
Episode 5: If We Shadows

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From set *Lorwyn Eclipsed*

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Following Maralen, Sanar and Tam ran to the edge of the palace grounds, where a potentially deadly fall to the ground awaited them. Maralen glanced over the edge, then led the students to a long, curving stem with a bud at the top, big around as an ox. “Does either of you have a sword?” she asked.

Sanar and Tam stared at her. “We’re students on a field trip,” said Tam. “We’re not *armed*.”

“Well, I can’t call a faerie swarm to help us, or Rhys will follow them!” snapped Maralen. The faerie on her shoulder giggled like he was having the time of his life.

“Do we just need to cut the bud off?” asked Sanar. Maralen nodded, and he started dredging things up from the depths of his pockets, bits of mud and flattened leaf, crushed snarlflowers and a flier for Mage Tower tryouts. He smashed them all together, mashing the mud and vegetation until the paper was saturated. With this accomplished, he packed it around the bud’s base and backed away.

“What are you doing?” asked Maralen.

“Prismari study track,” said Sanar.

That was enough information for Tam, who covered her ears and ducked, while Maralen stood there looking bewildered. Sanar planted two fingers in his mouth, whistling.

Nothing happened.

Maralen frowned. “I don’t understand what—”

The bud exploded, sending sticky chunks flying in all directions. Sap splattered across the trio, and Maralen cried out in bewildered disgust.

“Did you *have* to blow it up?” asked Tam.

“Yup,” said Sanar.

With the bud removed, the stem was a soft-sided hollow tube leading to the ground. Maralen looked back toward the palace, then ran for the stem, boosting herself in. “Come along,” she called.

Sanar followed enthusiastically. Tam looked back, hesitant, before jumping after the others.

Inside, the stem was slick and sticky and smelled of nothing so much as the living concept of green. The three shot down into the dark, tumbling out at ground level, not far from the waterfall. Maralen ran through it, and the others followed, all rinsed clean by the tumbling water as they plunged into the Gilt-Leaf Wood.

Once there, Maralen led Sanar and Tam toward the tributary leading to the Wanderwine. Upon reaching the banks of the stream, she bent and began rummaging through the exposed roots of the trees growing alongside the water, pulling a wooden coracle boat out of hiding.

“You’ve been ready to run for a while,” said Tam, observing. “It’s like you created a world you knew you couldn’t live in. That’s why you asked Rhys to do you a favor and ran when he tried.”

“I needed—Oona was my creator, and I needed to know I wouldn’t become her if I had the same power she did. I needed to know that Lorwyn-Shadowmoor would be safe from her return. But I’m still myself. Even if parts of her live on in me, I’m *not* her, and I need to make Rhys see that.” She climbed into the coracle. “Come along. We need to find someplace safe to hole up until I know what to do next.”

“You mean until you know how to get us home?” asked Tam. She climbed into the coracle, causing it to settle lower in the water. “We need to find our way back.”

“And we need to find our friends,” said Sanar, settling beside them. Maralen produced a pole from the bottom of the boat, using it to push them away from the banks. They spun until the current took them, pulling the coracle rapidly toward the Wanderwine.

“I don’t know where we can find you a passage back to your home, but I’ll do my best, as soon as we’re away,” said Maralen. “You have my word. Right now, can we focus on escaping? Rhys is a hunter, and a tracker, and a very dangerous foe.”

“So why don’t you just release him from his promise?” asked Tam.

Maralen sighed. “Rhys is an elf.”

“So?”

“Elves live for a blink of an eye. They’re here and they’re gone before they have time to become anything less than perfect. Rhys is older than any elf I’ve ever heard of, because he made a binding promise to me. As long as he’s bound to me, my magic keeps him alive. It seemed so unlikely he would ever feel compelled to keep his word that it was better to let the promise stand and keep my friend.”

Tam stared at her. “That was ...”

“The only way I had of keeping someone beside me who’d known Maralen of the Mornsong when she was an elf and not a faerie’s dream.” Maralen looked levelly at Tam, not blinking.

Tam found herself wondering whether they had gorgons in Lorwyn, because Maralen didn’t flinch before meeting her eyes. Neither did most of the students she knew from Arcavios. They didn’t know to be afraid of a gorgon’s gaze, and so they weren’t. It was strange. At home, even her teacher would sometimes flinch, and she couldn’t have hurt him if she wanted.

When Maralen finally looked away, Tam sagged, and as Sanar leaned out of the boat to trail his fingers in the current, they let the water take them.

The tributary handed the coracle off to the Wanderwine almost gently, the water seeming to know it was carrying precious cargo. They spun but didn’t overly rock, and except for Sanar’s fingers, they remained dry. The Wanderwine flowed on, and they traveled with it.

Hours passed, the sun in the sky above them not moving, and occasionally they floated past patches of darkness on the shore, places where Isilu had gone stalking by. Maralen stared at them with wide, bewildered eyes, but she didn’t say anything, and neither did the students, allowing her the time to come to terms with her new reality. On and on they floated, until finally they passed below the canopy of a copse of fat-trunked mangrove trees, drifting into the sunlit shadows of a large swamp.

A vine reached out from the bank, snaring their coracle and tugging it gently to the shore. Tam gasped and began to stand, setting the boat rocking. Maralen motioned her back down.

“This was our destination all along,” she said. “I have friends in this bog. This is the home of the Stinkdrinker Warren of boggarts, and unless she’s moved along since last she sent word, we’ll find Ashling here.”

“Ashling?” asked Sanar.

“She’s another I’ve known almost as long as I’ve been myself. She’s one of the flamekin of Mount Tanufel, from which the Wanderwine River springs. We’ve been enemies as often as we’ve been friends, and she knows what it is to have people assume that you’re a villain even when you’re not. The only reason I don’t see her more often in Glen Elendra is that she thinks me a fool for keeping Rhys so close when his purpose is to end me. If anyone knows anything of your friends or the path that brought you here, it’s Ashling. She runs the length of the river and back again, carrying stories and secrets to the mountain. The pilgrim’s path, once walked, is not so easily set aside.”

The coracle bumped into the shore, rocking harder without knocking the trio overboard, and Maralen stood, spreading her arms for balance as she stepped out.

A four-fingered hand made of what looked like flexible black glass caught her wrist and tugged her onto solid ground. Tam and Sanar gaped as a lithe figure whose body shared substance with the hand stepped out of the shadows, helping Maralen find her footing. Maralen smiled warmly at the figure.

“Ashling,” she said.

“Maralen,” replied Ashling. Her face was a mask of the same black glass as her body, crowned with a shock of blazing bonfire. More flames leaked out along the line of her throat and from the creases of her joints, making her look like a barely contained inferno. She turned toward Tam and Sanar, burning.

“Whoa,” said Sanar, scrambling out of the coracle and staring at Ashling. “You’re beautiful.”

“Sanar,” hissed Tam.

“What? She is. Fire is always pretty, but letting fire decide to be a person is a special sort of pretty.”

Before Tam could explain how this was in poor taste, a new sound introduced itself, and she stilled.

Ashling was laughing. She kept laughing as she helped them out of the coracle and led all three of them away from the water and into the tangled shadows of the Stinkdrinker Warren.



Art by: Ilse Gort

“Boggarts” turned out to be the Lorwyn equivalent of goblins—friendly, curious people of Sanar’s height, whose skins came in a dazzling variety of colors, like a patch of verbose, sometimes oddly scented wildflowers. One of them had hauled Sanar off to learn how to fish for eels as soon as it was established that the three would be in the warren for a few hours—although not much longer, as Maralen didn’t want to give Rhys time to catch up if she could help it.

Now, she sat at a table made from a section of petrified wood, caught between tinder and stone, with Ashling on the other side, her story having flowed out of her like so much poisoned honey. It covered the table between them, viscous, sticky, and almost visible, while Tam watched from the corner.

“—And that’s why we’re here,” she finished. “We’ll need a better boat to take us down the river to Goldmeadow. I have to get Tam and Sanar back to the doorway they came through and learn what I can about Isilu walking the daylight land.”

“The elves and their high perfect Morcant are also aware that the night beast is walking,” said Ashling. “They’re concocting a plan to kill the creature. They’re seeking poisons that might allow them to complete the task.”

“Wouldn’t that be a good thing?” asked Tam. “Forgive me, but it seems like your world is better in the daylight. Our allies turned against us when night fell. If we can stop the night forever, we can perfect your world. Wouldn’t that be better?”

“Not in the least,” said Maralen. “Lorwyn isn’t meant to exist unchallenged. We need the balance Shadowmoor provides—the true, transforming night. Isilu and Eirdu are balanced forces, equal in all things, and we’ve seen what happens when we have one without the other. I don’t want to die. If I were to agree to ending the night forever, I would deserve the death Rhys promised me. Eternal day is Oona’s way, not my own.”

“Isilu would regenerate; the balance would be restored over time,” said Ashling. “Oona destroyed both the great elementals when she created her aurora, and they found a new balance between themselves after the aurora fell.”

“That doesn’t mean I can condone an attack on the natural order of Lorwyn-Shadowmoor, not when we’ve just gotten it back,” snapped Maralen.

“Then I suppose we’ll have to stop the elves,” said Ashling, sounding deeply put-on. “I’ll find that boat you need, and I’ll be coming with you.” She rose, heading for the door.

Outside, the sound of laughter rang through the warren as Sanar struggled to snatch slippery eels out of the water, egged on by the boggarts around him. He grinned, clearly enjoying the attention, and kept going.

And in the branches outside the room where Ashling had been speaking with Maralen, a faerie rested. It flicked back and forth between blue and green, the Lorwyn and Shadowmoor sides of its nature almost seeming to strobe, making it difficult to say which it was at any given moment. It remained sitting in a shaft of sunlight, head cocked to the side, frowning and perplexed as it listened to the conversation from within.

Finally, with a flick of its wings, it rose and flew away, vanishing quickly into the branches.

Near the dolmen gate, a flare of light split the darkness, then became the muscled, white-furred form of Ajani Goldmane. The unbroken night hung heavy in the air around him, day glimmering in the distance beyond veils of shimmering aurora created where the night and day collided. He took a look around, turning a careful circle. There was no sign of the four missing students.



Art by: Greg Staples

Ajani frowned, then started toward the dolmen gate. As he moved, a creature like a serpent with the tiny, jointed legs of a millipede loomed up behind him, mouth gaping to show venom-coated fangs. It struck, and he blocked it with the head of his axe, hard-won reflexes allowing him to stop the assault before it could happen. It was not a battle that could ever have lasted for long. The serpent was a beast,

huge and terrible but acting entirely on instinct; Ajani was a great warrior, a survivor of a hundred battles against greater enemies than this. He did his best to repel without wounding, batting the snake aside with his axe, trying to leave it alive, but the serpent struck again and again, until he finally had no choice but to strike it down.

Breathing hard but uninjured, Ajani finished his walk to the dolmen gate. It was unmarred: no blood or damage. He crouched, scanning the ground until he found the distinctive prints left by hard-tooled Strixhaven shoes, unlike anything that normally occurred on this plane. They were pointed away from the gate, the students clearly fleeing from something.

Ajani followed them across the clearing, passing the scuffs left by his fight with the Shadowmoor serpent, and all the way to the daylight edge of the meadow. He had barely stepped into the sunlight before a creature like a boar with wildflowers and mushrooms growing from its broad, grassy back slammed into him, squealing in pain and confusion.

Beasts of Shadowmoor and beasts of Lorwyn, both driven to attack by the sudden change of day into night. This wasn't how things were meant to be. Even as Ajani fought off the boar, he could tell how out of sync with itself the plane was—and how unhappy.

This had to stop.

The boat supplied by the boggarts was large and luxurious, at least compared to the coracle; it had an upper and a lower deck, and an actual wheel, allowing it to be steered by someone who understood boats. That wasn't Maralen. It wasn't Tam or Sanar, either, and although Ashling was accompanying them, she didn't know how to steer. In the end, several boggarts agreed to take them down the Wanderwine, allowing them to return the boat to the warren once their passengers had been dropped off near Goldmeadow.

Maralen stood on the deck, hands tight on the rail, eyes on the dense edge of the wood. Tam came up beside her, hair shifting and twining around itself as they stood in temporary silence. Finally, she asked, "What are you watching for?"

"Rhys," said Maralen. "He knows I don't have many friends left outside of Glen Elendra. He's bound to suspect I'd go to Ashling before anyone else, and I'm sure he's following us."

"Friends are important," said Tam. "But they can leave you vulnerable, too." She looked back at where Sanar looked over the railing, dangling one blue hand in the water.

"Yes," said Maralen. "I'm afraid that's true."

"I shouldn't be here. None of us should. That's why we have to get the others, and—"

"Tamira, you said it yourself," said the fae queen gently. "It's too dangerous. I'll send your friends after you when all this is over and Isilu is asleep again. You have my word."

Tam frowned. "You're running from this Rhys because he wants to keep his word. Please forgive me for not putting too much stock in your promises."

"I meant it when I asked for his word," said Maralen. "It's ... You weren't here. Things were different then. I didn't know how much the world would recover from what she'd done."

"She tells that truthfully," said Ashling, moving to stand beside them. "The old fae queen, Oona, she managed to capture the auroras that naturally flare between night and day and braid them into a single great aurora that kept the whole plane locked in one state or the other for centuries at a time. Night

never fell. Day never rose. We're meant to be creatures of balance, shifting between night and day as Eirdu and Isilu command, and she stopped us where we were to stagnate. Lorwyn doesn't remember Shadowmoor, nor does Shadowmoor remember Lorwyn, but a creature knows when it's only half of what it's meant to be."

"Oona broke the world," said Maralen.

"Why is that your fault?" demanded Tam. "Just because this Oona might be back, that's no reason you should have to die."

"She made me," said Maralen.

"And? Just because she's your mother—"

"She's not my mother," said Maralen. "She *made* me. She pinched off a piece of herself, like plucking a petal from a flower, and she *made* me."

Tam went still, staring at her. Maralen scoffed.

"Never heard of such a thing, little stranger? Did you think all lives began with a loving embrace and a family to welcome you? Mine began in Oona's bower, petal-born and larval, distinct from the faeries around me in that I was half-finished, waiting to be put through my instars by Oona herself. I was to be her avatar, a part of her, carrying her consciousness ahead of my own. She fed me nectar, royal jelly for a queen, and she plucked the wings from my shoulders when they began to form. She kept me as a weapon, not a child. She could see the restiveness spreading through the world, the cycle struggling to reassert itself, and I was meant to become her when the world inevitably rose against her. She made only two mistakes, my maker-mother, and I was one of them."

"What was the other?" asked Ashling with sudden interest.

Maralen turned to blink at her. "What?"

"You said she made two mistakes. You're the only avatar of Oona I know. What was her other mistake?"

"Ah." Maralen shivered. "She made and molded me, and when the time was right, she slipped me into the shed skin of Maralen of the Mornsong, who had no more need of it. She made an elf of me, to rule Lorwyn, and she didn't consider what the heart and hopes of an elf might do to her careful plans. She made me someone else when she married me to my mask."

"Was that her second mistake?"

"No." Maralen looked at the water. "My creation was her second mistake. The first was my brother. I was meant to rule Lorwyn when Oona could no longer carry the crown, but I wasn't her first choice. She wasn't sure any piece of her could remember itself as she did when subjected to Shadowmoor's light, and so she made another before me, intended to be Shadowmoor's prince in waiting. She made him incomplete, as she would make me, for he was only meant to serve half the world, and she intended to fill our empty places with herself, her coldness and her cruelty, her desire to make a world out of nothing but Oona. She already knew he was flawed when she chose to make me, from the other half of the same petal; he fought her, he defied her, and he demanded to be left to rule Shadowmoor according to the natural cycle of things. What memories I have from before I was Maralen came originally from Oona, and they're colored by her experience of them. I remember my older brother fighting her so hard I thought the palace might fall. He wanted to be himself and his own, not hers. He befriended a giant, a sage who carried stories of Eirdu and Isilu, who were legends then, not parts of our living world. He called the man 'father,' pledged to be a good son to him, and Oona was infuriated. She ordered the giant killed where we could watch and told my brother the only lesson he should take from fathers

was this: That fathers will always leave you. Fathers always fall. My brother was ... He was shattered, and he swore he would never forgive her, or any part of her, however half-formed. I didn't see him after that."

"Did Oona hurt him?" asked Tam.

"No, she whisked me away to become Maralen, and by the time I remembered who and what I was, my brother was gone. The faeries told me he vanished into the green, and I've not seen him since. As far as I'm aware, all that's left of Oona lives in me. Through me, she might be able to return, and so Rhys watches for signs of her awakening, ready to strike me down when he sees them. So you see, this *is* my fault. I was part of Oona when she broke everything. Rhys only seeks to prevent me from bringing the healing to an end."

"That's nonsense," said Tam mulishly. "You can't be blamed for things she did before you existed, even if you were part of her. You didn't have any control. It's not your fault."

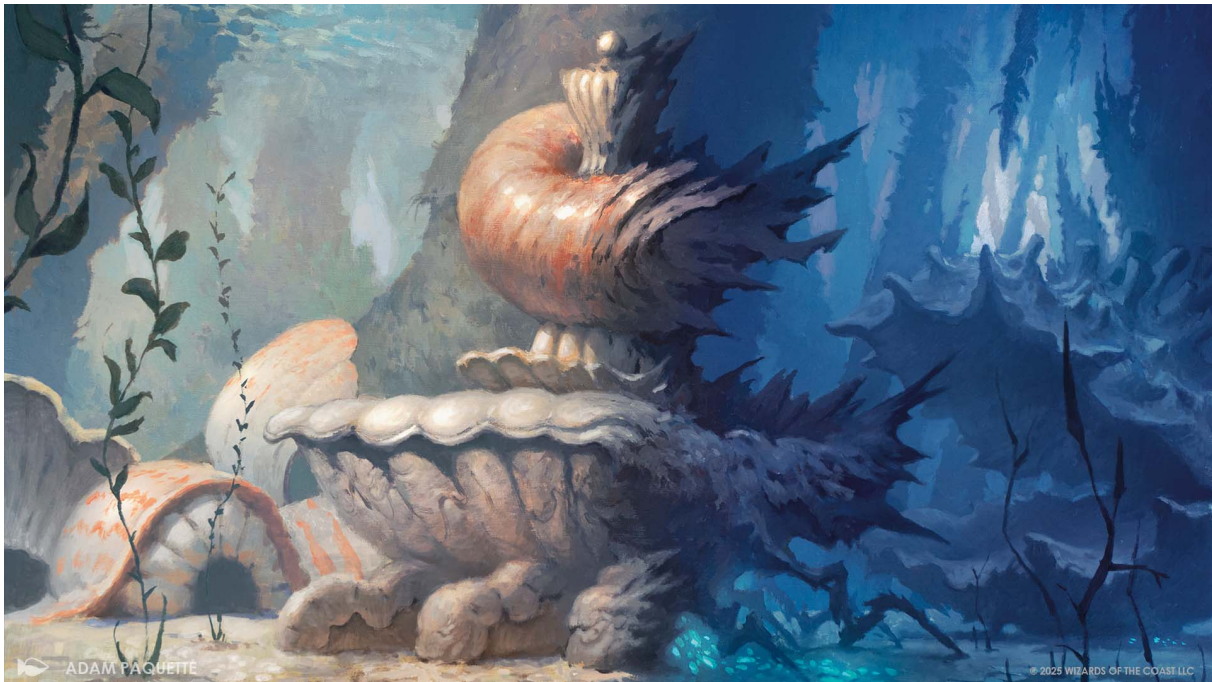
Sitting on the edge of the table, the faerie that had been accompanying them frowned up at Maralen, wings at half-mantle. It opened its mouth, looking for a moment like it was going to speak, only to flinch as the boat jerked to a sudden stop, running hard against the bank. Ashling and Maralen rushed to shout up at the boggarts who were steering them along the river, demanding to know what was happening.

In the commotion, the faerie rose and flew away, a perplexed expression on its face.

At the helm, the old boggart let their shouting wash over him, then leaned forward and yelled, "Look to the river! All the new experiences there are don't mean a thing if I can't carry them home."

Maralen and Ashling turned to look, then gasped.

The river just ahead was slashed through with a hard line of night, auroras sparking along its edge, and on the other side was only darkness. Shadowmoor had taken the Wanderwine.



Art by: Adam Paquette

"This boat stops here," said the boggart.

“What do we do?” moaned Maralen.

“We walk,” said Ashling. “My memory is as unbroken as yours.”

Maralen frowned. “What do you—”

“The elemental’s touch has left some consequences. My form may flicker night to day, but my heart no longer changes.” Sanar ran down the deck toward them. Ashling turned to him. “As long as you stay within my light, you should retain something of your daylight nature.”

“People don’t change between night and day where we come from,” said Sanar.

“Even better,” said Ashling. She bowed to the boggart at the helm, then led the others to the side, where they descended the ladder to the aurora-rainbowed bank below.

Like a predator on the hunt, Shadowmoor lay in silent wait.

“Where are we going?” asked Kirol, hands bound with a length of elven silk. Even that had been a compromise—the perfect had wanted to secure their feet until Lluwen reminded her that Kirol would be unable to flee if something attacked them while they were gathering the dawnglove. Morcant had scowled but agreed that letting the vampire die before they could retrieve the dawnglove would serve no one any good.

“Silence,” said Morcant sharply.

Lluwen leaned close, pitching his voice low, and said, “The night doesn’t draw a straight line. There’s a grove here in the Gilt-Leaf that Isilu’s already taken, and the flowers we need should be growing there. You’re going to go inside and gather them for us.”

“You make it sound so easy,” grumbled Kirol.

“It is. You just have to pick some flowers.” Morcant turned to look at them, and Kirol flinched.

“I told you to be *silent*,” she said, her voice cold. “I expect obedience from those who serve me.”

“Picking flowers is what got me into this situation in the first place!”

Lluwen prodded Kirol in the back with his spear, and they shot the hunter a wounded look. Lluwen jerked his head toward Morcant, a pleading expression on his face. Kirol sighed and kept their mouth shut. If they’d done that sooner, Morcant might not have figured out they could pass between night and day without losing their memory or getting distracted by transforming into their “Shadowmoor self.”

They walked the rest of the way in silence, stopping when a line of auroras appeared across their path.

“The stranger will continue,” commanded Morcant.

“They don’t understand what—”

“Are you contradicting me?” Her voice was poisonously pleasant. “What a fascinating choice.”

“No, Perfect,” said Lluwen, slumping as they turned their attention back to Kirol. “You have to go.”

Kirol blanched. “Please,” they said. “This isn’t my fight. I don’t want to—I mean, I don’t know—”

“Just go,” Lluwen said and pushed them forward.

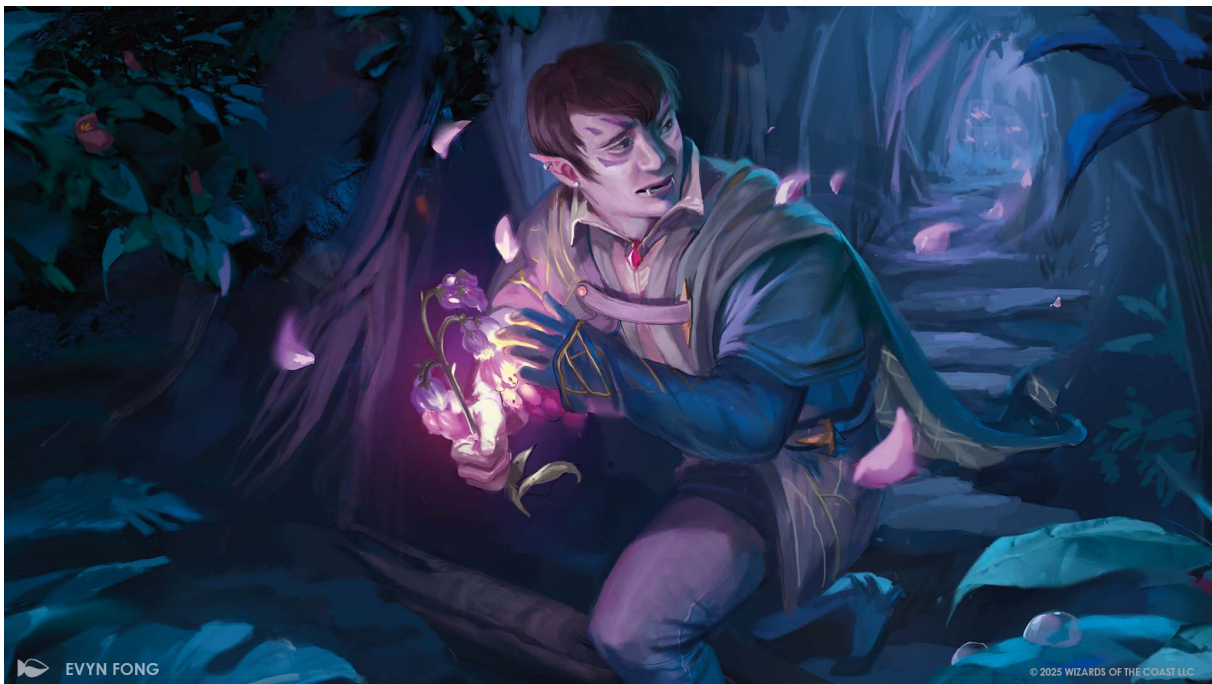
Kirol stumbled through the line of rainbows and looked back, demoralized, at the two elves standing in the light. Lluwen gestured with his spear, and Kirol turned to go deeper, moving toward the center of the grove. Perfect Morcant had been unable to provide a description of the dawnglove flowers, saying

only that they would know it when they saw it, and so they kept walking, scanning the ground and hoping for a sign.

When it came, it took their breath away.

The dawnglove flowers grew in small patches, glowing pink, purple, and blueish white, like dawn distilled into something so beautiful it seemed impossible. Their bound hands shook as they reached out to pluck a sprig, and they found themselves wishing, desperately, for their school-issued shears, designed to prevent bruising a single petal.

A branch snapped behind them. Kirol tensed, and their vampirically sharp ears heard the crackle of distant, hard-banked fires creeping closer. They turned and saw dark outlines, humanoid shapes crackling with barely contained heat, like banked charcoals. It was easy to miss them in the dark, their presence betrayed only by the dim embers in their eyes. Leaping back to their feet, they ran, and the cinders gave chase.



Art by: Evyn Fong

Several times, Kirol felt the heat of their bodies against their skin. But they were faster—even in the wrong shoes—than the cinders were on the uneven ground, and they burst through the veil of rainbows with the dawnglove in their hand, dropping to their knees in the loam.

“Kirol did it!” said Lluwen, taking the dawnglove reverently from Kirol’s hand and holding it up for Morcant to see. “But the cinders ...” He looked uneasily at the figures on the night side of the veil, unwilling to pursue further, burning in the dark.

“The stranger evaded them once; he can do so again,” said Morcant. “Send him back.”

“It’s ‘them,’” said Kirol, getting back to their feet. “And no. I won’t go. I’m not dying for you people.”

“You’re dying for whatever I say you are,” said Morcant. “We need more dawnglove. Go. Lluwen, make him go.”

“I won’t,” said Lluwen. “They don’t deserve to die that way.”

“Lluwen—”

“No.”

Morcant was glaring, clearly prepared to push the issue, when a white blur burst out of the trees and landed between them, a massive two-headed axe in his hands, fur on his shoulders bristling. He snarled at the aurora-line, and the cinders retreated. He snarled at Morcant, and she snarled back, less bestial, more arrogant.

Then he rounded on Kirol, who moved in front of Lluwen ready to defend the elven hunter from the massive lion-man. Instead, the lion spoke. “Are you one of Professor Vess’s missing students?” he asked.

Relief washed through Kirol so strong it felt like it might wash them entirely away. “Yes, sir,” they said. “I got lost, I lost my friends, and now Perfect Morcant”—they gestured to the elf—“is making me pick dawnglove for her. Please, I want to go home.”

“And we shall,” said the lion. “My name is Ajani, and we are leaving.” He turned his glare on Perfect Morcant, who tried, and failed, to match it. One hand on the small of Kirol’s back, he began guiding the student away.

Lluwen had an instant to make up his mind. Looking between Kirol and Ajani and the furious Morcant, he moved, darting after them before she could stop him. Her face contorted in anger as the forest took them.

Ashling stepped into Shadowmoor, blue light racing along her skin and her deeply banked inner fires melting into something frozen and shimmering, like the magnetic lights that sometimes danced in the sky above the Furygale back on campus. Sanar gasped. Tam stopped walking and stared. Ashling turned to face the pair of them, a small smile on her transformed face.

“By night, I’m what we call ‘rimekin,’” she said. “I know you still. Fear not.”

Maralen moved to take Ashling’s arm, clearly unafraid. Tam and Sanar stepped closer. They began, all four of them, trudging toward the transformed Goldmeadow.

They were less than halfway there when arrows began thudding into the ground around them, herding them closer together. Ashling blazed blue-bright and ominous. Maralen cried out in confusion. And the moon-eyed Shadowmoor residents of the city emerged from the brush and bushes all around them, spears and knives in their hands, the transformed Brigid at the front of their pack.

“We can’t fight them, or we will hurt them,” said Ashling, still blazing. “What do we do?”

“We find out where they’re taking us,” said Sanar.

The kithkin surrounded them, herding them deeper into Shadowmoor, past the city, which loomed and lurked at the same time, bristling with defenses, dangerous in stillness. The ground was a pool of inky dark, spattered with glowing fungus and flowers, like the night sky above and below at once. They walked on and were still walking when Tam paused and shivered.

“What?” asked Maralen.

“It just ... It feels like hot tea on cold nights,” she said. “Like when you know the frost is coming, but you have a good book and a hot fire. Why does it feel like that?”

“It felt like that in the cave,” said Sanar.

Maralen wasn't looking at them anymore. She was looking behind them, into the distance. "I know how," she said.

They turned, all of them, even the kithkin, and saw Isilu walking serenely toward them, a small green speck flitting in front of the beast's moon-crowned head. Maralen gasped, clapping her hands over her mouth.

"What?" asked Ashling.

"That's ... I know that faerie," she said. "That's—"

"That's the faerie I saw in the trees back at school!" said Sanar.

"—My brother," finished Maralen. "I-I only know him in his Shadowmoor form, from Oona's memories, but I *know him*."

"Shadowmoor tells lies," said Ashling warningly. "He may not be who you believe he is."

But Isilu was coming, and the Shadowmoor kithkin were frozen in reverent awe. Tam grabbed Maralen's sleeve.

"We can run," she said. "While they're distracted. Please, let's run."

On the horizon, where the edge of the forest met the fields, a line of torches appeared.

"The elves," said Maralen.

"Elves?" demanded Brigid. "In *our* fields? You strangers are bad enough. We won't allow it."

The kithkin began to cluster together, shaking their spears and notching their bows as they eyed the torch-line. And all the while, Isilu came closer, the living night descending on the drowning dregs of day.