
Episode 4: Fetch Me That Flower

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From set *Lorwyn Eclipsed*

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“I’m still not wearing hiking shoes,” grumbled Kirol as Lluwen continued urging them deeper and deeper into the trees.

The elf responded by pushing them between the shoulders. “What are ‘hiking shoes?’” Kirol looked at their captor’s hooved feet and swallowed. It was one thing to be on another plane of existence. It was something else to have the time to slow down and realize what that meant. Before, they’d been with the other students—not friends; they didn’t know each other well enough for that—and they were running for their lives. Now, they were alone with a strange, hooved elf who seemed to think they had valuable information that someone called the “high perfect” would want to hear.

“See my feet?” they asked. “How they’re sealed inside leather boxes?”

“I *know* what foot covers are,” said Lluwen, sounding insulted. “Kithkin wear them all the time because their feet are soft and delicate.”

“Kithkin?” asked Kirol, then they shook their head. “No, we don’t want to get distracted. All right, so we call these foot covers ‘shoes.’ Or ‘boots,’ sometimes. Or sandals I guess—you know what, never mind. Hiking shoes are meant to be worn on soft, delicate feet when you’re going to be walking for a long time. They absorb more of the impact, and they help to keep your feet from hurting.”

“Do your feet hurt?”

“More than I would ever have believed possible,” said Kirol mournfully. “I play Mage Tower at school—that’s a sport. Actually, it’s *the* sport, as in the best one—and I run laps and all, to stay in shape, but I’m usually wearing the right shoes when I do that sort of thing. These are class shoes. They’re soft and thin and meant for wearing when you’re going to sit around for hours listening to people talk. They aren’t meant for walking miles and miles through forests full of roots and rocks and uneven ground.”

“My feet don’t hurt at all,” said Lluwen.

“That’s because you don’t *have* feet,” said Kirol. “You have hooves.”

“I walk on them, so they’re feet.”

“Anatomically speaking, they’re not. If we dropped you in a dissection lab, the doctor who took them apart would say they weren’t.”

Lluwen prodded them with the tip of his spear again. “No one’s taking me apart,” he said, voice low and dangerous.

“I didn’t say I was going to—oh, come on. It’s hypothetical.”

“Hypothetically, keep walking. We’re almost to Lys Alana.”

“What’s a Lys Alana?”

“Only the most beautiful city in the world, in the most beautiful forest in the world,” said Lluwen, voice turning reverent and almost wistful. “You’re so lucky to see Lys Alana for the very first time. I wish I could see it for the first time again. The way the sun shines through the trees, the way the whole world gleams golden—oh, it’ll take your breath away.”

Kirol paused, blinking. They looked around and realized the trees had changed while they were walking. They were more evenly spaced here, seemingly placed according to a pattern that was too close for them to see—although they would have been willing to bet that it was another of those omnipresent spirals, twisting through the world around them like a song they couldn’t quite understand. The branches were elegant and purposeful in their arching growth, covered with climbing flowers and delicate boughs that bore pale green leaves edged in living gold.

The bark of the trees was broken up, almost like a pattern of scales, and the space between the “scales” was covered in a thin layer of smooth, gleaming sap that blazed gold when the sunlight struck it, giving the whole forest a delicately gilded air. Kirol stared at it as Lluwen continued urging them onward, until they stepped between two trees and Lys Alana appeared before them.

That was the only thing it could possibly have been. The forest was big, but they couldn’t imagine it was big enough to contain two cities. And there was no other word for what lay before them. Wooden boardwalks connected homes and tall, elegant towers one to the next. Doors were set into the trunks of trees that had been seamlessly integrated into the body of still more buildings. High overhead, wood and vine walkways connected the higher residences, creating a multi-tiered community that blended seamlessly into the forest around it.

And everything was made of that gilded wood, making it all blaze with a brilliance and beauty that took Kirol’s breath away. Lluwen stepped up next to them.

“Lys Alana,” he said, sounding pleased with himself. “Come along. I’m taking you to High Perfect Morcant now.”

“Wait—can’t you tell me anything else? I don’t even know what a high perfect is.”

“No,” said Lluwen, sounding confused. He turned to look at Kirol. “If you don’t know right from wrong, or insult from flattery, you can make mistakes, but you can’t give insult. That’s very important.”

“What happens if I insult the high perfect?”

“She has you killed.” Lluwen shrugged. “So this is better. Follow me.”

“... Right,” said Kirol, following him as he started for the nearest stretch of boardwalk.

Other elves began to appear as they walked through the city, their coloration and clothing blending in with the city so that they became virtually invisible if they didn’t move. They turned to look as Lluwen and Kirol grew close, plainly curious about the newcomer.

“What? Have they never seen a vampire before?” grumbled Kirol.

“No, they haven’t,” said Lluwen. “No one has. That’s part of what you’ll need to explain to—”

“High Perfect Morcant. Yeah, yeah,” said Kirol.

They started up a spiraling set of stairs that appeared to have grown out of the trunk of a large oak. Lluwen shot Kirol a quelling look.

“Not many elves get to see the high perfect,” he said. “This is an honor.”

“An honor you won’t tell me anything about!”

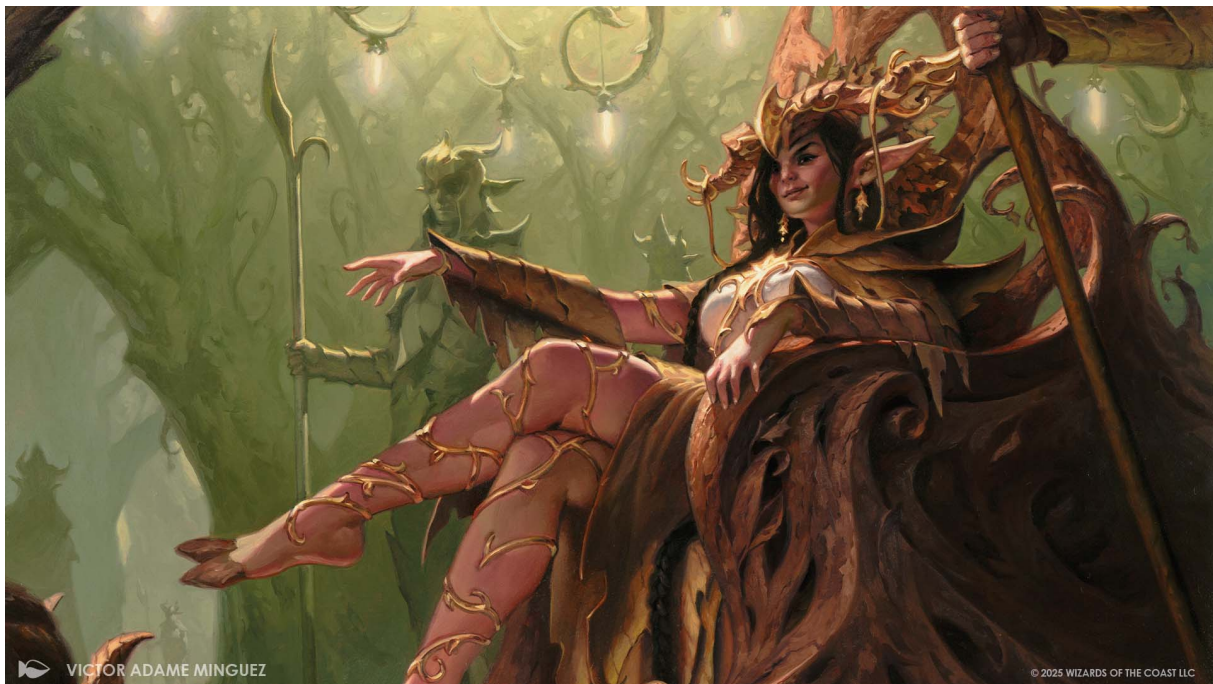
Lluwen smiled. “Now you’re catching on!” He stopped and leaned over to knock on a tall, beautifully carved door covered in more of that gilding sap.

After a long pause, a woman’s voice called, “Yes? What cause have you to interrupt my perfect contemplation?”

“I am Lluwen the faultless, hunter of the Nightshade pack,” replied Lluwen, looking nervous for the first time since they’d arrived in Lys Alana. “I’ve found a stranger in the forest who knows something of Isilu and why he walks out of sync with his promised time. Their knowledge nests inside them like a bird’s egg, and I have not cracked it, for my ears are not yet worthy of truth’s perfection.”

There was another, shorter pause before the door swung open, revealing a perfectly round, golden-coated chamber. The walls were lined with tapestries of golden-tinted moss flecked with tiny white and yellow flowers, like a daylight emulation of stars. A tall chair had been placed near the chamber’s single tall window, and in that chair rested a woman.

Kirol took several steps into the chamber without intending it, eyes fixed on the woman. She was tall and beautifully rounded, with a symmetrical build that they could have admired all day. Her hooves were larger and sharper than Lluwen’s, polished and gilded in gold, and her horns were breathtaking, so large that it seemed they must be too much for her long, elegant neck to support, their tips bending out and then spiraling inward, like the emulation of a crown. They, too, were tipped in gold, and as the sunlight through the window struck her, she *gleamed*.



Art by: Victor Adame Minguez

There was no other word for it, and the only possible word for her explained the title Lluwen had given her: she was perfect, so of course she would be the high perfect, as she was without flaw and with no room for improvement.

She looked at Kirol, and the weight and beauty of her gaze was such that, for a moment, they thought they might collapse beneath it.

“Who are you?” she asked, and if there was no kindness there, there was no cruelty either. She was asking a question, not passing judgment.

“My name is Kirol, ma’am,” they said. Should they bow? They bowed. That felt wrong, but there was no way to take it back, so they worried their lower lip between their teeth and offered, “I’m a student from Strixhaven. I’m not supposed to be here. Lluwen found me in the woods, and he stole me so I could come and talk to you.”

“And are you angry about that, my young friend, with your sharp teeth and your hornless brow?”

“I was, but now I’m not,” said Kirol. “If he hadn’t stolen me, I wouldn’t get to look at you now. You are ... perfect.”

“I am, aren’t I?” She stood, hooves tapping against the floor. “My name is Morcant, and I am High Perfect here in Lys Alana. You may have the honor of using my name.”

“Thank you, ma’—Morcant.”

“Now, is it true? Do you know why Isilu walks?”

“I do,” said Kirol. Morcant gestured for them to continue. “My classmates and I were on a field trip for school when we followed a faerie and fell down a hole that shouldn’t have been there. When we fell out again, we were here in Lorwyn, outside a big dolmen gate. So we went through, and we found that big moon-headed creature sleeping in a circle underground. One of us got too close, and it woke up and bellowed and chased us back to the meadow. But the meadow wasn’t the same. It had been filled with sunlight when we landed, and now it was filled with darkness.”

“You say you *woke* Isilu through proximity alone?” asked Morcant. “Impossible. The night elemental sleeps when weary and wakes when the time has come for the dark to fall and Shadowmoor to rise. The Great Aurora once dictated those wakings, but with it gone, Isilu and Eirdu make their own balance, and we have some measure of it. Eirdu is still awake. Isilu shouldn’t have awoken until a good six months from now. What has been granted to Lorwyn’s keeping should be Lorwyn still, and what is deigned to Shadowmoor should not expand.”

“I don’t ... I don’t understand,” said Kirol. “People keep talking about this cycle, and about how things change, but they don’t tell me how, or why.”

“Our world is defined by day and night,” said Morcant. “Perfect, beautiful, faultless day, and wicked, twisted, bitter night. Once, the Great Aurora kept the night contained and the day protected so that we were shielded from one another. But the aurora fell, and in its place, two beasts arose, one glorious and good, one embittered and evil. Eirdu and Isilu. Lorwyn and Shadowmoor. Where they walk, night becomes day and day becomes night, and the precious border shifts, ignoring treaties, unmaking oaths. They can never meet. Where one has walked, either night or day will linger until the other arrives. We hear word that Isilu walks in Goldmeadow, and through the fields around it. These are places ceded to the day. If we can’t put the night elemental back to sleep and lure Eirdu to soothe the broken light of those places, they may be lost to Shadowmoor forever.”

Kirol blinked. “That isn’t quite what Brigid said ...” they said, carefully. “I think maybe I’m getting multiple historical accounts of the same thing.”

“There are always many sides to the same story,” said Morcant. “You speak of Brigid, the hero of Kinsbaile, do you not? Kithkin are a simple, uncultured folk, close to the land, concerned with their

community, not with the needs of the wider world. She would only see what was before her, not its implications or the possibilities it presented.” Her voice dropped, turning thoughtful. “Isilu is out of cycle—vulnerable, perhaps. And what an opportunity, if someone could seize upon that vulnerability. If they could end the night forever, and welcome endless day in its place. We would no longer work to undo in the moonlight all we had accomplished in the sunlight. The Gilt-Leaf Empire could rise again!”

“Um,” said Kirol. “I’m not from around here, and I’m not sure it’s appropriate for me to be involved with anything that begins with an empire rising again. I’d like to go now, if that’s okay by you.”

“But how do you kill the night itself?” Morcant was off in her own world now, following the twisting trails of her mind further away from the tower room where Lluwen and Kirol stood, listening to her. “With the weapons of the night, of course. Dawnglove grows only where the dawn is a legend, never to be seen. Daylight’s moonglove produces the deadliest poison known. The healing strength of dawnglow is more potent still and would act as purest death if delivered to the night. Mix it with summer dreams and bind it in a tincture, and all the power of the night won’t save the beast.”

In the doorway, Lluwen made a small sound of dismay that was something like a gasp and something like a moan. Kirol glanced over their shoulder and saw their former captor gone pale, gripping the doorframe like a lifeline.

“I’d *really* like to go now,” said Kirol, taking a step back. “I need to find my friends.”

“Oh, no,” said Morcant, and she smiled a terrible, perfect smile. “We need you. You’re not going anywhere.”



Art by: Heather Hudson

Deep in the Gilt-Leaf Woods, on a twisting path that led nowhere near Lys Alana, Sanar frowned and looked around himself in a great circle, even turning to look back. Seeing no trace of Kirol, he sped up to catch Tam and tug her sleeve. She gave him a bewildered look.

“Yes? What is it?”

“Kirol’s gone.”

Tam stopped walking. Abigale did the same. Both turned to look back, finding the same absence of cheerful vampire among their party.

“Where are they?” asked Tam.

Abigale shook her head, puffing up her feathers as she signed. *I haven’t seen them since we reached the woods. I thought they’d gone up into the trees to sneak up on me again.*

“Well, they’re not there,” said Tam.

“Should we split up?” asked Sanar. “They can’t have gone far.”

Tam looked conflicted. “We need to get back to school so we can finish our project,” she said. “It’s not safe here.”

Abigale narrowed her eyes, puffing her feathers out even farther. *Kirol is our friend*, she signed. *I’m going to go find them. You can wait here if you like.*

She turned and began to storm away, following the tracks they’d left from the river. Tam and Sanar exchanged a look.

“One of us should go after her,” said Tam.

“I’ll go. You wait here,” said Sanar. He bounced onto the balls of his feet and ran after the unhappy owlin.

He hadn’t quite managed to catch up before everything went wrong. Abigale, focused as she was on looking for Kirol—something she was trying to achieve with broad turns of her head, sometimes rotating it almost all the way around—didn’t notice when the brush to one side began to rustle and shift. Sanar, who heard the branches scraping, froze immediately. Abigale did not and was taken purely by surprise when the massive, gnarled head of some unfamiliar beast, crowned with antlers made of tangled, grasping branches, rose out of the brush. The head was attached to some equally massive creature based on the sounds now coming from the trees.

Sounds Abigale couldn’t hear. Horrified, Sanar watched her begin to backpedal away from the creature into the brush on the other side of the trail. He grabbed a branch and rushed forward, intending to defend her from the advancing beast.

Unfortunately for him, this caught the thing’s attention. It turned its head toward him, the motion causing one of its antlers to catch him in the chest and fling him away into the trees. He hit hard and collapsed to the ground, no longer in a position to defend anyone.

Abigale made an unhappy hooting noise and rushed the beast, which bellowed loudly enough to trigger the function of her hearing aid meant to alert her to alarms and explosions. She clapped her hands over her ears. The ringing was enough to make her dizzy, and she staggered deeper into the brush, away from both Sanar and the beast.

She didn’t even see the edge of the tributary Brigid had told them to watch for. As she stumbled, her foot hit the top of the sloping bank that led down to the water, and she fell.

She had time to think Kirol would tease her for forgetting how to fly, again, before she hit the water. It saturated her feathers almost immediately, dragging her to the middle of the deceptively deep stream where the current was at its strongest. It caught her, keeping her suspended below the surface and above the bottom as it pulled her rapidly toward the Wanderwine.

Abigale thrashed, unable to swim against the current or the weight of her feathers. When that didn't get her anywhere, she stopped, forcing herself to calm down as much as she could. Like most birds of prey, owlin had air sacs in addition to lungs, which would give her a little extra time before she started to drown. Clinging tightly to her forced calm, she began moving her hands in quick, restrained arcs.

A mage who needed breath to work their magic would have been in terrible danger in the depths, but all Abigale needed were her hands, and the gestures that told the whisper of her internal winds where to go.

Her hands moved, and bubbles began to form around them, answering her call. When both Abigale's hands were full of air, she raised them to her face and pressed them over her beak, creating a mask of sorts. Gratefully, she took a deep breath, then pulled her face away from the bubble long enough to spit out the water she had swallowed.

The panic tried to surge back and overwhelm her, and she shoved it aside, pushing her face greedily back into the bubble and inhaling as the water took her. As long as she could keep herself away from the banks, which were made of rough stone that would hurt her severely if she slammed into them, she could let the current carry her to the Wanderwine. She was sure she'd seen shallows there. She could climb out and wait until her feathers dried enough to let her go find the others.

Yes. That would work, it would be calm and controlled enough to prove that she deserved admission into Silverquill when the time arrived. She balled herself up, trying to ride the current without being hurt, and held the bubble to her face as she focused on her eventual escape from the stream.

Ahead of her, the water grew lighter, signaling the proximity of the larger river, and forms moved in the shadows. Abigale stiffened, forcibly controlling her breath. Her air was self-replenishing, but it could still run out if she started to panic.

As she grew closer, the forms resolved into fish-finned bipeds with long arms and elegant, scaled tails, clutching spears and tridents. They pointed to her and swam forward, menacing her with their weapons.

Desperate to remain calm, Abigale did what she had done since she was a small child trying to avoid getting into trouble with her parents: she held her hands in front of herself and started to babble, fingers flashing. *I'm sorry is this your river I didn't know this was your river but I guess it might be your river anyway if you can just help me out of the water I'll go away and nobody needs to get hurt I really didn't mean to bother anyone I'm so sorry—*

One of the fish-people held his hands out toward her, palms forward, motioning for her to stop. Confused, Abigale did. He began moving his hands more slowly and deliberately.

Her hearing aid was intended to help her communicate and had been designed by a Silverquill upper-classman with a flexible definition of the concept of "hearing." It took a moment for it to interpret the stranger's signing, then the words began appearing in her mind, clear and comprehensible:

Slowly, unfamiliar one, slowly. Are you an elemental beast? You look like bird and elf at once—a strange blend. Did you fall into our waters?

Abigale blinked, then signed a careful *yes*. The stranger swam closer, signing again, and Abigale watched his hands, trying to follow his words.

What a clever tool you wear! Are you here because the early night is spreading? These waters are not safe for you. So many of our kind have changed over to the night.

I mean no harm, signed Abigale. We're trying to tell the faerie queen about the night-beast.

We have something you must see, signed the fish-man. Will you come with us? No harm will come to you, if you agree.



Art by: Gustavo Pelissari

Abigale considered her answer for a moment then nodded and signed, *Yes*. The man swam forward to offer her his arm, and one of the women did the same, getting her situated solidly between them. With this accomplished, they began to swim toward the Wanderwine proper, towing Abigale along with them. It was so fast that it was almost like flying, and Abigale hooted laughter as she allowed herself to be taken into the distant depths.

Sanar came running back to where Tam waited, breathing heavily and covered with little scratches from where he'd blundered into a thorn hedge.

"Sanar? What happened? Where's Kirol? Where's Abigale?"

Sanar stopped to put his hands on his knees and catch his breath then straightened and said, with ill-concealed terror in his voice, "A big thing came out of the bushes and scared Abigale. She fell and found the tributary we've been looking for. The water took her away."

"Drowned?" asked Tam, even more alarmed.

"I don't think so. Her feathers just got soaked and she couldn't fly out of the water. The current was sweeping her back toward the river last I saw."

Tam paused, the tendrils of her hair twisting around each other as she worried at the problem. If they went after Abigale, they might not find the faerie queen in time to warn her about the giant creature spreading transformational nighttime everywhere it went. If they didn't go after Abigale, they might

not find her in time to go home. There were no clear answers. There were no easy solutions. No matter what they did, someone would suffer.

What would her teacher want her to do? Tam didn't talk about him much—didn't even like to think about him much, to prevent the mind-mages in her theory classes from catching a glimpse of him in her thoughts and starting to ask questions—but she knew he would have wanted her to choose the option that would protect herself and save the most people at the same time.

“You say she found the tributary?” she asked. Sanar nodded. “Good. Take me there. We need to reach the waterfall.”

Sanar frowned, looking unhappy, but didn't argue; he could see the logic as clearly as she could. “This way,” he said and turned, slouching back the way he'd come.

They didn't have to backtrack far to find a narrow deer trail to the tributary. Its banks were steep but clear of vegetation, and they were able to follow it easily deeper into the trees, until the sound of a waterfall washed everything else away. They sped up.

The waterfall came into view, crystalline water cascading down over smooth, polished stones, sprays of mist creating rainbows that danced in the air all around. “Behind and beyond, that's what Brigid said,” said Tam. “We have to go behind and beyond.”

“All right,” said Sanar. He ran forward, plunging into the shimmering wall of water. He didn't reappear. Tam gasped.

Following more slowly, she reached out with one unsteady hand to touch the cascade. Her fingertips slid smoothly into the water, which was cool and smelled so sweet. She had never wanted to drink something so badly in her life. She took a deep breath.

Her classmates needed her.

She stepped forward.

Maralen dropped to her knees on the floor of her chamber, clutching at her hair with both hands as she moaned. “No, no, *no*,” she snarled. “I *refuse*.”

The drift of flower petals covering her dressing table and the floor around it remained as they were, unchanging and accusing. They were small and fragrant, and they came from no flower that bloomed in Lorwyn or in Shadowmoor. But Maralen knew them. Oh, how well she knew them. She had been born of them, once, when she was made by Oona, before she had taken on the shape and memory of Maralen of the Mornsong, whose name she still carried.

These were the petals of Oona's flesh, and they couldn't be here, unless—

Unless the twist of magic that had allowed one of her creations to become independent and alive without her consent was somehow coming unmade. It shouldn't have been possible for Maralen to be her own person. She should have been a part of Oona even to the end—and maybe, under it all, she still was.

Eirdu had left her, and whispers were reaching the court that Isilu walked, and day and night were clashing. They would go to war. After the war would come a new aurora, the binding and breaking of the cycle. It would seem so reasonable, so rational, the best way to preserve their world.

It would make her into Oona reborn, and Maralen would be washed away.

She pushed herself to her feet and swept the petals from her dressing table with a motion of her arm, then sat and stared at her mirror. Instead of her own slowly transforming eyes, she met the terrible gaze of Oona and pushed herself away from the mirror so hard that she hit the floor again, this time on her backside.

The mirror stood empty, mocking her fear, and she heard laughter in the air, distant, strange, and familiar, like something out of a dream. She swiped at her ears, trying to chase the sound away.

The chamber door swung open.

Maralen was on her feet in an instant, her reflexes not softened by her royal life. A group of faeries swept in, surrounding a small blue creature who looked something like a boggart, and a tall, humanoid elemental with red-striped green skin and tendrils that faded from white into red in place of hair. Maralen gasped.

“Who are you? What is this?” she demanded.

“We found them climbing the palace stairs,” said one of the faeries. The others nodded and shouted their agreement. “They said they wanted to speak to you, so we brought them to you. They have no weapons.”

“The one appears to be an elemental,” said Maralen. “Elementals *are* weapons.”

“Who, me?” asked the tall stranger. “I’m not an elemental. I’m a gorgon. My name is Tam—Brigid sent us. We’re not supposed to be here, anyway. We’re from a place called Strixhaven, on the plane of Arcavios, and we just want to get back to school.”

“Whoa,” said Sanar.

“What?” asked Tam.

“I’ve never heard you talk that much.”

Maralen winced as another peal of laughter rang in her ears. “Do any of you hear that?” she demanded.

Tam, Sanar, and the faeries looked confused. Maralen turned a sharp look on her faeries. “Leave us,” she said.

They flew slowly out of the room, leaving her alone with Tam, Sanar, and the mocking laughter.

“Now,” she said. “This is Lorwyn-Shadowmoor, and you are very far from your Arcavios. What happened? How did you come here?”

“We fell through a portal and woke up this big thing with a moon on its head,” said Sanar. “It’s walking around. Brigid said you’d want to know, and that maybe you could help us get home.”

A bubble of laughter forced its way up Maralen’s throat. “Help you? Who’s going to help *me*?”

“Help you with what?” asked Tam.

“There are flower petals everywhere, and the cycle is out of true,” said Maralen. “Oona is returning, and this time, I don’t know if I can stop her.”

“Wow. I don’t know what *any* of that means,” said Sanar.

The door of her chamber slammed open then, and there was Rhys, a small blue faerie sitting on his shoulder and pointing at Maralen. Sanar yelped and pointed to the faerie.

“That’s what we followed through the portal!” he said.

Rhys had eyes only for Maralen, his expression cold as the dead of a winter night, a strange, terrible relief in his eyes. “You weren’t going to tell me. You were keeping it secret, weren’t you?”

“Rhys, you don’t understand,” said Maralen desperately.

“Could it already be too late?” He closed his eyes as if in great pain. “Maralen. I made a promise to you long ago.”

“We don’t know—”

He didn’t wait for her to finish. The elf drew a dagger from his belt and lunged.

Maralen shrieked and threw her arms up, crossing them to cover and protect her face. Then the most unlikely thing happened. Rhys, every movement graceful and filled with terrible purpose, slipped on one of the flower petals covering the floor. His eyes went wide with surprise, and—in a move of extraordinary speed and grace—he crossed his leg mid-lunge, catching his weight on his other foot.

And slipped on another flower petal.

Now thoroughly out of control, Rhys took two wild, stumbling steps and tumbled out of a nearby window. The faerie on his shoulder leapt into the air, scolding like a startled magpie. Everyone watched in stunned silence—except for Tam, who was doing something geometric and glowing with her hands.

“What was that?” asked Sanar, stunned.

“Probability magic. Who was that?”

Maralen lowered her arms, giving the faerie a betrayed look. “You’re supposed to serve me, not betray me,” she said. “Why don’t I know you?”

The faerie turned toward her, still scolding, still not forming actual words.

“What’s going on?” asked Tam, urgently now.

“We have to go,” said Maralen. “That was Rhys, my adviser and oldest friend, and he’ll kill me if he thinks Oona is coming back.”

“Why?” asked Sanar.

“I made him swear that he would.”

“You just said—” began Tam.

“I know what I said!” snapped Maralen. “But I’m not ready to die, and if we can settle Isilu and restore the cycle, I may not have to. Now, we have to run, before he comes back.” She eyed the little faerie. “You, with us, now.”

Looking deeply amused, the faerie flitted to Maralen’s shoulder. She turned toward the door and ran. Tam and Sanar, not seeing much choice in the matter, followed close behind.