

TWELVE

“Is it true, Tonlin?”

The Council had requested a recess in the trial shortly after revealing the musician’s dynasty. Louve and Dorothe couldn’t believe their friend was descendant of Cansang’s First Man, as neither of them had heard anything of his lineage until now. But now it all made sense - why Tonlin had kept from them that he had run away from his home and his concern for his parents. The girls looked on him now as a stranger, as royalty among peasants.

“No!”, he blurted out, almost shouting and then quickly rectifying is answer. “Yes. Sort of. My father is Cansang’s Divine, but I didn’t mean for Torrick to die. He attacked first!” Tonlin yelled, desperation in his voice. He shuffled his feet on the marble floor of the dungeon, where they had been escorted back to while the Council talked amongst themselves, allotting the trio to address the issue of their Bard’s identity themselves. *“But so what? It doesn’t change anything. I’m still me. I still fought gremlins beside you two, and I’d do it again.”*

“So...” Dorothe crossed the small room, staring directly at Tonlin, though he tried to avoid her gaze. *“Was this your plan all along? To gather the crystals to find a way to remove the curse on your family? That’s why you were in Regnarsvar during the Festival, isn’t it?”*

He met her eyes with his, only for a moment before his gaze fell to the floor again.

“... I’m sorry, Dorothe. I’ve used you.”

As if the notion that the boy pitied her was the most upsetting thing about her day, Dorothe closed her eyes, attempting to block out her thoughts and his voice. Her expression showed anger, and though Dorothe wanted to direct it at Tonlin’s selfish motives, at his unwanted sympathy, she could not. When she opened her eyes again, Louve placed her arms around Tonlin, knowing very well what it was like to lose parents. Though she was raised oblivious to their existence, when their deaths were revealed, it was like they were ripped from her before she had a chance to know or love them.

“Don’t be sorry. It’s not your fault.” Dorothe reasoned that the mere thought she kept in the back of her head that perhaps Dromme and Rasmus and Skjold most of all could be brought back at the reformation of Sjel was just as selfish as Tonlin’s usage of the girl.

Tonlin brushed Louve off of himself, not wanting to be comforted. *“The curse that King Reddus II placed on my bloodline was a plague. At first, it just seemed like an ordinary illness in my great, great, great, great, great grandmother. A fever, sweating, cramping... Gradually it presented with discoloration and hot and cold flashes in her neice and nephew. Further down the bloodline, boils appeared and gangrene afflicted my great, great uncle’s fingers and toes, finally identifying this disease as a plague. He made the choice to move our family away from Cansang, founding the small town of Long Fjord.”*

“Soon the town grew, despite the signs that the plague could be spread to others. Soon the disease overtook the town and overwhelmed the Clerics who were sent to heal the afflicted. Father Darrius was among them.”

Dorothe knew of the plague, being that her mother had died in Long Fjord soon after giving birth to her, resulting in her placement at the Chapel of the Clerics. But it wasn't the mention of the plague that caused her to look to Louve, who had the same confused expression she did.

“But wasn't Darrius the first Necromancer?”

Tonlin shook his head.

“That's a lie. He discovered the first Necromancer and was most likely used as a scapegoat, excommunicated from the church publicly to make sure that people would buy into the idea that the Necromancer was taken care of. The Council knew that sending Darrius to Long Fjord was a death sentence. He died when I was only a child. Father Darrius was a good man.”

Louve began to doubt the authenticity of the books she grew up researching. Her mouth fell open as she remembered where it was that the Surclerics Facil and Tarcel were mentioned in her studies.

“Blessed Dyr... I knew the twins' names from somewhere and I just recalled where!” The Druid flailed her arms dramatically, taking to pacing about the room. Dorothe and Tonlin watched the blonde, waiting for the second part of Louve's exclamation. When none came, the Lordless girl grasped her companion's shoulders in an endeavor to calm and focus her.

“Breathe, Louve. What are you talking about?”

“Oh! Right.” The Druid gave a sheepish smile, embarrassed at her own absentmindedness. *“Their names were in a book detailing the death of the Lord Dromme from the perspective of some of the witnesses there. They were there!”*

“What...? The twins were there... as children?” Tonlin scratched his scalp.

“No, they were members of the Council then too! They must've been about our age, because it described them perfectly as they appear now. That's why they seemed so familiar... I just couldn't place it.”

“That's impossible. They don't look any older than we are. That makes them somewhere in their 40s, maybe even 50s.” The musician was in disbelief.

“Is it impossible...?” Dorothe had already pieced it together, since before the Council had intercepted them in Aften. These details only made the idea solid. *“Facil is the Necromancer. I fought him in Bretta's barn. He was the one Darrius discovered, and that's why he and his sister haven't aged in 20 years. Gods, it all makes sense!”* It was the Lordless girl's turn to take to pacing now.

“But why would they stop us from gathering the shards?” Tonlin asked.

“I'm not sure. Perhaps they want the shards for themselves, or they know the Gods would disapprove of their Necromancy - that is, if both of them are Necromancers. So far I only know of Facil, but if they were

both present at Dromme's death, they must both be." Dorothe took a long inhale, feeling as if a great weight was suddenly placed upon her. "... *How are we supposed to beat them? How do we get back the shards?*"

The sounds of panic and fright echoed from outside of their cold cell, causing Louve and Tonlin to race to the tiny window, trying to get a sense of what was happening out there. All that the barred slot allowed them to view was the building across the walkway and some of the sky. The yells were definitely coming from toward the center of the capital city, they could tell. The two turned to Dorothe, who was standing at the end of the iron-based walls, craning her neck to see if any of the guards would be coming for them. The marble door stayed shut.

"Psst..."

They all three whirled back around to inspect the hiss coming from the window, finding a keyring dangling between the bars from pale fingers. Louve looked to Tonlin, who was already stepping forward to claim them. The hand retracted and nothing else was heard while the young man fiddled with the silvery tools. He bent his arm around the outside of their cage and began to concentrate his efforts to find which key was their freedom through a process of elimination.

"*Who's out there?*" Dorothe demanded, though not unappreciative of the assistance. When there was no answer, she approached the window to listen for any sign that their savior was still around. All she could hear was the continuing commotion coming from the stadium.

"*Got it!*" Tonlin exclaimed as the iron-bar door swung noisily outward, allowing them passage from their confinement. He and Louve hastily left the cell, the Lordless girl not quite sure what to make of it all just yet. "*I'll see if the front door is locked*", the male volunteered, happily jingling the keyring on his finger, eyeballing the keyhole before him.

"*I don't like this... at all.*" Dorothe couldn't quite trust that they weren't being set up for something, and with the unknown situation outside, she felt they were about to walk into danger's waiting maw. But the pair ignored her sense of foreboding and the door swung open with ease, without Tonlin's keys. On the other side of the iron slab, two familiar faces peered back at the trio.

"*Selene...? Donovan?*" Louve gaped at the two guild leaders, unsure if her eyes were deceiving her.

The Surthief and the Surfighter were definitely present, as Selene lifted her hand to the pair gawking at the doorway, greeting them fondly.

"*What are you two doing in Voluundrun?*" The Lordless girl was thankful for having friends in high places, but with the content of the trials, she couldn't be sure they still had faith in her. "*What's going on out here?*"

"*We're here to save you, of course*", Selene's toothy grin gave Dorothe some reassurance. "*Get your things and let's get out of here!*"

"*The Council had sent pigeons out to all the guild leaders, informing us of the trial, and Torrick's death. They warned us against any future plots to collect the shards, and that yours wasn't in earnest.*" Donovan towered over the trio as they reclaimed their possessions from the other room, his words not entirely comforting. "*Let's walk and talk before someone discovers your disappearance too soon.*"

Dorothe buckled her plate armor back over her leather tunic, happy to oblige. Yet, she found some things still missing. *"Wait! They've still got our map, the totem, and the shards! We have to get them back!"*

"Don't worry. We have a plan." Donovan ushered them out of the marble building and around a corner, while Selene helped to fill the trio in.

"After the letters came, I sent a pigeon to Donny--"

"Donovan", the Surfighter corrected, his quiver jostling on his back as they moved, this time accompanied by a steel bow that was strung over a shoulder.

"-- Since I knew you guys were headed that way. We both agreed there was something fishy about this whole thing. A lot of details were excluded from the Council's letters, like why they would want to keep someone from repiecing Sjel. The point of the shards was to bring the guilds together when turmoil forces us apart." Selene gave Donovan a sympathetic glance, knowing the Lord Rasmus had died a week prior.

In only a few days, the Fighters had already begun to face segregation in the same way the Bard and the Paladin had. When the guilds were disbanded by the Council, no one stepped forward to protest the changes. The citizens carried on quietly, while guild members mourned the loss of their homes and their families in silence. Though the Thieves' Hole was unaffected, Selene was a firm believer in the brotherhood of the guilds. She would not see this change go unfought.

"We also spoke with one of your Surpaladins", Donovan added. *"He vouched for your credibility."*

Dorothe breathed a sigh of relief. It had been too long since she had thought of anyone back in Regnarvar. Her mind wandered through thoughts of how her fellow lordless guild mates were faring and Mother Sigrid's well-being. The guild leaders led the group around the corner toward the towering Chapel of the Clerics, and the girl paused a moment.

"Wait, what are we doing here?"

"See, the thing is, Donny and I--", Selene was cut off again.

"Donovan."

"-- We figured if anyone could reform the guilds and find a way to save the remaining Lords... well, it should be a Paladin, a Bard, and a Druid."

"We're getting you those shards back and sending you off to finish the job." Donovan shoved the Chapel door open, standing aside to allow the others through before him.

The ground floor of the Chapel was all but clear of Clerics, making Dorothe wonder what exactly was going on outside that required their attendance. They rushed to the back of the chamber, spotting a flight of stairs that would take them up to the second and third floors. Their steps echoed with each stone slab they climbed.

"But we really did kill the Surdruid, you know..." Tonlin couldn't let the guild leaders continue to help them under false pretenses. The trio weren't as free of crime as they wished to be, and possibly still not worthy of carrying the shards.

"Oh, we know." Selene smirked.

"We just don't care." Donovan led them into the third floor, which was usually governed by the child prodigies that were accepted into the Chapel. There were none wandering the halls, however, and they were free to move to the other side of the floor. *"He was a piece of shit anyway."*

"You have no idea", Louve frowned.

"I doubt the Council would put the shards with the children." Tonlin suspected they had taken a wrong turn somewhere. *"What are we doing up here?"*

"I know." Dorothe pointed toward the wall opposite where they had surfaced from the stairway. *"When they took us up the spiral staircase, I thought some of the walls looked like hidden doorways, access to the other floors. This must be the doorway here."*

"Yeah, that's correct." Donovan kept a look out while Selene ushered the trio toward the wall.

"But how did you know it was here?" The Lordless girl couldn't imagine the guild leaders ever being inside of the Chapel before. It seemed unlikely.

"I've been following the Council around for a few days." Selene stated the fact nonchalantly. *"They had no idea I was tagging along behind them."*

"... Nice." Tonlin laughed.

"Okay... now, how are we supposed to open it? We don't have any Clerics with us, do we?" Louve shook her head.

"Sure we do." Selene grabbed Dorothe's hand and waved it in front of the wall. The group was stunned as the rock grinded across the floor and slowly slid aside for them - but none more surprised than Dorothe.

"What... what did you do?" The dark-haired girl stammered, her mouth agape.

*"Not me - **you**."* Selene tugged on the girl's hand, pulling her into the spiral staircase with the others.

"But I don't understand. I'm not a Cleric, Selene."

*"I don't have time to explain it to you right now, Dorothe, but you **are**."*

Donovan nudged the girl to keep her moving. They only needed to climb one floor, up to the Council's Chamber. Louve and Tonlin kept hushed, following behind Donovan. Neither had any clue as to what was going on, but their goal was clear. They had to get the shards back.

"No... No, I'm a Paladin. Or, I was." The dark-haired girl couldn't keep her thoughts straight. Torrick had called her a Cleric too, hadn't he? But she left the Chapel before being accepted to the Clerichood. In fact, she never really showed any promise in the vocation. Not even after her moon day did she take an interest in her studies.

The stairwell ended in another hidden doorway that needed to be opened. Selene tugged Dorothe up to the wall.

"Go ahead."

"What?" The girl's mind was elsewhere.

"Open it up!"

"No."

Selene stared at her impatiently, a hand resting upon her hip.

"What do you mean 'no'? We're trying to help you!"

Dorothe knit her brow, her eyes searching the Surthief's for some answer. *"Then tell me why I can do this."* She waved her hand in front of the doorway in the same way Joel had. The wall rumbled as it moved aside. Donovan took the other two into the chamber and began the search.

"Not now." Selene followed suit and left the stairwell.

The girl was not happy with that response. She slowly walked into the room, anger beginning to eat at her. The group was spread throughout the room, inspecting every inch of the floor. Donovan called to Selene, conscious of how little time they had, that at any moment one of the Council members might burst through the stairwell and find them.

"I thought you followed these guys around! Shouldn't you know where the shards are?"

"They hid them before I got here. I didn't see where they were put." The Surthief stared at the carved pillars of the Lords.

"Of course. That would be too easy." Donovan disappeared behind the white marble counter, muttering to himself.

Dorothe couldn't concentrate on the shards anymore. She didn't *care* anymore. Selene knew something about her, but wouldn't share. That wasn't fair. She had a right to know! It was Dorothe's life, and if anyone should know who she was, it was her... right? She stamped a foot on the speckled granite floor, fury overwhelming her. Flames shot from her boot and crawled across the floor, a low wall that shot upward as it encircled Selene. The Surthief hadn't enough time to recognize what had happened in order to move out of the way.

"Dorothe!" Tonlin's attention was caught right away, and as he sprinted toward her, Louve and Donovan looked up to find Selene had been surrounded by a bright red-orange fire. *"What are you doing!?"*

"Tell me!" The girl ignored her friend's shouting. *"I'm tired of being a joke, of knowing the least about my life out of everyone around me! So tell me **who I am!**"* The flames climbed higher, and the Surthief couldn't be seen anymore.

"Dorothe Addams." Donovan held his hands up, hoping to convey to the girl that he had no intention of harming her. *"No one is laughing at you. You are not a joke."*

"Then why do I feel... so confused?!" Dorothe felt like she couldn't breathe again. Her temper had gotten the best of her again, and it was exhausting her. The girl didn't even realize she had started to cry out of frustration. She had so much pent up rage inside her, demanding to be let go of, but this was not the way she meant to do it.

"That's what I was talking about." Selene's voice came from behind a pillar of a hooded figure whose hands were steepled together in front of herself, presumably the Lord Osmus. Unharmred, she stepped out of the shadow as the flames died down. *"You are a Cleric, Dorothe. That was Cleric fire."*

"I don't understand!" The Lordless girl felt like she was missing something that was obvious to everyone else.

"I know you don't." Selene approached her, seemingly unworried that Dorothe might send flames at her again. *"You chose the Paladin vocation, but your blood is of the Clerics."*

"My mother was just a farmhand..."

"But your father was Abjorn Addams."

"What? Am I supposed to know who that is?" She was given a name, but Dorothe didn't know what to do with it. Still she felt like others knew more than her.

"Don't they teach you kids anything these days?" The Surfighter scoffed.

"Well, I wouldn't expect the Chapel would've said anything about it." Selene shook her head.

"About what!?" Dorothe shouted.

"Abjorn was one of the best damn Clerics there was", Donovan clasped the Surthief on the shoulder, smiling at the dark-haired girl. *"He was a member of the council, chosen to replace Darrius after he was sent away. For a good reason, too - he excelled in almost all aspects of the Clerichood. Why do you think they took you into the Chapel so early? Your father was the best of 'em. Abjorn was killed during the death of Dromme, right after your mother succumbed to the plague."*

A silence fell over the group as the Paladin soaked up this information. She didn't know how to feel, confused about who and what she was. Though some answers came with the name of her father, more questions came as a result. It seemed to explain her affinity for fire spells, but she felt no connection to Ejel, the Clerics' Lord.

"My father was killed, and my mother died of illness...", Dorothe's voice echoed in the decorative chamber. *"I apologise for my outburst, but if you knew who my father was all along, why did you not tell me until now?"*

“When you told me your name, I suspected you were Abjorn’s child”, Selene began. “I couldn’t be sure until I heard the Council mention his name when I was following them.”

“What!? What did they say?”

“Found them!” Louve pointed up to the carved marble pillar of one of the Gods. A woman towered over the group, depicted as a Cleric, with white robes covered in silver stars. The woman was stone-faced, staring off into what the Druid suspected was the Other-Realm. Her hands met at her waist, holding still a long marble sword. In the length of the blade, seven slots were made, yet only five were used. The shards were resting there inside the stonework - The Paladins’, the Thieves’, the Druids’, the Fighters’, and the Clerics’.

“Who is she?” Tonlin stood next to Louve, marveling at the marble woman.

“Manen, the Moon God.”

The answer came from neither Louve nor either of the guild leaders. Tarcel stood in the doorway from the staircase, her bright robes lightly spattered in dark red splotches on her left side. She stared up at the carved pillar, her expression blank. The group gathered together under Manen’s sword, readying to defend themselves.

“What did you do?” Dorothe asked of the blood-covered twin.

*“Me? I did nothing, as I always have. Enora believed you, however, when you **subtly** accused my brother of Necromancy. You were right, of course. I’m the one who healed his hand.”* The woman slowly began to approach the statue of Manen. *“Enora wouldn’t leave well enough alone, and Joel was convinced. The old codger got overexcited and made a scene. So Facil killed him - in front of the whole crowd. His temper gets the best of him at times, much in the same way yours does. Unfortunately, Enora was able to get away.”*

The Lordless girl looked to Selene and Donovan.

“How long had you been standing there?” The Surfighter demanded.

“Long enough.” Tarcel crossed the room, stopping just in front of the group. *“Move aside”,* she waved her hand, determined to close the distance between herself and the Moon God. When no one budged, she groaned and rolled her eyes, lifting her hand toward the large sword. Her fingers curled into a fist and gently began to pull back toward her hip. With it, the five shards loosened from the marble blade and gravitated toward the Councilwoman.

“Stop!” Tonlin yelled, rushing at the female twin and knocking her down to the speckled granite floor with a grunt. As Tarcel’s concentration was broken, the shards fell with her. They *plinked* as they hit, but were undamaged by the impact.

“Get off me, fool!” The Cleric shoved Tonlin aside with strength that was not fit for her small stature. He was flung a few feet away, back toward the group. *“You couldn’t have gotten the shards without my help. Now, I believe these all belong to you...”* The map and the Puck Demon’s totem were set on the floor beside Tarcel. *“Take them and run!”*

No one was quite sure they heard Tarcel correctly. Louve helped the musician up as the guild leaders began to collect the shards, depositing them into the Druid's shoulderbag for safe keeping.

"Why are you helping us...?" Dorothe wasn't convinced the twin's actions weren't some ploy to lure them into further trouble. She approached the woman, bending down to grasp the idol and take the map.

Tarcel shot a hand out to grip Dorothe's arm, her eyes furious.

*"I said **RUN!**"*