had not changed since her scouting. Still they were not the true targets nor were they the true

attacking power, as the spell effect was dying down Anna order everyone to charge in.

As they ran in Iris turned to Rosamia, "If you distract him I'll finish him off." Rosamia nodded in agreement and then she saw Iris fly upward in the sky to disappear.

Her target was big and was armed with a full size tree trunk that was being used as a large club. She ran directly at him and powered a holy spear attack. With magical speed she was able to avoid the overhand swing of the giant at the same time because of its large size it had been a close missed attack. The holy spear attack had a very small range but packed a very large magically forced punch, Rosamia was now close enough and let the spell go as it targeted the giants left tibia. The giant roared in anger as a large snap could be heard when the spell connected. To her surprise the giant reacted fast enough and shifted his weight on his other leg as he did so he used his large club and made a sweeping motion with it to knock her out, and possibly kill her. Rosamia put her spear away and ducked in the only safe spot which was between the giant's legs.

With the injury he had sustained the giant tried not to move from his location, Rosa took that advantage and powered a holy arrow spell and aimed upward in the giant crotch. The spell connected and again the giant reacted in an unexpected manner, the blow had once again only served to anger him more. The giant bent down his head and looked at Rosamia as he was going to try and grab her and eat her whole.

Rosa paid him no attention as she saw Iris coming down from above both swords enchanted with lightning landed squarely in the back of the giant's head. With both sword firmly planted in she released the spell and fried what was left of his

brain. She used the rest of the spell flying power to head back to the ground as the giant fell hopefully never to come back up.

Adam wished that he was ignorant of the current situation and what was at stake, because if he was he was sure that part of him would enjoy this fight against the left over goblins. They were no match for him at all, already he had cut down about five that were left over and had opened his way to Mike. He gave a quick glance at Anna, which was dealing with the leftover goblins that had packed on her, and then he rushed at his target. At this stage there was no denying that it was Mike, same build, same defensive stand, same everything. He was clad in a black armor, his sword was different but of the same type and his eyes were burning black. Those were the only differences.

The last time they had fought he had been the victor but only by a margin, this time Adam had to win. As he prepared his first attack Adam said to him "I'll do this so she does not have too."

The first horizontal slashed was blocked and the second thrust attack missed as well as Mike moved away and counter attacked with a vertical upward swing with his blade. Adam avoided the blow and as he prepared to swing in with another combo attack Mike swung his blade in a downward arc forcing him to move backward. Something was different in the way Mike was fighting but Adam could not figure it out, all he could feel was aggression from him. Adam buried his emotions down and put himself in the same aggressive state to match his. He then charged at his target.

Anna was dealing with the leftover goblins, so far everything was going to plan and sadly everything was also happening as was shown. Anna called out to Alex, "I know I asked you to

promise me to stay around me but you need to confront her as soon as you can. I would like to believe that Iris will be able to convince her but really I think that you are the only one that will really be able to learn anything from all this."

While Anna protected her, Alexandria powered a chain lighting spell, "You realize that everything is the same, I don't want you to go through that. I'm sure that Iris and Rosa can handle her for a while. I'll join you and I'm sure I can use magic to stop him."

As she suggested it Anna cut her off, "No, I know that I said that Mike was the target but now that the time is here and I see her for my own eye I know that I was wrong. Please go and confirm what we need to, also I need you to believe that I know what I'm doing. I think I figured out something."

Alexandria unleashed her spell that targeted the goblins in front of her and then jumped to the one next to them and jumped again two more times. The path was now clear for both of them, "I don't like it, I really don't, but I do trust you with my life so I'll wish you the best of luck and I'll go help the others."

As she rushed off Anna had a small smile, "Thanks, best of luck to you to." She then turned to the two men going at it. While the fight seemed equal Adam was putting in more energy than Mike was which did not bode well for his victory over him. She rushed in their direction.

Iris and Rosamia arrived near this mysterious dark knight that seemed to be enjoying the view and taking it all in. She pulled her attention from the fight with Mike and Adam and turned to Rosamia, "Looks like you got better after all. Shall we do it again?"

Before she could answer Iris screamed at her, "Why? Why are you doing this?"

She turned to Iris eye blazing with dark energy, "Oh how I hate you and your continuing existence. Do you know the pain I went through because they save you? *Do you have any clue at ALL!?!"*

Iris was stunned at the level of hate that she could feel coming from her. Iris could also see dark fumes all around her, it was like she was using all her rage to power herself. But this was beyond rage and was well into loathing, Alexandria had been right there was no way that Iris would be able to talk to her because of this.

The dark knight released the energy she had at Iris, Rosamia created a magic shield to block the attack. Not knowing how much power she should use she went all out and used as much as she could. The blast connected and broke the shield but whatever was left over fizzled before it got to Iris.

It's at that point that they heard a scream from behind, "*No! no more.*" Alexandria stomped her foot on the ground, as she did large stalagmite erupted from the ground all around the dark knight. Immediately after Alexandria teleported high above her and then launched an instant fireball in her direction. While Alexandria started to fall she teleported back to the ground and prepared her next spell as she saw her fireball spell being blocked by a magic shield and then the stalagmites being cut down using a flaming dark enchanted blade. "That was some attack little mage but can you take as good as you give?"

She outstretches her hand and sent a concentrated beam directly at Alex's heart, the beam was so quick that Rosa had no time to try and block it. Alex made no movement to avoid it as she let go of a lightning spell, both attacks hit but only the dark knight was hurt as Alexandria had

protected herself with the anti magic protection spell.

Adam was getting nowhere fast and Anna would join in the fight soon and he did not want that for her. Speed was not enough so he then added magical strength and charged at him. He aimed one of his sword strait at Mike's chest and readied his other for a vertical slash. Adam could feel the seconds tick by, anytime now Mike would have to move to avoid the blow but at the last second Adam felt his weapon being hit by another. Mike had block the attack with his blade and was now pushing it out to the left, Adam confused because there should be no way that he should have the strength to match his still followed with his second attack. As Adam started the motion Mike grabbed Adam forearm and stopped him, seconds later he started to squeeze.

Adam screamed as he felt like his arm was being crushed, as Mike let him go he could see that he had a wicked grin on his face and with unexpected speed he swung his blade to Adam's mid section scoring a deep hit. Adam stumbled backwards as Anna jumped in the fight protecting him from another hit that would have killed him.

Alexandria noticed that they had lost the dark knights interested as she was now more focused on the fight that was about to start between Anna and Mike. She also saw that Rosamia had started rushing to Adam side to go and heal his wounds. She only had moments to get her attention and try and avoid what they knew would happen next. She motioned for Iris to move away and put herself in the way between the fight and the dark knight. "Move away little mage, this is why I'm actually here, this is what I want to see."

Alexandria stood her ground and launched and ice spell at her target. With an annoyed look

on face she dispelled the spell before it got to her. Alex could unleash more magic on her but that would not help free Mike, at least she did not think it would. "You'll lose. Anna will find a way to break the spell if anyone can, it's her."

This new attitude amused their new enemy, "That is what I want to know. That was the hardest part in breaking him. She was always in him mind in his heart, so in order to fix that I removed it all."

Iris had a very concern look, "You can't do that! There is no magic that can do that, there is always a part that stays."

She was then faced with an angry stare, "And what would you know of anything?"

Before she flared up again Alexandria cut in, "Well I do know a lot and she is right, there is no way to remove everything."

The dark knight moved in order to see the fight, "Well if you are so confident about that than simply watch and see, but I will warn you that I found a way. He will kill her and nothing will stop him."

Alexandria did not know what to do next, from the looks of it a memory spell was used. If that was the case then Anna should be able to break it she was sure of it, but she had checked for those types of spells and found nothing plus there was also the vision. She was running out of time.

Anna powered the sword red then pink, the time that she had been playing in her head over and over had come. Part of her tried to convince herself that this was just like any sparing match that they had done so many times in the past, and when it was all over the winner would congratulated the other or there would a stupid joke thrown at the other and things would go back to normal. But this was not the case, his blows were meant to kill her. She avoided everything she



could still being naturally faster than he was and counter attacked when she could. With all the attacks Adam did he should have been winded but he was in the zone and would not budge an inch. She screamed at him, "You keep saying that no matter what you will hear my voice, well prove it... *Come back to me, NOW!*"

It had no effect, no pause at all. She then thrust her sword forward to attack his side, as she had seen before, he countered by moving to the side and tried to slash her from behind. She knew that the blow was coming and was easily able to block it by swinging her sword back to block the move. Afterward both of them repositioned themselves.

Nothing had changed, Anna then shook her head again she was letting things happen and was ignoring her own inner self that was screaming at her about all the little things that she had learned while fighting him. He had told her many times that even when his logic was telling him that he was one hundred percent right that he would drop that without a second thought and follow what her gut was telling her. Generally speaking Anna considered herself a very confident person and rarely questioned herself, but this was one of those times where she would have really like to have more to go on. She looked at him and silently whispered, "Please, please let me be right about this."

Everyone else just stared as Mike charged at Anna. At what seemed like the last second she moved away and then waited just another second before she moved closer and attacked. The sword went from pink to red as it pierced through his stomach and as the energy was released his mid section exploded and Mike fell dead on the ground. The most stunned of them all was the dark knight,

"I can't believe you actually did that, I must say that I never expected it. Well that will change things a bit." She laughed at how the situation had ended.

Anna was on her knees as her hand was stroking the cheek of his face. She tried to hold back the tears but really doing so was futile. She kept looking at his dead eyes and kept muttering, "Please... please let me be right... come on please let me be right."

The other Lights Templar thought that she was in shock over what she had done at the same time they all did not know what to do. Alexandria forced herself to take a step in her direction and then she noticed a change in their enemy, she was no longer laughing and was now ignoring everyone else around her but Anna. "The way you are acting... you know... how?"

As she asked the question Anna's was finally able to breathe a large breath and let it all go as she saw that Mike body was turning into a dark vapor. It only took a few second before his body completely disappeared like it had never been there.

Alexandria was stunned, "That's how you got rid of the memories somehow you removed them while you created a magic double."

There was no time for a confirmation as Anna stood up and rushed at the dark knight. She screamed at her with everything she had and as she took a step the blade turned red, then pink then white.

The dark knight created two blades using her dark magic and rushed in to meet her attack. As Anna got close she swung her blade at one of hers and snapped it in half. She then blocked the other attack with another swing of her sword. When the blades connected dark energy seeped from her

blade and traveled to Anna's and then to her arm, the immediate pain that she felt hurt her but not as much as she assumed that it would have. She wondered if that blow that she had suffered from that dark cleric a long time ago had anything to do with that.

Anna pulled away and pulled out her other sword as her enemy did the same and created another new blade using her magic. There was no way that Anna could power her original blade's enchantment, but now she had access to another power. She focused on what Rosamia and Iris had thought her and created a magical shield around her blade in order to be able to create a barrier to prevent constant contact with her enemy's magical weapons.

Anna resumed her attack on her enemy and every time she could she destroyed one of her weapon with her still white enchanted sword. Then the counter attack would occurred and Anna blocked it with her other protected sword. The white enchanted blade also cut any piece of armor like it was not there and sliced away at her body with every attack Anna was able to make. As the battle continued Anna realized that the wounds inflicted were naturally healing at the same speed as the first avatar of darkness. But that did not stop her from continuing from slicing her up as much as she could.

Eventually the dark knight felt frustrated, she realized that her conjured swords were no match and she also realized that Anna had superior fighting skills compared to hers. Tired of this dance she disengaged and pulled back, "I'm done here. I think you figured out what I can really do and because of it you know that you can't kill me. Plus I don't want to kill you just yet, I have what I needed from this little experiment and can start

the next stage."

As she finished talking Anna saw that she was positioning herself the same way Alexandria did when she was about to cast a teleport spell.

Quickly as Anna could she dropped her original blade and grabbed on to the dark knight's arm.

Her enemy was stunned and looked at Anna, "Did they not tell you what happened to your husband when he did the same thing?"

Dark energy quickly enveloped Anna's body from the arm that she was still holding. The pain nearly dropped her unconscious but again the shock of it was less then when that dark cleric had blasted her with dark energy and if not for Adam nearly instantly killed her. She grinded her teeth and held Mike's original sword still glowing white, as tightly as she could. Then she quickly thrust the blade at the dark knight's mid section. The enemy stopped focusing energy on Anna to hurt her and tried to avoid the blow but was unsuccessful as it sliced through her armor and pierced through her stomach.

Anna kept hold of her other arm and stared into her enemies eyes, "While this may not be holy energy constantly burning your insides I'm sure it still hurt you." She approached her face, "Now, tell me... where... he... is."

The dark knight called her bluff, "Every second that you burn me with that enchantment is ticking away time from your life. How much time have you already lost minutes, days? Even if you let go of it all in one blow the original Avatar took three and he was still standing."

The dark knight then grabbed hold of Anna shoulders and with unexpected strength pushed her a few feet away. As Anna fought to keep her balance the dark knight saw that the others had now joined her.

She casted a dark shield around her, "As I have said I want you all to suffer more before I finish you all off." She looked at Iris and then Anna, "Some more than others."

Rosamia, Iris and Alexandria quickly started casting to dispel her shield. The dark knight knew that it would take them a while to do so, so she continued talking. "Still you gave it your all and surprised me so I'll leave you off with this." She then pointed behind her, "As I'm sure the orcs have told you I have a base up there, there is where you will find him." She then raised her finger in the air in a lecturing manner, "But before you go off to save him, know that you will have to face all the giants and goblins that have joined me before you are able to reach him."

Anna was puzzled by this information, "Why only giants and goblins where are all the humans that also joined you and where are you going to go?"

She chuckled, "That is where the torture comes in. I've created a few of those Mike's and have learned all I needed from the original. So they will lead the human army and attack your human lands and destroy all that you have worked so hard to build and protect as you try and save your husband here." She paused for a moment and then continued again, "I supposed you could always let the orcs save him, they must be done freeing Cagan by now and will probably head here. When they see him maybe they will save him for you or they may possibly kill him. In the end the choice is yours and are you not all about choices?" The shield was about to break, which was faster than she had expected, so she once again prepared her teleport spell and left.

As soon as she disappeared the shield vanished. Anna shook her head and depowered the

white enchantment back down to nothing. This had not gone as she had wanted but they did save the village, they also confirmed that she had the powers of the dead avatar of darkness and it was safe to assume that she was also selected via kidnapping as Iris had been.

Anna then turned towards the mountains that she had pointed at and then looked at her team or more importantly her closed friends. "There is so much that we still don't know but we know what she will be doing next and more importantly we know where he is. Maybe it's just me that wants to believe this but I know that Julia and the others will be able to hold the line long enough for us to get him out."

Iris smiled at her, "I know that she will."

Rosamia quickly looked at Adam who nodded and then looked at Anna, "I'm sure that the General will help her with the full backing of the Crusader army. Also I don't see Catherine being too intimidated by her, she is sure to put up a fight."

Alexandria smiled as well, "And there is no way that the Council will sit this one out considering what happened the last time." She quickly turned to everyone and then Anna as well, "Seems we all agree as well, let's go save him as he's waited long enough."

Anna gave then all a warm smile, Alexandria had been right this had taken a long time but soon it would be over and once together again they would find a way to stop her even with her powers, prophecy or not.

## *Chapter 5*

Anna was sitting on a large rock at the base of the mountain. She was about fifteen minutes walk from the main camp that had been established. When she had first updated Julia on the situation they had both agreed to stay in contact from then on just in case. While the situation was different their enemy was the same so new information could be advantageous for both of them, plus it made Anna feel like she was helping in some fashion and she figured that Julia felt the same way as well. They had agreed that Anna was going to contact her at regular intervals as her pendant as it was the only one made that was able to reach any of the others over any distance.

"Julia, can you talk?"

A floating blue'ish looking face of Julia suddenly showed up in front of Anna and it looked very ragged. "I can but just in case something comes up do you mind going first?"

Anna smiled, "Not a problem at all." She repositioned herself to get as comfortable as she could and started, "As was expected the orcs did free Cagan from her grip. While that was a nice victory for them, once it was achieved they were still left with a lot of orcs that wanted vengeance for what she had done. So K'azugg and a few other leaders made their way to the only known enemy base which would be our current location and also where she said Mike was."

Julia nodded, "So far things are going as expected then."

"Yes it is, but that's also part of the issue as well right."

Julia agreed with her, "True because things are going as she expected them as well, so it's a good possibility that she gave you this location because she is planning on abandoning it as well."

Anna wanted to disagree but she had come to the same conclusion as well, "It makes me wonder if all this is just to stall us while she attacks you for some reason." Seeing as there was no comment from Julia, Anna continued her report. "The orcs are going to move up the mountain tomorrow, it was agreed that we could join them in order to help and free Mike."

Julia interrupted her, "Haha, like there was any way that they could have stopped you."

Anna did not really have to think about it as she answered her comment, "We would gone one way or the other for sure, this way it does help a bit as we will not be on our own."

Julia had a puzzled look on her face, "Hmm, I'm not convinced by that. After what you said and now being so close I can't see how it's not eating you up, the waiting I mean."

Anna took a moment to answer, "... I would be lying to say that you are wrong but given the numbers of giants, goblin and orcs... Well even I have to admit that it would be very unwise of us not to join up with them for this, as much as the wait is killing me inside."

Julia wanted to tell her that she would drop everything and join her with a large portion of her Crimsones but given everything that was happening there was no way that she could do that. "On the bright side of things tomorrow you start the offensive so you can possibility get this finished then."

Anna had a worried look, "That could happen but, while the orcs plan is aggressive and I can even say foolish in some ways, there are a lot of



them. By Adam's estimation it will take us a while to reach the top, assuming that is where he is as there are plenty of smaller structures as you go up so he could be in any of them." She gave Julia a small smile, "Hopefully we will get lucky but it may take us a while still. That said that's pretty much all I have to report, how is it going on your end?"

A frown suddenly appeared on Julia's face. "I wish I could say that it's going great but there are issues. After you warned me about it, it only took a few days for everything to escalate. At this time it's not all out war but from what the General is telling me the conditions are not that different from way back when the orcs where attacking and the Crusaders where holding the line against them."

Anna was stunned at her comment, and also disappointed. "Wait it's that bad already, after all the work that we did?"

Sadly Julia nodded, "As you know it's much easier to destroy then it is to build. But yes the situation is that bad, mostly because the enemy is not as clear anymore. She is currently still attacking with humans only so it's not as easy to tell who the enemy is compared to when the targets were orcs. We also know that she knows this as well as she is still sending in small groups, but now they are more experienced and seem better prepared to deal with our normal attack teams. While the cities, towns and other places are still under our control once again they are all under attack but this time it seems that the focus has changed." Not that Anna could see but Julia took out a map, "As you know it seems that she focused a lot on Capio before, now it seems that she is mostly targeting any place that have teleportation circles already a few have been destroyed."

Now Anna was confused, "Any idea why?"

Where the ones lost strategic in some way?"

"Nope not at all, I mean don't get me wrong the fact that they are destroyed still causes issues for supplies and reinforcements as this is how we have setup our rapid deployment strategy over the years. But still even the small towns can be reinforced at this time with only a short march, that being said temporary troops are now at those towns and villages in case they get attacked again but it seems like they are being ignored now." Julia then smiled at Anna, "And that is where my request comes in. I've asked Lithius to look into the reasons why she could be doing this but can you ask Alexandria as well or anyone else from your team."

Anna nodded, "Sure not a problem, if we come up with anything that could explain why I'll let you know right away."

"Thanks. Currently the Order and the Council are not too worried but the General and I seem to think that this is part of something larger than just forcing us to deploy troops at random locations. While it's true that doing so is depleting our available manpower I can't shake the feeling that there is more to it than that."

Anna nodded, "I agree, same with me here. There is so much that she is doing that does not make sense but it's obvious that she does have a plan and unfortunately so far we have been only playing catch up. I mean we still don't even know her name but we know where one of her bases is, where she is holding one of our own and the fact that she was going to double her attacks on you. Worst part about it is that most of this information comes from her. Once we find Mike hopefully we will know more."

Julia smirked, "While I agree with you don't sell your efforts too short, you figured out what she

was and we now have an idea on what she is capable of and that's something."

Anna shrugged, "Yes and no, now that her power is confirmed why is she using so little?"

Julia nodded, "Hmm, I don't have an answer for that one." Julia then looked around, "Sorry seems I need to go, keep me posted and good luck."

Anna smiled, "You too."

She wanted to try and take some time to see if she could figure out a reason for the teleportation circles to become targets, besides the obvious, but already she was hearing footsteps coming her way. She turned around to see the rest of her group, "I take it that they have finally made a decision on which leader we will be going under for the climb?"

Alexandria nodded, "It was obvious but yes, the leaders have decided that we will be under K'azugg leadership. As an extra precaution, I guess what they would call a lieutenant will be added to his force in order to make sure that we don't go out of line. The orc in question is that other one that was yelling at K'azugg when we were saving Cagan a few years back." She took a quick pause and then continued, "Yea the more I think about it, I think that he hates us more then back then."

Adam suddenly shrugged, "Bah, who cares if he likes or hates us as long as he follows the plan then we will be fine."

Anna wondered about that, "So is the plan still the same?"

Rosamia nodded in confirmation, "So far it seems that we are still going to be on point acting as vanguard with K'azugg men right behind assisting us. Then you will have two other leader groups, one on our right and the other to the left, making sure that we don't get flanked from the sides. The part that is still a large concern is their orders not to stop until we reach the peak. When

mentioned they said that by the time it would be an issue reinforcements would be coming in to switch to continue the attack."

Iris then jumped in, "In a way it's a pretty simplistic but aggressive plan and for our parts we just focus on moving forward. Still it makes me wonder why did they trust us to take the lead like that if they hate us so much?"

Adam chuckled, "Actually it's because they hate us so much that we are in the lead. If they can't kill us then may as well throw us at their enemies and see what happens."

It was sad but Anna thought that Adam was right on this one. "Ignoring that fact and focusing on our task, Adam, Iris, are we still looking at mostly giants and goblins and only some orcs?"

Adam nodded, "From the many hours of scouting yes, that's pretty much all we will be fighting against. So far we have not detected any of them being reborns but that does not mean that we will not spot some during the fighting as reinforcements." He then stopped for a second and looked at Anna, "On that note of enemies, if orcs attack us do we retaliate?"

Anna nodded, "Don't attack first but yes do defend yourself if you need to. Part of the enemies are orcs so there is no telling if some of them are already in our ranks now just waiting for the right moment. Again only if you are attacked first please, we don't have the ability to fight what's ahead if the back will also attack us."

Adam raised his hands as he was giving up, "I know I know, I just wanted to confirm that's all."

Alexandria wondered how this was really going to turn out. She turned to Anna. "Do you still want me to limit myself as you asked me to, I mean if I don't it will make things go much faster."

Anna nodded at that comment remembering

how Alexandria had forced an army to retreat when she had cut loose at the fight at Calculus many years ago and that was before when she was at regular power. "Yes please, for one I don't think it will help the tensions that the orcs already have with us being there and second you have a more important job. When we get to a section that has one of those small structures I want you to break off and go check it out. Just confirm that Mike is there or not and then come back as quickly as you can to us. Don't take any risks and if something happens contact Iris."

She then turned to Iris, "You are her safety net, and if Alex contacts you for any reason drop what you are doing and get to her fast any way you can."

Both Alex and Iris nodded in agreement. "That's all good but will you three be okay, I'm not so sure the orcs will like it if we break rank like that."

Anna turned to Adam and Rosamia, "I think that we will be able to handle things okay if both of you are gone for a while, as for the orcs we will deal with that bridge if we need to cross it. Things are getting worse over on our side, and sadly we don't have time to waste on helping the orcs need for vengeance. We are here to save Mike and also to get information if we can, ideally not causing anything to worsen the relations with the orcs would be good but at this time I'm wondering how much there is save anyways. Still let's do our best like we always do."

Not wanting to leave it at that Anna continued, "Before we head back I'll update you on what Julia mentioned, plus she has a request that may help give you something else to think about before tomorrow." Once Anna had updated them on the situation and also told them about the question

that Julia had they all left to go back to the orc camp in order to prepare and rest, as much as they could, for the long battle ahead.

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The next morning Anna was with everyone else at the base of the mountain. While the orcs had prepared themselves it seems that their enemies had also added some extra defenses along the climb up. Large boulders had been placed along the large path going upwards, around those boulders you could see teams of goblins ready to defend the position. There were also other teams of goblins out in the open with weapons ready. At this time she could only see two giants and they were pretty far uphill. Anna wondered if those boulders were going to have another utility during the battle other than defense.

She turned and looked back, next to her you had her team and next to them you had near five hundred orcs all waiting for the orders to start the attack. "Adam you focus on the left, Iris on the right. Rosa try and stay on support and if you can try to make those giants come to us and Alex stay in the middle with targeted attacks, giants are the priority keep the area of effect small. During the fight if we need to move around do so, but when Alex is gone we stay in this diamond formation no matter what to keep Alex's position opened."

She quickly looked at Alexandria, "I'm figuring that having a guaranteed open location during a large battle like this will be needed when you come back."

Alexandria nodded, "Yes, I'll mostly be teleporting as flying will be an issue I'm guessing so I'll need to know that the location in front of Rosamia will always be free for me."

Rosamia gave her a quick smile. "I'll make sure that's always the case."

Satisfied that all orders were given Anna faced forward and then quickly looked at Iris, who seemed very agitated. "Don't worry, you'll make it through this."

Still looking ahead Iris answered her, "I know, I know. I mean they are mostly only goblins, but I've just never seen that many of them..."

Anna had to smirk at that comment, as it was a first for her as well. Before anything else could be said K'azugg took a large horn and blew as hard as he could, right after a large scream could be heard coming from all orcs as they took the first step forward.

The Lights Templar charged forward at the first, second and third groups of goblins in front of them. As they did, the sky was blanketed with arrows coming from both sides. The orcs and goblins paused for a second to raise their shields or seek cover next to a boulder, the Lights Templar's simply ignored it as they had protected themselves with a protection spell courtesy of Rosamia. Anna wondered if the orcs now regretted turning down their offer to also have the spell cast on them, she did not think so but still wondered.

It took only seconds as the battle began for the giants standing much further to pick up some extra boulders and start throwing them at the general location of the attacking army. As it landed screams could be heard from behind as orcs got flatten due to not being able to move away.

Rosamia powered a holy bow spell and put as much power as she could in the arrows, the distance was far but she would reach it. As she let the first arrow go she created another and let it fly at the other giant. When the spell landed on the chest of both giants it created a small explosion

that drew some blood. The wound itself would cause little issue but it would send a message that even that far they would not be safe. As if to further prove the point Alexandria summoned two lighting spells and also targeted the giant's chest area. The giants tried to reacted more to this by trying to move away but it was no use as the spell made contact and caused them a lot of pain. They looked at each other, grabbed their weapons and charged down.

Anna opened up on the first group with a sword blast, she maintained the level at red only as she knew that she would need to conserve energy. Still the blast killed three targets in one blow. As she got closer she used a bit of holy magic to speed herself up, they needed to use the minimum to give themselves an edge against the overwhelming numbers but not too much as running to much ahead would be hinder the orcs. Now in melee range and with no shortage of opponents Anna carved ahead to start to create a wedge in the enemy's lines as they climbed upwards.

While Adam would not argue that this was his element he still wished for better allies at his back and less of an uphill battle in his front. Magical speed needed to be conserved to a minimum, but nothing was said about strength. Adam slash horizontally at his target that tried to block, because of the difference in the blows basic strength Adam's sword knocked his opponents blade to the side and slashed him deep across his chest. Adam continued his swing until he reached another goblin that was close by cutting the arms bicep, which caused the goblin to drop his weapon. With his other weapon in hand he stabbed forward at a goblin that had replaced the first one that he had slashed across the chest only seconds ago and continued to march forward to the next target



behind it. As soon as he took one down another took its place, blows needed to count for two and even that was not enough as they continued to hit waves of goblins as they marched forward.

Performance would be key in a fight like this and Iris knew this. In order to make every blow count she enchanted her sword with lighting. While the goblins were not heavily armored, favoring more leather as protection, there were enough patches of metal on their head with their helmets, weapons and also small plates to help protect certain key places on their chest armor to help the enchantment conduct to their bodies just by hitting close to them. While this help make the goblin second guess attacking her it also created small opening for her to have time to cast quick fireball spells that she could hurl in front of her. The explosions were small but easily blasted four to five goblins per blow. Getting close to her proved fatal and staying away was as deadly. Her level of aggression helped create a bit of breathing room in a battle that had very little.

Rosamia and Alexandria worked as a team as best as they could. Their main focus where the two giants that were approaching them, seeing as Alexandria had better range with her spells she let her weaken them with quick lighting strikes all around their upper body. While she did that Rosamia aimed her holy bow arrows at targets that tried to cover themselves and hit them with projectiles. When none could be targeted due to position, she casted pillars of holy fire that erupted from the ground at the advancing goblins causing them to second guess advancing without being cautious of where they stepped. When the giants where finally closer, Rosamia switched at them with the same spell to finish them off. This left Alexandria to target the goblins in front using a

lighting spell that would jump from target to target creating a large opening ahead that could be taken advantage of in order to move forward quicker before the opening filled up with more attacking goblins.

As the giants fell around Anna with more being spotted at a distance she paid them no heed and continued marching forward and upward and killed as many goblins as she could reach. When a few clumped together to form a proper defense or potentially a charge attack against her, she let lose a red blast from her enchanted sword to knock them out permanently. From the looks of it they had prepared well to fight the orcs, but so far as arrows rained down on them and then suddenly bounced off they had not prepared anything against magical attacks or protections.

Anna attacked the enemy in front but as she committed to the overhead swing and destroyed her target she turned to the next one next to it and then the other beside him and so on. From the looks of it the orcs had sustained some damage due to the ongoing barrage of arrows being fired, but the Lights Templar group was doing well. The main concern on her mind was could they outlast their numbers and have enough energy to save Mike.

It nearly took about half an hour to be high enough to reach the first small outpost tower. Their locations were away from the main path up the mountain but still in its vicinity. Anna ordered the group to get in the formation that had been explained earlier, "It's up to you now Alex, good luck."

Alexandria prepared a quick levitation spell and then casted a teleport spell to get closer to the location of the tower, as she did she could hear the lieutenant that had been ordered to accompany

K'azugg curse. Before this started they had explained that this would happen, as expected the lieutenant was not pleased at all about it. K'azugg had issues with it as well as because it would weaken the attack force of the main vanguard group, not that he would have admitted that to anyone and because of that had joined in on the lieutenant's complaint. Alexandria finished the spell and disappeared, they could have complained all they wanted but this was happening one way or the other.

She reappeared about three hundred meters away from her target and also behind one of the mountain cliff in order not to get immediately spotted. Alexandria first looked around and found a ledge that she could use on the side of the cliff to get a better idea on her current situation. She casted a floating spell and removed the levitation one, as she safely landed she then realized how hard this would be.

The tower itself was only two stories and the second floor was partially uncovered and had a small floor extension coming out of it in order to create a sort of balcony. All in all it was more of a guard tower then anything, but due to its size there was never any intention of it being used by the giants. They had been told that this was giant territory so why have structures that they could not use, it was out of place and so it was also the best place for them to start the search.

Each of them was along the way upwards so one could not just sneak in or they would be trapped if spotted and it's not like they could ask the orcs to break off a group to go inspect it as they normally got close to it.

It took Alexandria a few second to take it all in, there were so many goblins it was like she had taken all the goblins and put them all in this one

place. She also saw two giants and they would be the real issue. There was no real way to know what was in those small towers so for the first one at least it would be near impossible to check it out without being detected. As soon as she would be spotted that tower would be a great spot to defend oneself against the goblin but would be a death trap against the giants. She needed to get rid of those present first before she could go in and she needed to do it in a way that would drain her as little as possible as she now agreed with Anna whole hardly on her comment of conversation.

Alexandria checked her instant spells that she had already prepared two fires, two ices and one lighting and then she executed the plan that she had come up with.

Her first action was creating an open area that was close enough to attack the giants, she casted a medium powered fireball and threw it at a group of goblins. The spell connected and killed ten goblins and hurt others around the blast radius. Instantly the other goblins stopped and started looking around and some even fired arrows at her general direction. While the radius of her spell was still present Alex used a teleportation spell and moved in the middle of it. As she appeared she used one of her ice instant spells that formed a three quarter circle wall of ice around her. Now she had a direct site to both giants in front of her and did not have to worry about her back and sides, her front on the other had was quickly becoming busy with a lot of goblins trying to attack her.

She had to slow the giants down but at the same time discourage the goblin. "It's been a while since I've used this but it should do." She launched one of her instant fire spells at the goblins stopping their assault temporarily, while she did this she also started casting a somewhat powerful lightning

spell.

Once the fire spell had been launched she then took her now free hand and joined it with the other, with a quick modification to the lightning spell she slowly separated both hands and as she did the spell split. Alexandria outstretched both hands each pointing at its own giant and released the spell that was now two. Both bolts made their way and contacted with their respected giants, one of them hit the left knee and the other the right one. The effect of the spell would not kill the giants but would slow them down considerably as they kneecap cracked and most of the flesh around it had been burned away.

So far her plan was working good, both giants had stopped moving the issue was that the goblins where more tenacious then she would have expected. Already a new group had formed in front of her and she swore that she could hear some of them trying to climb up the wall of ice to attack her from there as well.

She thought that she would have had more time, this would ruin her plan but she was committed so she continued. Again she launched her instant fire spell and to discourage the ones in front and again she powered lightning spell. This time she directed it to one of the giant that was currently kneeling on the ground, because of the lack of movement it was easy to aim for his head. The spell reached its target the giant fell, leaving only one to go.

It at that point that Alexandria froze for a second, there was no way that she could do this again as she had planned as once again goblins started to move in her direction from the front. Also she could see from the corner of her eye that goblins had succeeded in climbing the wall and were about to jump on her from above. The only

instant spells she had were ice and lighting which would only help against one for the two targets. Alexandria suddenly realized that for all she has been through this was really the first time that she was in a battle like this alone. This time there was no one that could bail her out at the last second and that realization suddenly snuck in as she was seconds away from being overwhelmed by goblins.

She could hear her own voice screaming insider her head, '*MOVE*, you still have time for that spell, so *move!!!*' Alexandria looked ahead and casted a teleport spell. She disappeared as the goblins landed where she was not even a second ago and reappeared on top of the still standing giant's shoulder next to his head.

With very poor footing she did not have time to freeze again, as the giant reacted with a surprise and confused look on his face she wound up a punch and hit him on the head with her normal fist. The giant did not have time to act more confused at her puzzling action as she had released the instant lightning spell directly at his head as soon as she made contact. As the spell took effect the giant started to fall and she lost what little footing she had.

Alexandria once again casted a teleportation spell and reappeared in front of the entrance to the small tower. She quickly entered and commanded her last instant spell to create a wall of ice that would block the entrance completely preventing any goblins from entering and with the giants gone no way to simply destroy the tower from the outside with her stuck inside.

Taking no chance Alexandria took a defensive position as she looked around the tower's first floor. The floor was made of stone much like the tower itself, she figured that it was about twenty-five to thirty feet in diameter. She was surprised to

see that the tower's first floor was empty; because of this she relaxed a bit and figured she would catch her breath as she inspected the floor.

As she looked around she saw that there was nothing much in the tower. There a small table with a few chairs, a chest and stairs that led to the second floor. When she put her hand on the table and chair she also realized that while it was empty the place was still used at least by someone as there was not a lot of dust accumulation on the flat surfaces. As she felt more and more comfortable that something was not going to pop up of a weird corner she headed to the only thing that seemed to be of important inside which was a very large crystal that was attached to the wall of the tower.

The crystal was about seven feet tall and about four foot wide it also had a purple tint to it. Using a quick spell Alexandria saw that it radiated tones of dark energy. Overall she was not sure what to make of it. The crystal was fogged up somehow but she should see that something was inside of it and it looked human.

As much as she wanted to take things slowly she also knew that she would have little time considering what was outside, throwing caution at the wind she placed her hand on the crystal and wipe the fog off the outside of it. Instantly her eyes went wide in shock, the face that she saw was Mike's. Quickly she wiped the rest of it and then stood back to get a better look.

What she saw concerned her quite a bit, "You are Mike alright... but you're not at the same time." Inside the crystal you have what looked like Mike's body. While all the parts where there his hands and feet where somewhat translucent and a large amount of dark fog were swirling around.

Alexandria was disappointed, for a while there she had hoped that she had found him already.

"Well at least now I know how you created that simulacrum that Anna killed and also now I know what the purpose of the towers are, they are breeding pits for other simulacrum." She thought about it more, "Hmm, so I guess that means that somewhere the original is in one of those."

She had to admit that she was impressed with her mastery of magic but this was wrong on many levels for Alex. She took her staff in her hands and moved a few steps back before she swung at the crystal container. It took a few swings but eventually a large part of the crystal was broken, once done the body inside just dropped to the ground. Already what had been finished was turning back into dark mist and pretty soon the whole thing would just disappear like it never was.

Part of her was happy that it was her seeing this and not Anna, yes it was a fake and it was pretty obvious but it still had his face, build and everything else. Anna had seen him die a few too many times already and there would be nothing wrong with spearing her details of this. As Alexandria reapplied her instant spells she quickly checked out the chest that was also there. Once opened she saw a dark armor, a blade and some normal clothes. She figured that these were for him when the process would finish.

Alexandria made her way up to the second floor to take a quick look before rejoining the others, while she walked up the stairs she wondered how many time she would have to do this. Ideally if they could destroy them before they were finished it would be better for everyone, and while she agreed with that, mentally, it would not be an easy thing to do repeatedly.

She reached the top and was lucky again as no one else was around as she looked outside she simply could not believe what she was seeing. All



the damage she had done was already gone and replaced with more goblins and once again giants could be seen in the distance. While it was too late now, she wondered if this plan that they had agree too was the right one. The enemies looked endless, but she took this as a good sign still. "If we are fighting all of this here, how many can you really have on the other side attacking Julia and everyone else?"

Before the giants could notice her she closed her eyes and figured out the location of Rosamia, "Time to join back with the others."

She quickly reappeared in front of Rosamia, as they had promised everyone was in a close diamond formation doing whatever they could to keep the middle clear of anyone and anything for her return. Alexandria noticed that there were a few small cuts on everyone but nothing serious.

Seeing as she was back the other dispersed, while Anna started to move ahead she took the time to ask her a question. "Did you find anything?"

Still Alex thought that sparing her the details would be a good idea, "Nothing of large consequence but I was able to confirm that he will be in one of those towers and that we should destroy the content of those that he's not in."

Clearly there was more to this but Anna simply nodded and charged ahead to confront the goblins, they would find him and that's what mattered.

## *Chapter 6*

Another hour of constant fighting had just passed and Anna was seriously wondering how long they could keep up. There were still no reinforcements that had arrived from the orcs, she had asked K'azugg if a messenger had shown up to give him an updated but all she got was an answer from that lieutenant to stop asking unnecessary questions and to keep fighting. Something was going on and she wondered if even K'azugg knew about it. Alexandria was once again checking out a tower, so far she has checked out five of them and still nothing. This worried her too but about this one Anna could do something about it, before leaving she had asked Alexandria to scout ahead to see how many were left and at the same time maybe see if there was any change in the enemy's tactics. Anna assumed that this was the reason why it was taking her a while longer to come back, she hoped for good news.

Currently they were in the ordered close diamond formation waiting for Alex to return, while Adam understood why it still made things harder in this situation with the enemy force not letting up. One thing it did do was give them the ability to communicate, "Hey Anna, what do you say that when she come back next time we all go with her, this battle is endless and idiotic at this point."

Before she could say anything the orc lieutenant scoff at him, "You are all weak I knew counting on you people would be a mistake, we are barely half way and already you are planning on leaving us."

Then it was Adam that mocked him, "Us

leaving you? Your people are about at half of what you started from. Way I see it, you're the ones that started leaving this battle first."

Anna could not take it anymore, this happened every time Alexandria left and they were forced to get closer to each other and also at the same time get closer to K'azugg's main team that was accompanying them. Rosamia tried to calm him down but it had no effect anymore and Iris, typically the other person he listened without complaints, was too busy trying to fill in Alexandria role while she was away as well as her own. It's not that Anna did not understand where Adam was coming from but it was getting old quick in this condition. "Let me finish this once and for all, Adam we are staying as long as the situation remains as is..."

Before she could continue the lieutenant jumped in, "Bah it's only a matter of time before that little one of yours comes back lying about the situation just to have you all leave, you care nothing for our cause."

At that Anna bothered to take the time to look back at the lieutenant with a resentful stare, "Your cause is vengeance and nothing *more*, and while I understand it's reasoning never have we said that we would share in it. The reasons we are here is clear, and when his location is found we will leave. Assuming we can help you afterwards we will but only if we can, if you are not happy about that then you can always fall back, regroup and have your vengeance the next day."

Before she could continue or anyone else could reply she was cut off by Alexandria finally returning. She looked frightened and worried at the same time and before Anna could ask her what was going on she just blurred it out, "Their destroying the towers..."

Anna was wide eyed; she was not going to let him die for real, "Alex, Iris, find him... *Now*."

Iris dispatched her target and pointed left and then disappeared. Having caught her breath and understanding her meaning Alexandria also disappeared but focused on the right. Iris saw her first target, she also saw giants heading its way but she figured that she would still have enough time to check things out.

As she did a picture of Alexandria head appeared using the pendants magic, "The tower itself will probably be empty save for a large crystal. Now don't focus on what is in the crystal just see it for what it is and not what you think it is." While Iris was confused at what Alex was saying she trusted he judgment and teleported on the second floor directly and quickly went down the stairs hoping not the be discovered.

Turns out that Alex had been right the tower was empty save for the giant crystal, she approached it cautiously and then heard Alexandria talk again as if she was reading her mind. "Don't worry it's safe to touch even if it is oozing dark energy."

She got close to it and wiped the fog away and then understood. "Is there one in every tower?"

With a gloomy look Alex answered her, "Sadly so far yes."

Iris took a deep breath before asking the obvious other question, "Should I destroy it?"

Alexandria shook her head, "Don't bother, so far I've been doing that but you should not waste the magic and it will take you a few hits with your sword to break the crystal. Just leave and go to the next one, there is little time and with any luck the giants will do it for us."

This all felt weird for Iris, kidnapping of young people for future subjugation, more Avatars, a new

war and even reborns. Plus now she could add to the list multiple empty shells that looked like one of their own that needed to be destroyed by their hands. The last little while had turned everything around and now their nice world that they had worked hard for seem like it was slipping away.

"...Okay I'll head to the next one."

Still in contact Alexandria could see and hear the little bit of hopelessness in Iris's comment. "Don't worry, we will figure out a way though all this you'll see, but it's like Anna said we need to take it one step at a time..."

Alexandria paused as she got close to the crystal in front of her. This one had no fog and the Mike inside looked alive but in a lot of pain. She went to touch the crystal but at the last second pulled back, something was not right. She used a quick detection spell and realized that the crystal was protected; touching it without removing the spell would be a bad idea. She used another spell but this time on him, it had to be him but she had seen so many dummies so far that she had to be positive. The detection spell had issues seeing anything but dark energy as it was everywhere in the crystal and inside of him but as she focused more she could see it, holy energy that only they would have after refusing to go through the lord of light's plan for the rebirth spell and changing the rules for themselves. She gripped the pendant even more, "*Iris!* I found him, go get Anna and the others and bring them here. I'll hold off anyone trying to destroy the tower."

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With Alexandria and Iris gone there was no way for them to hold the normal formation, Rosamia yelled at the others. "I'll cast a shield and leave it up as long as they are away, you two keep doing what

you need to do." She then casted a holy shield around her and had it extend in front of her as well, once done she then casted a holy bow spell again it would not have the impact of some of her other spells but it would help and also give them a place to come back too.

Both Anna and Adam acknowledged her actions and charged forward at the enemies. It was slower going but better than being huddled up next to each other as this way they could move and with magical speed would be the better defense.

Anna was sure that they would find him so she focused on the task at hand and also wondered on how the next wave of giants would go as two of them appeared. She was about to ask Adam to join her against them as Iris suddenly showed up inside Rosamia's shield.

While Anna's face showed excitement for almost reaching her goal the faces of K'azugg and his lieutenant showed a different look all together and unsurprisingly it was the lieutenant that spoke first. "So you will all leave with those coming at us?"

Both Adam and Anna fell back to Iris and Rosamia, ignoring his comment Anna looked at Iris "You found him?"

Iris nodded, "Yes Alex did and she it at the tower defending it now." As she said it, higher up, dark clouds appeared and flaming rocks of fire started to fall from the sky. It was looking like Alexandria was keeping her promise of holding the line.

Anna smiled, "Thank God, okay can you take us all there in one shot?" Again Iris nodded and when she did they all grabbed hold of her.

While she was casting the spell Anna turned to K'azugg, "We will come back or help out somehow if we can but we need to do this first, I hope your

reinforcements get here quick." She did not have the time to see or hear their reaction as the world around her disappeared and when it reappeared she was in the back of Alexandria, who was still casting, on the second floor of the tower.

Anna started walking in the direction of the staircase leading to the first floor, "Is he below?"

Alexandria was distracted but needed to answer her, "Yes and I took care of the magic trap but I have to warn you..."

Iris then put a hand on her shoulder, "You go with her and explain it. Adam and I will make sure no one interrupts you." Instantly Adam jumped down and went on the attack flowed by Iris, Alex wanted to protest but she had to agree that this maybe was the better way to go.

Alex quickly walked to get ahead of Anna and Rosa and escorted them down. "I understand how she created that double now and how she created more but in order to do that she needed the original somewhere so that the spell knew how to build the simulacrum properly. What I don't understand is why she did that." Alexandria pointed to the figure inside the crystal. With all the protection spells removed it was very clear to see that the dark energy inside the crystal was coming from inside of Mike. The crystal function, it seemed, was to feed it back in him.

Anna stared at his floating body that was very obviously in pain inside the crystal. "Can we take him out?"

Alexandria was a bit hesitant, "In theory it should be safe."

Anna took her sword, which was really his sword that he had dropped when he had been captured, and slashed at the crystal with as much precision as she could. It would probably be impossible to free him without getting cut at all but

at the same time one small slip and the wound could be fatal. As the crystal broke Mike's body dropped and in doing so he was also cut at many places but nothing major. Anna put the sword away and approached him as slowly as she could, even if all she wanted to was rush at him. As she did he moved and went in a kneeling position, dark energy was fuming out of his body like a vapor and when they looked closer they saw that the wounds he had suffered from the glass of the crystal were regenerating. Anna did not even have to ask Rosa or Alex, she knew that this was a bad thing.

When the wounds were healed the black vapor disappeared and he looked up, "...Anna, you found me... I'm so happy." He was still in pain but it seemed internal somehow.

Anna kneeled in front of him and reached out by putting her arms around him. Even if it had only been a few months it felt like an eternity had passed since she had last held him, something had happened to him but they would find a way to fix it. The important part was that they were together and that fact alone lifted a large weight off her shoulders.

Rosamia approached the both of them, "Let me removed some of that dark energy, I'm sure it will help."

Still holding on to Anna Mike shook his head slowly, "No that will only cause you harm and take too much time."

Anna was concerned, "What do you mean by that, what did that dark knight do to you?"

"Somehow she put a part of her powers in me; she needed to do it to get the information she needed."

Baffled Alexandria cut in "Wait! What? But given what we know that's not good at all."

Anna did not understand what she was



saying, "What does that mean, explain it."

Rosamia then stepped in, "It means that in theory he is like a dark cleric and will not run out of dark energy even if I take it out of him now as it will only replenish itself overtime. What's not good about that is that he still has that holy inside of him as well so in a way they are both at war against one and the other inside of him causing him the pain that she inflicted on us but on a permanent basis."

While Anna now understood what was going on she had no clue on how to get rid of it, "So she did this to get information from you why this way and leave it once she got what she wanted?"

Mike shrugged, "She needed information from me and the normal means where not working fast enough for her. With her power inside of me it made things simple but dangerous as I too could see in her head when she peeked into mine. The difference was that I did not control what I saw where as she did. As for leaving the power there that I have no clue on."

Alexandria reached out for the clothes inside the chest, casted a quick spell to change them a little bit to something more normal and handed it to him. "Best put this on, once we get you someplace safe we can figure where to go from there." He nodded and did as she mentioned.

Anna stood back next to Alex and Rosa and whispered, "We can fix this right?" as she asked they all looked at him or more specifically the dark vapor that was once again coming out of his body. Sadly there was no answer for Anna's question.

Shortly after he was done Iris's image appear in front of Alex, "Ah guys I hate to say this but we need to leave and if you can go to your left of the tower as quick as you can." Before they could ask why as they started to move her image disspread.

They moved to the left as much as they could, Mike looked around. "Where are we anyways?"

Before they could answer a large bolder crashed in the tower destroying the right side of it, Rosamia casted a quick holy shield to protect them. As the rubble cleared Mike could clearly see outside and the situation that they were in. There was a swarm of goblins and a few giants coming at them, more dark smoke escaped his body. As he started to move in the enemies direction Anna grabbed him, "We should leave you are too weak for this."

As she was about to turn to Alexandria he stopped her. Mike looked at her and gave her a small smile, "I'll be fine, and this is actually what I need to use up this power."

Anna wondered about that but then she felt a hand on her shoulder when she turned she saw Alexandria. "It makes sense, the more power he uses the less will be in him so it should hurt less. The thing is that it will just come back so it's not a solution."

Somewhat convinced Anna then let him go and reached for his sword, as he had no weapon. He looked at it for a second and then opened his hands and dark energy blasted out of them and formed into swords that looked just like his. They were all dark and for some reason the swords themselves seems intangible. He saw their worried looks on all their faces but did not know what to tell them to make it go away as he himself was worried, the only thing he knew was that there were targets in front of him and he was itching to get at them. "Please hold on to that for a while longer." As he charged ahead he said one more thing, "Just try and stay behind me as much as possible."

Mike closed his eyes for a second and casted a

tracking spell, the information that flooded in his brain was massive and hurt him like heck but compared to the other pain that he was feeling deep inside himself it got drowned out quick. His first priority were the giants that were preparing for another thrown attack at the half destroyed tower, ideally he needed to get their attention quick in order for them to believe that the real target was not his friends and wife that had come to save him but himself. With the new knowledge of how to use this power that was now in his head a plan of attack formed itself and as soon as it did he sprinted at his targets.

Moving closer to Anna but still being forced to deal with the goblins attacking him Adam shouted at her, "So is he going to be okay, I mean he's going in pretty deep there? Should we follow him?"

Before he could ask another question or even before she could answer everyone in the battlefield stopped for a second to hear the loud cry of a giant in pain. No one knew what had happen but they did see the giant stumble to one knee and as he did they could see Mike magically jumping upwards towards the giant's chest, as his feet was about to land on the giant's chest he raised one of his shadow swords and pointed it at the giant's head.

In an instant, as he let the blade go, it morphed to become more cylindrical and then before anyone could see shot upwards at incredible speed. By the time they looked at the head of the giant, which seemed to be its target, the sword had disappeared and left a hole that went through and through. The giant had not time to realize what had happened to him as he started to fall to the ground already dead. As he fell Mike's feet connected with the giant's body and then he again used magical energy to propel himself at his other

target with only one shadow blade left.

The new giant had seen Mike and the direction he was heading. He waited for the right time and grabbed him mid air with his hand. A smile appeared on his face as he moved his hand closer to his body, as he was about to squeeze and pop the fleshy target that he had captured a dark globe appeared all around his hand and then suddenly it disappeared with his entire hand leaving behind a stump and the fleshy target that was starting to fall to the ground.

The giant automatically grabbed his bloody stump with his other hand and was in complete shock. They then saw Mike, who was now free falling, aim his sword at the giant and let the blade go. Once again the blade changed and pierced its target leaving a large hole across his head. While this was happening, with his free hand, a globe of black energy was being collected in a head size ball. Still falling Mike let the ball go and then it split in to smaller ones raining down at the sea of goblins awaiting him on the ground. Many of the goblins died on contact with the dark energy and those that did not were in no position to continue the fight. Mike then landed on the ground and recreated two shadowy blades before magically sprinting to his next targets.

Adam could not believe what he had just seen and luckily the same held for the enemies that had stopped attacking as well during the five to ten seconds all this had taken place. Reacting faster than the enemies to how open they all were, Adam took advantage and went on a flurry of blade slashes. Arms, sides, legs or heads it did not matter as all would be fatal immediately or in the very short run. Now even closer to Anna he changed his questions, "What is *that!*?"

For a second she realized that she was not

sure how to answer. That moment was small, so small in fact that he did not realize it nor did the others around her, but she did and Anna knew that this was something that she would need to resolve quick as soon as she could. "That's Mike, that dark knight did something to him, but trust me it's him. He just has a bit of a power boost now."

Even if they shouldn't, considering the situation they were all in, they looked at her for a split second with a questioning look. Adam was still defending himself and glancing at his teammate that had just down two more giants, "You think?!?"

Anna ignored his last comment and focused on the new situation that they were in. It was obvious that Mike was trying to use as much power as he could to empty himself, so stopping him when they were being attacked would probably be a waste of time. The rest of them were all tired but he was making himself out to be such a target that they were less and less enemies around them. "Having all of us keeping up with him would be a waste of energy, Rosa, Iris and Adam you stay together and deal with as many goblins as you can." She then turned to Alex, "You are with me as we try and keep up with him, or stay in his vicinity as much as possible."

As they split to follow her orders Anna and Alex charged deeper in as the rest created an obstacle for the left over goblins as they tried to move down the mountain to attack the orcs and move away from Mike.

Seeing as they were in the thick of it there would be no time to talk but in a way both Anna and Alex needed to. Alexandria quickly casted a communication spell and without issues she was not able to speak in Anna's mind and vice versa,

'I've gotten better with this spell so I should be able to maintain it with no issues as long as we are close, and also there should be less intrusive thoughts that pop up then before...'

Anna then interrupted her 'Thanks, as I have a very good question now, what happened to him? Rosamia mentioned that he was like a dark cleric but while he is using some attacks they used he is also using some that the Avatars used, so where does he fit in and can he be put back the way he was?'

As Anna protected her, Alexandria let a lighting spell that would chain from target to target go from her hands. 'I'm not sure, maybe the difference is because she put her power in him and not let him feed off her like most cleric do. Assuming what he said was true. In theory in order to bring him back to normal once the power is removed then he should be fine, the issue is that if she did do that to see what was in his mind why leave it there if it could be removed? If she got what she wanted why take this risk, which I'll admit has me worried.'

She slashed her sword at the mid section of a goblin and then spun around to stab at an incoming one that was charging at Alex from behind. 'Maybe she thought this would torture us somehow? Split us apart because we would be afraid of what he is now?'

Alexandria was trying very hard not to sound too worried as she thought her next thoughts, 'Are we not afraid of what he is? I mean could she be controlling him somehow and all this could also part of her plan, no matter how this ends this is going to be asked.'

Anna wanted to argue but she was right, no matter what there would be questions and concerns and that could lead to doubt. Even more

reason to confront him when she could, but again this was no time for it. 'Let's answer that when the time comes and for now continue with the current plan of stopping her army here, helping the orcs and also draining his energy...Also, if we can, let's also try and follow what he said about staying behind.'

Alexandria let a fireball spell loose as she gave a worried glance at Anna, 'Are you thinking that he would attack us?'

'Not intentionally no, he is big on control so that helps but in certain situations and now with all this unknown inside of him...' Anna's last thought did not give Alex any warm feelings about all this at all.

Most of the giants that he and his tracking spell could see were very far off. Mike wanted to simply change upward in their direction and keep attacking. He could feel that his friends were still on the battlefield, most of them had stayed back but two were close to him. One of them had to be Anna, which only helped to worry him more. He did not blame her at all for her actions as he would have done the same, but he also knew that staying close was a bad idea.

He had once again charged in to another large group of goblins, they were no match for him at all. As he powered a shadow spell that would soon explore around them they tried to attack him by any means that they could. He dodged a few and kept moving as to not get stuck but only for that reason, the multiple cuts and slashes he was receiving were already healing so he paid them little attention. The spell now ready he let it loose and a group of twenty plus goblins died with many more injured.

He charged again at another large group that was further away from Anna and the other that

were now getting closer to him. He still had tones of power, he could finish this and clear the whole section but if he did that the others would be hurt. Doing so would help empty him and would remove the constant pain that was currently lessening.

Part of him wanted to get away from them; it would be easier for him and for her. Again he felt goblin swords slice at his body, the pain it caused was instantly excruciating but it allowed him to use more power to heal the wound, which help his overall problem. The spell build up was ready again and again tones of goblins died. Charging at an even larger group even further away the same thoughts of moving away from then and using more power occupied his mind. It scared him as something inside of him knew that it was wrong but he could not figure out why.

Suddenly then the tracking spell fed him new information in his mind, as he stopped to focus on it he let whatever energy he had built up go killing those around him instantly. He turned backward, "Orcs, why would they attack us now?" There were less enemies coming down from the top of the mountain, he would leave it to them and he would go deal with the orcs.

Alexandria was more exhausted then before, "Why is he moving around like that?"

Anna noticed that there were less and less goblins around them but it was still a challenge to move around safely. "It's because he's being obstinate and bull headed."

Before Alexandria could ask what she was talking about she then saw Mike magically charge and jump backward from where they had come, he then continued past the small obstacle that Iris, Adam and Rosa had created and continued downwards. "Where is he going now?"

Anna turned to her with a very worried look,



"Alex you have to teleport us to K'azugg now."

Alexandria was stunned, "You don't think that he going to go attack them do you?" When no answers came but the worried look was still present she grabbed Anna's hand. "I'm warning you I don't know where K'azugg is exactly so this will be a bumpy ride."

As they disappeared Adam was left wondering, "So are we staying here?"

Rosamia fired a few holy arrows at approaching targets. She looked at Iris who in turned looked at her with a puzzled look. Rosamia figured that the lead of the trio fell on her shoulders, "Iris wait until you can get a firm safe location from Alexandria's location, once you do let me know and in the mean time yes we hold our position."

Anna turned to Alexandria, she had not been joking when she mentioned that it was going to be bumpy. Currently they were free falling from very high up in the sky, Alexandria was in full concentration and Anna was the last person that wanted to interrupt her as the ground was fast approaching. Anna figured that her only job right this instant was to make sure not to let go of Alexandria's hand. Then she felt Alex squeeze her hand, "Good news I found him and I see a spot that we can appear on. It will just be a moment." While she casted the next teleport spell Anna wondered what other spell would have been used if no spot had been found.

Anna was a bit off balance when she reappeared suddenly on the ground. Still it had only taken less than a few second and she already could hear the annoying voice of a certain lieutenant. "Bah now you reappear, you could have just stayed away the real reinforcements are now here."

Tempting as it was leaving now would cause issues, already she could see that Mike was barreling in their direction killing many goblins as he could and using up as much power as he could in the process. Alexandria cleared a path for Anna using a fireball spell and looked ahead, "So he's going to stop right, I mean he will see us and stop right?"

Anna took a step forward, she was not sure what was exactly going on in his head but in a situation like this if he assumed that the orcs were with the goblins and she was right in the middle of it he would stop at her location, he had too.

More information pounded in his brain, now there were two human targets up ahead. This made little sense as the only humans around where the Lights Templar. He opened his eyes and then he saw her. Alexandria was backing her up but she was not moving as a large force was right behind her. He had planned on just blasting them in one fell swoop but now that was impossible, he needed to get rid of this power and keep her safe and she was doing the opposite of what he needed. Why, he just could not figure it out. He focused more magic and then jumped to get to her location in order to tell Alexandria to take her away from here. Mike landed a few feet from her, as he did Anna rushed to him and slapped him. Healing magic was already healing the superficial wound, "Why... did you?"

She had been right he had lost focused. "Ask yourself when was the last time orcs where our enemy?"

Mike was confused he had attacked orcs for a long time with Anna there was no reason to hold back the release of pain on them, but then why had she stopped him. Seeing as clarity was the last thing being shown on his face Anna continued,

"The enemies are the goblins and giants and the real target is that dark knight, don't go creating new enemies. Ignore what is going on in your head and listen to me and only me okay?"

Alexandria was doing her best to keep the goblins off of them but pretty soon she would need help in order to do that. It was true that the attacks were lessening quite a bit but even she knew that there was little time for something like this. She hoped that Anna could get through to him quick.

He was confused, finally he was able to lessen this pain that had been assaulting him for what seems like a very long time and the spell kept giving him new locations on the enemy's movements. Free himself and save them that had been the goal but there was more to it than that. "I'm very confused but in all this confusion I know one thing, one constant, and that's that I can believe you no matter what I think." He ignored what his head was telling him from the battle that he had been in, still was in, and looked at her with as calm as a tone as he could muster. "What do you need me to do?"

Anna smiled "Discourage these goblins from attacking us and let's make our way back to the others." He nodded, turned and released a large wave of dark energy at the goblins and made his way upwards slowly with Anna at his side and the orcs and Alexandria behind him.

Alexandria was now taking it a bit easier to replenish some of her stamina. She left Anna who stayed around Mike while he single handily took over as the vanguard while she joined up with the orcs who were currently swapping most of the original fighters with new ones that had come with the reinforcement. K'azugg and his new lieutenant had stayed around, K'azugg purposely moved

closer to her as he watched what was happening in front of him. "Is he okay to be doing that?"

Alexandria was curious about the mild concern but wondered if it really was concern at all, "As long as Anna is around I have no worries."

A grim look appeared on K'azugg face, "I'm not sure how comfortable I am with that answer."

She almost wanted to laugh at his comment but held it back and instead turned it around, "Be that as it may it is what it is and while we are on the subject of comfort I'm not sure how I feel about reinforcement that arrive as the fight is winding down."

This time K'azugg was hostile with his answer, "That will be dealt with later and is of no concern to the like of you."

Alexandria shrugged, "Then there you have it for both our concerns as we both have the same answer for each other. Now let forget about those for now and focus on what is in front of us."

Clearly he was mad at her answer but she care very little especially considering the amount of pain he had caused Iris on how he had delivered the information on the captives that they had abducted. Still leaving the orc pissed off would be of little help, but before she could lessen his anger Mike suddenly stopped.

Anna turned to him as he focused at the top of the mountain, "What's wrong, let me know what's different."

"Something is happening at the top of the mountain, targets area disappearing by large amounts."

Close enough to hear Alexandria wondered what he was talking about, suddenly a floating head of Rosamia showed up using the pendants magic. "What is the current situation down there should we meet up with you or stay?"

Alexandria turned to Anna who yelled loud enough for the pendent to pick up her voice. "Have her team scout the top and tell us what is happening."

Alex saw Rosamia nod in approval and then her image disappeared. From there they continued their climb upwards.

With the enemy ranks lessening, the refreshed orcs and Mike's new power the climb up was going at a quick pace. After about thirty minutes they got a communication from the scouting party that was now on top of the mountain. This time it was Iris's face that showed up and she had a wide eye expression. "I'm not really sure how to explain it but there is a very large gate or portal up here and pretty much everyone is going in it on mass."

Mike turned to Anna, "That needs to be closed."

Anna nodded, "Yes it does as I think I have a clue where it's going and I hope I'm wrong. Alexandria, if you can, go and help Iris to close that thing."

Alexandria slowly shook her head, "Up the mountain, down the mountain and now up again... I'm on it." As she disappeared Anna could not help but smirk at her comment.

As time went on the climb was more of a climb up a mountain then an attack. Most of the goblins had broken ranks and disappeared and no giants had been seen for a long while now. Eventually they had reached the top where the rest of the Lights Templar were simply waiting for them.

There were no signs of any portal or gate but there were a lot of large houses around, large enough for giants and yet the place looked empty. Anna, Mike, K'azugg and the lieutenant marched close to the others. "What happened?"

Alexandria shrugged quickly looked at Iris and

then started her explanation, "When I got here I quickly did a quick spell to figure out where the other part of the gate was heading, as soon as I did I hit some resistant and shortly after the gate simply closed by itself."

Rosamia then moved next to her, "After that it was pretty chaotic as all the giants where gone leaving the goblins alone. They all scurried out pretty quick, I saw no need to chase after then."

As soon as they heard the news both K'azugg and the lieutenant left the group having spent already too much time around these human and now that the battle was over saw no point to stay with them any longer.

Anna looked at them marching back to their own to inform them of the situation. She then looked at Mike, he seemed calm now and in less pain but he was still focused on something in his head. Anna then turned to the others, "You did the right thing, now lest all rest up a bit and try and figure things out." She then took her pendent in her hand, "Before I join you there is some news I want to give to a certain Crimson commander."

While she contacted Julia to let her know Anna felt grateful and wary at the same time, Mike was back by her side and the long battle was finally over but was it simply a prelude to what was up ahead.

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Much later during the night while mostly everyone was sleeping Anna was looking around to see if she could find where Mike had run off too.

After everything was done and inspected everyone had decided to camp on top of the mountain and leave early next morning. While sleeping surrounded by orc was not an appealing thought to everyone it was safer than just sleeping

in the middle of nowhere. As much as there was distrust, no one was interested in jumping on the other during the night while they were sleeping especially after the day that they all had just been through.

During her updates and the updates given Mike had let Anna know that he needed some time alone, she figured that it would be a good idea considering everything. Knowing him as well as she did it took her no time to find him sitting on a rock looking over the horizon. "All I have to do is ask myself where can I find a place with a nice view where there is not a lot of people around and there you are. I'm happy certain things are still the same."

He did not answer, which worried her. She sat next to him and he turned to her and gave her a small smile. Anna knew that what she was going to do was going to be hard but it needed to be done. "I gave you time, but you still seem as lost as before. I know that I'm asking a lot but also there is so much going on right now, so please talk to me. Together we are unbeatable right so why do you think that cutting me off now is the right way to go?"

His smile vanished, "And here I thought that my reason was easy to figure out." He turned and looked at her, his eyes were pitch black. "I'm afraid that I'll lose control and hurt you somehow and while it will be unintentional I still want to avoid it."

Anna thought about his comment for a second, "Hmm, that's a very hard position that you are in because what you are doing right now is hurting me. So unless you want to start trying to figure out the degree that you are whiling to unintentionally hurt me to keep me safe then I suggest that you talk to me. What is going on?"

He chuckled mildly, "I'm stuck in my head again right..." Mike slowly shook his head, "Fine. This power is causing me a lot of pain deep inside but when I use it I feel myself coming back to what I was before and part of me wants to do that as soon as I can so that things can go back to normal."

"Is there any way that you can use this power without using destructive spells?"

He nodded, "Nope, sadly all the knowledge I have to use it mostly for attack base spells. I'm not sure why but that's all I can call up in my head."

Anna thought about it more, "...While that helps in certain situation it's also dangerous. You lost track of things back there right?"

"I did, in order to figure out my movements I used a tracking spell. That was great to give me the information I needed but eventually it all blurred in my head and everything became dots that I needed to get rid of. It's just that there were certain dots that I wanted to avoid and that became harder as time went on."

She had figured something like that happened, it was not the first time that he had lost his way during a battle and would probably not be the last. Normally it was not a big issue but with this new power at his disposal it was a different story altogether. "I know this will be hard to ask but can you endure the pain if you are unable to fight?"

Mike smirked at her comment, "I can't just step aside especially considering what might happen next."

Anna cut him off, "That's not what I'm saying. For better or worse you have this power but we also need this power to go against her. I'm not sure what it will do but I think it maybe our trump card against her somehow."

He was confused, "So I need to fight but I can't



fight?" After he said it he then understood what she wanted. "Hmm, I must be distracted. You want to know if I can stay as normal as I can until the right time comes around." When she slowly nodded he thought about it for a moment. "I think I can, there will be things that will worry others like little slips here and there but other than I know I can do what you ask."

She reached out and gave him a quick kiss and then whispered, "You worry about yourself and let me worry about how the others react okay."

"There will be so many questions about if she is controlling me somehow."

This time it was her that chuckled, "Oh I bet, and truth be told even I wondered that for a little while." She then looked at him in his eyes that were once again normal, "But after this I know that you are not being controlled because no one but you could rattle over so much worry inside your head as you have in the last little while. There is no way that she planted that inside of you."

"Haha, I'm not sure how I'm supposed to take that."

She moved closer and reached out to hold him around his waist like she had so many times in the past. "Hey I'm convinced so what does it matter if that's the end result?"

He put his arms around her, "Not a thing, not a thing... Thanks, I was being a fool again by trying to push you away." She smiled, "As long as you realize it."

They stayed like this for a little while, the time passed apart for him was a confusing mess but for her it was all very clear. What was also clear was what needed to be done next. She broke the happy silence that they shared, "Again I know you may not be up for it but there is something else we need to talk about."

Mike nodded, "Yes we do. We need to figure out a way to stop Genevieve."

Anna instantly let go and sat upright with a confused look on her face, "Who?!?"

Her look made him smile. It was nice to smile again, it had felt like a long time and also it helped. "It's the name of the dark knight, I told you I know a lot about her some of it is good knowledge and other not so much. Again I could not control what I saw, unlike her somehow."

Anna took a deep breath, "This is going to be a long night then."

"Yes it will, because if you want me to help like I normally do..."

She cut him off, "You need to know what has happened in order to fill in the gaps. I know." She then reached out for her pendant, "But in order to do that we will have to invite someone else this time."

Anna thought of a name inside her head and then a floating head of an obviously sleeping Julia appeared. It was odd seeing her without her normal braided ponytail that she always had to keep her red hair in place. Mike looked at the image of her still sleeping, "You know we may need to talk to Alexandria about that, it's odd that we can activate these while the other person is not aware like this."

As Anna nodded thinking the same thing Julia started to wake up from the voice that the pendant was broadcasting. Julia was startled, obviously, but regained her composure quickly. Still groggy she answered them, "Not that I don't like these updates but please tell me this is important..." She squinted at them as the glowing blue light was hurting her eyes a bit, "...and quick news I hope." Anna felt sorry for her friend as this was going to be a very long night.

## Chapter 7

Anna and Mike were lounging on the same rock formation as the night before. She was sitting between his legs, back to his chest while he held her in his arms. It seemed that they had just collapsed like that and were still sleeping. Alexandria pointed at them, "See I told you I could find them pretty fast, mind you I'm not so sure how comfortable that is."

Adam stopped right beside her, "Your right that looks like a horrible way to spend the night, the back issues alone would make the next few days hard."

Rosamia looked at the both of them still peacefully sleeping, "Oh I don't know about all that." She then looked at Adam, "It could be comforting to feel each other's warmth like that while sleeping."

As Adam turned a shade of red Iris finally joined up with the others. "Well I'm with Alex and Adam on the uncomfortable part, but should we wake them or wait? I mean that orc did tell us to go *fetch* them but he could wait, I suppose, they are done using us so there is no need to follow his request right?"

Still with her eyes closed Anna answered Iris comment, "True as that maybe but it seems that we still need them for something." She turned and smiled at Mike, they had finished so late that they just figured that they would relax a bit and watch the sunrise, it seems that somewhere along the lines they had fallen asleep. They quickly kissed and then stood up to try and remove some of the kinks from their bodies.

Anna then turned to the rest of the group, "A plan was formed to try and stop Genevieve, but from what Julia said of her current situation we will need extra help and we plan on asking the orcs for that."

Everyone else was all stunned and except for Iris they all asked their questions at the same time.

"Are you mad, why would we do that... *again?*"

"What's happening at home?"

"Genevieve?!? Is that her name? Sooo many questions here."

Mike gave them a small smile, while things were different with him very little was with them. "No we are not mad, things are pretty bad and yes that is her name. As for the other question I think you should just join us when we meet with K'azugg and whoever else as we will be there to go over it."

Reluctantly but with a playful smile on her face Alexandria turned around, "Fine I guess I can wait a little while."

As she led them to the location requested Anna looked at Iris who was surprisingly silent and very moody. The news that she had gotten over the last few days had hit her very close to home and Anna knew that the new information she was about to hear would not help her at all.

They approached to the same quickly erected command tent that they had seen before. Mike looked around at a lot of frustrated orcs. From what Anna had said sure they had won the fight and gotten their vengeance but they had also lost more than few of brethrens doing it, and on top of that had needed the Lights Templar, humans, help to do it. He whispered to Anna, "How do you want to play this if they refuse? I know that you want to keep good relations but looking around..."

She sighed, "I know, I know. The more time we spend with them it seems that things get worse

these days. As we learn of the things that happen during the war and their current attitude, well it's affecting even us. That said some of us are also looking at things the same way as they are so how can I expect the humans and orcs in general to suddenly get along?"

She then quickly smiled and shrugged, "I knew it was not going to be easy and that there would be setbacks along the way and to answer your question we don't have a choice they need to accept so worst case scenario we create a setback. But even with that I still want to try and get there at one point so let's not create too big of a setback." Mike nodded understanding her wishes and tried to think of a different way to convince them just in case things did not go so well.

While inside the tent, only K'azugg and that lieutenant was present but it was noticed that a large number of orcs were also guarding the tent from the outside. When they all approached the small wooden table that separated them from the two orcs they saw that the lieutenant was visibly more angry with them than K'azugg was. Adam taking it as an invitation smiled at him, "What's up with you lieutenant you seem very agitated this fine morning."

As the lieutenant started yelling at him both Anna and Mike bowed their heads down not believing that this is how things would start. "I am the second in command to the first attack tribe and *MY NAME IS ORAKH NOT LIEUTENANT* you dumb beast."

Adam shrugged, "Ohhh that sound impressive, but here is the thing you never offered your name so what were we suppose to call you? Grumpy is taken by me so maybe you would have preferred Dopey?"

Very quickly Orakh slammed both hands on

the table, "*I should kill you this very second.*"

Adam smirked, "You can try..."

"*ENOUGH...*" K'azugg hated everything about this and wanted this to end quickly, seeing as he now had the attention of everyone he turned to the humans. "We are done here and heading back home, when are you doing the same?"

It was not the way Anna wanted to approach this but Adam had given her little options. "Ideally we will be back home pretty quick. The goal is for us to head to the tower and there a portal will be opened for us to use." While K'azugg seem to care little for the how, Orakh on the other hand seemed a bit concerned by it and also there was some chatter between her own teammates.

Alexandria wondered why this had been approved from their side. She turned to Anna, "A portal, I take it the Council agreed with this otherwise there is no way that it would be opened but... why? I mean there are other ways that will not deplete as many casters if we need to get back so quickly."

Anna nodded, "I'm sure that is true but if things go to plan then we will not be the only ones going back to our land."

Iris was visibly confused as everyone else, from what Anna was saying others would be going back with them but in this area of the world there were not a lot of possible candidates. "What's going on?"

K'azugg crossed his arms, clearly he was no going to get his wish of a quick meeting anymore. "We would like to know as well."

Anna pointed at Mike's direction letting him explain. "Before we go over the plan we would like to share in the new information that we have on this new enemy of ours, this dark knight." Before he could continue Orakh pounded his fist on the table again, "No, go over this plan of yours."

Mike glanced at K'azugg and then back at Orakh, "We can do that but this information could be useful."

"Will this information give us insight on her powers or her plans, if not then its trivial information. She is the enemy we don't need to know the why's just that's she is attacking and we need to stop her. The why's may only server to confuse ones actions and waste valuable time, now get on with it."

Mike was visibly disappointed, this was not so much a surprise coming from Orakh but both Anna and he had hoped that K'azugg would have changed enough to know better. Seeing as he was doing nothing about it Mike supposed that they had been wrong. "Fine then I'll let Anna finish explaining the plan and I'll update our team members after this." Iris was happy to hear that. She would have asked anyways after even if it was not offered but this made things easier and plus with only them she could ask more personal questions.

Anna wondered how this was going to end. Part of the plan was to get them to understand that they were connected to this enemy as much as they were, now with that gone. "Fine, currently she is attacking our cities and towns." It was hard not to notice the two orcs smirks appear on their faces as she said this. "It's also believed that the giants and goblins that used the gate yesterday will somehow connect with her and join in on this attack. In order for us to be able to push it back we would ask for your help."

Ignoring the obvious reactions from her team members, K'azugg wide eye expression and Orakh laughter was hard to ignore. "HAhah, that's rich and why do you think that we would help with that? They could kill you all and we would care

very little, actually she would be doing us a favor if she did that."

Anna was not amused by his comment one bit, "Once we are gone she's coming back here to finish you off, if you would not have be so quick to dismiss Mike's information you would know this. We figured that if you helped us then we would all have a better chance than separately." She then turned to K'azugg, "Like before."

Recovering from his laughter the orc just waved her off, "Still not interested."

"There is nothing for us to gain to help you with this you should have realized that so why did you ask?"

Orakh was stunned by K'azugg response as it implied that there would be a way that they would help. He turned to him, "Do you know what you are saying? You must know that you are in no position to even say what you just did?"

K'azugg did not react but he was looking at Mike. Anna had told him that something funny was going on with K'azugg and his standing with the other leaders but from what he was seeing here there was way more going on then they knew. Still Orakh comments had pushed his buttons it seems and it became hard to control the emotion inside of him that was telling him to use his power on this orc. Mike closed his eye for a second and buried it as deep as he could. When he reopened his eyes he knew that he had not succeeded as much as he had wanted to, his eyes were pitch black and he felt a bit of magical energy build up in his hands. "We will be fitting a large force with an enemy that has enough power to destroy us by herself. Chances are that we will not be walking away from this fight as victorious as we would like. If your hatred for us is as you say it is then I can't see how you don't understand the advantages you are to



gain from helping us. I'm sure that you K'azugg of all of them know what I'm implying."

K'azugg smiled and Orakh was furious. "Can't you still see it, even now, for all we know he's as corrupted as she is and nothing he says should be listen to. He is a dog now at her beck and call and we need to put as much distance with them before she pulls on the leach. You really are a fool..."

Before Mike or anyone else could react to his comments, K'azugg quickly backhanded the second in command of the first tribe. "You will also remember who you are talking to as well. I am K'azugg *LEADER* of the home defense tribe. Remember your place and our orders. Even if he is controlled or not if the leaders see a benefit to this then we will join them. You mentioned that I was not in a position early to comment, but you fail to remember that *I am* in more of a position then you are."

He then turned to the humans, "Now leave us we know enough of what you want. We will update the other leaders and a decision will be made. Once done you are to leave with or without our help."

Once they had left it was obvious to see that many orcs where starting to leave but the majority of them were still on at the top of the mountain in the now abandon giant village. Things were very quite with the Lights Templar as they tried to find a spot that not occupied by their new neighbors. When they finally settled in Rosamia turned to Anna and Mike, "Okay so what is really going on? Do we really need their help or is there something else?"

Anna had a gloomy look as she turned to Mike and then back again to Rosa. "In order to come up with a plan we needed to contact Julia. Now the original plan was going with the assumption that

we as a group could stall this leader while everyone else deals with her attack force and then join us when it was possible."

Alexandria then understood, "Ah but with that gate spell and the numbers of giants and goblins added to the mix things are imbalanced."

"You are correct. So assuming the orcs join then they can deal with the extras. If they don't..." Anna hesitated but continued anyways, "Then Julia will be forced to approve the request to use the reserves."

Adam was confused, "What reserves are you talking about?" With the drop in population that had happened there were no reserve people that could help them that he could think of and then it hit him.

Seeing his expression of clarity Anna continued, "By reserves I mean all the new people that have recently joined the Crimson or Crusaders. They are barely trained and will get massacred if they face a giant but maybe able to deal with a few goblins. As soon as it was suggested to Julia she refused but pretty soon she may not have a choice. So in a way we do need them otherwise she will be forced to send a lot of people to a death sentence."

That was the last thing that Rosamia wanted too but that still left many complications. "Okay I understand why now but while this logic maybe okay with the Council I don't see the Crusaders or the Order taking it too well. Also will this not cause issues with Julia's position as well, that was the topic at hand before any of this started is it not a problem anymore?"

"Oh it is but I know Julia, we all do, while she wanted to keep her position she will not want to do it at the cost of lives. Going with the orcs will not help her at all with the new Crimson nor will it

help her with the old ones, but the alternative is sending untrained people to probably die. No matter how you look at it she losses but this way more people have a chance to live. As for the other groups... well they don't really have much of a choice in the matter."

Rosamia shook her head, "Oh you can't just say that, the High Order will not approve and I don't see the Crusaders going along with it again."

"Well... that's not really an option they have anymore... is it?"

Rosamia was still dumbfounded at what Anna was getting at, what agreement had the Order and Crusaders made that would remove their options and then it hit her. "Oh no, power of control was given to Julia as per the last vote. If the other members of the High Order go against this they are also indirectly going against one of their own, Catherine, and the most respected soldier of all the Crusaders, the General." Rosamia dropped her gaze. "If this plan happens and she forces this, there is no way that we will be able to repair that. I know that we talked about this a while back but it's way too soon to remove the control that they have, or think they have."

Adam was having trouble with a lot of things being said, he pointed at Mike. "So this is your plan right? Why oh why would you do this. Not only will it destroy everything that we did but it will also put one of your friends in a really bad position."

Mike took a deep breath and he also felt Anna take his hand, he did not like what Adam was implying. But as she had promised Anna was the first to speak on his behalf. "It's true he did mention it but it was agreed by me as well, and while you may see me as having a bias opinion on this, remember that Julia also agreed as well and

she is one that stands to lose the most."

Not liking where all this conversation on mistrust was heading Iris figured that a selfish request might help to cool things down. "If you all don't mind let's put all that aside for the moment." She turned to Mike, "You mentioned that you knew more about her. It seems that you said that her name is Genevieve, what else do we know?"

Mike nodded at Iris and was all too happy to change the subject. "From what Anna mentioned you pretty much figured out the broad strokes but there were pieces missing. Her name is Genevieve, and yes she was taken like you in the middle of the night. She lived in Capio, which probably explains why she attacked it so much. She was abused and broken like you were as well and then she was left in a dark corner to die. Now from her view that was a good thing for her, it meant an end to everything, which was better than a continuation of what was happening. But then they came back for her..."

Iris carefully listened to what he was saying, she remembered how she felt back then and could understand why she felt a level of happiness when she figured that it would stop. "The reason they came back for her, is it because of me?"

He was not sure how he wanted to answer her question but then Anna stepped in, "It's not because of you as you had nothing to do with us rescuing you. It was not your choice nor was it part of any plan that you had."

Iris forced a smile, "Yea but I'm sure she does not see it that way." She turned to Mike, "I'm right, right?"

He sadly nodded, "As Anna said it's important you realize first that it's was not your fault but yes you are correct that is the way she sees it. From what I pieced together, she was the second option

to become the next avatar of darkness and you where the first. That's probably why the Avatar recognized you during that fight even if you had no more of his influence in you. If you would have agreed then she would have been cast aside again."

Iris thought about it, in reality Genevieve probably thought that she had no control of her own life at all being used, then cast aside and then used again. No wonder she was doing what she was doing, it did not matter that she was using the power that had enslaved her as now she could at least show everyone the pain that she had been through to everyone that had just turned a blind eye. Even if the reality of it was that no one really knew it was happening at all. She was unique or at least that was what everyone told Iris all the time, so why think that there was another or others it's seemed.

Taking Iris's hand to try and comfort her a bit, Alexandria looked at her and then to Mike, "I understand why she has such a mad on for Iris and also in destroying what we built, but is that where it stops, because it does not feel like it."

Thinking about it more Mike had to agree, "Unfortunately most of what I saw was the pain of what happened to her in the past. She was very careful not to reveal her plans while she was in contact with me. So I have no clue how she raised an army like she did nor what her true intentions are because I agree, vengeance is a big part of it but there is something else she is after and that is where I figured that you could give me a hint as to what that is."

Both Iris and Alexandria were confused, "How can I do that?"

"By casting that spell again, Anna explained to me what you did in order to find me. I think that maybe if you use me for the catalyst of the spell

that we can see her next step."

Alexandria was not sure what to say or how to feel, she had promised to back Anna up and clearly she had agreed with this but considering how it turned out the last time and now with the current circumstance. "I'm not ...sure about this. I mean I understand why you are asking I do. But that spell is very experimental, at best, and with what is at stake don't we want to try something else that will have better results?"

Slowly Anna reached out and hugged Alexandria and whispered to her, "I know we, I'm, asking a lot by putting you in this situation but we believe that it will give us the edge that we need and we do believe that you are fully capable of fulfilling this request."

Alexandria thought about it and then took a deep breath, "Fiiiine, I'll do it. But while it worked the last time there is no guarantee that it will work again. Also we will need to find someplace that is empty and given the spell only Mike and I can participate otherwise I really don't think it will work at all."

Anna smiled at Alex, "Thanks a lot Alex and whatever you need."

While she was not regretting her decision Alex still was not completely convinced, "Suuuure no problem. We may as well do this while we wait for the orcs decision, if we can figure out her main plan then maybe that will help convince them." Alexandria moved away from Anna and then headed towards Mike, "Come on I'll explain the particulars of the spell while we search for a proper place."

After a bit of searching Alexandria found a house that would perfect, it had no windows, only one entrance and also was far from the orcs. Not that she figured that they would understand what

she was doing but at the same time she did not want to take any chances in case they did and also this would help prevent outside interference. She looked at everyone that was still outside, "I don't think I need to say this but just in case, don't come in no matter the reason until one of us comes out and if you can keep others out as well." She then looked at Mike that was inside and then turned to Anna with a weak smile. Anna nodded and wished her a silent good luck.

When the large door closed behind her Adam turned to the others. "I guess I'm the only one that is worried that something may happen and we are leaving possibly our strongest member of the team with him in a closed area."

His comment stunned Rosamia and Iris, the two then turned to Anna wondering how she would react to Adam comment, and were stunned once again when she barely reacted at all, in fact she smiled at him. "Truly Adam the fact that you still don't trust Mike is not really a surprise at all, what is more of a surprise is that you are willing to admit that Alexandria is in fact probably the strongest of us. Probably to be rivaled by Iris."

Iris barely knew what to say or think after hearing that, there was a time where that would have been her goal but after having her eyes open on all that she lacked she was surprise to hear were Anna thought that she ranked. "True as that maybe Anna that still does not answer my question."

"I'm not worried Adam that he's being controlled at all, after last night that's all gone for me. Still after experiencing the spell and what it can show him I can only think of one thing that may make him lose control and even with that I still don't think that he would hurt Alexandria."

Seeing that he would get nowhere with her,

Adam simply stood next to the house and waited while Rosamia stared at him. She did not know what to say, she had wanted to stop him many times for most of his comments but she would be lying to herself if part of her wondered the same as he did. She envied the relationship that Anna and Mike had but wondered if that was blinding her a bit too much in this situation. Not knowing what to do she waited as well.

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Alexandria first looked around the house, distractions would be dangerous with what she was going to do and would spell failure. It surprised her to see that the first room of the house looked very normal ignoring the fact that everything was more than ten times its size. Every chairs and table were sized for giants a fork had fallen to the ground and itself looked the size of a tall human. This reminded her of when she casted a shrinking spell on herself in order to see if something have fallen between two bookshelves at her house in Astrum.

Feeling a bit more comfortable with her surroundings Alexandria recalled the spell in her mind. Due to the complexity this took a while but there was no way that she wanted to rush this. Once ready she turned to Mike who had just stood silent in the middle of the room this whole time. "Sorry about that, mental preparations that needed to be done."

He shrugged, "It's all right it gave me time to try and clear my head as much as I could. From what I was told I need to think of her as much as I could and nothing else right?"

Alex nodded, "That would be for the best seeing as I can't add too much of her information



to the spell. Are you ready then?" He simply nodded in confirmation.

Alexandria positioned herself next to Mike. "Okay clear you mind and think only of the future and her." Alexandria closed her eyes and started with complex words that now only she would understand and then recalled the specific gestures that needed to be performed. She could feel that magic stamina that was in her leaving her body in order to power the spell.

'So far so good.' Then as time went on the place cooled and then the environment around her changed, she waited a bit longer and gave more power to the spell until it was done. She then focused her own mind and tried to think of the things that she had told Mike in order to not be the cause of the distraction for the spell herself. She tilted her head upward and opened her eyes.

A deep fog had filled the room and once again was heavier in the center, already there was a picture that had appeared. Currently it showing was the Impregnable Tower. Somewhat relieved with her ability to recast probably the most complicated spell that she knew, she then turned to Mike and what she saw gave her a large shock.

Alexandria saw him oozing dark energy all around him, he had his hand outstretched reaching out to the image of the tower with a maniacal smile on his face. Seeing this made her lose her concentration and instantly the spell started to cancel itself.

Alexandria took a step back still looking at Mike in shock, his smile was fading and the dark energy was slowly stopping. Not knowing what to say Alex panicked, "...I'm ... I'm sorry you surprised me and ... I caused the spell to fail... it will take a while for me to be able to do it again... I'm sorry..." She then ran to the door, forcefully

opening it enough for her to squeeze through and kept on running.

Iris quickly followed while everyone turned and looked back. Mike was slowly opening the door more for him to pass through as he saw everyone expression he explained. "An issue happen that was unexpected due to my new condition, it scared her and the spell suddenly canceled." He then smiled, "What she does not realized is that the spell did not fail, I know her real target now it makes so much sense. I don't know the real reason why she is after it but I do know what she is after."

Anna started walking in the direction that Alex had ran, "I'll go and..." Before she could continue Mike stopped her. "I'll go it will be better if it comes from me. While I do that you guys head back to where we were before and once everything is cleared up with Alexandria we will head back so I can explain."

It did not take long for Iris to catch up with Alexandria, "Please stop, what happened?" Seeing as she continued running Iris used a bit of magic and quickly made her way next to her, as soon as she did she grabbed her by the arm in order for her to stop and then looked at her. She was crying but more than anything she looked really sad. "Take a moment and then tell me what happened? What did you see this time?"

Alexandria swallowed her sadness as much as she could and tried to calm herself before she started talking. "I failed twice this time."

Iris was even more confused, "What do you mean by twice?"

"Mike reacted oddly when the spell started and for the split second I was frightened which made the spell collapse, we only had time to see one image and that's it. That spell takes a lot out of me and we don't have time to wait, without that

answer and then if the orcs don't join..."

Iris was now starting to understand Alex's feelings, "Okay I get it but why do you say you failed twice then?"

Small tears were still coming down Alex's face, "...I promised her that I would have her back and that I would be there for her. If we can figure this out and force Genevieve to put him back to normal then things will be all right again and I blew that for Anna... She asked me specifically to help her out and I let her down, again."

Iris realized that her past failures, as she saw them, was still haunting her after all. Before she could say anything they both heard a familiar voice.

"So that's why you have been acting differently then I remembered, hmm..." Mike then got closer to her, he seemed calm and normal but sad at the same time. "I am so sorry Alexandria, we keep seeing you in a certain way and keep forgetting how new you still are to all this. Adam, Rosamia and Anna and me have spent our lives living this life where failure often meant that someone else paid the highest price. You have grown so much and so quickly in the past years, it's remarkable really. But that said it also make it so easy for us to forget that when things like this happens it affect you more then we realize and for that I, we, apologize."

Iris let go of Alex who simply looked upwards at the sky. "My life before this revolved around books, learning and doing the best that I could in order to make my dad proud. He was the only thing I had... Then I meet you guys and finally felt like I could make a difference, I like that feeling a lot so I did everything I could to stay around. But then I realized that I was also lacking so much, I double my efforts and kept going. But these

setbacks cause me so much confusion inside of me. Would I ever catch up? I tried to deal with it but the more it went on the more it got worse and now... I still want to be with you guys and I still want you to count on me but can I even ask that at this point?"

Before Mike could answer Iris busted out in laughter. She realized that her action confused both of them and were very insensitive but she just could not help it. She calmed herself as much as she could. "Oh man, I am sooo sorry Alex but really how do you think I've been feeling this whole time about everyone and yourself? To hear you say all that and to hear me thinking 'I feel the same way' made me react the way I did. I'm sorry... I just don't know what to say..."

Alexandria was stunned, "Whaaat? I knew that you thought similar but come on in battle you are superb. Holy, Arcane and fighting skills to back it all up, you are like the total package Iris."

"Sure think that if you will but like you said a few years back and I was milking cows to help my family. Magic, battle, and God everything else that we have done... for a while I let it go to my head but when my eyes opened and I saw how much I was lacking as well. Right now this total package is feeling very useless as she is confronted with what happened and what is about the happen."

Mike chuckled, for all their confusion they were still very strong and it seems that they did not realize it at all. "We all have moment like that, I'm currently going over a big one right now. I don't know if what I'm doing is what I want to really do or if I am being controlled or not. I keep thinking that in the next second I'll hurt the very people that I hold dear without realizing it. Again we all have moment like that where it's all just too much. But a very wise person reminded me that during

those moments you also have people that are there to believe in you and will not leave you behind simply because you failed or curse you if you do something wrong. In fact they will reach out and tell you that it's all right and that we will figure out something together."

Alex smiled, "Sound like something Anna would say."

Mike nodded, "I did say a very wise person right? In any case I don't know if what I said helped for the other moments and everything but I can tell you that in this resent one you did not fail. In fact if someone failed it was me more than anyone."

Alexandria was puzzled, "How could I not have failed the spell is gone and I can't cast another one in time and all you saw was that tower."

"I failed because I lost control over myself and this power that just wants to be used. The reason I lost control is because when I saw the tower most of the dots connected and I realized what her real goal was and stopped holding it back for a little while. Okay sure I still don't know why she left me this way but I am very confident that I know what her target is now and why she was so desperate to get the knowledge inside my head."

Alex looked at Iris who seemed as clueless as she was. "Okay so what is it then?"

Mike smirked, "I would rather go over that with everyone once we get back... and also, while this will sound a bit inappropriate, I have a favor to ask you before all that." As he explained what he wanted and his plan Alex and Iris both smiled. "Oh I am more than prepared for that."

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A short while later they returned to the rest of the

group who seemed to be waiting a bit impatiently but, save for Adam, were all smiles when they saw Iris and Alex return normal and if both Anna and Rosa missed their guess a bit happy as well. They both sat next to Rosamia and Mike made his way to Anna, "Glad to see that things turned out okay."

"Well I just had to tell them what you told me, how could I fail?"

She smiled; it was so good to have him back, "So about this plan of hers that you figured out."

As he was about to start as familiar orc, to all the others but Mike, followed by a few others approached them. "I Murag have been ordered to get you. A decision was made by the leaders, now follow me."

Mike shrugged, "I guess it will have to wait again."

This time there were less people around the tent and only K'azugg was present. Before Adam could comment Anna took the initiative. "I see that your shadow is not present, is that a good thing?"

"Orakh is currently preparing." He then gave them a wide grin, which could maybe pass as a smile. "He will grace us with his presences soon enough no worries." He then crossed his arms and looked at Mike, "Seems that your plan worked and some of us will be joining you in order to *help*."

Mike was about to thank him as K'azugg cut him off and continued, "I was able to get them to agree on the basis that our hated enemies is about to get the kicked hard and it would be a good opportunity to figure out your armies leftover forces strength after the fact. You know in case you are stupid enough to attack us again or if the other leaders finally decided to end this fight once and for all."

Confidant that he had the upper hand in this meeting K'azugg continued, "With that it was

agreed that we will join you but there are conditions otherwise we stay." Both Anna and Mike looked at each other, they had figured out that there would be conditions but for the life of them had no clue what those would be. It had been agreed that if it was too high of a price to pay that they would be forced to refuse, there was only so much that Julia could force the others to accept after all.

"First we would prefer to be in the back of your armies. If your attack squad fails only then will we join in and also if we do join in we play for keeps. What I mean by that is if human, or anything else for that matter, dare attack us we will kill them. We are not going over there to take prisoners."

Iris wanted to scream at him for that last comment but given what Mike had told Alex and her she held back and waited as he continued. "If we are to be split up then tell us what your plan is and we will see if that is acceptable. The last thing is that we will need assurance that we will be able to get back using our own power somehow. If you are able to do that then you can have our help."

Given the last conversation Mike did not really want to place Alex in an unwanted spotlight so quickly but he had little options. "Alexandria is that something that can be done?"

She thought about it but it did not take her as long as would have been expected. "In reality if the main portal will be opened again then it's a simple matter of leaving it open for them to head back. As for the other issues I suppose gate spells could be used, they would be limited as you can't simply leave it open if the other one is too far away but that just limits where they can be deployed. Also if we do that it gives a nice way to evacuate others if things go really bad."

Anna loved the idea and turned to K'azugg,

"Does that sound good to you and your people?"

"I guess that will do, but it will require trust from our end that you will not simply close those gates at the right time and leave us to die."

Anna shrugged, "For this to work at all there will have to be an element of trust on both side as we will have to trust that you will not simply turn your backs and attack the people that we ask you to defend at the right time as well."

Mike stepped forward a bit, "You have the better deal in this K'azugg and you know it."

A grim look appeared on K'azugg's face, "I would not be so sure of that but I will agree that our position seems more favorable overall."

Mike then nodded to Alexandria and then turned back to him, "Well in effort not to make you too comfortable Alexandria here has a present for you that will help remind you of a promise that I was told that you made to one of our own."

Alexandria then reached in and deposited a small sphere shaped item on the table. "Take it and once you have that information on the people that got captured that you promised then simply break the sphere and talk. The magic in it will take what you said and send it to me, eventually."

He picked up the small bauble and tried to purposely break it by accident and could not. He then chuckled a bit. "It will take time to get that information..."

Alexandria cut him off, "Oh I know, but don't worry with that item I can also check in on you here and there. I would not want you to simply forget."

He looked at it again, "Me having this will cause issues, I can't accept..."

Then Iris cut him off and it was easy to hear the anger in her voice, "Then *deal* with it! It's the bare minimum that you owe me and Genevieve for



what you help do to us and the others that we don't know about." K'azugg turned to Mike, "Are you sure that now is the right time to bring this up and make this demand?"

It was Anna that answered his question. "Is there ever a right time to talk about what was done and how to deal with it?"

Seeing as he had lost this one and was not all that interested in going back on his word if they were going to be so insistent K'azugg pocketed the sphere and changed the subject. "Fine, now if there is nothing else we need to prepare. Teams will be chosen soon now that you have agreed to our terms and will leave this place midday in order to head to that accursed tower. Be ready and when you have information on where you want us to be, tell us."

As K'azugg left the tent Mike felt a bit relieved that so far things were going well. At the same time Iris was happy, those people would not be left forgotten for long as she and Alex would make sure of that. At the start she had wondered like Adam if going back to the old patterns was a wise thing considering Mike's change but this and the conversation that was had earlier removed most of those thoughts. She felt convinced and she figured that Alex was in the same place as her as well.

Once again the group made their way to their current camping ground. When they got close Adam pulled Mike away, "You're doing a good job but I'm not convinced. With all that power there is no way that you can simply just go back like that, what's really going on?"

Mike closed his eyes and focused as much as he could, he had seen firsthand how quickly he lost control during Alexandria's spell and currently Adam was pushing it. Adam did not want to give in, so he asked again, "Well! Trying to think of an

excuse or a way to convince me?"

Its then that Rosamia showed up, "Adam what's going on?"

Anna flowed right behind her, she could see that Mike was having issue and Adam was really not helping by pushing him. "Yea Adam what is going on?"

Adam chuckled as Mike just stood there near frozen in his head. "Sure I'll be the bad guy again; I don't like this plan at all. I think that there is a setup of some sort and we are blinding ourselves in thinking that everything is going as we want it to."

Normally he could deal with Adam's comments but not right now, Mike moved to Anna. "Fine let's see if you are the only one that sees it that way. Anna can you contact Julia?" Still mad at Adam she reached for her pendent and extended it so that everyone around her to see and hear properly, "Julia can we talk?"

Julia's face appeared and just like all the other times she seemed very overwhelmed but had a smile on her face. "I'm currently meeting with the General, Catherine and Lithius to discuss the plan to deal with the final push that will be happening any day now. So your timing is perfect actually." She paused and looked to her side, "Currently I'm being told that I need to order the reserves to protect the city of Missa." This shocked Rosamia, Missa was the main city where the High Order ruled to think that it would be a main target for an attack was hard to believe.

Mike had not had the time to update Anna on what he now knew so this news was less surprising to him then everyone else. "Julia is the overall situation still the same?"

Her face then showed concern, "No it's not. Currently the all teleportation circles around Missa and Missa itself have been destroyed. Also a new

player, you or your twins that she created, has shown up at different locations leading armies directed at certain places. One of those locations is Missa, you also have Capiro, Calculus and this tower itself. Calculus and here are less problematic as we can still get help to them but Missa and Capiro are different as their circles have been destroyed and our ability to send large forces are cut off. And to top it all off we still don't know where she is and so far there have been no sightings of giants or goblins."

With the limited view that the pendent communication would show to the others it was easy for Mike to quickly move to Alex to whisper a quick question while Julia was finishing her report. "Alexandria are you okay with me possibly tipping your hand on something you have been keeping secret about?"

She gave him a cautious look, "That depend, which secret?"

"Your new teleportation spell abilities." Alexandria quickly shrugged, "Oh that yea that's fine it was going to happen soon enough anyways." He then smiled and returned next to Anna so that the pendants magic could see him again.

Currently Anna was going over the details of the orcs and their conditions for joining on the fight. While everyone did not pleasantly approve the idea she figured they would still go with it as none raised any issues at the time. Julia nodded, "That's good news but still leaves us complications."

Anna nodded and turned to Mike, "Yes I agree, I guess we will have to modify the plan a little."

He nodded back at her, "I agree as well, and I also think that we need to protect Missa and Capiro as they will be the main targets of this attack. We can use the orcs for that..."

Automatically a voice cut him off and that voice was Catherine's, "There is *no* way that we will allow the orcs to protect Missa that is going too far."

Mike shrugged, "Fine then don't split the orcs and let them defend the tower with limited man power on our side and use the extra resources to bolster the defenses of the two other cities. Keep in mind that this way *you* will mostly be protected by orcs I wanted to split that a bit to make it more even but if you have an issue with that..."

Julia looked at Catherine, "Well, it makes little difference to me as he said but it would be preferable to use the orcs for this tower only, having them split could cause other issues during the attacks."

Catherine then nodded, "Yes I think that will be better as well, thanks you Julia."

A small caught could be heard, "Pardon me but how do you plan on moving those people to bolster those defenses, remember teleportation is out of the question and without a solid connection we can't use gate spells as well."

Automatically Alexandria then knew why Mike had asked the question and she answered Lithius. "No worries there, me and Iris can head there and I think that the pendants that we have on us can be used to provide for that connection we need for the gate spells in order to move the forces around."

Everyone could hear the bit of confusion in Lithius's voice "Are you planning in blindly teleporting there? I need not remind you of the dangers of that do I?"

Alexandria did her best not to laugh already she had preformed blind teleports at least twice if not three times, but still the issue here was that while they had told the Council on what had happened to them with the rebirth spell they did

leave out certain parts and one of those part was her new mastery and understanding on arcane spells. The main reason why she had wanted to keep it a secret was that she had no clue why one affected the other and did not want to spend the time with other Council member poking her in order to figure it out. "A safer means will be used; I'll fill you in on the details later."

Julia went over what was left, "Next we need to deal with your twins, and from what Anna told me they are very powerful opponents."

Anna nodded, "There are not too many options for those, I'm sure that Lithius and Catherine will be able to deal with the one aimed at the tower but for the others..." She turned to Mike, "It will have to be us somehow."

He nodded in confirmation. "I would suggest that Rosamia and Adam handle the on heading to Missa, Iris for Calculus and Alexandria for Capio."

Before anyone else could Julia asked, "Ah I'm sure I'm not the only one that has noticed that you left out some members of your team there."

"I did that on purpose. There is a lot of doubt about me currently and having doubles of me going around helping her forces will possibly cause more issues then the orcs if I join in. The other reason why is that while I'm not fighting I can handle this, but during a fight I can easily cause more harm than good especially if we are still fighting other humans. No I'll stay on standby, as Anna suggested to me. As soon as we have a confirmation on her location then I'll jump in action and join the fight." He then turned to the person next to him, "As for Anna I would wish for her to join in with Alexandria or Iris but I'm thinking she will not agree with that."

Anna suddenly gave him her half smile, "And you would be correct. If you plan on going up

against her again then I plan on being there right next to you so I'm on standby as well."

Julia looked at the faces around her and shared in their mix feelings. Having those two on standby during such a large fight felt like a waste but the explanation did make sense. "Alright as soon as she gets spotted then we will let you know." She paused for a moment and then continued, "I maybe reaching with this but can you contact the dwarves as well? Could they not help?"

Adam turned to Mike and Anna, the dwarves now those were allies he could get behind instead of the orcs. Mike was left with a dumfounded look on his face as Anna answered Julia's question. "To my knowledge no they can't help out with this one."

She then looked at Alex as she approached Anna, Mike moved out of the way. "When all this started, I contacted them about it. While I was able to convince them to build a new marker it's still not done. I asked again when we figured out what Genevieve was and while they promised to speed things up it would still take them a long time. I'm sorry but they can't help us in the way you would like."

Both Julia and Adam were visibly saddened by the news. Julia then nodded at them. "Well it was worth asking. With that all figured out we need to prepare, before that I think you have news for them Lithius?"

He approached Julia, "The main portal will be open once again in a few days. I realized that this will be cutting things very closely as her main attack force will be on those cities and here in about a few days as well but..."

Anna interrupted him, "It's alright, we need to head to the tower here and I'm sure that will take about the same amount of time so getting it

opened faster will do very little. Let just hope that we all make it in time."

He nodded and with that the plan was set in motion and the communication was terminated. Mike then turned to Adam, "I know that all this probably did nothing to convince you but if I am planning something with all this then somehow I was able to get the Council, Order, Crimsons and Crusaders to all agree... I'm good Adam but I'm not that good."

He was about to leave to take a moment collect himself as the meeting had taken more mental energy that he had wanted to as Adam stopped him. "Are you not missing something, what's her true target? What did you figure with Alex's spell?"

Mike stopped and looked at Alexandria and then at Adam, "It showed a tower, what do you think that means?"

While Adam thought about it Alexandria smiled, that smile was caught by Iris. Very quickly Alex grabbed Iris's hand and slowly nodded at her in order for her not to say anything about her reaction. During the meeting Alexandria figured out what Genevieve true target really was. Mike was right it only took that one image to see it especially with what was happening.

Adam coming out of his inner thought process voiced his conclusion, "So it was all about revenge, if she destroys the tower then she see it as taking down all the work that we have done and showing us that we can't do anything to stop her? If that is the case then why only leave the orcs to defend it?"

"The protection of the people come first and our physical homes second would you not agree? When she shows up I'll stall her as much as I can, once you all have secured your locations then than join up with me to stop her. It's as simple as that."

Adam nodded and dropped the matter, as he

would need to think about it more.

During all that Alex's had kept quite but had to smiled when she had seen that Mike had in a way lied to Adam. Sure a tower was what the spell had shown but it was not the Ancient Tower that they used for their homes but the Impregnable Tower that still housed some of the avatar of light's life essence. Adam was too much on edge so there was no point in bringing it up now but she was curious as to what the true plan really was. She made it a point to ask during their way to the Ancient Tower on the orcs side.

Not even an hour passed and the appointed time to meet up with the orcs had arrived. As K'azugg had promised Orakh was once again by his side and so was a good three hundred orcs. When K'azugg spotted them he waved at them, Anna and Mike left the rest of the group to see what he wanted. "Good to see that you are finally on time and that I don't have to wait for you." He waved around, "Here you have the majority of the first attack tribe, comingled with some of my men. Orakh will have the lead during battle and I have been tasked with the job of being mediator between our two races." He smiled at them, "You should all feel honored."

Both of them looked at each other trying to figure out why he seems to be in such high spirits but nothing came to mind as K'azugg continued. "Also the other leaders have agreed to let us use some of the supplies that they brought for the previous attack. So far all we need is to get there, which should take us about a day and a half and for you to tell us how you plan to position us so that we can see if we agree before we even make it across."

Still unsure where he was getting his motivation Anna figured that she would give him



the news. "It's been decided that you will not be split and that you will only be guarding one location. I will let you know that you will be the primary force guarding this place, assistance will be provided by priests and mages and some bodyguards."

K'azugg took it all in, "Okay I see that our generosity is being a bit abused as we figured that we would not have been the primary force for a location but which location are you planning on sending us to?"

She gave him a mischievous smile, "You will be defending the Lights Templar main base, our new home, the Ancient Tower."

There was a moment of silence as K'azugg thought about what she had just said. Then there was a look of bewilderment as he turned to Mike, "This is a joke right? What game is this?"

Mike did not see what the problem was, "No joke at all, it's as she said. I figured that this would be great for you and your people. It's a spot that you know, that backup that you will have is also top notch, you are not separated and you are also guarding your way back home."

Still seeming to have issues with the concept K'azugg waved his hands at both of them. "You are all mad. Fine I'll update Orakh, I would assume that preparing a defense against and attack for that place will be very simple as a lot of the men where there way back when."

As he left and Mike and Anna made their way back they bummed into Alexandria and Iris. Alexandria looked to be in one of her questioning moods as well and wasted no time as they got closer to start the bombardment. "You mister are hiding something, we both know that you lied back there when Adam asked you what the target really was."

Iris was shocked at Alex's accusation and Anna less so. Mike nodded, for some reason Adam and Rosamia were not around so it made for a perfect time to explain. "Currently he's in one of his moods that he will just not listen, especially to me considering what happened, so I figured this was the best way for now."

Iris hesitated but still asked anyways, "So what is the plan then?"

He shrugged, "It's not much of a deviation really. I will try and stall her as long as I can, once you are all done, come and join in on the attack. The change and what I did not want to tell him is that the true target is the Impregnable Tower; she is after the leftover life energy from the avatar of light. That's why she focused on the teleportation circles, she wanted to block off that section. In order to do that she needed information on where they were and how they were defended and used, that's where I came in. Over the years that was our primary method of movement for our troupes so of course I would have that information. When I saw that image and with everything else that Anna and Julia had mentioned the night before it was simple to see."

Understanding the plan and ruse, Iris nodded. "Yea, keeping Adam in the dark on that would be best. I'm sure for him he will only see this as more fuel to the fire that you are working for her and want to be there on your own or with as little people as possible in order to simply hand it all over to her." She looked directly at him, "That's not going to happen right?"

Mike did not know how to answer that one and it was then that Anna stepped in. "Look at it this way, this is Mike right? He is not a double or whatever Alex called those things."

"The word I used was simulacrum and yes that

is his body as there would be no way for her to replicate the unique life energy that we have due to the spell."

"Good, so next you both are the ones that told me that she said that no matter what she tried she could not get rid of me in him right?" Alex turned to Iris and they both nodded in agreement. "Alright so with the fact that he is Mike, and that she can't remove me from his mind do you think for a second that even if he does get controlled that I would let him hand it over to her or that he would be able to hurt me while I stopped him?"

Alexandria simply smirked but Iris was still worried. "I'm not sure how you are able to put so much faith in the fact that emotions will be the key here but... Look I don't agree with how Adam is going about it I really don't. But his concerns are not that unfounded; even you Mike have to admit. At the same time I do know him very well and you are right, no amount of words from me or Rosa will convince him as the only thing that will is to see it with his own eyes. So I'll hold the secret but you have to promise me that you will tell something to Rosamia. I fear that if you don't it may start a rift somehow and enough things have been broken in the last little while. At least that how I feel about all this."

Alexandria reached out to Iris, "To be honest I feel the same way. Leave that blockhead out of it and once he sees that he was wrong then he will just bounce back but he will take extra offence of we leave Rosa out of it. Even I know that one."

Anna turned to Mike, "You agree as well right?"

He shrugged, "Tell you what Iris, you tell her yourself, tell her everything or simply what you think is right. I think that will be the best way to go about it to inform her and also lessen your own

worries about what was mentioned." It's at that point that Iris felt a bit bad for bringing it up.

As Mike left Anna stayed behind to reassure her a bit. "Don't worry about it, what you said was right. Adam is not the only one that can be a blockhead sometime." Iris gave her a small smile, having Anna agree with what she said did help.

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When all the other members had left and it was only him and Rosa, Adam figured that now would be a good time to approach the subject that had been annoying him without being bombarded by everyone. "So the orcs will be occupying the Ancient Tower and everyone else will be elsewhere fighting. Am I really the only one that sees this as the worst plan possible? It's like he's throwing us back to when this all started when we were fighting the orcs to close that blasted thing but now worse as we will also have enemies in the back of us because of her armies."

This whole thing was unpleasant for her, "I realize that this is how you feel but..."

He instantly cut her off, "Don't tell me that you honestly believe him that he's in control and all that? How can he? You of all people should know how an extra boost of power like that alone changes a person."

This time she had had enough. "*Will you shut up!* Yes I agree with you that I find it odd that he is able to handle that much power and stay the same. Yes I agree that it is a possibility that we are being played somehow. *YES I AM WORRIED*, there I said it are you happy?"

Before he could answer she quickly continued. "That said... Anna believes and while she may not be the best judge of character in this case do

remember that she was willing to *kill him* just a little while ago knowing that whatever that was, even if it was him, needed to be stopped. I pray to anyone that will listen up there that she *never* need to do that again as I personally know that I could not do it. Also so far he has done nothing wrong or anything to prove that we should be concerned that he is being controlled. Yes he is having issues and I agree with you a hundred percent that something will need to be done about it soon as even his control will only last so long. Already he cannot participate in a battle like normal so there are issues but you can't just outright jump to the 'he can't be trusted'. He is our friend and right now he needs our help not our accusations or worries."

Seeing as she had finally stopped, Adam realized that he might have gone a bit too far. "...I just feel that the other shoe is about to drop with all this and I want to be prepared for it."

Now calmer that she had gotten all of it out and also that she had finally broken through a bit Rosamia grabbed Adam's hand. "I know and I feel that too but please tone it down, for me. I'll talk to the others and if something comes up that I think may lead to that feeling that I'll let you know and we can confront it... together okay?"

He nodded and gave her a weak smile. "I guess that makes sense." Rosamia almost wanted to chuckle at that last comment still moving it aside and Adam's constant stubbornness; she hoped with every core of her being that he was wrong about all this.

## *Chapter 8*

She was feeling comfortable; finally things would be going down the right path again. Then she felt a chill run all across her body. She tried to move but couldn't for some reason, worried she looked around and all she saw was darkness. She then felt it wrap along her body covering her, holding her, drowning her. Again she tried to move, the black mist was now above her chest and pretty soon it would envelope her whole. As much as she knew that panicking would help nothing she could not help herself. She screamed her last scream as the darkness enveloped her whole. Anna suddenly woke up, she could move and felt fine. "What a crazy dream..."

Currently they were in a small tent that had been provided from the orcs supplies. They were all resting from the forced march that they had done in order to get to the tower in time. Privacy such as this was not provided to everyone, but then again most orcs did not care so it had been no issues at all. She turned to Mike and suddenly realized the cause of the dream. He was in a fetal position, covered in sweat and also covered in a dark mist. Anna did not know much about magic overall but it did not take an expert in the field to know that something was wrong. She moved closer and put her hand on his shoulder, "Are you okay, you look terrible."

She could barely hear him, "I'm ... so sorry... looks like I won't be able to... hold on. I'm trying as hard as I can but... It feels like it's eating me from the inside."

Now fully alert she stood up and went out, she

could encourage him all she wanted and she knew that would help him but what he needed was another type of help right now and there was only one place that Anna knew that she could get it. Currently it was Iris's turn at lookout, so the timing was good as the next person would be Adam and that would have resulted in a lot of questions that they did not have the time for. Anna pointed silently at the tent that Iris and Alexandria shared. Understanding her meaning Iris nodded, acknowledging that Alex was indeed inside.

Quickly as she could she entered and woke her up. "Alex, he needs your help. Something is really wrong."

Still groggy Alexandria rubbed her eyes with her hand, "Who needs what now?"

Anna figured that it would be easier to show her. Still not really sure what this was about, Alexandria just let herself be marched and dragged away to Anna's and Mike's tent. She instantly woke up when she was him. "This is really not good and also impossible..."

Concerned even more Anna turned to her, "What do you mean impossible."

"It seems like he's lost control and can't hold it in anymore." She kneeled next to him, "Mike I need you to do something. I'm going to magically cast some spells to figure out what's happening to you but you can't react or let it react automatically okay." He slowly nodded in confirmation.

Alexandria prayed in her head that he would have enough control to do it because otherwise she assumed that the magical counterattack would leave her in a really bad shape. She started with simple spells to test things out and then moved on to the more intrusive kind and because they were so intrusive they were equally dangerous as they left both caster and target completely open to one

and the other.

It took a while but eventually Anna saw Alex stop casting spell after spell, for a while it seemed that certain same spell had been recasted but there was no way for her to make sure if that was the case. What worried her more was the look of concern and worry on Alexandria's face. "Have you figured it out?"

She was still looking at him as she answered his question. "Yea I have. Mike I'm going to have to ask you to move and go someplace with me. So while I explain what's going on try to gather as much strength as you can." He did not answer but she did not really expect him to. "While both Rosa and me where right in thinking that she put her power in him... She did it wrong somehow."

Alexandria stood up and continued the explanation. "Normally you can only cast so many spells before your body runs out of stamina. Now eventually with rest, your tank replenished so to speak and you are ready to go again. In order to cast more spells you need to practice and it gets easier and also feels less draining."

Anna nodded, "It's the same as fighting, the more you train the longer you can go and the faster it becomes."

Happily Alexandria nodded, "Exactly now in his case, it looks like his limit is broken. What I mean by that is that his tank keeps filling up even when his body it telling it that it's full, so it spills everywhere." Again Anna nodded and Alex continued. "When it spills like this it's got no place to go so it bleeds out of him..."

She then paused and tried to think of a way to say what she needed to say without causing any pain to Anna but could not possibly see how she was going to do that. "This action of spilling out everywhere is eating at his body. Remember when I



used too much magic to close that portal and it burned me out. The same thing is happening here but he can't stop it." Slowly she nodded her head and tried not to look at Anna directly, "Unless we do something he's not going to make it."

Anna paused, this was not the time to react to what Alex had just said as it would not help at all. Soon they would be facing her and then something could maybe be done, but he needed to last that long at least. Calmly as she could she asked Alexandria "Is there anything that we can do, for now?"

"Yes we can, all we need to do is let him use the power enough and it should buy him time before it fills up as much again."

"He told me that most of the spells he knows are destructive in nature. That will cause a problem as there are no targets right now..."

Anna stopped as she saw Alex smirk at her. "You both really need to learn more about magic, especially now. All he needs is to cast a large enough spell and commit it. How do you think we know who can cast the biggest lightning bolt or fireball among us, we don't aim it at living targets to find out you know." Quickly catching on and feeling a bit ashamed Anna realizes what Alex was planning. "Still with the amount of power at his disposal I suggest that we move elsewhere."

Anna help Alexandria help Mike move outside of the tent. When Iris saw him she was about to react but Alex waved at her in order for her not to worry and then put her index finger to her mouth in order for her to stay quite. Seconds later the three vanished, leaving Iris there with Rosa and Adam.

When they reappeared they were on a ledge in the mountains somewhere. "Okay Mike I took us pretty far with that teleport." Alex looked at Mike,

"I just hope that it was far enough. Anyways it's up to you. Cast it all or a part, just make sure that you aim for something really far away." She pointed to a mountain range, "Something over there would be a good idea."

He slowly nodded and then focused on a simple attack spell. It was that orb spell that he had used, its just that this time he would put half of his available magic in it. Once the spell was cast instantly he felt better more in control and less like he was being eaten alive from the inside. Then he had the same wide eyed look as the two next to him. The ball in front of him was nearly as big as he was; Alexandria had a very worried look. "Did... you use everything in that spell?"

"No only half." Alexandria mouth dropped open and she quickly then casted a levitation spell on all of them and made sure that she was in physical contact with the both of them as well.

"Well half it is then... now hurry up and throw it at the target before something happens... please..."

Mike guided the spell and away it went to its target. Alexandria then casted a teleport spell to take them away. Anna was about to ask why she was so concerned when they reappeared floating in the sky very far away from where they were but then she saw it. The blast had finally reached something and a massive explosion happened. It was so big that it leveled the mountain that it had targeted and also the ones next to it. Never had she seen such a large destruction spell and she hoped to never see one like it again.

Alex on the other hand was simply confused. "I don't get it, that's enough power to destroy a whole city. No shield would hold that and there would be no survivors. So if you have a part of her power, it's safe to say that she could do the same with

little effort, so why bother with the armies and pin point attacks?"

Now feeling much better Mike turned to her with a sad smile, "That's easy sadly. If she did that then it would be all over far too quick. You are talking about someone that has been tortured, poked, abused, and left to die only to be taken up again to repeat the same pattern of torture. What makes you think that she wants any of this to end quickly?"

Anna then continued, "The way I see it and how she has acted so far, yes she wants vengeance on us and wants to hurt us but she also want that on everyone else. We are not the only ones that did not try and save her from what happened. I mean did Capio even do anything when she was taken or even announced it that orcs had attacked them at night and had taken someone away? A small village like Iris's is understandable but a city?"

Alexandria did not know how to argue the point but felt very discouraged nonetheless, "I get that we will not be able to get her to stop now, but can we even stop her?"

Anna shrugged, "I don't know but we have to try." Alexandria took a deep breath and then teleported them back to the camp.

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Now that she was more or less alone Iris thought that it was the perfect time to have the discussion with Rosamia. She poked her head in and saw that Adam was wide-awake. "So are you ready to spill it all out or do we have to ask?" she smirked, of course he would know that she knew something. As Rosamia woke up Iris explained everything.

Adam was furious, "Now you see Rosa, there is no way that I'm not right, you have to see it now."

Rosamia looked at Iris, ignoring Adam. "So he told you to let us know?"

Iris hesitated but clarified anyways, "He agreed to let you know and somehow leave Adam in the dark as they are all convinced that he would not understand... or want to understand."

Adam took offence to that, "Now wait up there..."

Quickly Rosa cut him off, "Remember what you said... together. Now let me continue to ask her some questions." When he stopped she turned back to Iris. "What do you think about all this? Do you think he's being controlled like Adam is saying?"

Iris truly thought about it again as all this had been one of the only few things on her mind. "So far no he is not being controlled, I don't see how he could be. But could he be at a later time... sure he could, very easily too now. The power you saw when he fought those giants and goblins might be his maximum but there is no way that it's her maximum. Assuming those levels, if she wanted to she could control any one of us if she really wanted to at least that's what both Alex and me are thinking."

Adam thought about it some more, "So in a way I was right but also wrong at the same time." He then nodded, "All right for now I'll drop it then."

Both Rosamia and Iris where shocked, "What! After that long talk you hear that from Iris and you are ready to drop it, I'm happy that you are more understanding about all of it but I'm also concerned here. Next time something like this should I just tell you to go talk to Iris?!?"

Adam shrugged, "It's not like that at all. It's just that you started the process and she finished it. If I had talked to her first it would have been the same results but just turned around and well... I

wanted to talk about it with you first so... yea, don't think about it too much okay."

Mildly reassured Rosamia figured that it she would drop it for now. "Okay so, all good now?"

"Heck no, guy still lied to me about something important and I need to deal with that." He turned to Iris, "Do you know if they are they still sleeping?"

After explaining the situation some more Adam got up and left the tent with Rosa and Iris following behind him. "Why that little... where the heck did she take them then..."

He then paused, they all did, as they felt a large quake and saw a large explosion in the distance. All orcs reacted and went on alert, and on that Adam was forced to agree as he did the same. As everyone waited for the next attack Alexandria, Anna and Mike reappeared around their tents. Before any of them could say anything they hear the booming voice of K'azugg, "What did you people do, *again!*?"

Mike now near back to normal tried to calm the angry orc down. "We figured out a plan against our enemy, we just needed to test it out. I mean you think she can protect herself against that?"

The orc leader was still very flustered but accepted the lie nonetheless. "Next time, you tell us if you try something like that." He turned to look at his fellow orcs still on alert. "Well seeing as we are all awake now, pack up we may as well continue to the tower." He then turned and started yelling as his men, "No worries it's just the humans being stupid again. Put your weapons down and start packing up as the break is now over. If you have complaints blame them or wait until we get to the other side and take your anger on those humans that will dare attack us."

Anna turned to the others as K'azugg left,

"Charming as always."

Adam and the others then approached them. "Okay what heck was that really, and no lies anymore okay."

Mike sighed and then looked at Iris who had a very apologetic look on her face. "Seeing as you know everything I'll let Alexandria explain it as it is." A bit surprised that Anna was not picked but then she quickly understood why Alex explained the situation to the others sparing nothing.

Rosamia looked at him, "Alex do you know how long he has?" Anna was also wondering that one but also wondered if she even wanted to know that answer. "I don't know it depends on too many factors really. I do know the best thing to do is to get rid of it somehow as destroying the landscape like that is not really a good long term option."

It's then that Adam approached him, they all waited and wondered how it was going to blow up. "Don't lie to me anymore and prove me wrong okay." Mike apologetically nodded at him and then Adam nodded back.

Alexandria looked at both of them, "Wait... What was that? I mean a while ago you wanted to tie him up and throw away the key until this was all done with. And now... that's it?! Sorry, sorry and all good!?"

Adam shrugged "What you though that we were going to hash out our feeling and insecurities and then understand each other and then what... hug it out?"

Alexandria was confused, frustrated and confused some more. "...I ... ah ... but ... Arrrg... Everything about you... It's just ... Arrrg... I don't get it I just don't get it."

Adam shrugged, "Well that's your issue, in the mean time I have a tent to pack up and then a plan to figure out in order to kill that blasted

dummy of his." He then smiled at her, "I think that will be a great way to resolve my issues don't you think?"

As he left Alex nodded her head. "Rosa, I have no clue what you see in him and wish you the best of luck."

Instantly Iris reacted, "Alex, that's taking it too far."

Rosamia chuckled, "It's all right, I get that a lot actually. But if I had to guess, those towers you inspected probably had bodies in them right?" Not knowing where she was going with this Alex simply nodded as Rosa continued. "Now I'm sure that doing what you had to do did not leave you with a good feeling, imagine in a little while we will be force to kill them when they are moving and more alive. You have to realize that his last comment was only said so that you would see him as that guy. What he is truly doing is saving me from having to do that action. He will enjoy it just as much as we will but in his case I'm sure he will bare it happily if it means that I don't have too."

"I guess... maybe, but if that is the case why not just say it... ahhh that guy I swear."

Iris then chuckled, "You two tease each other so much that I always see it as older brother and younger sister." At that Alex when livid, "*Don't you EVER say that again!* You are my sister, and that is it...Last thing I need is to think that he is related to me somehow." She then stormed away, "God I could never live that one down, plus that's twice now... arrg. Now I'm glad that I'm going to go blast something soon."

Iris stunned that her comment had that effect simply said one word, "Twice?"

Rosamia was laughing throughout the exchange. "Hahaha, oh that felt so good. A long time ago I said the same thing shortly after Adam

had joined the team somewhat unofficially and she reacted in a similar fashion. I'm just happy to see that with everything that has happened that she can still act that way, it's very comforting to see. Also if you want to see something funnier say the same to Adam and you will get a similar reaction." Iris figured that she would just take her word for it. Mike was not sure if he agreed or not but it did not matter, somehow they were still able to laugh and that's what was important.

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Currently sitting on the empty top floor of the Ancient Tower on the orc side, Alexandria could only feel one thing, soreness. After the confrontation and revelations with everyone in the team things had gone back to normal. Sure there was still that question looming in everyone's heads but there was nothing to do about that so it was just pushed aside. The plan was set so that she and she alone would have to go against the simulacrum that would be attacking Capio. Sure Alex would have Crusaders and Crimsones around her but their main target would be the invading army more than anything. Because of this Mike, Anna and against her wishes Alexandria had teleported away to a less populated area in order to train Alexandria to fight the simulacrum in case magic was less of an option.

While the idea had been sound, as what better way to train then to go against the original, it had still been very brutal for her. For a while now Alex had been training with Rosamia to expand her skills for melee combat but this crash course had been something else entirely. This also gave them the time to explain a plan b of sorts if things did not go so well against Genevieve. The plan itself



was not really a secret but it would be important for Alexandria to know of it in advance in order to pull it off. Overall she hated plan b, but it made sense.

While she was healing her sore muscle Alexandria suddenly felt a large magical energy building up around her. "I was wondering if they were going to make it in time." A large blueish portal appeared in the middle of the room. Their way home was open, and the final conformation could finally start but seeing that portal there brought a wave of nostalgia over Alex. "The plan is sound, the plan is sound..." She repeated this a few time and then took a large breath. The plan was sound but because of its execution it was also attached to some less interesting experiences. Putting those out of her mind Alexandria relaxed as much as she could while waiting for all the others to climb up the tower.

The mood was grim as the rest of the Lights Templar and also the orcs made their way to the top of the tower. Like Alexandria they silently took a small pause when they saw the portal and its significance that it had on everyone. Breaking the somber mood Alex made her way to the front of the portal. "The portal is stable and goes where it's supposed to, or so my magic tells me. I'll head in first."

She made a quick wave and then jumped on the other side in order to land on a very similar looking tower but on this one she had the pleasure of being greeted by some familiar faces.

Unfortunately Lithius and Julia's faces where very grim and also there was a gate spell next to them. As the other started to arrive behind her Alexandria was easily the first to be able to ask. "What's going on? Did we not make it in time?"

Julia made her way to the other side of the

tower and pointed ahead. The attacking force was massive, waves of humans, tones of goblins and a few giants with one black armored male commander in front of the troops. This sight gave everyone a pause and a similar wide eyed look. Now Mike was sure that the Impregnable Tower was the true target, still the sight in front of him made him wonder if he was wrong even for a little while. "Is the plan still the same?" He turned to the orc commanders and then back at Julia, "They will need more than a handful if they are to hold this place against something like that."

Before Orakh or K'azugg could comment Julia answered his question. "We will all be in front with them, Catherine is already preparing on the ground floor and Lithius is planning on cutting down their size as much as he can. As was always the plan, the people need to be protected first so the other cities and towns are more important than here. Once they are able too they will return here in order to reinforce the orcs and us." She then turned to the orcs, "Assuming things turn bad you are to retreat to the portal as fast as you can as we hold the line for you. If the tower is overridden the Council has made it so that the portal will close, meaning that you would be trapped on this side for a while. I'm thinking that's something you want to avoid."

Both Orakh and K'azugg simply nodded as they took in the size of the enemy forces. "Why are there more then was reported to us?"

Julia shrugged, "That was an unfortunate reality that happened to all attacking forces, one moment they are a few hundred and then they suddenly double in size as new bodies appeared from the ground itself."

It did not take much for everyone to realize that she was using reborns to bolster her already

sizable army.

The inner thoughts of what that meant were cut off by Lithius, "The gate spell next to me will bring you to the first floor of this tower, I suggest that we head there now." He then looked at Alexandria, "Sadly you will not have time to explain how you plan on doing it but you need to get to Capio so that we can open a gate spell there. I've informed other mages of the magical signature of your pendants, all they are waiting on is your word to start the spell."

Alexandria nodded and then looked Iris, "Can you handle moving the others for me?" Iris nodded, "I'll start now." Alexandria then casted the teleport that sent her to Capio as Lithius, as worried as he was, curiously looked to try and discern what was different about the spell that allowed her to perform it with such accuracy.

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It had only taken a few moments after she had arrived and Alexandria was reminded why she hated the city of Capio so much. The attacking army was fast approaching and what had been decided from the governing body, was to use all available forces from the city to protect the entrance to the second section for the city leaving the third section to defend itself. Oh sure basic weapon had been given to some of the men in the third section but even Alexandria could see that they were in really bad condition. Heck she wondered if they would even protect them from one blow before they snapped. While the gate was opening and the Crusaders were coming out Alexandria had decided to have a small talk with the captain of the guards, that discussion had left her with no results save for her being more furious

then before.

After having stomped her way to the entrance of the gates of the city she turned to the Lieutenant next to her. "Please tell me that your men will be able to defend this place as it seems that we will get no help unless they reach the second section."

While she was the only Light Templar member there she was fortunate to have many very capable Crusaders assigned to help her. One of which was the lieutenant, he was the same person that was with the General at those meeting and was also considered his left hand and that spoke highly of the man himself. He immediately stood at attention before answering her, "We will protect everyone here to the utmost of our capabilities and also keep you safe."

Alexandria was scowling after hearing his answer, it seems that the curse of her position had not completely disappeared even after everything. "You're priority is to the people here, in this battle I'm just as important as you are in order to keep them safe. Don't split your focus on my account."

"I have orders from the General himself and also from a member of the Council that you belong to." He gave her a quick small smile and a small nod, "I'm sorry to say that if you plan on convincing me otherwise, you will fail."

Alexandria let out a deep sigh, there was no way that she had time for this and also there was little point to it. Still she was not just going to stand there being defeated. "Fine fine, I understand but at least let's work together then as I will not just allow you to cover and protect me during the whole fight. First let's start with your name, because of what recently happened calling you by your title leaves me with a bad taste. Also is there anything that would help out with the defense of this place that maybe I can help with."

He seemed to think about it for a moment, "The gates in front of us are strong but also very big, once they are destroyed it will make things harder for us to keep them bottled in. That is one of my main concerns. As for a name, you can call me William."

There was very little time but there was enough to deal with that problem. Nodding Alexandria then made her way to the doors and then crouched. After saying a few words she put both hands on the ground and then magical energy flowed in. A few second after one-foot thick stonewalls appeared from the ground creating a funnel at the entrance of the city. She stood up and started walking back to the William's side. "Okay that should help out a bit, I've also created a small ledge on the other side that should allow for a men to stay perched up there in order to attack from above."

As he smiled at her he ordered his men to do just that and stand at the ready. "Thanks for the help."

She gave him a bit of a devilish smile, "No problems but as much as you are happy now you probably will not be with me soon."

As William was suddenly very worried Alex continued. "While I get that you have your orders, I also have my own. I need to destroy that commander in the black armor. He, is, very, powerful. So much so that you and your men are to stay away from him at all cost as he will destroy you. I know that I can't change your mind in such a sort amount of time but at the same time you getting killed on my behalf puts your blood on my hands and I don't want that as well."

William had a very grim look on his face but she did not care, the commander was her responsibility and if left unchecked would be able

to kill many people. Before the lieutenant could say anything she lifted herself in the air and looked for her target.

He was easy to spot as he was currently with the front lines charging with the other humans that had agreed to join with her. Her magic detection also saw reborns in the mix as well, but William would have to deal with those for now. Ideally Alex needed to use as little magic as possible for this fight as this would be just a stepping-stone for the next one to come.

She channeled the energy in the clouds as the sky turned dark and aimed three lightning bolts at her target. The simulacrum instantly stopped and casted an energy shield with the dark power that he controlled. She tried again but the results where the same. Ideally she would have used a more destructive spell to open a fissure to swallow him whole but unfortunately she had arrived far too late for that and casting something like this now would cause too much damage to friendly targets and its surrounding. Seeing as casting a larger spell to destroy the shield was also out of the question it left her with very little options.

She landed on the ground and hoped that the extra training would pay off. Realizing his true opponent the fake powered his sword with dark energy and launched it at the doors of the city. They exploded open but the walls that she had created where still intact. 'Good luck William now to make sure he does not do that again.'

Alexandria rushed at him with her staff that she had magically strengthen, it was obvious that in a prolong close battle there was no way that she could win so a plan of action had been prepared and all she needed to do was touch him only once. When she got close with her staff he moved away to her left and counterattacked with an overhead

swing. She was prepared for that and block him with her staff with a horizontal swing to the left, as she had seen during training simply blocking was not good enough as there was also an issue of strength that she needed to compensate for. She did this by pressing a part of her staff to her side in order to help her one left arm take the hit of the blocked blow.

As expected blocking had caused some bruising on her side and left her arm feeling a bit like jelly but it had allowed for contact which allowed for an electric spell to travel directly from her to him bypassing any shield that he could create because of the melee range. As the spell connected he simply flinched. During the testes in training this had been tried and failed to drop Mike to the ground as well, but there was no way to know exactly how much power these copies had so there was a possibility that it could have worked. Unfortunately that possibility was now dashed away. Sure it would hurt him and eventually he might fall but she would not be able to hold out that long in melee combat. So that left the only plan that had worked, which was a point blank full spell attack via touch like she had used with the giant's head.

Alexandria put some distance between her and the target. As expected he responded with a forwards charge at her, due him holding his blade primarily with the right hand it had been instructed to dodge to the left as soon as the charge began. Because the move had been planned and also countered ahead of time he stopped his charge and repositioned. 'Perfect', that was the moment she had waited for as he repositioned himself he would pause for a few seconds giving her time to use a spell. She teleported next to him and reached out to his back, as she was only a few

inches away he to pull back as quickly as he could started to attack her with a sidekick. Blocking was now out of the question as now he was also probably using magical strength to boost himself up and after the bruise there was no way that Alex wanted to test out that theory. Still she had gotten close and the attacker was following the preferred attack patterns, which made him predictable and would give her another opening eventually.

The Crusaders were all busy at the entrance of the city. Thanks to Alexandria when the doors had been blown open there was still a way to stop their charge and make sure that the attackers could not squeeze in from the sides of the large opening.

The Lieutenant assessment of the enemies had been spot on. With physical enchantment magic being available to both sides it made using it practically useless and left them only with the base advantages of combat experience and skills. The reborn caused an extra kink in the plans and slowed down their progress of defense considerably, but with the knowledge they could still deal with those using means of decapitation they could still have the upper hand.

The real issue that worried William was that commander in black and Alexandria. As long as she kept him occupied things would go okay but all that would change if he turned his attention at them. Still so far she was doing much better than had been expected, but from where he stood she needed to finish this sooner than later as she was running out of time.

'Darn it, darn it, darn it...' Alex had had a few chances and had blown all of them as he was simply too fast for her at this range. Once she had received the ability to cast holy spells she had made it her mission to be able to cast every single one of them once in order to know how. While that



success had been reached it meant very little in trying to master the spells. Physical speed enhancement magic had been drilled into her by Iris, Rosa and Adam but still after all that matching the skill level required for this was too much for her. Currently the simulacrum had found the proper speed in order to always leave her on the defensive. The teleportation trick was now also too obvious, she started to worry, she still had access to spells that would destroy him but she may need that extra power against Genevieve.

'Focus, focus, foc...' She realized her mistake too late as she felt a kick to her side. She had paid too much attention to his attacks and not enough on her own movements. She had already avoided his attacks twice by moving to the left side, without paying attention she was doing it again and now because of the pattern that she had created she was now on the ground with a few broken ribs unable to move as the copy was preparing for a final overhead swing that would probably chop her head in half.

There was no more option, dying was not something Alex could do so she powered a spell and hoped that she would have enough for the fight ahead. As the spell was about to get committed he swung at her and his attack was stopped by another blade. Alexandria smiled as William, now with a few cuts on him in order to get to her in time, had blocked the blow for her. It was clear that blocking it was a stain even for him so there was only so many times he could do it, but once had been enough.

Alexandria quickly grabbed on to the simulacrum ankle and let loose both of her instant lightning spells. The target spasmed for a few seconds and then dropped on the ground. Alexandria quickly healed her broken ribs and

looked at William, "Quick he's down for now but he should heal it away pretty soon." The lieutenant did not take long to position his blade to the throat of the target and then severed the head.

Now okay and with her main mission out of the way Alexandria gave him a warm smile, "Thanks and sorry about earlier, I'm just not a fan of being treated differently from the others... but in this case..."

He chuckled, "Think nothing of it, given what I have just witnessed thinking of you as a defenseless mage was wrong of me in the first place as well."

Happily she stood up and took in what was left to do. The Crusaders were still holding the line but there were a lot of enemies left and a lot of those were reborns, seeing as she was still waiting on Anna she figured that she would pay the lieutenant back for saving her life. "I'll help out as much as I can with the reborns, with any luck we can be done here quickly and then you can take a good portion of your men back through the gate to help out the General back at the tower." William nodded in agreement.

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After Iris had been used to provide the temporary marker for the gate to be opened, Rosamia, Adam and the rest of the support forces were able to reach the city of Missa. Every time Rosamia stepped into this city she was surprised, she always assumed that the last time that she had left it would be her last.

This time she had another reason to be surprised, the gate spell had been opened next to the original teleportation circle that had been destroyed. For all her time that she had spent here

and even after everything that she had seen she had never imagined this city in any other state then pristine. Now as she looked around that mental image was shattered. Sure the damage was not that big and would be repaired in less than a week's time when things cooled down. But it was impossible to ignore that somehow Genevieve's troops had somehow made it in one of the most fortified city and caused damage, that alone gave weight to how serious this situation was with her.

Due to the lack of time that they had there was no way to get all the information on what had happened and more importantly how it had happened. Already as they and everyone had arrived they were escorted to the front lines. Their familiarity with the Order and the Crusaders tactics helped them understand the big picture of the plan that was being used to stop the attacking forces. Also because of what was happening and due to the amount of time that had passed Adam was more accepted then previously with the other Crusaders. As for the Crimsones that had joined them, they too were quickly following in line with very little order being given. Their training and the last few years that they had spent together had helped out a lot with a situation such as this.

When they reached the front lines they were able to see their enemies. After a quick count, it looked like the forces where a bit smaller then what was attacking the Ancient Tower but not by much. The majority of the enemies where composed of humans, with goblins and also some giants. Also just like the group attacking the Ancient Tower this force was also compromised of reborn and a lot of them at that from what the spell was telling her. It had previously been agreed between then that Adam would deal with the commander and that Rosamia would deal with the

reborns.

What had not been agreed on was the surprise Crimson escort of three that were told to follow Rosamia. While it's true that she would be the only priestess so deep in the front line she would argue that she had more combat experience than some of the others Crusaders in the front line.

Unfortunately there had been no time to argue that fact and she would have to accept that, still it did not mean that she would just go along with what was planned out for her by a certain overprotective someone.

"Alright guys so you are here to keep me safe, well you will be happy to note that I will try my best to stay around you..." Rosamia then had a mischievous smile that instantly caused the three Crimson to frown, she then pointed deep within the enemy lines. "That is my target. There is a heavy concentration of reborns there and it's where I'm going. The energy that I'll take from them will be aimed at the giants. Once the first pocket is destroyed I'm going to the next and so on."

One of them looked with a curious look, "You do realize how deep that is and also how dangerous correct?"

She nodded, "Of course I do, but that is where I'll be most needed and do the most good. You can choose not to follow..." Again she had a mischievous smile on her face. It's then that the Crimson realized that they had lost with this one in more ways than one, but there was no time to complain nor to try and dissuade her of her choice as the horns blew and the attack started.

Rosamia knew that she needed to use a little magic as possible as well but she also needed to do a large dent to help out otherwise lots of people could lose their lives against the reborns. At the same time those reborns would allow her to be able

to make that desired dent without using a lot of her magic, she just needed to get close to them. She magically created a physical shield around her and the Crimsons in front of her. "Charge ahead and don't stop until I say so." To their credit they did not hesitate as they ran as fast as they could, joining up with the first Crusaders in the front line and then they continued as ordered as they got close to the attacking army, nor did they hesitate as the enemies crashed into the bubble only to lose balance and fall to the ground to the side.

From afar all you could see is this magical glowing golden shield that plowed through the enemy lines and destroyed its formation. While this created a great opening for the Crusaders to jump in from behind they would be too far away to provide help once she had to remove the protection shield. In order to survive she needed to believe in the Crimsons that had been assigned to her.

As she finally reached the first pocket of reborns she continued to keep the protection shield up. The enemy was pounding on it ferociously with their weapons, after a few seconds the Crimsons looked back to see Rosamia with her arms extended with glowing black eyes. Once she had taken all that she could she extended the leftover magic of the shield to push the enemies away. "Get ready I'm about to drop the protection, focus on the front and a bit on the side and I'll take the rest."

They nodded and got close into position, again Rosa was impressed Crimsons were trained much differently than Crusaders. As the enemies fell and the bubble popped she only had seconds before they would just swarm them and so she used those seconds and created dark balls of glowing black energy and threw it at them. One in the back and two to each side, they did not have to connect as

when they left her vicinity they erupted in smaller dark balls of energy and rained on all of them.

Unless they used a magical shield for protection there was no physical defense against that attack as the only thing it would do is lessen the pain but it would hit nonetheless. Also after stealing most of the dark energy that powered their bodies they would not be able to heal from the blows for some time. The Crimsones did their jobs as well and stood their ground to protect her front.

All in all they had destroyed or crippled a group of reborns but there were many others, Rosamia scanned the battlefield and saw her next target. Using the leftover energy she created another shield before the enemy could make another attempt to swarm them, now with a dark glowing shield protecting them she pointed to a location. "That's where we are going next."

The Crimsones nodded and now understanding her tactic gave her a small smile and then rushed where she had pointed. Again they would be too far from the giants but they were getting closer and when she would be done a large portion of reborns would simply be normal humans by the time the Crusaders got to them. On top of it she would need to use little of her own magic, overall it was a crazy plan that had a lot of risks but also a lot of rewards. She then thought that she would have to thank Iris next time for giving her the idea when she had seen the modification to the shield spell that Rosamia had made.

The dark armored commander was easy for Adam to spot as unlike his creator, Genevieve, he was in the very front lines with his men. As Adam rushed to his target he saw the commander throw dark energy at his current Crusader comrades from afar instantly killing them. He needed to be stopped and this time Adam would succeed. Adam

powered three holy spells, the first and second where the obvious speed and strength enhancing spells and the last one was one that he had not used in a long time. As his blades started glowing pure white he increased his speed.

In a typical reaction the enemy then charged at Adam, 'You're always charging and you always expect your target to move away, well not this time.' When the time came to move away Adam crossed his swords and rammed into the incoming target. Both weapons connected to his and with both having magically enhanced their bodies it became a battle of who had the greatest natural strength to break the others block. Like to male buck with their antlers crossed none of them wanted to let the other one trample them over.

But Adam knew this enemy well and new that keeping the upper hand in a pure strength contest was a bad idea. Right as the commander seem to get the upper hand Adam suddenly twisted his right sword and pushed it to the left. With the blade still locked the commanders balance gave away for only a second before he recovered, but this second gave Adam time to thrust his left sword forward and gave no outs for his enemy to dodge or block. As Adam pulled out his sword and the commander pulled away he could see that his enemy was mad through the slits in his helmet, Adam gave him an aggressive smile. 'Good you good for nothing, get mad and see if you can come close to my level of rage right now'.

Due to the holy enchantment on his blades the wound that he had given him was healing very slowly. This caused the dark knight to favor his side a bit more then he should have while the wound healed enough. Adam attacked mercilessly at the commander's wounded side, again he knew his enemy and knew that in a contest of speed he

was faster. With one blade he attacked at a fatal spot, which was always blocked or dodged, but with his second blade he would swing at any location that would score him a hit. Those attacks were not always successful as well but some were and just like the other wounds could not heal as quick. 'The last time I was easy on you, part of me knew that if I did kill you in front of your wife that if she somehow recovered that things would never be the same no matter what. Selfishly I did not want that to happen as Rosa is happier this way. But now I know you are just a stupid copy, and I will *KILL YOU!*'

Having suffered many little cuts the commander raised his sword up high, dark energy flowed in it. Adam positioned himself behind him thinking that he was going to try and hit him with an energy blast as was the typical action but he realized how wrong he was when the enemy planted his sword on the ground and then the dark energy expanded all around him like a shock wave with him in the center. There was no way for Adam to dodge it so he tried to defend himself by creating a magical shield around his main torso only to shield the vital organs as much as he could. Adam could not cast shields as quick as Rosa or Iris but a long time ago he has seen a mage do a similar thing as he did now to help him survive and attack that could not possibly have missed. When the energy hit him it made him fly a few feet away from his last position and fall flat on the ground.

His arms and leg hurt like all heck, there was no way that he would be able to move as quickly anymore without healing. But as Adam looked up and saw that his enemy was now predictably charging at him with his sword overhead glowing with dark energy to try and land the final blow, he smiled. Rocking his body forward Adam placed



himself in a in a runners starting position and before the enemy could get enough momentum on his overhead swing he sprinted at him. White glowing blades pulled back Adam tackled his target and then as he connected he thrust both swords forward in the copies abdomen. Before the commander could react to push him away and let his healing save him, Adam sliced both swords away. As the sword cut through most of the bone, muscle and flesh the dark knight finally fell to the ground. Before anything magical could be done Adam aimed one of his blades to the targets head and slashed.

As the commanders body was starting to transform into a foggy dark mist Adam healed his wounds and looked at the battlefield and tried to find Rosamia. "Where the heck is she?" When he could not see her in the front line he looked farther and noticed a dark glowing shield appearing and disappearing. Holy pillars of fire could also be seen attacking the giants well before they were in range of any Crusaders or Crimson. *"What the heck is she doing all the way over there!?"*

Adam stopped his silent cursing as a Crusader lieutenant waved at him, "Soldier your target is dead, fall back in line with the others."

In a mocking tone Adam waved him off, "Like heck I will I need to get further ahead of you guys in order to reach an obstinate priestess." Not waiting for his protest Adam dived in the heart of the enemy's lines to reach the one he loved and then give her a mouth full for going in so deep. He fully expected to receive a mouth full himself afterward from her but he knew that would not stop him, he was worried and she was going to know.

From afar inside a tower overlooking the battle one of the High Order priest, Rob, approached his

older High Order comrade. "Joseph, how goes the battle?"

"With the numbers we faced and the Crusaders that we had on hand we knew that we would win. With the extra reinforcements given to us due to the numbers that we gave Catherine we are now sure to come out victorious with minimal losses."

As Rob looked at the battlefield himself he wondered, "Knowing Catherine I don't think she will appreciate that you gave her a wrong count of our current forces, she will learn of it after this I'm sure."

Joseph shrugged, "I'm not worried, Catherine is devoted to our cause and she will understand that this was done to further protect the holy city. The successful attack against our teleportation circle may give ideas to others that we can be attacked and it can succeed. We need to show everyone that we can come out of this better than the others in order to show our strength. Catherine will understand and will agree with the plan, I have no worries." His face then turned grim, "My worry is that over there making her way to the end of the enemy lines."

Rob took a closer look to what Joseph was looking at. It took him a while but then he understood to whom he referred to. "Again Rosamia is causing unnecessary waves by using powers that she should not be able too. But we can't do anything about that can we?"

Again Joseph shrugged, "No you are correct, but we will need to have a personal chat with Catherine. It seems to me that Rosamia's power is growing; with all the time she has spent with her I can't see that Catherine has not noticed it. It's imperative that we know how Rosamia is doing this as a normal priestess cannot hold more power

than one of us in the High Order."

"We could ask her to join our ranks again? That could solve the problem..."

Joseph instantly cut Robert off, "No! That caused too many issues last time and we will not repeat that again. Our options are simple, we must know or this must be stopped somehow. It's the only way."

Rob then nodded, "I understand. Once this is over I will summon Catherine here and see what we can learn."

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Iris was thankful that in the case of Calculus their teleportation circle was still functional and that the extra help that needed to be sent over to bolster their troops did not have to wait for her. With the extra stops that she had needed to make she was wondering if she was going to make it on time before the attack started.

As soon as she had arrived, the city was already in alert and most of the guards were missing. This basically told her that they were probably already in position at the back entrance to the City. Iris tried to not think about the history of that battle field as she rushed to get there herself. That was the place where Anna and Alex had helped defend against the attacking orc army. It's also the place that Rosa had first casted the Valkyrie spell fully knowing that this would mean that she was sacrificing her own life. Lastly it's also the place that a dark cleric was defeated without having to sacrifice the defender, which ultimately helped open the path for the forces here turn back the attacking army and close the portal.

This place resent history and the Lights Templar's history was closely linked and Iris felt that she needed to continue this tradition. Sure

she felt the pressure of that but she also remembered all the resent comments that had been said about her. She would prove them right and show everyone what she was truly capable of.

She made her way to the vanguard position with Kyle and Jessica already present surrounded by many guards, Crusaders and Crimson. Kyle waved at her, "I was wondering if any of you were going to make it." He pointed at the attacking army that was already getting ready to move, "As you can see I don't have time to update you on the situation, so you may want to pull back for a bit before you jump in."

Iris looked around; it seemed that the forces were divided in three large parts with the main vanguard section being more in front than the others. A group of mage could be seen behind each section and also a few on top of the city gates accompanied by many archers. Iris suddenly smirked; this was the same as the last time from what she had been told. The main column would advance and create a wedge in the attacking formation pushing the enemy as much as they could to the side where there they would be attacked by area effect spells by the mages. This would help with the friendly fire and also cause it to be hard to create a proper formation from the attacker side. "I think I can figure out what you are planning."

As both troops started to advance she looked that the battlefield to see if she could stop that dark knight commander. It took her no time as all as he was in the front line already readying his weapon coated with large dark flame in order to send an attack their way. "That one is mine. I recommend you all stay away from it."

Quickly enhancing her movements and strength with magic she positioned herself between

the commander and the main vanguard. Focusing forward she created a holy shield in order to block in incoming attack. The shield would hold but just barley, this commander was not playing around at all.

Kyle looked at Jessica, "Should we listen? She is so young I mean and wonder if she in over her head?"

Jessica hesitated, "I hope not because that dark knight seems to be attacking with the same powers as a dark cleric and I'm not sure I could stop it myself. Let's trust her and simply keep an eye on her in case she needs help." Kyle nodded and gave the orders to his men, when it came to military tactic there were no issues but with magic it was a different story and there was no other person that he trusted more than Jessica.

Iris needed to get his attention and quick. She enchanted both her blades with lighting and ran at the target, which was also charging at her. For a long time holy magic was easier to cast then arcane and even with the extra power they all now had this was still the case. Still there were some spells that she had practiced and now those spells could be casted with quick efficiency. As he got close she then finished the spell that she had already started. Suddenly She then disappeared and reappeared behind him, quickly before he could realize what had happened she launched both enchantments on her blades at him scoring two hits. The damage was already quickly minimized by his magical healing abilities, but now she could feel the hatred coming from him. She had his attention, which was the first part of the plan, now it was up to the second part, which was stopping him.

Seeing as he was healing and that she was out of melee range he powered another dark energy

blast channeled using his sword and threw it at her direction. Given their positions, now Iris had her back to the attacking army as they had essentially flipped positions when she had teleported. She did not have to think twice about it as she simply dodged the energy attack.

While she was in the clear and was preparing her other attack she heard human screams coming from behind. She took the risk and took a glance behind her for a second, she cursed herself as she was suddenly reminded that the attacking army was made of living humans as well as reborns, goblins and giants. By dodging the blow they had gotten the full brunt of it, instantly killing some and badly hurting others.

Adam had told her that the Lights Templar group mostly held a hypocritical attitude when it came to killing humans. Never had any of them been told to kill another human, which was great because when it came to Alexandria, Rosamia and herself it's something they wanted to avoid at all cost. At the same time if a dark cleric showed up then all best were off. Plus you also had to ignore all the goblins, orc, ogres and giants that they had all killed without really giving it a second thought.

So really what made humans so special if they had the intent on killing you or those you wanted to protect. Iris could never give him an answer to that one, all she knew was that killing her own kind did not feel right, and while she realized that it was stupid to be okay in having the dark clerics exempt from that rule for some reason it still felt like a line had not been crossed. Given what had just happen she was not too pleased even if she had not directly been the cause of it.

With renewed vigor she charged at the copy and this time applied a fire enchantment on her swords. The dark knight blocked her first forward

thrust with his sword and tried to move out of the way for the second attack, the same thing had been done a long time ago with the real Mike and she had learned from then. As the copy tried to move out of the way, Iris change the attacking maneuver and instead of doing a horizontal slash she spun around and changed the direction of the slash to meet with the direction of the dodge. The feint had only partially worked as he had moved quick enough to position his sword to block that blow as well, but in doing so could not readily attack her and due to the close proximity he was also taking a lot of fire damage from the enchantment.

The back and forth went on for a longer while than Iris would have wanted. Sure she was landing a few blows and preventing him from being able to use most of his blasting attacks due to the proximity. Unfortunately none of the blows allowed her to do anything fatal and because he could not attack with his energy he instead focused it on healing which prolonged the fight. She needed to end this quick, there were still the giants that she wanted to take care of and soon after there would be Genevieve. Iris thought was much as she could on a spell that could be used to cause maximum damage with a minimal cost in power.

Finally something came to her but she had been told that using it on a living being was strictly forbidden. Then again was what she was fighting even living? It was created by magic and turned to black vapor when it died, heck Iris even wondered if the thing could talk, as so far it had said nothing. Her mind made up she moved backwards, canceled the enchantment to one of her blades and sheaved it as she would need the free hand to execute the spell.

As she did so the dark knight powered his

sword with dark energy and charged at her. Iris used the other sword that she still had and blocked the blow. Normally this would have been a giant mistake. Already the dark energy was coursing from his blade to her body causing intense pain, less then she had experienced in her youth during the torture but very similar in some ways, plus very soon the strength of the blow would overtake her. Still soon was enough time for her free hand to reach and touch one of his knees, when she made contact the spell activated.

A while back she had used the same spells to destroy the golems with a touch, the spell would dismantle whatever surface you touched and normally rebuilt it to its base components. Now given the need Iris only powered the spell to do the first part, which essentially simply destroyed what was touched. As the armor peeled away and then the skin and finally muscles around the leg that she had touched the dark knight screamed an ungodly scream. Iris looked in shock at what she had done as he dropped to the ground. After a few seconds he planted his sword in the ground and large amounts of dark energy swirled around him.

Iris had no clue what he was doing or casting and she did not want to find out, quickly she thrust her still fire enchanted sword at his neck. For good measures, as it connected, she commanded the enchantment to explode. The dark energy then stopped and his body dropped to the ground. Still a bit disturbed at what she had done and how it had reacted, she watched as his body decomposed in a dark vapor.

Soon after she shook her head, the morality if she had suddenly crossed the line that she did not want to unintentionally would have to wait, the giants where staying in the back and constantly lobbing large rocks at the defending army and the



city walls. Given that mountains surrounded the city there would be no shortage of ammunition for them. Iris took out her other sword and reapplied the enchantments to both.

She needed to take care of all giants before someone gave her the call to join up with Mike and Anna for the battle against Genevieve. With the aid of arcane and holy magic she figured that she would mimic the attack patterns of a certain someone that had decimated many giants on his own recently, this was a perfect time to show everyone what a Lights Templar member could do.

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Orakh had felt pretty confident when he had been told where he and his men would be stationed in order to assist, but as he and everyone else made it to the bottom of the tower all he could do was curse. Originally the tower had been surrounded by a large forest, that forest help provide a good defense as it would be hard to move large numbers quickly and in formation. But now a large part of the forest had been cut down in order to make room for homes and provide the materials for those homes.

He had been told that all villagers had been evacuated to a safer place, not that he cared one bit about that. But then they had told him that they would use the village as a defense for the mages that would provide assistance to the front lines. This meant that they would be out fighting in an open field with little cover. Sure this had been somewhat expected but for a while the idea of it had disappeared only to now come back with the added reality of the enemies numbers. If it was up to him he would just turn back and let them fend for themselves, it's what they deserved. But he did

not think that K'azugg would agree to that and he had also given his word that he would do what he could to the other leaders back home when this idea had been accepted.

Seeing his obvious discomfort as they made their way to the defensive line K'azugg put his hand on Orakh shoulder. "I know you do not agree with this idea, but something tells me that we need to do this." He took a moment looked directly at Orakh's eyes, "That said, if things go bad we retreat and that call I leave in your hands."

This confused Orakh, "Wait? So if I were to say we head back now you would agree with that?"

K'azugg paused for a while but then nodded his head, "Ideally I would like to see this thing thru somehow but yes if that is your call. At home I am leader, and when decisions needs to be made for our people then that is my and the others leaders duty. When decided then you and all other orcs need to follow those decisions knowing that we do what we do for the better of our overall people. Here, in this battlefield, this is your home more than mine and it is wiser for me to listen to your consol so for here you lead and command."

K'azugg smiled at Orakh's obvious confusion, what Orakh did not know is that there was a reason why the leader of the first attack tribe had not participated and why Orakh had been given command. While K'azugg was truly interested in knowing how this would end for some reason, it was also a great way to test Orakh's ability to command in a situation such as this. His choices today would help the leaders figure out his future in the overall tribe.

Orakh now knowing that K'azugg would follow his lead suddenly felt more at ease with the whole situation. As his men prepared themselves on the front lines and waited the enemies' attack, spells

where cast on them by priests to help with their defense. Orakh glared at one of them and automatically the human priest turned his head in disgust. This make him laugh when he stopped he addressed his men, "This is far from where we all want to be right now, but the leaders found it wise for us to assist these creatures... and I agree with them."

This statement caused confusion among the men as so far his overall attitude had led everyone to think otherwise. Orakh then pointed at one of the priest, "Look at them taking more discomfort then ourselves in helping us. They know that without us they will lose here and be destroyed, and because of that weakness they ask our help to stop their own... PATHETIC all of them. Today we will kill many humans and once done, be that they win this war or not, we will report back to the other orcs that they are a broken race that cannot even find unification within their own as we orcs have for so many years." He then turned and pointed his weapon at the attacking force, "Today we show this inferior race our superiority as we always have and always will."

The orcs where all fired up screaming and shouting after what Orakh had said and K'azugg smiled as Orakh could not have acted better. Deep within him he knew that today would be a good day, as something big was going to happen and he meant to see it.

Julia was with the General and Catherine, their main task was to kill the main attacking commander and then assist the orcs in defending the tower. "I think that it may be a good thing that you asked Lithius to cancel that language spell."

Catherine, already in a bad mood, waved the comment off. "Pfff, like I want to talk to those beasts. They can say and think what they want, we

are the only race gifted with the holy magic, clearly the lord of light has chosen us and will protect us and because of that in the end we will be victorious."

Julia was skeptical, due to her close friendship with the Lights Templar she had pieced together a lot of little comments that had been said and come to a personal conclusion on the matter of what Catherine has said. She turned to the General, "I take it that you think the same?"

The General continued to look at the advancing enemy as he answered her. "Currently they serve as a tool that we can use against our current enemy. I care little for their people and given my history with them hope that they die along my enemy. As for the matter of faith I will leave it in the priest and priestess hands as they are more capable than mine."

Catherine smiled, "All humans are protected and cared for by the Lord of Light." She then pointed ahead, "Even these poor souls that had been lead astray. Once freed, they will see what they have done and then the lord of light will help them; our task is to make them see this."

This was the first time that Julia had seen Catherine like this; it was surprising but also understandable. Both she and the General were soldiers this was not the case for Catherine and considering what she was about to participate in, Julia figured that this is how she coped with the consequences. In any case Julia figured that she would soon find out if she was right or not very soon as the enemy commander was now in range and was already powering an attack. The battle had begun and they had a duty to perform.

The attack was fully underway and K'azugg had to keep his emotion in check. He knew that this was a serious matter even for his people as

there was the potential from some of them to die. They would die on a strange land for a battle that really did not have anything to do with them. Still part of him enjoyed this battle, here he was attacking a hated enemy and when one of his men got hurt the same race he was fighting against would heal them. It made for a surreal experience. There was one thing that was nagging at him and it was Orakh, for a while now he was contently looking at him. "I can fight just as well as any other, so what is the issue?"

Orakh took down his target and answered the question while he prepared to take a swing at another. "An orc that can't fight is an orc that stays at home, if I thought you could not take care of yourself I would have protested to you tagging along." Taking out another target he then quickly pointed at another battle. "No the issue is that I keep expecting you to ask me to order some men to go and help them."

K'azugg laughed, "We were told that they are the best of the best and that they would take care of that dark knight commander. I feel no obligations to help them do it... unless they fail and then he comes at us. You keep seeing me as a human sympathizer and I keep telling you that I am not. I have no issues helping them if I see something to gain from it and that is possibly the only difference between us when it comes to these people."

Orakh did not comment and kept focusing on the attacking humans but at the same time he wonders if he and a few other leaders had been seeing K'azugg in a wrong light all this time.

The battle plan had been for the General to be the main target battling the dark knight and for Catherine to back him up. Julia, not having any access to magic herself was to keep the others

away from the battle. The General was a seasoned warrior and despite his age even Julia did not want to go against him on a one on one battle, but even considering that from what she saw he was having issues overall. The fight had started well but as soon as the commander had created a magical shield around himself, Catherine had been eliminated from any possibility of attacks it seemed.

While she would still protect the General from random blast and heal him here and there, there was little else that she could do. This disappointed Julia as she knew that if Rosamia was around she would still be trying somehow. "Can't you dispel that thing and help him out?"

In an angry tone Catherine yelled at her, "I have been trying but the spell is powerful and it takes time, not that I would expect a non magic user like you to understand. Just focus on your duties and we will focus on ours."

After pushing back a few of her targets with her spear Julia figured that putting the issue aside would be for the best. It was obvious that Catherine was not happy about how things had turned out and was now lashing out at anyone commenting on it. The General had the upper hand again but was still having issues finishing it off and the longer the battle lasted the quicker the dark knight was able to recover. Somehow she would have to help but she would only have one shot at it so she would have to still wait until the perfect time showed itself.

If this had been a contest of pure strength the General would have won this a long time ago. What he was having issues with was the speed that he could not match. With his many years of experience he was able to see certain patterns in his attacks and when he did he took advantage of

them and got the upper hand. Unfortunately this did not last long and the dark knight then adapted which resulted in fewer opportunities from the General. Currently the commander had started the attack with an overhead slash, which then followed with a predictable horizontal one. Normally this is where the General would have counterattacked as the third strike should have been a forward thrust but it had not been the case, which forced him to stay on the defensive.

This battle was infuriating for him as he saw his limitations but could not surpass them in that instance. As he prepared for another block with his large two-handed sword he looked around to see if there was anything that he could use and then he saw something. All this time Julia had not interfered but now he could see her looking back more and more. The general then smiled, this commander was indeed very strong and if left alone would have killed many but he was also fighting alone in many ways as he was getting very little support from his army.

Now with a new plan in mind the General positioned himself and went on the attack, he started with a sideways slash which the commander dodged. Shifting his weight and using his other hand to guide the blow the General attacked again with an upward arc. Instantly the dark knight jumped at the obvious defenceless chest area that had been created with both of the General's hands now above his head. While he could not attack with his sword the dark knight tackled the large General leaving him defenceless for a few more seconds. There was no way that the General could block the next blow and he had no doubts that the next blow would be fatal.

Still it did not matter and the General smiled as the final blow never came. He looked up to see

that the commander was going to finish him off with an overhead swing that had been cancelled by a spearhead from the back of the neck. Julia pulled out her weapon as the commander's body fell to the ground, "Hope you did not mind the assist?"

The General regained his posture, "This was no duel, and his army could have tried to step in more if they cared anything for him so I see no reason not to gladly accept your help in the matter."

As she smiled at him he took measure of the current battlefield. "Even with this large threat eliminated this battle is still not in our favour thankfully the mages are holding their own against those giants and keeping them off our backs."

Catherine then stepped in to heal both their wounds, "Well now we are in a position to go and help them out and change the course of the battle." As they all agreed and joined in against the main army Julia was also silently hoping that her close friends would provide indirect help somehow. The way she saw it even with the three of them helping out it would probably not be enough.



## Chapter 9

*I*t did not take long after Iris had dropped them off at the Impregnable Tower that the heads and torsos of giants started appearing above the tree line of the forest that surrounded the old tower. Mike grabbed Anna's hands, "Looks like I was right after all and that we don't have much time before the battle starts."

He looked in her sparkling green eyes, "I know I should not say it but..."

She smirked, "Then don't say it, it's as simple as that." He opened his mouth but before any words could come out she continued, "...But you simply can't help yourself, well no matter what you say I'm staying."

She reached out to him and caressed his cheek with her hand. "Don't worry I know that at the start of this there is nothing I can do but that still does not mean that I'll leave you alone. We are together forever remember that, so while it will feel like you are fighting alone out there remember that I'll be right there by your side. Also when the time comes know that I'll jump in right when you need me the most."

He closed his eyes and smiled, "Hmm, my one and only greatest treasure..."

The moment was then cut off by a voice coming from the tower, "If she is your treasure, then why did you have to go and take mine then?" Both of them looked to see a blond haired man coming out of the towers first floor. "Hawk! What are you still doing here?"

He approached the both of them, "While I know that you somehow made it to the top." He

then pointed at the still glowing light at the top of the tower. "For some reason you did not take everything when you were there, I figured that eventually one of you would return and then I would have my answers."

Mike could not believe the patience that this man, for years he had stayed with the others trying to get the legendary treasure that was at the top. When the time had come and they had made it all the others had disappeared but he had stayed behind. Mike looked back, time was running short and once again if Hawk stayed there was a very good chance that he would get killed. He turned to Anna, "I'm sorry but I have a favor to ask you."

She smiled, gave him a quick kiss and then let go, "I know, I'll make sure to get him out of here." He took another look at those green eyes of hers and then turned to face the incoming army.

Seeing as he had to use as much power as he could for the plan to work he once again created a sword out of dark energy. While this one was solid it still felt odd to him compared to his regular one that was still in its scabbard attached to Anna's hip. He could feel the army advancing from the rumbling on the ground. It took little time and then he could see them. Mike counted his blessing, most of the army was primarily comprised of goblins and reborns. From what he could see there were few living human, which was good as there would be no way that he could spare them during the attack. The other lucky piece of news was that she was there clad in her dark armor and this time in the front of her army.

Hawk looked ahead, "Intimidating as they are, I'm still not going anywhere. Also not that I have much love for you guys but don't you think you should help him out? There is no way that he can fight all of them... unless that's what was up

there?" He turned to her with a questioning look, "What was up there after all?"

She took a deep breath, where to start and how much to tell him. As she took Hawk and lead him and herself to the entrance of the tower for cover, she pointed at Genevieve. "If you want to know what was up there then just watch her. What she will be able to do is what was up there. But before you ask the obvious question you should also ask at what price it came with."

Mike powered a large ball of dark energy and pointed it at her and her army with his free hand. "You only have one more chance to stop this and back away otherwise I will have to stop you."

Genevieve almost wanted to laugh, "You're negotiating skills need work, I mean preaching a peaceful solution with that pointed at us? How are we supposed to believe you?"

"Hmm, you're right about that but would there be any scenario where you would listen or even consider it?" Her eye flared dark and a large smile appeared on her face, "I'm glad, it seems you finally understand. *ATTACK!!!*"

The goblins, humans, reborns and giants all started to charge. Mike put more power in the spell and launched it at the main body of the army. When it landed a large explosion occurred, killing and hurting many. The charge slowed but those still alive continued. This time Mike took his created blade with both hands and focus the energy on it, dark energy was swirling all around it. He stood his ground and then slashed at the empty air in a horizontal movement as he had done so many times before with his old sword's enchantment. The difference now was that instead of a blast the energy it created a large crescent that cut down all that were in its path. He did this a few more times to mow down as much as he could

from those trying to come to swarm him.

Hawk could not believe what he was seeing. "You told me to look at her but right now she is just floating in the air in order to avoid what he's doing. Personally I'm more impressed with him right now... is that what that glowing ball is, magical power?"

Anna was less impressed than Hawk, still so far things were going as planned. "It's like I said she is the real target to look at, Mike only has the faction that she gave him nothing more. And what she has is pretty much the same thing that is on top of that tower."

A large part of the force had stopped advancing this even included the reborns which had very little to lose in the first place. Taking control over himself Mike looked up, "Are we finally going to do this or are you just going to stand there while I kill all your allies?"

"And here I thought that you finally understood, here let me teach you again." She powered an energy ball herself and dropped it on the ground. Mike created a shield that would cover him completely. When the spell landed and even bigger explosion that he had originally done occurred. While his shield would hold the blast, Mike realizes that breaking it had never been her point. He heard the screams for the goblin, humans and giants alike as they got caught in her spell radius. Whatever she had promised them to follow her, she was making sure that everyone understood that in the end she had no allies and that they were just all pawns for her to play with.

As the spell effect dissipated, Mike threw an energy ball of his own at her. For good measures he then propelled himself in the air and charged. Genevieve outstretched her hand and simply absorbed the incoming ball, as it dissipated into

nothingness she created a sword of her own to block the incoming attack.

Hawk was nodding his head, "This is insane with power like that you could level cities, why the heck did you leave something like that behind?"

Anna looked at the battle, Mike's attacked had been blocked and currently they were both on the ground going at it and destroying anything that came close to them. "Remember what I said about the price of that power. In order to use it you had to merge with it and in doing so lose yourself to it." She looked at him, "Basically whatever you wanted to do with that power or whatever you thought you were going to do with it would be all for nothing because as soon as you got it you would not be yourself anymore. All your thoughts, needs and wishes would be absorbed and comingled with something. So in the end you would die and something else would replace you."

Hawk was in shock, "...W...what? But, all those years... that's not what the legend said, that's not what was promised, this is no good." For a while there Anna wondered who he was talking too as he seemed to be babbling to himself. Some of what he was saying did not make any sense to her. Besides the rumors of treasure what else was there that was said about this tower? What promises or legend was he talking about?

While she was thinking about all this he took a step forward outside of the protective walls of the tower and started casting a spell. Anna knowledge of magic was limited but she knew a teleport spell when she saw one. "Hawk, who are you really and what where you truly after?"

As he was about to finished the spell he gave her a smirk, "If you would have actually included me as you had agreed to way back when then maybe I would have told you. Now I'll just leave

you with the questions like you did to me." And with that he disappeared.

Anna was not too thrilled by Hawk and the mystery that he had just given her but at the same time he, or whatever he was, mattered little. She focused again on the fight, at this point no one but the two were attacking each other and everyone else was hanging back and some were fleeing away. Anyone that approached them would instantly be blasted by a wave of dark energy that they were throwing at each other between their attacks. Again this was part of the plan; unfortunately none of Mike's attacks seemed to affect her at all. Just like when they went against the original avatar of darkness and Rosamia had attacked him using his own power it just fizzled, which means that they would now have to go with plan b after all. It was only a matter of time now.

Mike was throwing everything he had at her and nothing was making a dent on her at all. For him things were not going so well, some of her attacks were hitting him and it hurt like heck. He had to constantly spend energy to heal himself otherwise it would be the end of him. As he backed away to catch his breath he yelled at her, "*Why?*"

Baffled she stopped attacking, "Why what? you have to be more specific here."

"Why do this to me what was the point? What did you want me to do or did you do this to control me at some point?"

Genevieve looked at him with an even more confused look, and then she burst out in laughter. Finally when she stopped she nodded at him, "Wow you people... You want to know why; I did it as a test. When I saw what was up there in your mind, I knew that I had to take it for myself. Seeing as what happened to me I know there is a way to get the power and still stay as yourself. What I did not

know is could a person actually have light and dark and survive. I know of the pain when you mingle both together but is it something that you can survive. That is what you are, just at a smaller version."

This time it was Mike that was stunned, "Well you failed, whatever you did to me it's killing me and unless you want to the same thing to happen to you..."

She cut him off with more laughter, "Ahhahaha, if this experiment worked and it did why would I simply let you go? You're dying because I made it happen that way. I only left you alive in order to see if it was something that could be done, once that was confirmed I figured it would be way more fun to see what you would do in order to survive." She looked at his eyes, "Did you have fun killing all those enemies using that power. I mean they where your enemies so what did their lives matter in order for you not to feel the pain."

He yelled at her as he charged for another attack, this time his whole body was surrounded by dark shadows and he had magically changed his sword's blade to be four time its length and height.

Genevieve ignored the energy, 'Such a fool, all these attacks only serve to power me up I wonder how much time it will take him to figure it out.' As for the sword she moved out of its way, when she did the blade exploded bombarding her with more energy. She regained her footing and before he could do another attack like the last one she called up some magical energy of her own and used it to propel herself onto him. He tried to brace himself for the impact but as soon as she was about to connect the energy around her exploded in front of him blasting him backward on the towers outer walls. She walked to him as he was already trying

to stand up. "Do you know why I hate both of you so much?"

Now that the battle was near her Anna responded as Mike currently was focusing on healing his wounds. "Because we failed to save you when we saved Iris."

She pointed at Anna, "True but for you two that was the second time that you failed to save me. The first time was when I still lived in Capió and you both left me there begging for any food that I could get my hands on."

Anna was confused was she referring to the time that Mike and her were working there as sell-swords. "That was a long time ago and what did you want us to do about that?"

There was rage in Genevieve eyes, "You found a way to help others later on, made them go a nice little town where they did not have to beg for food."

"But that was completely different, they were going to kill them if we did nothing..."

Genevieve cut her off, "*And it was much better to leave me there starving?* Think what you will there is always a reason that you will come up to make you feel okay with that you did." She then turned to Mike, "And on that note of making people feel better how about we focus on doing that for me now. You know that you will die soon, and I've already seen how she reacts to seeing you die..."

She then looked at Anna, "How about I see how you react when I kill her."

"ARRRRRHHH!!!" Mike was now livid; he threw everything he had at her. Energy blast, sword hits and his own body. During that time she block the sword blows, simply absorbed all the energy and when she could launched a few lighting bolts at him just to remind him that dark energy was not all she had at her disposal.

Anna took a step forward the time would be



soon. She grabbed the pendent and called out, "Alex it's time, call Iris so she can get the others and get here when you can." It took little time for Alexandria to teleport next to Anna's location.

"I've let Iris know to go pick up the others, they should be here soon." She looked at the battle. Most of the scenery was now filled with broken trees and tone of bodies. Currently Mike was giving it all he had but Genevieve was too much for him. He was blood stained, had wounds everywhere and was also breathing very deeply where as she looked as fresh as a daisy. Okay sure she seemed very angry and was also throwing lots of dark energy and arcane spells at Mike, but from the looks of it she was ready to go on for many more rounds. "So plan b right?"

Anna simply slowly nodded at Alexandria. "You know I'm not a fan of that one and you also know that there is no way that I'll just sit on the side lines as well..."

"Who's going to be on the side lines?" Iris suddenly appeared with Rosamia and Adam.

Anna smirked, "Alex has a bit of a part to play in one of those crazy plans, just like everyone else. But for her, her part ends quickly."

Adam slapped Alex on the back, "Baaah, no worries about that. Tell you what next time we go against something like this I'll sit it out and you can take my place."

Alex was not amused by the comment but there was little to do or say about it. Adam then turned to Anna, "So what's the plan and when do we jump in?"

"The plan is simple and I'll explain as we go but right now we wait still, the time is not right." Rosamia, Iris and Adam all looked at the current battle and how badly Mike was getting hurt and they all wondered on when the time would be right.

Mike knew that he was almost at his limit. He could barely use any dark energy at all and right now he just focused on what he needed to do and was also trying to dodge most of her attacks, which was impossible. He used what little he had left to create a small shield to block a lighting strike that she had commanded and blocked her sword blow with his own which resulted in shattering his own created blade, but even with all that there was no way for him to block the dark energy blast that had been thrown at him. The blast made him drop to the ground; he searched within himself for more dark power but could find nothing.

Her enemy was on the ground and was now empty, sure given time his power would recover but really Genevieve saw no need to let that happen. As exhilarating as all this had been, it was now time to finish it. She approached him calmly and raised her sword with both hands and got ready to plunge it in his body. "I guess I'll start with you after..." She then paused as she received a stabbing wound in her chest.

Genevieve looked down to see a glowing white sword piercing her body. The sword was a fully conjured one like she had used and was being held by Mike who had a smug smile on his face. "You gave me the knowledge to cast this spell but with all the darkness in me there was no way that I could access the holy magic in me." He then stood up, "But now things are different."

Now it was Genevieve that lost it, she screamed as loudly as she could. She was actually feeling real pain again as it was burning her from the inside. As he pulled out the shining white blade her hand made its way to the wound, she tried to command it to heal but it took time and it still hurt.

Adam still looking at the battle, as was

everyone else was starting to understand; "Okay now we go in right?"

Anna slowly nodded, "Not yet but soon. This next step will be the tipping point." She turned to Iris, "When you get a chance go to Mike and bring him back here, he will need healing." Iris was curious why that task was not given to Rosa but did not argue.

Genevieve reached out for Mike's throat and grabbed it. There was no more playing now, once she got this power she told herself that never would she feel pain like this again but here it was all over again. A dark mist was wrapped all around her, and even with her eyes completely pitch-black you could see the hatred in them. "You where able to do that because of me and the power I gave you and the knowledge that came with it. *Well no more.* I will take it back, I'll take it *all* back!"

A large globe of darkness then started to burst out of Mike's chest. He screamed as much as he could as it felt like his insides where being ripped apart. Once out the globe then got absorbed by Genevieve. "Soon all the knowledge you gained will be gone and so will your trump card." She threw him in the direction of the others, "Now time to be whole again." She raised both hands in the air above her head and closed her eyes.

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Orakh was about to call it in, sure the commander was dead and tone of the reinforcements that the humans had promised had joined in but it was still not enough. Currently he figured that the attacking army was mostly comprised of reborns and for some reason they were not staying down anymore. Plus the priest that where healing them could not keep up anymore, at this time they were losing

men and the enemy was not. "K'azugg I'm about to give the order, this is all that we can do." As K'azugg nodded in agreement screams could be heard from the attacking army.

Everyone turned to see the reborns suddenly stop and then turned to living statues. Shortly after their color disappeared and their flesh turned once again to dirt as that had been what had originally been used to create their magical bodies. Once that process was done all of them collapsed on the ground, more than three quarters of the attacking army suddenly just disappeared.

K'azugg turned to Orakh, "I guess we stay?" Not really sure what was happening but seeing what was probably the biggest opening in combat history Orakh lifted his weapon and charged at the reaming enemies.

As the rest of the orcs rallied around their combat leader Catherine turned to the General, "I guess this means that this will be over soon, she must not have been that powerful if they were able to stop her on their own."

The General smirked and wondered if they had been left to the side once again, "The fight is not over but it seems that you are right."

Julia did not comment, something told her that if this were really over that Anna would have let her know somehow. Still there was little that she could do but hope that Catherine was right and that they would send her a message soon to alleviate her worries.

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Tears were coming out of Anna eyes; so far the plan was going perfectly but those screams coming out of Mike. She had to put it all away and focus on what needed to be done. Genevieve still had her hands up high reaching out to the heavens they

needed to act now. "Iris go and come back here with him. Adam you're up, but at the same time I need you do what you are best at."

As Iris ran to Mike Adam looked back, "And my specialty is?"

"Press her buttons; piss her off as much as you can."

Adam glazed at Rosa and then Alex, "Is that really my specialty?"

Anna ignored him and then turned to Alex, "If you can cast that protection spell on him as well, I'm sure he will need it."

Alex hesitated, "That will drain me quite a bit..."

Anna smiled, "I know but he's going to need it as he's very good at what he does. Rosamia go with him and keep him safe."

Alex casted the spell on Adam as requested, "Here you go but keep him mind that she is more powerful then what we went against the last time so I really don't know how long the shield will last."

Adam nodded, "Once it start shimmering watch out, I remember." He then turned and enchanted his own blades with a white glowing energy and then dashed at his target with Rosamia following from behind.

Now that she had reclaimed all her power she turned to then, "Now to finish..." A quick sting interrupted her as Adam had successfully cut her at two places, once to her side and another to her back. She barely felt it. "It barely sting anymore your effort mean nothing little ant."

Adam smiled, "I remember being called that by your daddy and guess who got the final blow on him?"

She waved her hand at his direction and an energy wave appeared directed at him, it was so quick that there was no time to dodge. As it hit the

shield spell it dispelled it. "That thing was not my father, how dare you say that."

Adam charged at her again, and again scored two more hits with his blades to her other side and to her lower leg. "Hey you started it. You called me an ant like he did. You want to rule the world, like he did. Heck even now you think you are so powerful that you are not even putting up a defense... like he did. Now that I think about it are you really sure that you are in control or is he still pulling your strings?"

"I am in *control*! His power is mine and mine alone and I will do what I want with it." This time a large wave came at him and also lighting from the sky. Adam was very glad that Anna had asked Alex for the shield but Alex had also been right in her warning as the shield was already starting to shimmer after that last attack. Soon he would have to be out of the fight, as he knew she was way too strong. Still he was not done yet.

Again she did not bother to block his blows so this time he took advantage of it and planted both swords in her stomach and got real close to her. "Sure he asked to kidnap you and then he tortured you, but because of that all those dark thoughts that you had and all the things you wanted to do to others you have the power to finally do it now... Face it; you're happy that he did what he did to you now that you are where you are."

During this whole time Rosamia had been trying to drain some of her energy, while that succeeded it made little difference as she had too much of it. Still her job was to make sure Adam survived and after that last comment she wondered if he was going to. Rosamia used everything she had accumulated and created another shield around Adam.

"*Happy!*... *HAPPY!!!*" Genevieve exploded with

power. The resulting blast broke Rosamia shield then depleted Alexandria's and then reached Adam's body. It sent him flying backwards with the towers outer walls stopping him. Rosamia ran in his direction to heal him. Adam could not even open his eye, he was alive and he had accomplished his mission of ticking her off.

Anna looked at Iris who was still healing Mike. "We will take over, now it's your turn. I know you will not want to do this but you need to push her over the edge."

Looking at Genevieve Iris wondered if she was already there. She turned to Alex, "Can you?"

Alexandria casted another protection spell, "Now I really don't know how long it will last, please be careful."

Iris nodded, "I'll try and use some of my own power to help out hopeful that will help."

As Genevieve slowly walked to Rosamia and Adam Iris move in between. When she saw Iris she stopped. "You of all people show your face now of all time, you must have a death wish."

Genevieve once again exploded with another large wave of dark energy. Iris could not afford to just let Alexandria shield spell take the hit as behind her Rosa and Adam would still get hit and that was not a mistake that she would repeat. Iris used everything she had and created a holy shield to protect not only her but also her close friends behind. The blast connected and Iris could feel the shields power weakening at a rapid pace. She poured more power into the shield, she had to make it last, she needed to block this.

Finally as the shield collapsed the wave had dissipated. Anna had been right deep down Iris did not want to hurt this person but she had left them all with little options and the worst part is that she knew exactly what to say in order to hurt her.

Having protected herself and her friends with her own power Iris stood tall. "Is that all you have? I guess that's what should be expected; I mean you are only second rate after all and in the end you are only playing in the shoes that were meant for me."

Genevieve had no words she simply blinked in front of Iris and grabbed her by the throat, as she squeezed she enveloped her with her dark power. Iris knew that it would be soon over, Anna had asked her to put her over the edged but she never mentioned anything about buying her time as well. She hoped that it was not a requirement of this plan of theirs. Iris then tried her best to look at Genevieve dark eye that seemed ready to pop out of their socket. "Ha ha ha ...Amateur... Second rate... That is what you were then when compared to me and that is what you are now."

Genevieve squeezed even more; so much that now Iris could barely breathe let alone talk. The shield around her was shimmering and would drop at any second. Iris prepared herself for the worst; she prepared herself for the same thing that had happened to her when she had been this defenseless girl and had had her whole body enveloped by this dark power. And when the shield finally popped that is exactly what happened.

Alexandria was looking at the black globe that had swallowed up Iris. "She better survive that somehow."

Anna thought the same thing, "She will, she is the strongest of us right." She then turned to Mike, "There is no more time can you do it?"

He nodded, "Yes I think so. You two both know what happens next so get ready."

Slowly Mike positioned himself in front of the towers entrance and Anna and Alexandria moved away. Mike felt groggy at best but good at the same



time. She had removed it all and the power was no longer eating away at him and it was also no longer causing a clash with the holy energy within him. But she had been right, the knowledge of those spells that he had learned was also fading quickly but she did not have to know that. It took all the concentration he had but somehow he managed to create another white holy blade, the conjured blade was not solid but it would do the trick. "Genevieve stop all this, can't you see that she is right."

He purposely put the white glowing blade in front of him as she looked in his direction. "I forgot nothing, the only thing you did was free me of your pitiful plan. Hmm, now that I think about it while that part was your plan was this whole thing even your idea at all? I mean did you not need my help in order to come up with this whole thing? Pfft, the avatar of darkness only choose you because you where the only thing available at the time. You know I take it back Iris was wrong and Adam was right, you're not even second rate in the end you're just still a scared little girl not knowing when you will get your next meal and when he offered you power you gladly took it."

Genevieve dropped Iris's body to the ground and charged at Mike. "*Diiiiie!!!!*"

Rosamia quickly ran to Iris and started healing her, miraculously she had survived but she needed help. Alex also made her way to both of them.

Genevieve was seconds away from making contact with Mike. Calmly he took a deep breath and prepared himself for the blow that was coming. As he did he took a step back and the conjured blade of light instantly disappeared. As Genevieve tackled him her own dark conjured blade disappeared as well and so did all the dark vapors that enveloped her. In tackling Mike she had entered the first floor of the tower, where all magic

would be canceled out.

With the wounds that he had suffered and the added tackle Mike was still out of it but he needed to pull it together otherwise all the pain that his friends at endured would be for nothing. While she was still in shock over what had happened he grabbed her and pushed her further in the first floor. He had no weapon but he would make sure that she would stay inside until the others made it in. Genevieve finally stood up and also understood what had happened, she tried to conjure a new blade but nothing would come. She could still feel her power but it was like a whisper now. Outraged she took out her physical blades from their scabbards and turned to Mike. "Nice, I'll give you that but all I need to do is get past you and make it outside. That should be easy enough."

Before she could charge Anna walked in. She took Mike sword and gave it to him, and then she took out her own sword that was strapped to her back and aimed it at the dark knight. "The person you will face is me now and we both know how that turned out the last time."

Iris was finally opening her eyes. She saw that Rosa, Alex and Adam where currently healing her with their magic. "Did we win?"

Alexandria forced a smile, "Not yet but so far so good. Anna is currently keeping her company inside the first floor of the tower."

It hurt but Iris chuckled as she realized the whole point of it all now. Alexandria bit her lip for a moment and forced herself to continue the last part of the plan. "I know I'll be asking a lot but you and everyone else need to hurry and get inside as well."

Rosamia looked at her, "And where will you be going?"

Alex was already helping Iris get up, "I only

have two things left to do, make sure you get in there and make sure that she can't get out. Then in theory that's it for me."

Iris chuckled as they all made their way to the entrance as fast as they could afford. "So that's what you meant when we appeared. Yea I don't see you going along with that, I'm sure you will find a way."

As they all made their way inside Alexandria nodded at her, "You better believe I'll find a way."

Alexandria crouched on the ground and magically repositioned the large rocks that she located below to block the entrance. Magic was used to push the rocks in place from the outside and as soon as it was far enough the first floor anti-magic area would stop the rocks where they were. It did not take long to block the whole entrance leaving only slits between the cracks to provide some lighting inside. For added measure to make sure they would not topple Alexandria casted a large ice wall on the portion of the rocks that were still on the outside of the tower.

There was no way for Genevieve to get out now, and there was also no way for Alex to get in. Still that anti-magic area only applied to the first floor, which allowed Alex to teleport to the second. When she appeared in the same large empty room there was not much for her to do still, sure she was in the tower but there was no way to go down from here and the only way to go up was by being one of the chosen and stepping in the circle in the middle of the room of the first floor. A thought then occurred to her this anti-magic area must be a spell in its own in a way, she reached out with the power she had left and tried to make contact with the existing spell.

Anna had been holding Genevieve in line while Alex closed her only way out. While it was

happening she had fought ferociously but Anna held her off. Now that it was closed her attacks slowed and she had gone very quiet. Overall Genevieve was very good but was no match for Anna's years of experience, already she had cuts at a lot of place where she was unable to block the attacks and in some cases those cuts were at lethal locations. For those it was noticed that somehow she was able to still heal even in this magic dead area, which showed how much power she really had.

Anna continued her attacks without giving her an inch, and mostly kept her on the defensive. From the side she saw that Adam was ready to tag in, because of this Anna double her efforts to increase her attacks. In here they had the advantage and this constant switching would allow them to keep on her at full power without tiring themselves more than they already were. Overall the plan had been successful, the only issue now was how quiet Genevieve was. It seemed like she was focusing on something other than the fight and that made Anna worry.

Adam flipped with Anna, "How does it feel to be an ant again?" there was no response from her. 'Fine, ignore me all you want then.' Adam also went on a flurry of attacks. Overall she was defending herself well considering that she felt like she was miles away from what was actually happening. Only the fatal wounds were slowly healing so they had a chance to take her down but something told him that they had to work fast and smart.

Genevieve was frustrated had she paid more attention when she was in Mike's mind she would have known about this floors interesting ability. Still while these fools tried to take her down she used everything she had to try and take down the

magic that was preventing her access to all that she deserved. The issue was that it was slow going and there was something else going on as the spell should have collapsed by now. Soon she would have to look for an alternate way to get out of this trap, assuming there was one.

Alexandria had been able to access the spell in question but something was odd about it, it was losing energy somehow. As much as she did not want to admit it the spell was far too advanced for her to fully understand but there were parts of it that remind her a lot of the protection shield spell that nullified any magical attacks. Going with what she knew of that and with the little power that she had left she casted a few spells in order to reinforce the parts that she could understand and also were losing power. She wondered if that meant that Genevieve still had power in that floor and also worried what that meant for her friends that were fighting her that had none.

Now it was Rosamia's at the attack. Normally she would not have jumped in given her skill level but Genevieve seems sluggish and with all the other wounds that she had suffered even more so. Plus it gave time for the others to recover and for all intent and purposes Rosamia was still very fresh. She used every combo that she had trained with but sadly most of the hits that she scored were superficial only. Still Rosa's main goal was to tire her out for the others to finish her off, the only other things that mattered was making sure that they stayed away from the middle section of the tower otherwise they would automatically be transported to the second floor with no way to come back down.

Trying to destroy the spell was getting her nowhere it seemed, there had to be another way. It had been prophesized that she would be the one to

destroy what they had done, sure it was also mentioned that it would come at a great cost for Genevieve but she did not care about that, all that mattered was that she could win so how? What was she missing?

Having recovered Anna took the lead again. This time things were less one sided, as Genevieve was more alert. Anna doubled her efforts with combos that would aim at her limbs, if she could slow her down or make it so that she could not swing her swords as easily this would make it easier on the others.

Anna thrust her blade forward, as Genevieve blocked the blow and was readying a horizontal slash with her other blade Anna ducked and counterattacked with a low quick. Anna saw Genevieve jump up to avoid the kick and at the same time she angled both her blade down in order to attack Anna from above. The move was a good one but was too slowly executed and that gave Anna time to use her free hand to punch Genevieve in the gut. The blow connected which forced her to awkwardly land on the ground; Anna took the opening and used her blade in a low horizontal slash to attack one of her knees. The attack hit and Genevieve screamed in pain as the wound forced her to drop to the ground.

Genevieve saw all of them circling her, she was down and while she was healing the wound it was all happening too slowly. But then something occurred to her as they moved to circle around her, it seems that they were purposely avoiding the middle of the room. She wondered if that meant anything.

Anna pointed her sword, "It's done Genevieve, give up. If we can we would like to spare your life but that's only going to happen under certain conditions."

Genevieve spat at that offer, if they thought that she was going to simply give up they truly did not understand. Her vengeance and anger was everything she had, it was her being and the only thing that was left of her. Everything else had died a long time ago. She looked up and turned to Iris, all this was because of her. If she had stayed where she was being tortured then she would have been freed of all this pain. Anger swelled up within her.

Anna got ready as Genevieve seemed to be moving in a position to attack. Suddenly Genevieve threw one of her blades at Anna, that she deflected and then they all saw her jump at Iris. Still in no real condition to react fast enough Iris could do nothing but to take the flying tackle. The momentum caused her and Genevieve to stumble backward by a few feet, close enough for Iris to touch one of the ruins in the middle. As soon as she did both of them disappeared.

Adam looked at Mike, "I take it that was not a part of the plan?"

On the second floor she would regain her powers and there was no way that they would be able somehow get her back to the first floor, "Nope seat of our pants from this point on." Quickly they all moved to the middle and the spell transported all of them to the second floor.

The spell powering the anti-magic area of the first floor was no longer being drained; Alexandria hoped that this was a good sign. As she finished her own spells she saw that someone was teleporting in from the first floor, her eyes went wide as she saw Genevieve on top of Iris appear. "No no no no... You can't be here..."

Iris was trying not to think about what this meant for everything and just acted. She used one of her free hand and stabbed Genevieve in the side abdomen with one of her swords, she then kicked

her away and then launched a fireball. Seeing an opportunity Alex quickly joined in and lunched a quick lightning bolt at her as well. All spells connected and Genevieve staggered backwards. As the others appeared they all heard a maniacal laughter coming from her. "Hahhahaha, you almost had me... so very close."

Not wanting to listen to her Anna charged at her with her blade already glowing light green. Genevieve raised her hand and then dark tendrils came out and grabbed on to Anna and all the other Light Templar members.

"For a second there I thought that you would win. But I was told that I was going to win so how could that be, there had to be a way... Ahhh, I know I've said this before but, it's over now." Instantly all members of the group screamed as they were bombarded with dark energy that was flowing into them ripping them apart from the inside.

Alexandria had one instant spell left, a fireball, she knew it was going to hurt but that pain was going to be less then what they were all experiencing. She commanded it to launch and the result was a point blank explosion, Alex suffered some burns and wondered if she had cracked something but at least she was free from those tendrils. Quickly she tried to summon whatever power she had to free the others but as she looked up she stopped.

Genevieve was shaking, not only that she had a frightful look on her face. Her hand dropped and in doing so the others all dropped to the ground suddenly freed from her spell. Alex turned her head to see what had her so spooked, she saw the construct as it was midway down the stair that headed to the third floor.

The construct was a creation that had been



created to help cast the spell of rebirth and in a way protect the life energy that had been left behind. The other thing about it is that it had the same form as the avatar of darkness had chosen for himself. Genevieve could not believe it and slowly shook her head, "You can't be here... they killed you... *YOU'RE DEAD!!!*"

There was no time for anyone to say anything as she launched a large attack spell at the construct. As the spell connected it just stood there and took it, its eye suddenly glowed light blue but other than that the spell had no other effect. She launched another and then another and blow after blow they all had no effect on it. It was easy to see that she was not pleased and was suddenly preparing a larger spell, before she could cast it the construct raised his stony hand and then a blue'ish shield bubble appeared all around Genevieve. Spell after spell they all failed to get her out, still she continued to try.

Having regained some of their strength the Lights Templar all stood up and wondered on their next step. Adam pointed at their enemy in the bubble, "Can she get out of there?"

With some hint of desperation Genevieve answered him, "I will and then you will die..."

Adam paid her little attention, "Yea as you said we have heard it before from you, Rosa mind asking that thing? I think that he will only listen to you being chosen and all that."

Rosamia wondered about all this but made her way to the construct, "Can you answer his question, can she escape?"

"Eventually she would, but I can keep modifying the spell in order to add more layers. So in the end no she will never be able to escape."

Adam was thrilled, "Sweet, would have known this we could have just set this up and save us all

this painful battle. Hey Rosa, ask him if he can kill her for us."

As soon as he said it they all paused and looked at him, Genevieve included. It was Iris that broke the silence, "Ah... look killing her while we were battling is one thing but doing it like that feels wrong..."

Adam cut her off, "And you think that she would spare you given the chance, this is our chance." He then turned to all the others, "This is what we were doing right? Just a few minutes ago in the first floor where we not going to cut her down if she had not tackled Iris?"

Alexandria moved next to Rosa, "I know that we can't leave her like this but maybe we can ask him if he can put her in something like a stasis spell of some sort." While Adam could not believe what he had just heard Rosamia and Iris both had smiles on their faces, as they seem to like this idea.

The construct then answered their question before she could ask. "A stasis spell is out of the question but I could easily dispose of this fledgling avatar, keep in mind doing so would have consequences."

Mike looked at Anna, the last time they had dealt with this construct something seemed funny to him and now even more so. "What consequences are you talking about?"

"This is an answer you should already know." He then turned to Alexandria, "Especially you."

Now they all looked at her, Alex was suddenly reminded of all those time Solanar was trying to make a point and put her on the spot in order to test her somehow on how quickly she could figure something out. The thing is that this time she had no idea what it could be. "I have no clue what he is talking about."

With a bit of annoyance in his speech the

construct clarified his statement, "Destroying her would stop all active spells that is currently being fuelled by the dark energy as there would no longer be a vessel to keep the spells active."

Adam shrugged, "I don't see any problem with that."

But then Alexandria eye suddenly opened wide as she understood what the construct was referring too. "Oh my god, we can't kill her." As they all looked at her puzzled and confused she continued, "Holy spell was created by the lord of light, Chaos, by essentially piggy backing on the already exiting spell that the lord of darkness, Order, had created. If all the spells that Order created stops when we kill her then it stand to reason that..." She did not need to finish as all of the others suddenly understood.

Scratching his head Adam was still confused, "But that's insane, I mean you are saying that killing her would then cancel everyone else's ability to cast holy magic? If that is the case what the heck are we supposed to do?"

Mike's head was swimming too many pieces where falling into place, he turned to Anna and it seemed that she had reached the same conclusion as he had. Quickly they both shouted at the construct, "*Quick, put her in stasis now!*"

But the construct did nothing and with the shield around her there was nothing that they could do to stop her. They looked as Genevieve powered another spell. "That's too funny, so that is what that prophesy meant and that was the cost that I would have to pay." The spell finished and then she felt great pain, she turned to Mike and Anna, "Looks like in the end you finally understood me... I will have my vengeance. My legacy will make it so that you will be hated by all of the Order as they fall from so called grace as well." She

then dropped to the bottom of the shield not able to stay standing anymore due to the pain, "... You wanted to serve Chaos... well now you will have it."

Rosamia was wondering what was happening, "What is she doing?"

The construct answered her question, "She is self terminating her life using the dark magic within her. There is very little time before the process finishes. It will result in a large blast that I can protect you all from but I will need more energy to do so, shall I take it?"

Without thinking Rosa answered, "Yes!"

It was only for a slip second but the constructs eyes glowed blue again and then he raised the other arm in the direction of the life energy orb that was still on the third floor and absorbed all of its power. As he was doing this, shields appeared around all the Lights Templar. Mike had a bad feeling about all this and from the looks of it so did Anna but all of that matter little as Genevieve final spell finished and everything turned to darkness.

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The last of the attacking army had been dispatch a while ago Orakh turned to K'azugg. "I think it's time we go, things are all done here and whatever you thought was going to happen just did not happen."

K'azugg was frustrated, but he had to agree with Orakh. Slowly he moved with him as they both started to head back to the Ancient Tower, then they both suddenly stopped as every priest and priestess cried in pain.

Orakh looked at K'azugg, "Are they being attacked somehow?"

K'azugg slowly shook his head, "I don't know but it seems to be affecting the Crusaders as well."

Julia was kneeling on the ground holding Catherine who was still screaming in pain in a fetal position. "Catherine! What is going on, tell us?"

Finally she stopped screaming and then started crying, "...the lord... he's gone..."

Julia still did not understand as she still held Catherine she turned to the General. Taking a moment to compose himself he clarified for Julia, "Seems that we have lost our ability to cast holy spells. I'm not sure if it's temporary or permanent. The process of losing this ability was very painful." He then looked at Catherine, "And in some cases also very frightening."

K'azugg had a wide grin on his face as he saw priest and priestess move around to cast spells but nothing came. He patted Orakh on the back, "haha, we need to leave now in this confusion."

Orakh was still curious as to what was going on. "Don't you want to know what is happening?" K'azugg looked at Orakh directly in his eyes, "They lost their magic... you understand what that means right?"

Orakh eyes went wide in shock and then quickly he turned to his men, "We need to leave now, into the portal all of you. It's time to go home." As he now races to the Ancient Tower he too had a large smile on his face.

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It took a while for the Lights Templar to regain consciousness and even then Iris, Rosa and Adam were still on the ground catching their breath over the pain that they had felt by having a part of them suddenly ripped out. Alexandria, Anna and Mike were now standing in front of what was the construct, currently his stony body was replaced by living scales and he was now also all white with

a slight glow around him. Mike looked in his blue eyes that for all intent and purposes seem alive and real now. "What are you now, or should I say what have you really been all this time?"

"Clever you six have always been it seems."

Rosamia finally getting a hold of herself stood and looked at this new creature in front of her, "What do you mean by that?"

"Years ago the battle was going poorly, the best that we could hope was a draw between the two of us. So I decided to give my children the time they needed and also some extra help. I had hoped that things would go something like this but never could I have guessed everything that has happened."

Iris was starting to catch on but it made little sense, "You are implying that you are the lord of light? But that makes no sense, the dwarves said you were dead and they were there during that time so how would they not know? Plus if you were him then what was up with that rebirth spell?"

"I need to make sure that no one could find me, while Order was trapped he still had powerful allies and building that spell to trap him had weakened me. So I made a choice to separate most of my power from myself and also bury my own consciousness in case someone tried to find me."

Alexandria now understood what that spell was truly for now. "The rebirth spell was created to wake you up after all. The spell was going to trigger something and then you would take over. I mean it was not lying as you did say that the person would be destroyed so no one would have been the wiser once you took over. What I don't get is that we did not go for the spell so what was the trigger?"

The avatar of light smiled, "Yes looking back that was a surprise but the spell was not the true

trigger. The trigger was access to my life energy."

Alexandria then cut him off, "That you gained access to when you restored what we had sacrificed and added the extra amount."

All this was fitting nicely but there were still so many questions. Mike shook his head a bit, "Okay but why wait until now if your memory was triggered then?"

"The process was incomplete; the request was unexpected and was not enough to completely restore me. But a fall back had been created in case my enemies found me before someone had a chance to use the reborn spell." He then pointed at the now dark spot that permanently destroyed a part of the stone floor, "When the fledgling Avatar attacked this body it caused the backup trigger to activate."

Anna looked at the location where Genevieve had taken her life and then to the Avatar, "You lied to us then, you could have put her in stasis and spared her from doing what she did."

The Avatar simply grinned but did not answer. Rosamia was confused at what was being said, "Wait, no that can't be..."

Before she could continue Adam interrupted, "I agree, if you wanted her dead then why did you wait for us to tell you to kill her?"

"Because I needed you to make that choice."

Alexandria did not understand his answer, "What's the point of that?"

Then Mike chuckled while Anna slowly shook her head, he turned to her. "Should I tell her or do you want to do it?"

Alexandria was now frustrated and made a note to learn more about this system of theirs, assuming that there was a later. Anna turned to the reborn Avatar, "He needed a scapegoat. Killing her removed all holy magic and there was no way

that he would take the responsibility of that especially if he plans on making his big return now that all his enemies are dead."

Mike then took over, "And I'm guessing that he's not planning on returning this power to everyone once everything is said and done."

"Ah so quick as I mentioned before. Now I will give you time to make another choice that will presents itself to all of you soon. During that time I'll go and reassure my children and give them the good news of my return. I hope that you enjoy your new powerless state that you gave yourselves."

With that final comment, without moving anything to cast a spell, he simply disappeared and left them there alone in the tower.



## *Chapter 10*

After his disappearance all members of the group mostly stood there in silence, with everything that had happened and what had been explained there was a lot to take in and think about. Eventually Alexandria broke the silence, "I'm having an issue answering the question if we won or not? I mean sure the army is stopped, we help save tones of villagers and..." she turned to the destroyed floor, "Well she has been stopped. But it all feels empty somehow."

Mike gave her a light smile, "I think that we are all feeling the same way. I see it as we won but the consequences of it... Mind you, the consequences of not having done anything would have been worse in my mind." He then turned to Rosa, Iris and Adam, "What about you guys how are you feeling, is what he said true are you now powerless?"

Adam scratched his head. "I can't seem to access any of the typical spells, Rosa what about you?"

For a while it seemed like she was ignoring him but in reality they saw that she was focusing very hard on something, after a short while her hands had a mild glow on them. "It's not good, the most that I can do it seems is a mild healing spell. I think at best it would be at the same level as Adam had. So it will do in a pinch but let's try and avoid fatal wounds if possible."

Mike was surprised and also partly happy about this turn of event, he then looked at Iris who avoided eye contact. "...I'm sorry but I don't know. I still feel something but I can't focus right now."

She then turned to the damaged floor and stared at it, "I just don't get it, I mean I get that she was mad and I also understand that she was in pain but... to do something like this? I feel that I should have found a way to help her somehow having gone through something similar but even being in her situation, in part, I can't see that I would have..."

Anna reached out and put her arms around her, "Maybe that's a good thing that you can't figure it out. She was in a very dark place and it was clear that she had resigned herself in thinking that there was no way out for her. So when this brick wall showed up there was no way for her to see any way around it which left her this only conclusion." Anna took a moment before continuing, "The only thing that we can do now is hope that she is finally at peace, that finally she feel no more pain and that her spirit is finally out of the constant darkness that she was forced to endure for most of her living life."

Iris wiped the tears out of her eyes and hugged Anna back, "Thanks, I'm still confused but at the same time I think you're right."

Trying to change the subject to a happier note Alexandria pointed at Mike, "So what about you, how are you feeling right now?"

He looked at his hands and did a quick mental inspection, "Overall pretty good considering. I have zero access to holy magic, but that's not overly surprising. All the dark energy is gone so it's not eating at me anymore." He turned to Anna, "So I guess I can say that I feel normal again." Anna smiled at him, it felt selfish and she knew that it was but for her it had been worth it.

Rosamia was worried, "I hate to bring this up but if Adam and I are like this now, I'm betting that the whole Order and Crusaders are very confused right now and confused is probably the best case

scenario. We have to explain it to them somehow."

Mike nodded his head, "I totally agree. I know that a break would sound great right now but your right we need to explain what happened, maybe we can start by going to the Ancient Tower and explaining it to Catherine?"

"Yes Catherine would have to be first."

Rosamia then wondered about something else, "Alex can you still use your advanced spells? I mean you suddenly could for both you and Iris after you got the life energy transferred in your bodies, so has that changed?"

It did not take long for Alex to think about it, "Nope not at all. Like Mike I'm bubcus on holy magic again but for arcane nothing has changed. I still don't know why having his life essence merged with our own caused this but for some reason I don't see how it would be related to how holy and dark magic was implemented by the Avatars or its collapse."

Rosamia was a bit relieved about this. "That's good news, I know I may be asking a lot but I think that we should head there as soon as we can." She looked at Adam and then everyone else, "I just have a bad feeling about all this. I know I shouldn't because the lord of light is back and that's what the Order wants, or at least that's what they say they want but..." She trailed off not knowing how to explain her sudden need to deal with this as soon as she could, but it turns out that she did not need to as all the others started to gather around Alexandria and Iris in order to get ready for the teleport spell. Iris nodded at Rosa, "There is still work to do, so let's get to it."

She took another quick look at the destroyed floor where Genevieve had taken her last action and then joined in with Alexandria in casting the teleportation spell.

They suddenly appeared in on the teleportation circle that had been built in front of the Ancient Tower. What they witnessed surprised them all. The orcs where already gone, the place was also filled with Crusaders, priest and priestess. For some reason they all seemed to be running around in a hurry moving boxes and belonging everywhere.

As they looked around Julia stood from one of the benches that she was sitting on. She pulled one of the Crusaders aside, "You may want to let your boss lady that she's back." For a while the Crusader was annoyed by the interruption but then he realized what Julia had said. There was a quick look of disgust in his eyes as he looked at the Lights Templar, or more specifically Rosamia, before he left in a hurry back in the tower.

Rosamia smirked, "Cat's out of the bag now right?"

Julia nodded, "Well, you have been gone for a while and news like the return of their creator does travel fast."

Mike was puzzled and seeing his confusion Julia simply pointed upwards. The sun was ready to set, which was odd as not that much time had passed since they had gone in the tower. "Were we unconscious for that long?"

Anna figured that about two hours had passed, "Seems like it, and it's hard to believe that he would have just stood there waiting."

Alexandria then chuckled at that one, "With the magic he has he could have been at both places at once really."

That comment raised a lot of concerns especially with had been said by the lord of light and who would believe them if what he said was wrong. Rosamia saw that Catherine, followed by the General was approaching them. "Julia, how

much do they know?"

She did not have time to answer as a very angry Catherine butted in. "I know that you knew all along where the lord of light was." She then looked at all the others and then set her focus back on Rosa. "You all knew where he was and said nothing of it. This whole time you had the spell that would free him but no instead of letting us know the truth you just took it upon yourself and decided to leave him there. From what I was told the only reason why he's now freed is because you needed his help in finishing her off."

She then moved her face only a few inches away from Rosa's. "During the fight he told you what would happen to all of us if she died and yet you all killed her anyways. Was being a hero that important to all of you that you were willing to sacrifice all our way of life?"

Iris was furious at that comment, "That's not what happened at all, we could not stop her from..."

Rosamia then raised her hand in a motion for Iris to stop and slowly shook her head. "Iris is right that's not exactly what happened, but we did know where his power was and kept that to ourselves, without his help we would probably all be dead and he did warn us of the consequences. There was just nothing we could do to stop her."

Catherine could not believe what she was hearing. "You know we were never close you and I but in the past years I thought that things were changing in that regards."

"I thought so too..."

This time it was Catherine that waved Rosamia to stop talking and when she stopped Catherine continued. "I just don't understand why you would keep something like that from us. Did you despise the Order that much, did you want to get back at

us in the High Order or was it simply all about your own ego in being the ones to show us the way?"

Rosamia bowed her head; all of this was all crumbling down so quickly. "I don't despise the Order, and while I may not agree with the High Order I would never go out of my way to hurt any of them purposefully. As for ego, I hope not, truly I do. When we learned about this secret we told one person in the Order, this person mentioned that we should say nothing." Rosamia then looked at her friends and then turned to Catherine. "We discussed what he said between us and came to the agreement that at the time now was not the right time..."

Furious Catherine yelled, "*And when was it decided when it would be the right time? And also who are you to decide that for us?*"

"If I would have told you would you have believed us? Would you have even listened?"

Catherine moved back a few steps, "Probably not, no." Then she looked at Rosamia not with anger in her eyes but sadness and disappointment. "But even if that is the case, it means that you never saw it to try. That I was not even worth the effort, even if I would not believe you back then, to be told the truth."

Nodding her head she started to move towards the General, "I think that part hurt the most, especially from someone like you. Now we have orders to all head back to the city of Missa. Ideally we should bring you with us to be trialed but we were told by the lord of light to leave that matter in his hands, and so we will as he is our leader our creator and we will listen."

Rosamia had a bad feeling about this, "Please be careful Catherine, and I know that you will not believe me but you still don't know the full story."

Quickly Catherine turned, "Fine, then tell you what. Tell me who told you from the Order to keep this a secret and as a sign of good faith I promise you that I will listen to your warnings."

Rosamia's eyes went wide; there was no way that she could tell her who that person was. "... I'm sorry but..."

Catherine chuckled, "Well I guess that's that then." Again she turned and ordered the General to follow her there was much to do and she was in a hurry to leave this place.

Adam reached out to Rosamia. "...You could have told her."

She could hear the hesitation in his voice. "No that would have been wrong as well and ultimately we made the final call to keep the Order out of this so we should bare the responsibility of that and its consequences."

Julia then stepped closer, "This is the first I hear of what she was told as the full message was sent to the Order members only. Correct me if I'm wrong but he was not trapped in that tower because he was thought to be dead right? If that is the case is that thing the real deal?"

Anna and everyone else looked at her with a look of shock. "How did you know?"

Julia shrugged, "Oh no worried you all tried to hid it well but there were a few comments here and there that all added to me figuring it out. I'm also guessing that the elves know as well, well at least Lithius."

Without noticing the man himself appeared next to them. "Yes we did know."

Alexandria and the others where all startled by his appearance and secretly wondered how long he had been there and how much of the previous exchange he had heard. "Truth is that the dwarves knew about it first, then the elves and then us. So

really while it was a secret it had a big circle of people that knew. Also to answer your other question, yes it is him and not a fake."

"Interesting" Lithius had wondered the same thing and was curious to know more but here was not the place for it. "The Order and Crusaders have been told to leave this place. Because of this its new purpose is no longer needed and it was decided that we will head back to Astrum as well." He turned to Alexandria, "Once there a Council meeting will be held at the soonest available time and your presence will be mandatory. It seems that there is a lot to go over. The others are also welcomed to join if they wish. I will go back to continue supervising of the transport of the inventory here, Alexandria I suggest you do the same." Not even waiting for an answer he then turned and left.

"First the Order and then the Council," Mike looked at Rosamia, "I guess I owe you an apology Rosamia as all this will probably crumble away soon."

A small smile appeared on her face, "No apologies needed at all. We did good here, sure I may have doubts about some of the other decisions that we agreed to, but this one is not one of them. And I know that while she may hate me at this time, and probably for a long time to come, that even Catherine would agree with that as well. But I'm thinking that we will be leaving this place as well."

Mike turned to Julia, "That all depends on the Crimsons I guess."

Julia raised her hands in the air, "Don't look at me on that one."

This comment puzzled Anna as Julia was their Commander. "Did something happen?"

Julia took a deep breath before explaining her



new situation. "It's more what is about to happen. In the end I was right, the new Crimsons did not like it that I agreed to work with the orcs. For them they are the aggressor of the war that occurred and can't see it that they were being controlled as well. I was told that a messenger was sent once the battle was over to the main town to the ex-Commander with the intent to remove me from my position."

Anna with a depressed look on her face reached out to her friend. "I'm so so so sorry Julia. It seems that whatever we do all we accomplish is too cause you trouble of some kind."

Julia accepted the warm hug, "I know it's never ending." She then smiled, "All joking aside, sure nothing was easy but the Crimsons are now in a place where they can easily recover from the massacre that occurred many years ago. And while I had a big part to play in that, this place played as much as a role in that as well. If I do get removed then sure I'll regret not being to also finalise it but at the same time I'll still stand proud of what I did. Stopping wars, helping to destroy Avatar's and helping the people regardless of territories that's what we were created to do and I lead that in all those in one form of the other. So I feel no guilt at all so nor should you okay."

Anna smiled, "What I did to deserve a friend like you I have no clue. Still if you need anything..."

Julia cut her off, "I know, I know. Mind you with what's about to happen I'm half wondering if you are not going to be the ones that need the help the most."

Mike wondered about that himself, "Well let's not worry about that right now as it seems that we have some time and..."

Adam then cut him off, "And now that you are

back you can worry about that for all of us."

A frown appeared on Mike head, "That's not really what I had in mind but..."

Adam just waved off his comment and started to make his way to the tower himself, "Sure sure, anyways it seems that I have to go pack my things. I can't say that I'll be sad to finally leave this place... again."

Alexandria then turned to Iris, "Oh, hey about that. Mind helping me move my things."

Iris saw a mischievous pleading look on her sister's face and she of all people knew about how many books she had in that room of hers. "I don't, really, want to... no."

With Alexandria still pleading Rosamia grabbed Iris's hand. "Come on I'll help out too, then she can help with ours I'm sure it will all go faster that way."

Iris followed along but she did not seem convinced, "That's what you would think right, but I'm not so sure about that."

As they left Julia started to follow as well, "I'm sure that I don't have to mention it but if you can keep me up to date on what you two will be planning." She then gave them a mischievous smile of her own, "It's much easier to bail you out of that fire that way when the time comes."

Now that it was only Anna and him, Mike reached out and gave her a kiss and then put his arm around her waist. "In all honesty how would you answer Alexandria's question of did we win? Because I have to say with everything that is happening is sure does not feel like it."

She chuckled a bit, "No, no it does not, and it sure feel like what she said about that prophecy actually happened as everything that we did is now destroyed and pretty soon the whole Order may be against us."

She then gave him a half smile, "But maybe that's the wrong way to look at all this. Face it this place served its purpose and did set an example that others may eventually redo at some other time. As Rosa said, we helped a lot of people more so then we ever could have with just our own power, and sure we maybe took the wrong directions in some of our actions but we are not perfect and more importantly we are alive and have a chance to fix those in the future. None of that is destroyed by what happened, so in a way yes we did win."

She then looked at him, "But even then when was it about winning or losing? Because I thought it was about helping and doing what felt like the right thing."

Mike laughed at that, "So true." He gazed in her brilliant green eyes, "I've told you how much I love you right?"

Anna gave him a small smirk, "Oh now that's not a onetime thing, you know full well that you can tell me that as often as you want."

"I love you and I hope to always have you by my side."

"I love you as well, and I plan on being there as long as you are by mine."

"Forever and always..."

## *Epilogue*

### **Iris's journal**

*I*'m still confused by what happened in the last months and I'm still trying to wrap my head over all of it. I learned why I was kidnapped and I also learned that there were others like me. But because of what happened to me it made me an instant enemy to one of those others. No matter what happens I will always be faced with the question of why was I the only one saved and I will probably never have an answer for that.

I wonder if I did would it have changed her faith or is it like Anna said that she was stuck in that dark pit and that she just could not believe that there was any other way. I know what she went through, and I was forgotten as well but even with all that, to do what she did... I think that for me I just can't understand because when the time came I was fortunate and also for some reason decided to grab on to that hand that was given to me. That helped me see that there was more than what I had just survived and help me believe that things could change. Somehow something tells me that that's the only way that she could have been saved but no matter what anyone did she also needed to believe as well and I don't think she had that in her anymore.

I feel guilty over this and Alexandria keeps telling me that it's okay but that I can't focus on that as in the end that was her decision and hers alone. Because of that what I should do is focus on my own future decisions and use the past as a guide for those. At least that's what she told me

that she learned from what happen with her father all those years ago.

And on that note there are a lot of future decisions to make. At this time there has been no word from the Order or their returned leader Chaos. Also from what we have seen after much experimenting, Rosamia can still cast a healing spell and so can I. Adam unfortunately so far only has his magical tracking ability at his disposal. It seems that the only things that we are still capable of with holy magic are our most basic spells that we used the most.

The overall group decision at this time is to stay in Astrum for now as it will be the city that we will cause the less issues being in. So far we need to wait until Chaos makes his first move as we really don't know what he will do. Also we, or should I say mostly Alex at this time, is still going over all the little details with Solanar and Lithius. Considering what happened between Catherine and Rosamia she also made it a point to inform Kilor about Chaos. As was expected there where many questions, he thanked her and mentioned that he would contact her soon but so far nothing new has come from that.

Playing the waiting game is odd for us but I don't mind this time. There were many times where doubt almost destroyed us by making us pick sides but in the end we were able to get past those and pull together.

This group is more family then anything and in the end none of us really wants to lose any part of that, as family gives us a place to belong and come back to. And that gives us a type of strength beyond our own.

