The siege for the capitol was over. The south had retreated to emplacements the north had build the previous year. The irony was not lost on them. Most Northerners liked to believe they were driven back, but the perhaps a few admitted that the southerners had simply lost the will to fight.

It was now the counter strike. Under the command of the new Supreme Commander, a new attack had commenced in the hinterlands. But for now the conflict was still far away.

For now, a wet wind blew through the pines, making them creak and groan. There were no animals around, and travelers walked briskly and avoided eye contact with one another, their bad weather cloaks drawn tightly around themselves. It was impossible to say that the conflict hadn't affected the north, even for those not close to the actual fighting.

And so, when others spied the pair sitting together by a large fire, tucked away on the side of the road, they walked straight by. And in doing so, they walked past an ageless immortal and a former First Sargent, arguably the finest blade master in the north.

Meridia lay back away from the fire, eyes running over Searcher.

The man looked uncomfortable for a moment but decided to return the gaze. Meridia was solidly built, and could never have been called beautiful, those who were forced to give a reason might point to her squarish jaw and snub nose, but there was an undeniable fierceness to her that one could not overlook.

Adding to this was a strange tattoo which snaked its way around her neck in the shape of a clenched fist, as if the tattoo itself were strangling her.

She currently wore heavy armor, a solid cast breast plate which gave way to overlapping plates around her torso, a strange and complicated affair seldom seen in the northern armory, as Searcher understood.

Her hair was white, and currently disheveled in the rain. She did not seem to be someone to care deeply about personal appearances, especially judging by some darker smudges on her armor, which Searcher supposed could have been blood. When she saw him looking at the spots, she casually wrapped her heavy cloak around her body, hiding them from view.

“Meridia you said your name was?” Searcher asked.

The female soldier took a swig from a canteen and wiped her mouth.

“Yes, and you're the legendary Searcher right?”

He nodded, expecting her to say more, but was taken aback when she neither instigated conversation nor looked like she expected Searcher to speak either.

The wind suddenly took up in a fierce blow, wiping the fire around.

Meridia scowled and crouched by it for a moment, blocking the wind. Then she added some dry wood she had been carrying in a skin.

“What are you doing?” Searcher asked.

She regarded him pointed south. “Orders. The attack on westfield is due.”

“This road doesn't head south. It heads west and east.” Searcher pointed out.

But Meridia shook her head. “Who said I was taking the road? I like to travel alone, and I can get there quicker by going through the hinterlands.”

“Do you know the way? A can draw a map. I've been back and forth through there many times. But I must admit, most stay to the road.”

“I'll take your map, just to be amiable, but I'm sure I have no need for it. There is nothing in those hills that can slow me.”

Her self assuredness surprised Searcher and he rocked back on his seat. He had been surprised when the woman had sat down by his fire uninvited, but now he was starting to understand the woman, he realized that brazen acts were probably common.

A part of his mind lit as he thought.

“Wait, you said Meridia right?”

She raised an eyebrow causing oilly sliver hair to tumble down from where it had been plastered. “For the second time, yes.”

Well then it all made sense. “Meridia of the First?”

“Formerly. Why do you ask?”

“I have met someone who knew your name. It was… Haverson maybe?”

For the first time, there was a moment of hesitation in her response, but Searcher could not tell which emotion ran through her at that time. The moment passed briefly, and her eyes focused back on him.

“Yes. I knew him.”

“And is that why you are here? Last I saw him, he headed to the far north.” Searcher said, pointing north west towards the distant coast. “But that must have been more than a year ago.”

“No, when I do not have orders, I simply go where I feel like going. I feel drawn sometimes to one place or another.”

It was Searcher's turn to raise his eyebrows. “I suppose I know the feeling.” He admitted.

“I'm sure you do. We are both here are we not, even as others walk blindly by?” She said, gesturing to a bedraggled traveler marching quickly past them, futility holding a cloak over their head. “The Lady of Secrets weaves her mysterious strands does she not?”

“You believe in her?” Searcher said, surprised. Most Northerners, especially as of late were becoming a cynical bunch, and the Lady of Secrets since time immemorial had never actually displayed any real proof of even existing. Needless to say she commanded very few follows as of late.

“I do.” Meridia said. “There is no other way to explain things. And what about you, immortal? Are you a follower?”

Searcher was again taken aback. Mostly people wanted to know about his journeys, his past lives and the people and places he'd seen, not his theological beliefs.

“I am not. Although I suppose its possible she exists. To be honest, if you were to forgive my heresy, I have been around long enough, even with my scattered memory, to not trust any of the gods. They don't exactly like me for some reason.”

“Perhaps its the immortality.”

“Perhaps.” Meridia responded.

“No, my only god is my feet, and my only prayers are to the future: when I will finally find what I am looking for.”

“How poetic.” Meridia said, sarcastically, crossing her feet. “And that has brought you here?” She asked.

“Yes,” he nodded, “I felt drawn, as I always do. This time the desert to the west...”

“But here first?” She said, leaning forward slightly. Her eyes periced, and she awated his response.

What was she getting at? “Yes. But simply because this is the easiest way of getting there. Plus I can travel through the Old Elven to get there. I always enjoyed that land.”

“Well then, willing or not, you are a follower of the Mysterious One, for our paths have intersected. It is as it should be, you know. Immortal or not, we all have our place among the threads.”

“Are you implying this meeting was predestined? I have never encountered anything I can remember that substantiates that hypothesis. Even the most powerful mages are unable to see the future.” Searcher said, scratching his head.

“Not predestined. Just in its own place. It fits among the threads.”

“Err, so you say...” Searcher said, trying to think of a reason to go back to his tent. His last encounter with a devote believer had not gone well. He had been force to run, like so many times in the past. Did the Unknowable One exist? Probably not.

A figure caught his eye along the road. The man was significant for some reason, stirring a memory deeper in Searcher's head than he could recall clearly.

Meridia looked up when the man got close, but made no move to stop him, even as he approached their fire. Two uninvited strangers in one day? What were the chances? Well, it was raining…

Wait. That was no stranger.

Haverson sat down in one swift motion and stared blankly at the other two. “Meridia. Searcher. Very interesting.” He said in a dead pan.