

# Episode 6: Full of Hateful Fantasies

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From set *Lorwyn Eclipsed*

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Inevitable as the dawn, Isilu and the circling faerie Maralen insisted was her brother drew closer, while the elves matched their advance, marching along the line of the horizon like an omen of apocalypse. The night-touched kithkin continued to ready their weapons and adjust their positions, forming a tight-linked wall of bristling arrows and readied knives.



Art by: Ron Spencer

“See how they stand?” asked Ashling, voice low and aimed toward Tam. “On the lee side of the night, fear of the unusual serves them well. They move as one, because they treat the outside world as a single enemy. Kithkin are always community-oriented but never so well-united by day.”

Tam swallowed, eyes flicking to the line of torches coming ever closer. “Is this really the right time to lecture me about night and day?” she asked.

“Any time the world provides a clear example is the right time to point it out,” said Ashling. “The night falls, the kithkin unite. The day dawns, the elves believe only they can see clearly in the sunlight. Our changes reveal other parts of who we are, but those parts are merely different, not greater or lesser.”

Isilu stalked closer, the trailing tangle of its wings dragging on the ground and cutting a furrow in the soil, which filled at once with glowing moonflowers and sparkling starlight buttons in a rainbow array of colors. The faerie left off circling the beast's head to flit down and fly a wide loop around Maralen's. She laughed, a tight, half-choked sound, and held her hands out toward the tiny figure. Not even the approaching danger could dim her joy in the moment.

"Brother!" she cried. "You came home!"

The faerie frowned and flitted back to Isilu, touching the great beast's neck with one hand and hovering there, keeping pace as the night elemental drew closer and closer to the small group. Ashling stepped in front of the two students, blue fire blazing skyward, and looked gravely up at Isilu.

He lowered his head to the burning rimekin, and while he had no visible nostrils, the sound of him sniffing her was audible from several feet away. Her flames flickered as he snorted, an exhale of air that smelled like the first frost of winter, like hot cider and newly fallen leaves. Somehow, there was no contradiction in those scents; they were part and parcel of the night elemental's existence, filtered through the mortal senses of the people looking up at him.

Ashling blazed even brighter as Isilu raised his head and looked back at the advancing legion of elves, then began circling the small group formed by the kithkin, Maralen, and her allies. Fog rose up from the flower-filled furrows its tail was leaving in its wake, curling in the air, and he snarled, attention on the elves. Sanar squeaked, moving to stand behind Tam.

"It's protecting us," said Tam, awed and confused. "It wants to keep us safe. But we're not from here. It shouldn't care about us."

"Night is flawed," said Ashling, picking up a spear dropped by one of the circling kithkin. "So is day. Both can care for things outside their normal boundaries."

Tam looked uncomfortable, moving to position herself closer to Maralen. Sanar followed, not wanting to be left exposed.

Maralen, meanwhile, seemed to have almost forgotten about the danger they were all in; she had eyes only for the little gold-flecked green faerie. "Brother!" she called. "Come down! Come back to me!"

Sanar frowned. "How can your brother be the size of my hand?"

"My brother was made to be a shapeshifter like Oona herself. The blue faerie that accompanied us was his Lorwyn self, and unfamiliar to me. Now we stand within Shadowmoor, and I can see the truth of him through his skin. I know him. He *must* know me. I just don't understand why he's staying so far away."

"Maybe this isn't the time?" said Sanar, voice tight. "They're *coming*."

The long line of elves was marching closer. Only about half of them were visibly carrying weapons; the other half carried torches topped in reliquaries of briar and driftwood that contained strangely brilliant flames, like they had somehow caged shafts of sunlight. Looking closely revealed humanoid shapes twisting within the flames, pressing their hands against the edges of the halo as they struggled to escape. Ashling hissed a curse under her breath.

"Sunlight elementals," she said. "Chained and captive and carried into night. They're meant to be free, not kept as trinkets to defend against the dark. This is ... It's indecent. How dare they?"

"Have you ever known the elves of Lorwyn to be guided by the needs of anyone else?" asked Maralen. "Oona cast me as one of their number for a reason. Maralen of the Mornsong was as selfish and shortsighted as the rest of them. She would have been a perfect mask for her maker."

“Too bad for Oona that you learned to be your own person.”

“Yes, and the one who gave me my best example has returned, if he would just *come down here* already.” Maralen shot a poisonous look at the faerie who circled Isilu, wings beating frantically. “Maybe he doesn’t recognize me. I would have been much smaller the last time he saw me.”

“That happens with goblin babies, too,” said Sanar. “I mean, we don’t normally turn into elves or anything, but we get bigger as we age.”

The elves were marching closer. Ashling’s flames leapt high and bright.

“Can we argue about this later?” she asked. “Try not to get stabbed.”

Tam squeaked.

The elves seemed to draw back for a long moment like a held breath, their spears and swords bristling. Then, with a peal of silvered bells, they surged forward and joined the battle.

The elves struck as individuals, and the kithkin moved as one. Those who carried bows pulled back their bowstrings, drawing them tight, and loosed arrows on the arms and shoulders of the elves who carried the captive-sunlight reliquaries. Not every missile struck home, but enough did, causing their targets to flinch, recoil, and drop what they were holding. The falling reliquaries didn’t ignite the grass around them: Instead, the captive figures in their flames uncurled and sprang into the air, laughing. They bowed to Isilu in obvious deference, then shot off toward the demarcation between day and night, returning themselves to the sunlit lands.



Art by: Jabari Weathers

The elves who had been separated from their reliquaries gasped and changed, flesh and bone melting smoothly into their Shadowmoor selves. They straightened, horns grown longer and covered in tiny thorns, looking in horror at the battle around them. Some turned to flee, only to find their former allies turning against them.

The Shadowmoor elves took up arms in self-defense, further splintering and slowing the advance of the elven forces, but still they continued to come, their armor deflecting kithkin arrows and their swords

in hand as they approached. Isilu circled Maralen and the students, bellowing a warning note into the night, and the air grew cold around them, bitter and unforgiving.

The faerie that Maralen claimed was her brother flew abruptly down and yanked her hair, hard enough that she yelped and tried to pull her head away. The motion caused her to turn enough to see the small detachment of elves that had circled around the field and now approached them from behind. She shrieked a warning as the faerie darted away again, releasing her hair.

There were six of them, all heavily armed, still draped in veils of artificial day by the sunlight elementals that three among their number carried as their captives. The reliquaries prevented those elves from drawing bows, but their swords could be equally effective, especially at close range, and the other three were unencumbered.

One of the elves drew back his bowstring, arrow already notched and ready to fly. Before he could release, a fist-sized rock smacked into his temple, and the arrow flew skyward, hitting no one. The other elves turned, eyes narrowed as they searched for the source of the stone. What they found was Sanar, standing in front of Maralen and Tam, hands balled into fists by his sides, shoulders hunched, breathing hard as he glared at them.

“Back off,” he snarled. “I don’t understand what’s going on here, or why it’s happening, and maybe you’re the good guys, but you’re pointing arrows at me and at my friends and so I don’t really *care* who the good guys are, because we’re not the bad guys. Leave us alone. We’re not a part of all this. We just want to go *home*.”

He picked up another rock, slinging it hard at the elf next to the one with the bow. His aim was remarkably good. This rock slammed into the elf’s wrist, causing her hand to spasm open. The reliquary she’d been holding fell to the ground.

The elf with the bow reacted immediately, notching another arrow as he fled to the safety of his peers. The elf who had just dropped her reliquary stared at it, the darkness washing over her, then bent forward with a gasp, horns and clothing changing, skin taking on a moon-cool pallor as Shadowmoor took her for its own.

She was visibly confused when she straightened, looking frantically around and finding no clear means of escape. Drawing her sword, she fell into a defensive posture, back to the kithkin, whom she clearly saw as the lesser threat. Brigid seemed to take her defection as a cue, because the kithkin warrior roared and charged the remaining elves, the other kithkin close behind her. Sanar kept throwing rocks while Ashling flung balls of blue-rimed flame, hands smoking with the heat of her assault. Tam whipped around, eyes flashing yellow as she stunned an archer.

Maralen fell back, pressing her shoulders against Isilu’s leg, seeking some shelter from the chaos. She didn’t have any weapons. She couldn’t defend herself unless she wanted to put her head down and charge the elves, attempting to gore them with her horns before they could impale her. The faerie continued to circle out of reach above her, wings beating frantically.

The sound of swords clashing and fighters groaning or gasping in pain was overwhelming. Ashling shouted something, the battle stealing her words away. Half of the kithkin were still aiming at the advancing force, while the rest fought the ones who had circled around, supported by Maralen’s allies. The second group was smaller but more pressing, since they were so close.

Tam shrieked and fell silent. Sanar slung two more stones, throwing them with all the force he had to spare, before glancing over his shoulder to find her crumpled and unmoving on the ground, an arrow protruding from her abdomen. Even her tendrilled hair was motionless, hanging limp around her head.

He wailed and ran for her, tripping over a fallen elf in the process. He grabbed the elf's sword, swinging it wildly as he spun back toward his fallen classmate.

Everything was chaos, loud and hectic and bloody. Even the air smelled red, iron-bright and awful. Sanar ran, ducking between Isilu's legs and racing for the sheltering Maralen. He almost ran right into the new figure that had appeared from beneath the night elemental and froze in terror at the sight.

There was no way Maralen could have heard him coming, his footfalls swallowed by the battle. The faerie stopped circling overhead, turning to watch as Rhys approached her. The elven hunter had a wickedly curved dagger in one hand, the silvery metal gleaming a sickly green with the poison he had spread across it.

When he was too close for her to run, he raised his voice. "Oona," he said. "I made your heir a promise. I made *my friend* a promise. This ends now. The cycle is more important than my care for Maralen."

She turned to look at him, eyes wide and terrified, but didn't run, and as he advanced, she didn't raise her hands to stop him.

It wasn't until he was close enough to strike that she spoke, whispering, "Rhys, please. It isn't what you think."

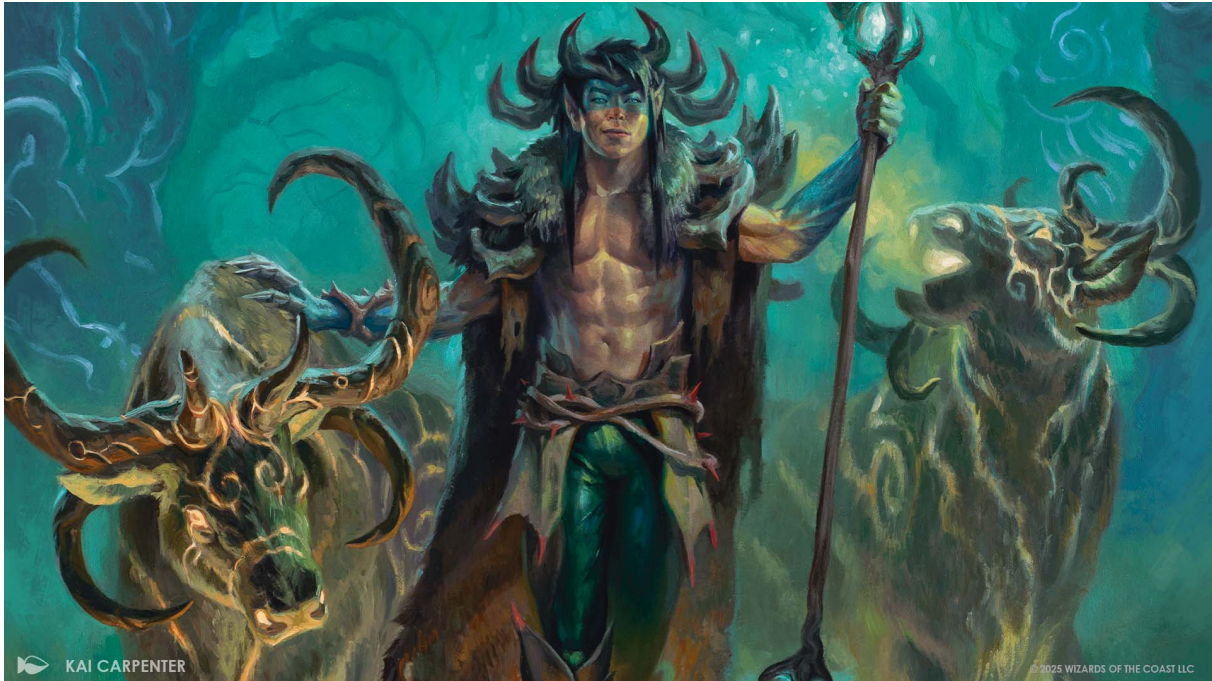
"Our world matters more than you, Oona," he said and brought the dagger down.

He didn't cut deeply—just a narrow slice across her arm—but that was enough. She sighed, a sound like all the winds of the world running out, and sagged as the wound bled petals in place of blood, her knees going weak and dropping her to the bloodied ground. Rhys stepped back as she fell, blinking rapidly, like a veil had been removed from his eyes.

"You didn't fight," he whispered. "You didn't fight, or try to control me, or promise me riches beyond counting. You didn't—you weren't—"

"Oona is dead. Maralen was my *sister*," snarled the faerie that had hovered above, dropping out of the air fast and hard and landing between Rhys and the fallen Maralen. He changed as he descended, growing larger, taller than any elf of Lorwyn or Shadowmoor, taller than the still-flickering Ashling. His wings vanished as he landed, leaving him grounded and glaring at Rhys, fury coming off him in waves.

His height would have made him imposing even without his broad shoulders and sharp features. His ears were pointed, and at first he seemed to be an elf, though the horns atop his head were in fact some sort of twisted antler-crown. Perhaps most striking of all, his forearms were the blue of a frozen winter lake, as was the top half of his face.



Art by: Kai Carpenter

His clothing was almost tattered, leaving his chest and arms bared, but the remains of fur and velvet covered his legs and back, making him look more like a prince in exile than a stranger who had been a faerie only a moment before. He looked down at the motionless Maralen, watching her long enough to see that she was still breathing, even if her breath was strained, before he began advancing on the horrified Rhys.

“Do you know me?” he demanded, and his voice was judgment.

“Maralen has no brother,” said Rhys coolly, falling into a defensive stance. He was clearly ready to fight and die if that was what came next.

“Except she does, and I know him,” said Sanar.

Both men turned. Sanar was crouching next to Tam, one arm suddenly bare. He had ripped the sleeve off his jumpsuit and packed it around her wound, careful not to jostle the arrow too much. He hadn’t removed it. Keeping it in place meant it could serve as a cork, keeping most of her blood safely trapped inside her body. The kithkin and elves were still fighting around him, but he seemed to have shut them out in his rush to save his friend. Only the small pile of rocks in front of him betrayed how worried he still was.

“How?” asked the man.

“I don’t know your name, I mean, but I know who you are, because nothing else makes any sense,” said Sanar. “You’re Maralen’s brother, the one who left before she was Maralen. The one the bad queen made and threw away. Now can we stop talking and *do* something? Tam’s hurt, real bad. I’m not in Witherbloom. I don’t know how to fix her ...”

The man smiled a thin, terrible smile, attention returning to Rhys. “Yes, I am that wretched wanderer of the night. Oona made me to rule Shadowmoor, knowing she would never grant us our independence. Once I understood that also, I left and forswore the idea of family.” He said the word like it tasted somehow foul. “I had no sisters then, and no intention to ever return. So imagine my dismay when I met a wanderer who told me tales of my own homeland, of Oona’s fall and Shadowmoor resurgent.

Then I got here and found my mother right where I had left her ... or so I thought. The woman you call Maralen looked enough like Oona that I believed her to be Oona herself, reborn in an elf's guise."

"Um, Tam—" began Sanar.

"Quiet, student," snapped the returned prince, eyes still on Rhys. "I, who had never known my sister, saw through her masks and realized she was not Oona returned. You, who claimed to be her friend, couldn't see half as much. You creatures of Lorwyn are so prone to being blinded by the light."

"Tam is *dying*," said Sanar loudly.

"My sister—my family—dies more swiftly." This time the word "family" was gentler, more puzzled. "If I talk to ease her passing, I will be forgiven. Your friend has venom in her veins and hours yet before her own aurora comes. He," and he gestured sharply to Rhys, "needs to listen. He owes me this. He owes us *both*."

"So save Maralen!"

"I can't," said the prince wearily. "His knife was coated in moonglow. The deadliest poison known to the daylight paths of Lorwyn. He's sealed her fate."

"I thought ... she was ... I promised her I would send her to peace before she could become her mother reborn!" protested Rhys.

"We were both mistaken," said the prince. "I thought she was Oona, so I taunted and tormented her, and when that didn't work, I brought outsiders to sow chaos. And you know what she did? She ran. She fled for her world's sake, for the cycle's sake, and she proved herself to have never been our mother at all."

"She was always Maralen," said Rhys, with dawning horror. "You convinced her that Oona was returning, and she convinced me without intending to, until I raised arms against her! This is your fault as much as my own!"

The prince looked at him sadly. Before he could say anything, an elf broke through the ring of kithkin and charged forward, a sword in one hand, a reliquary in the other. He charged at the prince, who waited for him to get close, then reached out and grabbed his wrist, twisting it hard until he dropped his sword to the ground.

As he did, the light of his sunlight-fueled reliquary fell across the prince, who rippled and changed once more, cold blue face and hands turning the bright blue of a summer sky. His face grew more pointed and his lips thinner, the weight of old sorrows falling across his shoulders.

When he spoke, his voice was higher in timbre and richer in cruelty. "You have no part in this anymore," he informed the elf and reached out to take the reliquary with one hand while he flicked the fingers of the other. The elf was gone. The elk that stood in his place looked bewildered—or as bewildered as a prey animal can look—then turned and ran away, hooves churning at the night-soaked ground.

"There's not much difference between an elf of this land and an elk," said the black-haired man who was not a prince at all, turning his attention back to Rhys. "I always found that amusing. But you—I don't find you amusing in either form. She trusted you. She cared for you. There was no treachery left in her, and you killed her. You *betrayed* her."

"I did what she asked of me."

On the ground, Maralen was still breathing, but only shallowly; the rootlike, bruise-purple marks of moonglow snaked out from her injury, marking the path of the poison through her veins. Sanar

shrieked something unintelligible and chucked another rock at an encroaching elf, who responded by backing up and firing an arrow at him.

Abruptly, the Lorwyn-draped prince of Shadowmoor was there, standing between the goblin and the elves. “No,” he said sharply, voice less forgiving than it had been when he wore the night on his sleeve. The remaining elves of this detachment were gone, replaced by puzzled rabbits who twitched their ears and shook their heads before they turned and ran off into the meadows.

The man tossed the reliquary aside as he reached out to rest a hand against Isilu’s flank, sighing in evident relief as the darkness flowed over him. He was Shadowmoor’s prince, not Lorwyn’s exile, when he turned back toward Rhys. “Night and day are two halves of the same whole, as my sister and I are meant to be,” he said. “She serves Lorwyn, and I serve Shadowmoor. By raising arms against the day, you raise them against the night.”

“I only did as she asked me,” said Rhys, voice gone small.

The prince advanced.

Rhys stepped back.

Maralen and Tam continued to die.

What came next seemed inevitable; they were alone in a field, no medical aid nearby, and a line of elves still stretched across the hills. Their numbers had been denuded by the fighting kithkin, but they still numbered enough to stop any efforts at escape. Then a loud roar split the night, echoing off the hills and trees alike. All of them who were capable of movement turned toward the sound, even Sanar and the night elemental. As they watched, a large white figure vaulted over the line of elves, a smaller, darker figure cradled close to it, and ran toward them across the field.

Whoever—or whatever—it was, it moved quickly, bipedal and agile, dodging arrows in the air and holes in the ground with equal ease, until it rounded Isilu’s flank and came skidding to a stop in front of the small group. The figure became clear as a white-furred leonin, carrying Kirol cradled close against his chest.

The vampire sat up as the leonin stopped running, a wide grin splitting their face and showing the tips of their pointed cuspid teeth. “Sanar!” they cried. “Oh, I never expected to be this glad to see you.”

“Kirol?” Sanar stood. “Is that you?”

“It’s me,” said Kirol. “This is Ajani. He’s a friend of Professor Vess’s.” They patted the white leonin on the arm, not seeming to notice his wince at being called Professor Vess’s friend. “You can put me down now,” they added.

Ajani nodded and lowered them to their feet. Kirol stretched, then hurried over to Sanar, seeming to notice the fallen Tam for the first time.

“Tam?” they asked. “Sanar, what happened? And where’s Abigale?”

“She-she fell in the river,” said Sanar. “She’s gone. And an elf shot Tam with an arrow. I remembered enough from my first aid classes not to take it out, but she needs medical care or she’s not going to be all right. Kirol, I’m afraid she might ... I think she’s going to ...” He stopped then, ear-tips quivering with the fear he was trying so hard to contain. Below him, Tam muttered incoherently. Kirol thought she might be counting. Were those—prime numbers?

“I met the local elves,” said Kirol grimly. “I don’t have any trouble believing that they’d shoot Tam with an arrow, or any of us. How did you get away?”

“We didn’t,” said Ashling, approaching the newcomers. “Shadowmoor’s prince is returned to us, and he turned them into beasts before driving them away.”

“Shadowmoor’s prince?” asked Ajani. He looked toward Rhys and the prince. Ajani squinted at him. “I don’t know you, but you look familiar.”

“The young vampire mentioned a ‘Professor Vess’?” said the prince. “Would that be Liliana, by any chance?”

“Yes,” said Ajani, sounding surprised. “How do you ...?”

“She and I both walked the planes at the same time. She knows me as Oko. I was Oona’s first attempt at an heir. I returned for Shadowmoor’s sake, and was reminded that I had a sister.” He gestured toward the motionless Maralen, then looked toward Rhys. “If you’ve killed her before I could know her worth, I’ll kill you in kind.”

“What happened to her?” asked Ajani.

“I was mistaken. I thought she was our enemy, and I struck her,” said Rhys. “Moonglove’s poison flows through her now, and it has no cure.”

“Moonglove,” said Kirol, voice going speculative. “Is that like dawnglove?”

“Yes,” said Rhys with surprise. “Moonglove grows only in Lorwyn. It makes the deadliest poison known. Dawnglove grows only in Shadowmoor. It can be used as a poison, but it has curative properties as well and can be used to mend what’s been broken. The elves of Shadowmoor guard it jealously. How do you know of it?”

“I was abducted by a hunter Lluwen who took me to see someone named Morcant who went by the title of ‘high perfect,’ despite being a massive jerk. They took me to pick dawnglove for them so they could use it to make a poison that would kill the big guy here.” They gestured toward Isilu, who snorted and pawed at the ground in evident disgust. “It’s supposed to destroy night stuff. Shadowmoor stuff, I guess? But during Introduction to Magibotanical Environments back at school, they taught that most magical poisons have equal and opposite counters that can be used to neutralize their effects. Non-magical poisons don’t always work that way, but I saw the dawnglove, and let me tell you, that plant is *magical*.”

Oko’s head whipped around, eyes narrowing as he focused on Rhys. “Is the vampire right?” he asked.

“My name is Kirol, and yes, I’m right,” said Kirol.

“They ... might be,” said Rhys carefully. “I don’t know enough about dawnglove to be sure one way or the other.”

“But there’s a chance.” Oko turned to Kirol. “Where did you see this dawnglove?”

“In a grove the elves led me to,” they said. “I picked it and gave it to Perfect Morcant before Ajani got me out of there. I’m assuming she’s behind this fight. She’ll want to use it as cover for her attack on the night elemental.”

“Then I will find her. Don’t let my sister die before I return,” Oko said and jumped into the air, becoming a small faerie once again. He circled the group once, then flew away, rapidly dwindling out of sight.

Ajani watched him go, then moved to kneel next to Tam, pressing a hand above the wound in her abdomen. His fingers glowed white as he eased the arrow out of her flesh, and the injury began to knit up under his touch.

Kirol caught Sanar's eye and gestured for him to come closer. Sanar staggered to his feet and crept closer.

"What?" he asked, voice low.

"We need to find that dawnglove, or the lady's going to die, and I think we'll be in real trouble if that happens."

Sanar gave them a flat look. "What, we're not in trouble *now*?"

"We're in so much trouble. But if Maralen and Tam live, we might get out of it. Ajani's got Tam; we need to help Maralen. Come on." Kirol moved closer to Isilu. "What's the worst that could happen?"

Sanar managed not to roll his eyes but followed, leaving Ajani and Rhys to tend the injured as the two students circled Isilu's leg and slipped away into the night.

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Isilu was unquestionably the largest creature either of them had ever seen. Kirol thought it might be comparable to the Founder Dragons, but they had never seen one of those fabled beings, only heard about them. They circled the leg and crossed under the belly of the beast to the fields beyond, Sanar keeping close behind, a rock clutched in either hand.

"Who are we looking for?" asked Sanar.

"Perfect Morcant," murmured Kirol, keeping their head low as they scanned their surroundings. Clusters of elves and kithkin still fought out in the open, but a large portion of the line was still distant, watching without intervening. Kirol frowned. They had seen battles like this described in history books, and they usually meant a distraction was in process, something to keep eyes on the spectacle while an ambush played out elsewhere. They began moving toward Isilu's head.

It was no true surprise when they got there to find Perfect Morcant, sword in one hand and gleaming purple-gold vial in the other. The liquid inside glimmered like starlight wine, and Kirol hissed sharply through their teeth.

"The dawnglow," they said. "We have to get it away from her."

"Okay," Sanar said and threw a rock.

It spun as it flew, distorting the air around it, and slammed into Perfect Morcant's shoulder, causing her to whip around and snarl at the students. There were dead elves on the ground around her, kithkin arrows in their chests, but she was as yet unscathed. She stalked toward them through the muck, sword high.

"Little runaway," she snarled. "Found an eyeblight to do your fighting for you? I'll have you both to feed my garden, and this beast will die before the morning comes." She slashed at Kirol, who flinched away—only to freeze as a hand grabbed her wrist and stopped the swing. Morcant turned to blink at her assailant.

Lluwen, brow now crowned with thorn-peppered horns and asserting his Shadowmoor self, slammed his forehead into hers, hard enough that Kirol and Sanar heard bone crack. Morcant staggered back as far as she could while Lluwen held her wrist. He leaned over to pluck the vial from her hand.

"Catch," he said and threw the vial to Sanar.

Still not releasing Morcant, Lluwen leaned down and snatched something from her belt. She gasped, clearly disoriented, and tried to grab what he'd taken back. Lluwen released her, holding up what looked like a gourd attached to a leather cord.

As he ran to Kirol and Sanar, his horns returned to their daylight form, while Morcant's twisted and grew thorns. She dropped her sword, looking horrified, and turned to bow to Isilu, beginning to murmur apologies.

"I have no idea what just happened," said Sanar.

"We'll discuss it later," Kirol said and grabbed Lluwen's free hand in their own. "Come on, Lulu."

"Where are we going? Wait, *what* did you just call me?" asked Lluwen.

Kirol grinned, almost manic. "We're going to see the queen," they said and ran back the way they had come, pulling Lluwen along, Sanar following the pair of them, all moving deeper into the night.