

The birth of the Lightners

A short story by
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One bright night, when the moon shone fully, bathing the mountains of an eerie silver pallor, Fhynaral, goddess of darkness, approached, uninvited, Rhotgar's forge, in the core of the highest mountains of the world. The God of Metals, busy moulding and shaping gold under his fiery hammer, did not notice his guest.

Slightly annoyed, the goddess raised her hand. A strong gust of wind blew into the forge making the red coals spring sparkles all over the place. Rhotgar swore and jumped three feet backward, patting his beard to extinguish the quickly spreading flames. Once he made sure he wasn't still on fire, he looked around to find the cause of the wind and he finally noticed the goddess. His eyes opened wide.

Fhynaral stood composed at the entrance of the forge. The moon beams did little to illuminate the silk dark dress she was wearing, but they shone brightly onto the numerous beautiful jewels she was wearing. She was tall, slender and pale. Her face was more beautiful than an elven princess and her body the most enticing. Her crooked smile alone could make every man tear their heart apart to give it to her as a gift.

"My lady!" Rhotgar sputtered, staggering. He quickly recomposed himself and frowned: "What bring you here, Fhynaral?"

The goddess made a few feather-like steps forward and smiled again. "I have come to watch in person the mystical craft that gives birth to such beautiful masterpieces" she pointed at her jewels. Her voice was soft and melodious, like of nightingales' songs, but also powerful and stirring.

The god almost dropped his jaw in surprise. He caught himself quickly, cleared his voice and stroked his beard, blushing. "Well, now. That's an exaggeration...".

"All over the world, every creature speaks of your art in shaping rock and metal, to create beautiful things" she interrupted him, drawing closer. "Would you give me the honour of letting me watch you work, brother?".

She seemed to become smaller, like a young lady admiring her master.

The dwarf's face was red. "They say so? Well, I guess, I've been refining my craft over the centuries. Sure, sister" he added noticing her waiting expression, "you can, hum, watch me work. I can show you how to create jewels".

Phynaral smiled enticingly and drew closer to his workstation. The dwarf reached for his hammer and resumed his work on the piece of gold, now cold. Feeling more confident, he became excited describing how he moulded metals.

The goddess rarely spoke, but looked at him the whole time like a child looks at her parents showing her something beautiful.

Hours went by, until Rhotgar, realising he had been talking the whole time, put down his hammer, turned to her and asked: "Maybe I can help you create something? Is there a jewel you would like to make, sister?".

"Actually" she regarded him admiringly, "there is something I would love to have your help with". She turned and gestured at the entrance of the forge.

Only then did the dwarf notice the creatures standing by the entrance, barely lit by the moon. Chained one to another by their hands and feet, seven goblins stood, as far as possible from the goddess, shivering in fear. Slightly shorter than the dwarf, the goblins were light-complexed and agile. Their skin was between green and grey and their face was twisted in a perpetual grin. Their ears were disproportionally big and pointed.

The god looked at them with disgust. "What have...".

"You see, my dear brother" she interrupted him. "My skills in creation are not as advanced as yours. I recall your mastery in creating the dwarves race" she pointed at him. "I would be most grateful, if you could help me shape these... creatures, into beautiful beings, that may worship me and show the world your crafting mastery".

The god's eyes went from his sister to the goblins in the corner, torn. "I don't think, hum, I don't know how... I mean, I thought you wanted to create jewels".

"Indeed, Rhotgar. Help me turn them into jewels. I want tall, strong and beautiful beings. I want them to harness my magic and be devoted to me. Let the world see once again the skills of the God of Metals".

The dwarf played with his sturdy hands, trying to disengage from the awkward situation. "Well, I mean. I guess I could, hum, show you how to, how to enhance their bodies and...".

"Thank you, brother!" she cheered, drawing even closer. Her exotic perfumes intoxicating him. Her body emanated a chillness that, even in the hot forge, made him shiver.

"Well, alright then. Bring them over. But I cannot make them devote to you, this is something they need to decide themselves".

The goddess face was stricken by an expression of anger, immediately replaced by a smile.

The arcane, holy process of life creation, which is only in the realm of the gods, began. For hours, the god worked on the new creatures, following the ever more demanding requests of the goddess of Darkness.

When the moon had set and dawn drew close, Rhotgar, sweating, was nearing the end of the process. He raised the hammer for the last time and was

about to struck it down to sigil the holy pact, when his sister raised a hand and, without uttering a word, froze the dwarf in that awkward position with her powerful magic.

"What the..." he tried to break free. She ignored him and focused on the new creatures. She drew her power and began chanting in a language never heard on the world, transferring her magic into them.

"Wait! Fhynaral, you can't force them to worship you!" the god tried to stop her, still stuck in that position, with his hands glued to the powerful hammer. "Damn you, stop it! Release me!".

He barely finished his sentence that the goddess finished chanting and released him. Losing his balance, the big dwarf tripped forward, his hammer hitting the creatures, casting the last, powerful blow that would sigil them.

The goddess, watching excitedly, was forced to close her eyes when a powerful white light illuminated the forge and struck the rock walls like a lightning.

Swearing in his beard, the dwarf righted himself, putting the forge to focus. He sighed in relief when he find out that the cave wasn't crashing on top of him, then looked down at the new creatures. He frowned.

There was no sign of the majestic and huge beings he had shaped during the night. In their place stood seven curious looking small creatures. They were as big as the goblins, but their skin was soft and crystal white. Instead of small and dark eyes, theirs were big and colourful, each eye of a different colour. The goblin's wide grin was replaced by a childish curious smile. Instead of a bulky bald head, they head long, soft dark hair that reached their knees.

Fhynaral looked at them, aghast. "What happened?!" she cried. "What happened to my beautiful strong beings?!".

The dwarf snorted. "I told you. You cannot force them to worship you. You, ungrateful childish goddess!"

The goddess regarded him with an angry look that would make any mortal flee for their life. She looked at the creatures again.

They were inspecting the forge, a curious smile on their face. They seemed completely indifferent to the gods presence, regarding them with as much as interest as any of the smith's tools. One of them reached for the god's hammer and lifted it to examine it.

Rhotgar leapt forward, astonished. "What're you doing!".

Startled, the white creature dropped the hammer, which fell heavily on the god's foot. Rhotgar bent in two, letting out a very un-manly shriek.

The goddess looked at the beings with contempt. "You are not worthy of my legions" she spat. She raised a hand toward one of them and pronounced a word. Black flames erupted from her palm and raced toward the creature.

The new born creature stared at the flames with keen interest until, when they were about to hit her, she blinked. A small, white, electric lightning took her place and she found herself between the goddess legs. The flames struck the floor, blackening and cracking the solid stone.

The goddess, taken by surprise, backed away from the creature and, in doing so, tripped on her long black dress and fell down flat.

The forge coals got extinguished as the Goddess of Darkness stood up, her anger freezing the cave in a magical chillness.

Rhotgar felt again his legs not answering to him. The creatures, still able to move, looked at the goddess with interest, then, with another blink, turned themselves into lightning and raced out of the forge, disappearing into the dawning day.

This is, as far as the legend goes, the story of the birth of the Lightners, who are more commonly known as White Magpies. The appellation is due to the inexplicable bad luck that is said to befall on anyone who crosses paths with these creatures. To the skeptical youngsters, the elders would tell of that time a white magpie was seen walking down the market street and, as a result, the fruit stand collapsed, causing an army of water melons to roll down the steep road causing havoc to the passing parade of the lords of the city. The tale would often be followed by the story of the siege of Enoras, when, as the storytellers say, a Lightner who was staring at the catapults, fired an unlucky shot that threw a boulder against the walls of the city, creating an opening that ultimately led to the city's fall.

Clearly, many of the stories are made up. Once the legends of the Lightners spread across Lothinias, people started using them as a ploy whenever something bad happened.

It shouldn't come as a surprise that many people tried to banish them, or even kill them, but most of their effort went to no avail, if not against them. Enchanted by the goddess of Darkness magic, as the legend goes, the Lightners are strong magic-users, and have the uncanny ability of escaping from dire situations. Not able to get rid of them, the other races came up with more exotic ways of counteracting their bad luck. In Farahil, for

example, people got into the habit of carrying a pouch of flour wherever they went, following a rumour that claimed if you pour flour on a White Magpie, their bad luck turns into good fortune. Whether true or not, the gossip started when a Lightner was caught in a spices shop and the owner, in the frantic attempt to kick him out, dropped a container of flour, which spread all over the place. After the white creature left the shop, the owner ran back in expecting all his shelves to have come down, or all his money disappeared, instead he found a small collections of diamonds hidden in the flour jar.

What's more solidly proven is that the Lightners are a peaceful people, if a people at all. Attracted by insatiable curiosity (mainly of jewels and precious metals) they spend their life roaming the world and seem to appear whenever something interesting is about to happen. They fly around using their magic powers that let them turn into lightning bolts.