The Alliance

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The Alliance

by Taylande

Summary

Hey, maybe this time something nice will happen! Let's hope to the fucking Goddess.
Sister

Two women, standing on one of Darkshore’s many islands. One soaked to the bone, missing a part of her body, a dagger in her hand. The other stood tall and proud, eyeless, dry and grinning, her fists at the ready. Both were tormented by whispers, whispers that threatened to drive them to the brink of insanity, perhaps even past that.

*You will only be accepted when you give in.*

*Kill her, kill her! She shouldn’t even EXIST!*

The former shook away these whispers as if they were something that had always been there. Her teeth chattered away at the biting cold of the water soaking her clothing and her skin. Oh, how she hated the water. All because of that one little trip. That one supposedly harmless trip to Vashj’ir.

“Shut up, shut up, shut UP!” the former screamed at nothing. “Elari… what the fuck? I thought you were my sister. By the Goddess I thought you’d help me.”

“Oh, Taylande. I had always loyal to our father. He wanted to get you back. Away from the Temple, so you could continue with his teachings.” The woman called Elari laughed and got into a crouching position, planning something. “You could have been glorious, could have had whatever you wanted.”

Taylande only glared, gripping the dagger in her hand tighter and tighter, ‘til her knuckles went a bright pink. Dizziness swept through her, due to the cold of her clothing, and it nearly knocked her off her feet. She stood her ground, though, not daring to give up any to a delusional sibling who would most likely alert the other siblings.

“You know I go by Tay, right? Fuck my full name. And fuck you, Elariel,” she spat. Tay glared daggers at her elder sibling, who had begun to change.

Damn druids!

Elariel’s frame widened as she got onto her hands and her knees. Her legs got thicker, the leathers she wore blending into her body and posing as a sort of… fur? Her feet became wide and clawed, as did her hands. Arms became thicker, bearing much more strength in them as they, too, were covered in the sort of “fur” of whatever animal she had chosen this time.

Within the next few seconds, she had assumed the form of a bear. But, the fur of the bear’s form bore not the same colorings as other druids. It, instead, grew to be a smoky black in color. In just moments, Elariel leapt upon her sibling, growling and roaring in her face. She raised her paw above her prey’s head, ready to bring it down on Tay’s face and scar it even further.

Tay, however, would have none of that. Ellemayne in her grip, she rammed it into her sister’s side, emitting a low growling from the latter. “You had better get the hell off me before I throw your ass into the Maelstrom. Better yet, I let Seranthi loose on you.” Tay grinned like an imp, shoving the blade as far into her sister as she could. It couldn’t be far ‘til she bled like a stuck pig, but Tay then gave it a few twists before ripping it out of her sibling.

Elariel roared once and pulled herself off the other woman, shifting into her kaldorei form once more. She could no longer do much damage with the bear’s aspect, not after her sister rammed one of the Moon-Blessed blades into her ribs. She had both her hands on the wound when an idea struck her. Seranthi, the druid considered only a beast, would heed her mental calling. She, a druidess, knew the stupid beast would listen to her.
She reached out, hoping the cat would be somewhere near. It had been her, after all, who had stabled the large frostsaber in Lor’danel, only a brief few miles north of them, when Tay had ran off those two weeks prior. It only took a moment, and the cat came running towards the duo. Now, all she had to do: stall her foolish sister long enough to drag her back to their father. Oh, how praised she would be for it.

“Hey, asshole! I still exist,” Tay spat. She had Ellemayne extended out from her body, aimed at the other woman’s chest. If she’d not been foolish and ignored the demons defiling Ashenvale, she would have Silverblade. She would have her hand. She would have her sister’s dead body lying broken and bloodied at her feet. But now, she would try and attain that regardless of the circumstances.

Elariel grinned, and began to laugh. Pain became present throughout it, and she began to speak. “Oh, come now my little fa’lore. Why did you leave our father? You could have had anything you’d wanted. A nice home, hot meals… that Gilnean--” Elariel spat the words like they were some sort of trash to be thrown away. “--Oh, what’s her name again?”

Tay felt anger rise up inside her. How dare her own blood speak of Val in that tone? How dare they? She wished she still had that other hand of hers, along with another dagger closed into said hand to carve out Elariel’s throat. She had the feeling her psychotic sibling would try to use this to her own advantage, and Tay mentally repeated to herself to not do what her sister wanted.

“Vellaena? Or had it been something more… disgusting than that? Filthy names for filthy worgen.” She grinned wider, unable to see if Tay had grown furious at the games she kept playing. Her mindless beast had almost arrived here, and she could threaten her little sibling even further. Maybe she’d even get Tay back to their father, wherever he holed up nowadays, through these means.

“Oh, but you could have had her, too! Your little concubine,” she taunted. “Though, do tell! Do tell why you left our father for the life of a priestess. Where you always got told what to do by this woman, or that woman! Oh, and that other girl. Kalandra. She could also have been yours. But enough rambling from me. Please tell me why.”

Tay’s fingers wanted so desperately to not hold Ellemayne, all so they could twitch out of anger. How often her left hand would do that, and how she never spoke of it or thought of it or wrote of it to mask her problem, as her father would call it. “That stab wound isn’t looking so good. But if you insist on bleeding out, I’ll explain.”

She tried to remain calm, launching into the truth. “All I ever fucking wanted in this life? A way out of the hell I lived in, a roof over my head, and one decent meal. There’s proof living with Father’d been hell, because it’s. ON. ME. Our Goddess-be-damned father, placed branding irons on my back as a punishment. He’d let me lay there after he did it, and when I still heaved and gasped in pain from those burns, he made me get up and do this maneuver or that, because he wanted some little assassin.

“He carved these markings into my face! I wasn’t even one thousand! I get to live with these pretty little scars and tattoos as a reminder of what I barely managed to escape. He starved me. He never let me eat unless he could tell I’d be on the verge of puking up my own guts. I got forced to sleep outside when it grew hot, when it rained down snow and ice, and Goddess, how I dreamt of running.

“Those things I just mentioned? I’ve not gotten a damned one. After you and Jaron visited, I started having daymares and nightmares that tormented me. I wanted some semblance of a good sleep. Oh, but that all became impossible at that point!”
Elariel grinned so wide that one would think it’d split her face open. But it did not. She’d succeeded in getting her sister talking, long enough for Seranthi to be nearby, hiding and waiting for her call. She raised a pair of bloody, trembling fingers to her mouth and whistled. Almost immediately following that, her hand dropped like a brick to the stab wound.

Seranthi, hearing that call of her master’s sibling, answered. The cat leapt out and bounded towards Elariel without a moment’s thought. Tay froze, afraid to do anything. Elariel had her frostsaber. *Her frostsaber*, the random gift from Nar all those years ago. Straight from Winterspring, where she had been taught, where she considered her home to be.

“Now, now. She’s a good girl. Would be a shame to dispose of her because you weren’t being cooperative. We get you back to Father, she lives. If not, she dies. Now please answer. Time’s a’ticker,” Elariel droned. “You’ve half a minute to give me a clear answer. None of your cryptic bullshit in that little journal of yours.”

Tay did nothing, only stood there and forgot all about killing this deranged sibling of hers. She had to make sure her frostsaber lived. Seranthi remained her last connection to home and family, and she could not lose it. Ellemayne she slowly lowered to her side by her trembling hand. Tay tucked it into her pants like a life depended on this, and a life did.

Carefully, she edged her way closer to the great cat and her sister. She knew the other woman could not see her, but still felt watched when she went to her riding cat. Soon enough, Tay stood only a foot away from her cat and sibling. She leaned a little bit closer, not wanting to be so very close to the woman who tried to kill her, she hissed, “I am not going back there, now give me my frostsaber before I drive this dagger so far into your body that it comes out the other end.”

Elariel grinned like a demon and pulled a small axe from her belt. It seemed she had come prepared for this foolishly long bickering between siblings. Instead of moving blindly forward to where her sister’s voice rang out, she reached out a hand and felt about for the great cat. Her hand soon found the cat, and she began moving up and down until she found one of the large teeth that protruded from its mouth.

She moved the small axe closer and closer to where her hand rested, wrapped around one of the fangs. Elariel took a slow and experimental swing to make sure she aimed at the correct angle on the weapon’s position and striking. She remained close enough, thankfully for her, and began an actual swing for the bundle of nerves that formed the tooth of the beast.

When the blade connected, she muttered a spell so quietly, her sister straining her ears to hear would not have heard. Tay screamed as she tried to rush towards Seranthi, but could not move, as the druidess had trapped her in place by means of thorny, unnatural roots. The cat roared as well, and Elariel swung again, having hacked the tooth off with two well-placed blows. She jammed it into the beast’s throat and managed to lodge the fang in the windpipe.

Blood immediately rushed to where the wound opened, cutting off the flow of air to its lungs. Tay roared and watched as her frostsaber lurched forwards and fell on her side, grabbing at Ellemayne and bending down to slice away the roots. For every root she cut away, though, two more seemed to take it’s place until a strong gale of wind swept the blade from her grasp.

“Ellemayne!” Tay barked as the blade flew away and landed at the feet of Seranthi. Elariel cackled like a mad fool, picking her way to where the sound of her sister shouting came. It took her less than a minute to reach her sibling, and she stopped just within what she thought to be just out of arm’s reach from her sister. But, her blindness had fooled her.

Tay’s arm whipped out like a viper, hand closing around the deranged druidess’ throat. Adrenaline
pumped through her veins like jade through the Pandaren Mines; plentifully. Elariel, already grasping at her throat and trying to remove her sister’s hand so she could breathe. The former’s muscles strained as she tried to keep the latter at bay long enough to get the tangling roots to remove themselves from her feet.

She leaned forward, spitting into the druidess’ ear, “If you even manage to live after I find a way to kill you as slowly as possible, I will find you. And I will kill you again. And again. And. AGAIN.” Elariel’s clawing slowly began fading, as did the tightness of the roots around Tay’s ankles. The woman raised her other arm--the one with no hand--and bent it, slamming her elbow into the elder one’s face.

Tay released her grip, watching her sister tumble down and lay there. She felt the roots recede back into the ground and rushed towards Seranthi. Ellemayne, being right there, she grabbed up in her hand. She now rested on her knees as she rocked slowly back and forth in an effort to stop the tears that threatened to spill. A great sob broke the air as she put the dagger down and gripped the cat’s own tooth lodged in it’s throat.

She pulled, and it did not move. She pulled again and again and again, until it finally came loose. Looking up, she saw the pain flashing in Seranthi’s bright green eyes, and the cat let out a low moan. A tear slipped out from the woman’s eye, and more followed. She held her breath for a moment and released it all into a loud, sorrowful sigh. Hand now shaking, Tay picked up the knife and held it to Seranthi’s now-blood-coated neck.

“Why?” Tay whimpered. “Why?! Sera, you giant furball…” Her attempts to calm down the cat did not work, as both seemed to know she would have to die. The wound had grown too terrible to heal, and so Ellemayne got pressed to the cat’s once snow white furry neck.

“Goddess… Elune have mercy on you,” she hiccupped as the blade cut through everything that kept Seranthi clinging to life. Seranthi huffed one last time, closing her eyes. Tay took the fang that killed her cat and tucked it into her pants, Ellemayne gripped tightly in her fist.

As the last of the great cat’s life fluids leaked out, Tay stood up and moved to the body of Elariel. Rage filled her and she screamed through the tears and the pain, hoping that would drive it all away. She took deep breaths, trying so hard to stop her crying, and she let that rage fly out of her when she looked at her sister’s corpse. Her foot slammed into the other woman’s side multiple times. That same foot flew into her face, her stomach, her torso, every possible part of her body. And all the while, Tay gasped for air through her sobbing.

She finally stopped, bending down and using her stump to move her sister’s hands over to the blade of Ellemayne. All of that rage pent up inside her now exhausted her, causing her hand to be shaky and her legs to be tired. She got onto her knees and began sawing off one hand weakly.

“If you ever come back to life like my mum did, you won’t have any hands you fucker,” she mumbled. “I miss Min’da…” More tears threatened to spill as time rolled by and both hands had been separated from the body. Tay only glared at it, placing Ellemayne at her side and throwing each hand into the opposite direction. She struggled to push the body into the rivers to let it be washed away. After all, an elf such as Elariel deserved no proper burial.

She stood and looked around, grabbing up Ellemayne, then stumbling through the more shallow parts of the water. Her breath stopped as she went, as it always would since she had been on the ship to Vashj’ir. But as of now, she needed to reach someone she knew, someone she trusted.

Someone from her old group, back when she had joined with the Alliance’s Military.
“Alrigh’! I see yer tha best tha’ they’ve got ta offer me. Elfies, get warned righ’ now. Aeva here is me second-in-command. She ain’t a girl ta fuck with. Anywho, Aeva, how’s aboot’che introduce e’rryone?” the dwarf barked. The woman he called Aeva, a half human, half quel’dorei, stepped forward and saluted everyone.

She dressed in the garb of what the humans and dwarves called ‘paladins,’ warriors of the Holy Light. Her hair flowed, long and golden, and she brushed it back behind her ears as if it were hindering her as she addressed the two elves, two kaldorei. The kaldorei only nodded once, which the halfling took as a sign to continue.

“Bal a’dash, soldiers. I am Aeva Petrovsky, squire to Ser Gregory Lemfield of the Argent Dawn. I am here only to have my skills tested, but understand I am an officer of the Grand Alliance Army. The dwarf--” She gestured to the short, stout man with a luxurious red beard, “--is your commander, though. He is Torrolf Redbeard.” Obviously, thought the duo. The two kaldorei glanced into his direction, only the male giving him a slight bow.

Aeva gestured towards a silver-haired young man who stood a few feet to the left of the dwarf, along with another human dressed in dark leathers. This human, though, had ebony black hair with the soft face of a woman.

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“The whitie is my older brother, Ivan. The woman you see next to him is his, erm, girl-friend. Amelia Royce. We’re supposedly getting stuck with you and being sent to aid the Cenarion Circle with Silithus,” Aeva concluded, “So please, try not to die.”


Aeva nodded once, then clearing her throat. She pointed at the dwarf and said, “Lieutenant-Commander, close to the rank of Commander. I am ranked at Knight. Ivan at Sergeant Major, hoping to become an officer. Amelia, at Sergeant. And you, my lady kaldorei.” She pointed at the elf with hair the color of pine trees, eyes more amber and golden than her own, and said, “Private.”

The elf with the pine green hair nodded and said nothing, waiting for some sort of new order to be given. She noted the other kaldorei with her, a bulky man with a trimmed beard and long, mossy colored hair. He saw her staring at him, and nodded once at her. This elf she knew. From the ten-year interlude they’d had after the Third War, the two grew close. Close enough to be… involved romantically.

However, time had separated them and she ended up leaving him so he could pursue his path and her, her own. They’d remained casual acquaintances, rarely meeting up to discuss this or that. But yet here they stood, reunited again. And neither one looked forward to it in the slightest.

‘And, ah, elfies? Intr’duce ‘erselfs?’” Torrolf questioned, making the hand motion before moving it up to stroke his great red beard.

The woman elf took a low, sweeping bow mockingly. Her eyes lingered on the half-elf like the girl was some piece of tender salmon she would devour before casting aside the bones. A cocky, impish grin spread across her face as she kept her eyes upon the other woman, Aeva.

“All directed their eyes now towards the latter of the two kaldorei now.
“Nashathel.”
Him

Sighing heavily, he glanced around the small cave he’d taken refuge in. It would be considered more on the cramped side to any other being, were they not a druid or some passing animal hoping to take shelter in the rain. A good thing for the man, since he could simply rest amongst whatever creature nested there that night.

He seated himself, pulling most of his mossy green mane back and half into a ponytail for comfort. The beard covering a good portion of his face, scraggly thought it was, could easily be straightened and so he did, simply running a sharp-nailed hand through the hairs like a comb.

“Quiet, finally…” he mumbled, though little he spoke. All from a small childhood problem, and even now he rarely said more than three words. Hopefully now, a good few years in the Dream would settle his nerves from all of what had gone on in his past. “Now I may fulfill that d--”

A crashing and cluttering of noises pulled him out of the trancelike state he started to fall into. Growling at whatever had interrupted this, he exited the cave and sped off in the direction of where the sound came from. Using the landscape and his skills to the highest advantage, he shifted into the form of a sleek cat as he ran, falling back into the shadows to spy just who--or what--had caused this disruption.

It only took some quick moments for him to circle completely around where he resided at the time, a small hut in Darkshore. The enhanced vision from the now catlike eyes stared around to spot the trespassing thing. It could still be a person, he reminded himself, approaching slowly whatever it happened to be.

As he rounded the small curve of his hut, he readied his claws, facing--

Kaldorei. One lone, defeated kaldorei.

“Nash…” she whined, sounding defeated. “Nashathel, dammit… get the fuck out here…” While she waited, she limped around, holding her arms close to her chest, hand straying down to a saber tooth tucked into the belt of her pants. He looked up to her eyes, seeing that raw emotion still hidden behind, pushed deep in the back of her mind. He noted the shadows under the eyes, the tattoos that seemed to brand her face, how she even looked around like she were some lost child, searching for a parent.

How pitiful the once great and cocky Taylande Silverblade looked. With every skin she seemed to shed, this one was, by far, the most memorable now. Nashathel shifted back into his lithe elven form, pulling himself up and making his way towards her.

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“Nash--” she choked out, stumbling over to him. A weak, halfhearted smile appeared on her face. Out of habit, she fell back into Darnassian speech. “Nash, you're here, thank Elune…”

“Taylande! Are you okay?” he asked, rushing towards her. Nash surveyed her body, looking her up and down to make sure no harm had befallen her whatsoever. When he reached her wrists, his brow furrowed as he looked at Tay's left one. “Dal quenat sen…”

Tay lost some of the composure she just regained, wrapping her arms around him as tightly as her exhausted person would allow. Her body needed more rest before she tried to pull him close again. She buried her face into the greyish shirt he wore, letting loose a deep sob.

Nash scooped her up and carried her inside the small hut, away from any prying eyes and ears.
“Tell me,” he mumbled, giving her a meaningful pat on her shoulder as best as he could. He laid her on the bed that had been pushed into a corner of the single room building. The bed, though made for one, had enough room left over for another body to rest in it.

She could only cover her face, shaking her head and throwing her arm over to mask the tears that began to stream down her cheeks. It threatened to come from her mouth as a series of gasps and grunts. It would either be this, or speak of what she had just dealt with. Tay chose the latter.

“I killed her… I killed my own sister… Sera-Sera’s fucking dead--” Tay cut herself off before anything else could come out. Already, she felt too overwhelmed with guilt about what just previously occurred. She wasn’t quick enough. She could never be quick enough. Not once in a thousand thousand years could she ever be quick enough to save anyone or anything that meant something to her. Never.

“Tay, calm yourself. Remember that day we finally arrived in Silithus, that Goddess forsaken desert. Distract yourself. You face these later, I--"

“I don’t fucking want to, dammit. I don’t want to think of Aeva or Amelia or anyone. I want you…”

The group stood together, all baking under the beating sun of Silithus. For whatever strange reason, it felt hotter here than in Stormwind’s Harbor. The weather patterns of Kalimdor never ceased to amuse the quartet from the eastern continent, where the more pale-skinned of the races seemed to reside. And the, ah, shorter… dwarves… as well.

Aeva stood in front of the smaller-than-average squadron of soldiers plus a Cenarion Druid. She placed her hands on her hips, a smile moving across her face as she took in a deep breath of the air. Rarely she let show that optimistic side of herself, but now it shone through. She exhaled, “Aah, Silithus.” Aeva spun on her heel, facing the commanding officer. “I don’t like it here.”

Tay smirked, eyeing the woman from behind. What a shapely body… She grunted and covered her smirk up by reminding herself she would be stuck out here for the next year or so, most likely, with a smelly, booze-loving dwarf and three humans, one of which who wouldn’t even count herself so. Oh, well. Maybe that woman swung both ways. She could only hope so.

“Torrolf, sir, I want to get the hell out of here.” The half elf stared at the dwarf, waiting for some kind of response.

“Oh, sadly we can’t, little ursus,” Tay started up, swaggering left and right with her eyes now never leaving Aeva. She propped her arm up on her side, elbow sticking out backwards as she hoped to elicit some sort of reaction from the other woman. Aeva, however, gave her no such pleasure as she narrowed her eyes and pulled the dull metal helmet from her head.

She raised a finger up to point at the kaldorei, staring a thousand-yard glare that threatened to kill you if you so much as looked at her the wrong way. “And you, elf, better shut that fucking mouth before you get written up for insubordination.”

Nashathel leaned over, jamming an elbow into Tay’s side and causing her to switch back to her standard Darnassian. “Asha?”

“Ana nal asha!” responded the druid in his short few words. Tay made a kaldorei symbol with a more… rude meaning than an interpreter would dare explain. This pulled out a glare from Nash as he turned away to brood off a few yards away from the main group.
Torrolf sighed, rolling his eyes as he stared at the two having some kind of lovers’ quarrel. Whatever the deal would be with this new kaldorei woman, he could tell there would already be enough fights within the ranks. Funny, he noted, that the two elves acted completely opposite of each other. One brash and cocky, the other more reserved. He suspected they had something between them, but now began to doubt so as they glared into opposite directions.

“Hey, Tay, get your ass up with mine or I’ll have you double-time it and force you up to the post without some water. And speak Common, too!” Aeva shouted, marching forward without looking back. She could hear the elven woman’s rhythmic footfalls coming up closer behind her, and not once did she dare slow the pace for her to catch up. No, she would make the private learn her place. Old or not, respect the uppers.

“So, Knight Petrovsky. Why is it you called my dumb ass up this way, huh?”

“You are aware that I know you’re attempting to get into my pants?” She stole a brief glanced at Tay, who tried to mimic a look of disbelief and confusion, though Aeva could tell she knew better.

“What? Knight, you should be more careful on these lands. Any fucking thing could pop up out of-

A large beetle, from the hives reported coming from what the druids called the Scarab Wall, surfaced, along with a many other insectoid creatures. Tay sighed, pulling out one of her daggers-- Silverblade, she had said to be the blade’s name--and readied it in defense of the allies she’d been forced with for this little trip.

“--Nowhere. Yeah, could just finish that sentence as soon as I jinx the entire group’s collective ass. Remind me to shut the damn up next time I start saying bullshit like that.”

Ivan stood near the back as his eyes began to glow. Foreign words, unknown to everyone but himself, were escaping his lips as he mumbled a strange incantation. While he focused his energies into the spell, Tay rushed forward without any warning, dagger raised high with a gleam in her eye. Tay threw her entire body forward at the buglike creatures that had dared to attack the group, not giving a damn about what happened to her. She hacked and slashed in wild, erratic behavior that would have signaled a quick death by the Alliance Military’s standards. But not for Tay, strangely enough. She moved around with a sort of deadly grace that signed the end of the line for the bug-things. Silithus’ inhabitants.

The magus’ spell finished up, a large, intimidating fireball being launched from his hands which spelled doom for not just the creatures, but also the elven woman. She seemed to have no regard for this, dodging quickly under one’s legs and dispatching it easily that way. She only became aware of the ball of fire moving rapidly towards her when she spun around to see.

“Goddess be my shield, for my every breath is yours!” she screeched in a rapid flurry of Darnassian, continuing, “I plead only for one more second of life!” And the fire dissipated, striking against an unseen barrier that now seemed to shimmer in front of Tay as it began to fade.

Aeva drew the claymore on her back, rushing forth and taking out another one of the insectoids. Even though she did not command the group, all followed suit and drew some kind of strength from her. Torrolf buried the bearded axe on him deep into the head of one, while Royce, Ivan’s lover, teamed up on one with the elven woman. Nash, however, was busy finishing one that tried sneaking away.

Soon as everyone chose the bugs they were set on keeping out of the fight permanently, they all
looked to Aeva, awaiting her next orders. All this she considered a testing of her abilities, measured down to each and every little movement of the eyes.

“Ama noral’arkhana…” Aeva breathed. Something inside her fluttered like a bird just learning how to fly, finally, after being in a cage for so very long. “Oh, um. Well. Let’s, ah, just head towards the Cenarion post, yes? Yes, let’s do that.” She beckoned for them all to follow, keeping her head turned towards their destination as everyone shared strange glances with one another.

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Nash held Tay close, wishing for the awful memories to flood through and get over with. Comforting her, he’d already spoken more than he would have dared in front of them. He glanced down at her, curled up with her head resting on his lap as she stared off into nothing.

“They’ve stopped…” she mumbled, sounding half asleep with a voice full of raw emotion. “The whispers. After... A-I killed her, they just… quit. But Goddess, I hate myself. I’m no better than my fucking uncle.” She took in a single ragged breath, the guilt almost overwhelming herself once more until Nash started up.

“Don’t say that,” Nash warned, brow furrowing. He began adjusting himself to where he could lay his full length across the bed. Tay pulled herself on top of him, resting an ear just over his left chest.

“Damn you, Nash. You never let me brood,” she chuckled weakly, leaning up and laying a gentle kiss on his lips.

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Outside, Nar sat in a tree, Bladestream not too far of a ways’ off. She spied her little sister go off into the hut with, she presumed, someone from her past. Nar sighed, dropping down from the tree and jogging off towards her hippogryph.

“Hey, Serrar. Speak some semblance of Darnassian this time, would you? You think we should maybe find Landrelia or Kyena and inform them of Tay at all? Or just an owl?”

The beast stretched its wings and ruffled its feathers, looking over at the shorter-than-average elven woman. “Perhaps. Go to Kyena. She will know what to do.” Nar grinned, striding over and patting Bladestream on the head and laying out a fish for him as a quick snack before they set off to find Tay’s aunt.

“That boy better not hurt my little sister…” Nar growled, clicking her tongue for Bladestream to set off.
Love

Chapter Notes

Happy Valentine's Day, everyone <3

Tay stared at Nash, wishing just only for a moment she hadn't come running to him in the first place. Something inside her said she did the right thing, the normal thing, another in her place would have done. But she never did this, running to somebody for some little bit of empathy and comfort after a gruesome act.

“Why are you even bothering to help me?”

“So you live.”

“Yeah, because you need me to live a shitty life with you. In case you don't remember, I fucked you when I was with another. And I fucked Ivan’s sweet little thing when I should have been fucking you. Then I went and alternated between you and Aeva for our entire. Military. History. Goddess, what the hell is wrong with you!”

“O surfas ana.”

Tay screamed at him, storming forward and striking his jaw. She couldn't do anything to him, she knew, but the next best thing is to simply try. Just try, hit something you know won't be affected, and let out all that pent-up anger and hate.

Being so close to him now, she paused and looked up, noting Nash’s handsome features compared to her more plain, stress-aged ones. The smoothness of his skin and the neatness of his beard, even the half-ponytail his hair had been pulled into. Damn Nashathel for being so very handsome!

Why are you thinking about this?! she thought, before yelping and jumping backwards.

It had been so long since her thoughts were her own. It scared her at first. The sudden newness of being able to think, to remember this or that without some evil thing nagging at the back of her mind, steering her thoughts this way or that.

Nash, startled, moved forward and grasped her shoulders to make sure she would be okay. Funny. They both were trained healers and menders, yet only one actually practiced it. Still, he felt it to be his job to make sure people would remain unharmed and injured. No wonder his mother called him a good child.

“Please... Calm yourself,” he begged quietly.

Tay just stared, amazed by her own actions. Her own thoughts, the incessant screaming and eyeballing an ex-lover--one she just pressed her lips to again. Even after their history.

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At camp, all proved to be quiet. Tay got to sit on her ass all day long, as nothing interesting had popped up. She’d fallen asleep at some point as well, waking up in the middle of the night while
everyone but herself and the druid slept. She sat up and scanned the surrounding area, seeing nothing but desert.

“Urgh, quit falling asleep when it’s a boring day… you have bullshit to do tomorrow,” she scolded herself. Tay trudged outside, holding the hilt of Silverblade loosely. A force of habit, since her father had raised her to be like that no matter what.

“You won’t be busy at all…” hissed a voice. It sounded familiar, yet foreign, but her blade immediately got flipped around to slit the throat of whoever decided to sneak up on a trained would-have-been assassin. Most likely a pawn to be used in her father’s great plot to kill Tyrande Whisperwind so he could assume the role as leader by manipulating everyone into crowning him.

She jabbed a fist into one of the attacker’s kidneys, stunning him momentarily as the blade got raised to this mysterious asshole’s throat. Their breathing immediately sped up, terrified at the fact that a quick movement of the woman’s wrist was now the only thing between their life or death.

“If you are one of those filthy hired assassins sent by my father, shove it up your ass!” Tay shrieked, alerting everyone within her unit to the danger and waking them up. The blade slid across their throat, ending the life of a foolish person who thought to kill an elf surrounded by people.

Torrolf waddled out from his camp, sighing as he barely made out the corpse lying in front of him and everyone else in the immediate vicinity. “E’rryone, we gotta increase th’ secur’ty of th’ base. Ivan’s up first, g’night!”

“Dammit!” Ivan grumbled.

Tay narrowed her eyes, taking the body out far enough so they wouldn’t smell the rotting stench of it later on. She dragged her feet on the way back to her small tent, mumbling to herself. “Jaron, dear brother… you always seemed a bit dull. But now I get to look over my shoulder… Too tired to deal with you and the commanding dwarf’s strange bull…”

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The Gong had rung, finally, throughout that accursed desert. Adrenaline coursed through everyone’s veins. It rushed through their systems, filling some with dread and others with excitement. Not even the lowliest soldier or adventurer went into this battle without any semblance of this golden feeling pumping into their hearts. Oh, how long it had been that the Cenarion Circle waited for someone to just ring that damned Gong!

Tay bounced around on the tips of her toes, waiting for Torrolf to issue the signal to their group that the front lines were ready to charge. They needed to hurry, to storm that damned bug-city. Ahn-something, she had heard it been called. People in the higher-ups whispered about dealing with the Temple later on. To hell with it! Death to every single bug in that filthy city! Those insects walked on kaldorei territory!

Finally, finally, finally. The signal. Lieutenant Commander Redbeard finally signaled it, as he got positioned up near the front with orders from another to leave his detachment near the back of the force. It didn’t matter, though. She got to fight! She got to feel her blood boiling again at the thought of being in another life-or-death situation.

The forces charged. Already, her ears picked up that sickening crunching and the screams of those that lost their lives almost instantly in this battle. Their corpses got left behind. This place would most likely be their grave. Every single person who died today would be avenged by some close friend in their unit.
Tay shoved herself through the clamoring forces trying to land a hit on a bug creature in front of them. She’d already lost sight of Aeva, whom she had hoped to keep an eye on throughout this entire thing. Why wouldn’t she, if she were already closer than ever at getting into the half elf’s pants?

“VICTORY TO THE ALLIANCE!” shouted a heavily accented dwarven voice. Tay looked over, wondering if Torrolf had fallen back in the group to inspire and raise the morale of the soldiers. “Hurry yer ass up, elfie! Ye’d be missin’ out on th’ action from back ’ere. I thought’chee liked a good ol’ fight!”

Taking that as a challenge, the elf shoved through and readied Silverblade. That thing measured almost as long as the standard issue shortsword did, slicing into whatever filthy exoskeletoned shit dared get near her. Tay began to count just how many she killed, not daring to use Elune’s Fire and burn away the organic material. Who knew if these things would reek like that “stink-bug” she stepped on when she’d enlisted for the military?

Time had no meaning right now, and eventually someone had to call for a halt and establish a sort of checkpoint to make sure nothing else followed. No stopping now though. Fighting every single thing that wasn’t an allied soldier played the most important role in the rushing through the city. She’d lost track of just how many of the bugs she ended while they pushed on through the mounds and mounds of whatever the hell these things called themselves.

“Tay! Ilisar! Elun’al. Alah ash elend!” Probably Nash, screaming at her to fill a dreaded creature with Elune’s Fire. She spun, trusting him, meeting one of the Silithid (as the commanders had begun to call them) and jumped out of the way. It sent her sprawling in the sandy flooring of the city, nearly causing her to collide with one of the walls nearby.

Awareness of her surroundings and everyone else suddenly kicked into her system. Close by stood a massive stairway that most likely led somewhere important to the bugs. She pushed herself up from the ground, glancing down at her now-dirty apparel.

Ugh, I need to change later, she thought.

She half stumbled and half ran back towards the insect that had the balls to sneak up on her. With a cry of anger, “Zin na’o,” Tay buried the blade deep into whatever doubled as a head to the Silithid. With a sickening and gut-wrenching noise, the insectoid fell back into the sand. It couldn’t be more dead at this point, and so she ripped the dagger from its top.

“Rest! We have pushed on long and far, though the ones who lost themselves in the heat of this--” The elven woman felt eyes upon her, heat rising to her face. “--Wouldn’t really know. Within only some moments, we march on their leader! Death to the Silithid! Glory to the Alliance!”

“Oh, how inspiring,” Tay sarcastically mumbled, wiping the blade off on the bottom of the robes she wore. Thankfully she had packed in another load of clothing.

The elven woman grunted and planted herself down where she sat, near the edge of the group once more. She inspected the edges of Silverblade now, making sure it still retained the sharpness on it that it had when she first strode through the gates of this accursed city. Why did they have to uncover a fucking bug land of death and sand?

“Oi, Cocky Bastard! Why are you sitting away from everyone else, huh? You could be in there helping the wounded idiots who still want to finish this thing up. We’ve been in here for Light knows how long, yet people still can’t grasp the idea of ‘If you’re wounded badly then go rest up,’ huh?” Aeva called over, voice calming down from the hollering sternness she’d started it with.

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Tay smirked, shrugging and stretching as she pulled herself onto her feet. “I don’t know. Maybe I felt like planning out another filthy ass line to use on some ravishing half elf I spotted swinging a claymore around. Damn, did she look like something!” She swaggered over to the other woman, leaning in closer. “I sincerely do hope she’s flexible.”

Aeva raised an eyebrow, a grin settling on her lips. “Do you now? You should probably know, Silverblade—”

“ON YOUR FEET! WE HAVE SILITHID TO FELL!”

The paladin immediately straightened up, putting on her stern face. She spun on her heel and marched off to the main host like some trained dog who heard this same call her entire life. Aeva didn’t bother to look back and see if the private followed her or not. The claymore on her back got pulled and readied to be put into use once more.

Tay growled, frustrated. Her grip on Silverblade tightened and her swagger turned into a quick walking pace. A glare replaced her previous expression as she summoned up her anger in hopes to get the adrenaline pumping again.

Soldiers fell back into order as they all marched up these steep steps to the domain of whatever foul creature awaited them up top. A group of dwarves nearby snickered and mumbled a few words of some traditional song they sang back in their homeland. Annoying. Tay hoped they would shut it up before she heard them finish it through.

Upon reaching the top, murmurs spread throughout the host of soldiers and druids. She didn’t understand why, until she looked to her right.

“I swear if I said the wrong fucking thing again…”

A colossal, titanic looking thing the dwarves had called a keeper. They had to fight this. Tay looked around for the half elven woman, just wishing she could be near someone she tolerated while this went on. Nashathel would not do. They had a… rough history, and she needed a fresh start.

Someone screamed, drawing her back to the heat of the moment. Silverblade immediately came up as she flipped it around, holding it like anyone trained to be a pet who slit throats for food. How she wanted to rid herself of that aspect of her. It could only remind her of the pain that fucking asshole had put her through.

One soldier engaged this… thing. If it even had a name. She dared not describe it, aside from the fact that it towered about as high as the walls blocking them in. It bent over, swiping the massive hand it used to fight. One man went flying off, and would have surely died had it not been for two mages working in tandem.

A gear in their heads switched over to saving someone rather than flinging violent spell after violent spell. Tay watched them with wonder when she got the chance to, nearly screaming when one conjured up a large ball of fire, sending it flying towards the seemingly unscarred behemoth. The raw power of the mages amazed her, how they kept control of their abilities and still managed to avoid too much injury. Like a beautiful, chaotic mess.

Before she could even turn back to avoid being killed, a large shape barreled her out of the way. Looking up and clearing dust from her now watery eyes, she just barely made out who had shoved her out of the way of, most likely, a painful death. “Next time, Silverblade, pay attention to the fight. Besides, Redbeard brought some signature booze with him for celebrating later!”
The paladin shoved herself off the large elf, rushing back into the fray to hack away at the unscarred goliath. Tay, angered now at how filthy her robes got, bolted towards the danger and began to help the assault.

So much time seemed to pass before finally, the giant let out a low groan, falling to its knees. Everyone began to scatter, now fearing they would be crushed under a toppled tower of a... thing. Screams and cries of fear escaped every other man and woman that stayed nearby. Some on the fringes of the host collapsed from the exhaustion of beating relentlessly on the behemoth.

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Later that night, laughter and drunken slurs of victory could be heard throughout the night. From the nearby encampment, from the Cenarion outpost, but mostly from the tents set up that marked Torrolf’s oddball group. He’d already drank Royce under the table, cackling as Ivan sighed and carried her to their shared tent.

Tay laughed at the sight, filling up a mug with the strangely enchanting and bitter taste of the dwarven brew. She raised it in a silent toast with Torrolf, bringing it up to her lips and chugging as much as she could handle before coughing and spurting.

“Sir, Torrolf, how the hell did you make this? It’s amazing but it’s... it’s uh, crap. I forgot what to say,” she started before slurring her words off into a cackle. She’d admit to getting drunk later. But who cared at the moment? They killed a behemoth, finally quit their constant bickering after Goddess knows how long of being in this filthy desert, and now got to drink ‘til they passed out.

Tay went back to the cask, dumping more into the half empty cup she held, taking it back to her smallish drape that she called a tent. After entering, she set the mug down and threw off her robe, exposing bare and bruised skin underneath. The pants went next, being replaced with shoddy brown-grey breeches that hung loose around her. The overshirt she had once belonged to Nashathel, which he’d given to her after an... interesting night.

“Tay… hopefully I’m not intruding but Redbeard said you went back here with a mug,” Aeva sighed through a few hiccups. She’d already changed into more suitable off-duty clothing for the night, looking up to find the elf half-dressed with a shirt partially slung over her. Tay quickly pulled the shirt all the way down, striding over in an ale-induced haze.

“Not at all, what is it?” she asked in as suave a tone as she could manage. “I had to come back here to get out of shitty clothes and into better ones.” Tay strode forward more, a cocky, somewhat predatory grin spread across her lips.

“Oh, understandable. I’m not complaining, am I? But do tell me m-more on that half elf you kept eyeballing while we ran through that dirty place,” Aeva flirted, clearly a bit tipsy from the commanding officer’s brew.

“Why should I when I get to look at a masterpiece in front of me? Although, if you insist. I’m hoping she’s flexible because I want to take her tonight.” Tay grinned a bit wider, starting up, “I like when the booze talks for me, and dammit does it taste good!” She moved back, bending down to scoop up the mug sitting nearby, and taking a large swig of it to enhance the effect it was having on her.

Outside, Torrolf could be heard mumbling something as he made some rounds before he would be collapsing into a drunken sleep. Tay shrugged, placing one hand on Aeva’s hip and sliding it down. This drew heat to the half elf’s face, along with a tipsy grin. “I am most definitely drunk off this shit, Knight. And I’m bedding you, ehm, prob-probably.”
“Then do it!” Aeva hissed, shoving Tay’s hand farther down south than originally intended.

“Goddess, when was the last time you got any sort of pleasure, Petrovsky?” Tay monotoned, squinting confusedly at Aeva.

Aeva shut the priestess up by pulling her into a sudden, alcohol-induced kiss.

Outside, Torrolf grumbled and began to call for his second-in-command, though she did nothing but ignore the dwarf. “Aeva, girlie, I-I need’je to do som’thin’ tomorrow, aye?” he asked, shoving open the flap to Tay’s small shelter.

His eyes widened as both women froze, Tay looking at her commander with eyes full of fear. Torrolf spun on his heel, letting the flap fall back into place as he walked away.

She found herself staring at another person from her past, one she’d hurt so badly before. Yet he still insisted on helping her. Nash always needed to help people. No wonder they were always half-late to something they should have been an hour or more ago, all because he had to help something on the way. And yet everyone would think they were, ah, busy.

“Are you alright?” he asked, eyebrows furrowing together. Nash still had his hands on her, even though she had made no motion to tell him to get off of her.

“Yeah, I’m just… do you have any sort of alcohol in here?” Tay asked, looking around and hoping some kind of beverage that gave her a buzz would get rid of the tense feeling hanging between them. She peeled herself from his grip reluctantly, taking two short paces away to look around before returning her gaze to Nash. He motioned for her to look under the small padded bench across from the bed. Getting on her hands and knees, she scanned underneath it, finding a small bottle of fruity wine, half empty.

She sighed, pulling off the top of it (with Nash’s help) and taking a swig. Nash closed the top, as she set it back on the floor within easy reach of her. Tay shook her head swiftly, trying to recall the last time she’d had any sort of alcohol that wasn’t strong and bitter dwarven ale. Needless to say, her memory failed her as she picked up the bottle again and took three more drinks of it.

“I’ll get you another bottle later--” She cut herself off, falling into a coughing fit after the wine left its taste in the back of her mouth. Nash rushed over, guiding her to sit back down on the bed. Without saying a word, the fit subsided as she leaned her head on his shoulder. “Dammit, I shouldn’t drink so much fucking ale.”

“You’re right, for once,” Nash joked.

Tay snorted, the ghost of a smile on her face. “Shut up…” She laughed after that, something inside her stirring and flipping her stomach over and over. “I missed this.”

Nash pulled her on top of him, allowing her to adjust how she seated herself on his lap. It didn't take long for her to do so as she wrapped her arms around him in an embracing hug. Though, it hadn't been the hug he expected, even with her history of bedding many women. Her head she’d positioned just right, mouth up against his ear.

“Surfas’o shal, Nash.”

Tay pulled back, looking at the druid to make sure he understood. Something in his eyes told her that he knew, and his hands made their way to the shirt that stuck to her skin. Slowly, he peeled it
off as his lips got distracted. The fruity taste in her mouth seemed to add a tingling to his own. As the shirt came off he paused, staring and waiting for some kind of confirmation.

“Like before?” he asked, casting aside the top half of her clothing. She shook her head, drawing him back in close while her hand worked at letting loose his trousers. The leather jerkin Nash had thrown around his body already came off, along with most other articles of clothing. The two cast aside all of the restrictions, now unhindered.

Nash gently pushed her onto the bed, easing her down as to not accidentally cause an ache to suddenly come out of nowhere. Though, he felt he would later be causing an ache or two. He reached his hand down, stroking himself gently before moving on to pleasure his returned lover. How nice it felt to have her back, to feel every inch of her once more. Nothing from the past mattered at this moment.

He stopped just before he entered her body, looking up to make sure she did this willingly. Something inside him said to not do this, but instinct told him otherwise. Taking in every feature of his lover, Nash inserted a digit inside to test the waters, or so to speak. As he did so, he took note of how her body moved and the quiet gasp she let out.

“Please,” she breathed, Nash’s signal to continue. “You know we’ve done it before and yet you still wait.” Tay’s arms went up over her head to restrain from making it rough, quick, like in the past. She didn't need that now, not yet. Something calming would do the trick for her, as it most likely could be the only calming thing she might have in quite a time.

“I know,” Nash grunted, working the finger in and out, slowly, before adding another one. He could hear her breathing picking up pace as he repeated this once more, waiting for any more of a reaction he could weasel out of her. The pace he kept, sometimes slowing down just to frustrate her. Soon enough, he removed each digit.

“Why… why'd you stop?” she whined, looking up at him curiously. He motioned for her to roll onto her other side, which she did, propping herself on her knees. Nash spread her legs apart some more, running a hand up her inner thigh. “Go fuck yourself, hn?”

“I'm busy, though,” he remarked with a smirk, once again moving his member closer to where he’d previously been. He heard a great sigh of relief as he edged in gently, leaning forward and holding a hand over her mouth. He could feel the smile of pleasure crossing her face, the only real satisfaction he required right now.

One arm just barely keeping her up, she used the other one to force his head down onto her neck. She then pried his hand from her mouth groaning through her teeth. “Remember when I told you to bite me, Nash?” she barely managed. “Because I--Goddess, Nash!” Just as she finished saying his name, his teeth were clamped down onto her neck, hand muffling her heavy breaths.

Nash didn't hold back much more, moving faster and faster while she rocked back and forth onto him. His free hand wandered down across her torso, gripping tightly on her body as if he refused to let her go. He felt so… possessive.

Finally, she released as he kept his movements for her to ride through the wave. As soon as she had finished, Nash kept going until he, too, had wrapped up the time they enjoyed together, removing himself from her body.

“I feel like you left a mark on that part of my neck,” Tay huffed weakly, rolling over and wrapping her arms around his neck. “Get down here so I can enjoy you more, you ass.”
Nash smiled and did as she asked, laying himself next to her on the bed. “Satisfied, Highness?” he chuckled.

“Don't call me that,” Tay mumbled with a grin on her lips. “But yes, I am, surfal.”
After spending a few days in Nash’s home, Tay stumbled outside in need of fresher air. Her head spun like a top. She could barely get a grip on her own surroundings, most likely from the bottle of wine she chugged down in an attempt to get drunk. Though Nash warned her against it, she did so anyways. What a foolish choice. She’d need to quit that at some point, but decided today would not be the day.

“Damnit, I have shit to take care of in Stormwind. I’m long past due for receiving orders,” she groaned, staring hungrily at the bottle still in her hand. She growled, leaning on the side of a tree. Anger suddenly surged through her. Tay chucked the bottle in front of her as far as she could, watching it spin through the air as she turned around. Stupid damned military, always sending her to the most awful places for this reason or that.

“Don’t leave,” Nash pleaded. He strolled up to his lover, hoping she’d be in a better mood than the previous night. Nash wrapped his arms around her in a hug from behind and felt the heavy, angry breaths enter and leave her body.

“I won’t be gone for long. I’m getting a mage to make a portal. Not riding on another Goddess-damned boat again, not after Royce got killed on our way to Vashj’ir…”

“Don’t. Leave.”

“Too bad. Besides, I owe you for that bottle of wine, Nash.”

“The bite marks--”

“Will fade. I’m not waiting any longer. And if your sister stops by, you can explain what we did the past couple of nights. You can come or stay, and I’d rather you stay so I can find you something nice. Goddess knows you can’t have more than one shirt.”

Nash sighed. He placed a gentle kiss on her cheek before backing off. She offered him a sweet smile, placing her lips on his as long as she could until she had to leave him. Again… Like she left everyone, always at some point or another. Like Aeva; she left the woman in shambles after Northrend.

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The reek of the freshly cleaned fish wafted up into the tavern situated right by the docks, drowned out only by the fire burning inside at all times. Off-duty guards stationed at the Alliance port wandered into it, sometimes coming out hours later and tripping over their own feet. One such thing just happened, though instead of two buddies laughing it was two quiet women, disheveled and tired-eyed.

“No. It’s just one night. I needed a fix,” the kaldorei growled, being careful to not mention the woman she currently took up with. This would possibly have sent the other woman into a fit of anger, for the kaldorei didn’t seem to grasp the concept of loyalty to only one person. A glare spread across her face as she stared up at the other woman, a draenei.

“Tay, you should understand--”

“Ishetti,” she hissed, getting more aggressive, “Don’t even try to change up what I’m saying. I said I needed a fix. It’s a dry spell. Now if you’ll excuse me, there’s a unit out there missing their
damned Master Sergeant.” At least the one-nighter remembered her name. The draenei had heard that hardly ever happened.

Tay glanced at the knife on her belt, wrapping a hand around it and striding off towards the gates leading out of the port. She mumbled to herself various things about the tavern, the unit sitting out in one of the coldest places on Azeroth when she’d been sent in to get some salted rations. Of course, she decided to spend a night of passion with some random woman in the tavern instead of actually getting what she’d been sent in for.

Quickly, she made a stop off at the docks, searching the piles for salted beef and salmon. It took some few minutes of digging with her almost getting caught. After finding them, she left a sack of coins where the cargo had been, so technically she had paid for the goods needed. While she carefully laid the crate-top back, Tay spotted a rather shady-looking fellow with dwarven ale-holding skins.

She strode over to where the “merchant” sold his wares, putting on a cold and proud look to mask her true suspicions about him. The elf knew this fellow would see her approaching, so she reached into the folds of her robe where a second blade--Ellemayne--lay hidden. Pulling Silverblade would be too much of a challenge in the middle of a public place. Especially when there were enough onlookers to run for the guards within two seconds.

The merchant man, startled at the elven woman approaching him, immediately threw on a smile, opening his arms wide in a gesture of welcome.

Tay, having none of this, eyed him before she said anything. “This better be beer or ale, not some fruity wines imported from whatever obscure human nation in the mountains of Hillsbrad.” She held out a coin of gold, the merchant’s eyes going wide. Greedy little man. He pushed forward five skins of the stuff.

“Most definitely, my lady elf, this is that fine ale from Ironforge!” he quickly stated, giving a nervous laugh. “Your business is appreciated!”

She huffed, moving back to the gates where she originally intended to go, where that horse-thing waited. Why the Alliance made her use the thing remained unknown to her, so she left it, setting off at a brisk pace. She’ll ride it only if she must, and hopefully that would be never. Seranthi could have eaten that thing if she wanted. Perhaps that’s why they didn’t let her bring her cat, because the big girl might have eaten--No, Sera had been trained too well.

For now she had to cover up the teeth marks left all over her body by the draenei woman, Ishetii. Aeva could never find out, not unless she wreck the poor woman. Tay probably would at some point, though. She had that gut feeling. But why she always attracted the biters, she’d not understand. Ever.

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“Ya spent almost HALF our designated coin on beer? And fish?!” Torrolf cried. “I said beef! Pork! Not the stinkin’ fish from the harbor!”

“With all due respect, Commander, the elves here eat more fish than anything. Nashathel won’t eat things that come from human lands, sir. As for the beer, your sorry ass drinks this more than anyone else!”

“INSUBORDINATION! I recommended your rank ta be raised up out o’ the amazin’ skill ya displayed from that dead planet and from all that crap with the Silithid! Yer filthy beer-lovin’
problem’s been gitt’n in the way o’ our missions, knife-ears!” Torrolf screamed back.

Bristling with fury, Tay forced a curt smile, giving her commanding officer a stiff bow and hissing through gritted teeth, “By your leave, sir.” The dwarf grunted, yanking the rations from her hands and storming off to where he’d pitched his tiny tent. She glared back at him, marching to seat herself by the half elf she’d become so acquainted with. That, however, might end sooner than most expected.

Aeva sighed, sitting uncomfortably by herself and waiting for the screaming match between two of her squadmates to end. When Tay came over and planted herself next to the other woman, she sat and watched Tay twisted off the cap of the skin, downing it within a couple of gulps. Ever since that night after storming through Ahn’Qiraj, her drinking slowly increased to where she had grown to become an angry drinker.

“I don’t care what that dwarf says, but when the Lunar Festival rolls ‘round, I’m going. I haven’t been to one yet. Plus, all these death knights put me on edge,” Tay spat, casting away the skin that had been drained so quickly. When did Aeva’s lover get so warped from whom she originally introduced herself as? It seemed now like the kaldorei had become someone else…

“Tay, surfal, please calm yourself. I promise you I’ll get leave for us to go to the celebration, so you can have fun,” Aeva reassured, resting her head on Tay’s shoulder. Aeva twisted the golden band around her right ring finger, worrying for her love. She wrapped her arms around the kaldorei in a loving embrace, unknowing of the affair that took place between her love and another woman.

Guilt rose in the kaldorei’s chest, though she quickly suppressed it. She’d only liked Aeva for her looks at first, but now she felt it fading and being replaced by so many other emotions full of confusion and loss. That draenei she couldn’t get out of her head. She just couldn’t find a way to rid her thoughts of the woman.

The Lunar Festival stood some months away, but guilt continued to wrack her. Aeva wanted to do this, and here she’d just been shit to her and everyone else. Even Ivan, whom she got along well with. She sat there for that night, not bothering to sleep because she knew she’d be wracked with nightmares, instead sitting out on that same spot and drank the skins she’d bought. All for herself.

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Moonlight shone through the high branches of the trees that seemed to blanket the glade, and revelers danced around laughing and cheering. The festival went on around the couple, everyone minding their own business in their own circle of friends, sometimes wandering to get to know someone else. Some, however, mistook the meaning of “getting to know someone”.

Tay shuddered at the peoples who got too close to strangers for comfort, squeezing Aeva’s hand to push out memories of that night in Valiance Tavern. How she regretted it. She remembered how drunk she’d gotten those two nights, to where she had no sleep. Not even a lick of it after Ishetii had rested. None after the skins she drowned herself in.

Even still, she kept depriving herself of sleep. Less and less of it every night, and more often than not she got none at all. It took so much out of Aeva, though, and that became the only reason she even bothered anymore. She thought of the ring around Aeva’s finger, of that night they’d been stuck patrolling the perimeter in Zangarmarsh. When she awkwardly pulled out the ring and asked that question of marriage.

“Tay! Aeva! I didn’t realize you’d be here!” Ivan ran forward, laughing and smiling with Royce right on his heels. The couple had their arms interlocked and only untangled to give hugs and
friendly greetings.

“Amelia, Ivan’s been treating you good, right?” Aeva asked, inspecting her soon to be sister-in-law. Their wedding had been planned for some time after they’d returned from killing the demon hybrid sitting atop the Black Temple in Outlands.

Royce giggled, adorned in one of the traditional dresses worn during the festivities. Ivan still covered himself in the Kirin Tor robes, reluctant to replace them with other clothings.

“Of course he has, dear sister! You should know that better than anyone. This boy was raised right!” She bit her lip and winked, intertwining her fingers with the ones of her beloved. “Oh, but what of you two? I heard from Ivan you’re going to--!

“As a matter of fact, I proposed to her in Outlands. Remember, surfal?” Aeva asked, smiling.

Tay grinned back, wearing that facade on her face and wishing she hadn’t done what she’d done that night. She would wreck Aeva. She would wreck the paladin and all of her hopes, shattering herself and building walls around her heart in the process. “Yes, in fact. You did. It was odd, but I don’t regret anything at all, surfal. Although, I have to meet someone. I’m sorry. I shouldn’t be too long.”

Liar, went that voice in the very back parts of her mind.

Aeva gave her lover a quick peck on the cheek as she bent down. She watched the towering elf walk off towards the woods. Ivan chuckled, offering to lead her to where something kept going on. “I am glad, little sister, you’ve someone. If mum doesn’t approve, she can deal with it, yes?” Aeva nodded as she went off with her brother, thoughts of Tay swirling through her mind.

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“Surfal? Where’re you at? I thought you said you wouldn’t be--” Aeva stopped in her tracks, and could only stare.

The kaldorei woman, her intended, her surfal, her lovely priestess, was with someone else. The man’s trousers were down at his ankles, Tay’s robe hiked up just below her waist. The man, presumably a--

Nashathel. He had his hand over her mouth so she couldn’t scream or make any noise whatsoever. Aeva almost charged in, but soon saw Tay’s facial expression. She liked it. Trailing her eyes down, Aeva saw on her lover’s--no, ex-lover’s--legs bite marks and darker spots from where his mouth had carved a path on Tay’s body.

The two finished up their business, Tay wearing an intoxicated look on her face as she pulled the robe and undergarments back to their places. Nashathel pulled his trousers back into place, securing a belt around his waist. They exchanged looks as they did so, giving the impression this was more than just a “friends with benefits” arrangement.

Aeva, saying nothing, stormed off. Everything hurt her as she distanced herself from the ex-fiancée she thought had loved her. This could explain how distracted her love had seemed earlier in the night. Tay wanted to get away, to hook up with another person instead of being loyal. Like she should have been in the first place.

Why had Aeva even let that damned kaldorei seep into her mind, her heart? What had she hoped to gain from the scandalous affair, as her mother would call it? Did she even love, the kaldorei? Damn her. Damn her damn her damn her. Aeva silently prayed a thousand hells unleash itself upon
Tay, would take all of her happiness and cast it out the window and into a fire to burn away.

Tay had no heart.

Aeva just lost hers.

Only a year or so after the whole Naxxrammas business got cleaned up, just two months after defeating the Lich King, units got sent out to control the remaining Scourge in the land. Nobody knew where Bolvar went, that brave Alliance hero who seemed to make the Wrathgate a less terrifying thing. Soldiers got to rest, finally, after so many snow, undead filled days and nights in that Goddess-forsaken land.

Tay sat in a bar, celebrating to herself the fall of another stupid threat that could have been taken care of so easily. If, of course, the legendary Tor’landa and Lan’reli still roamed the damned world. Another Lunar Festival had passed, just a couple of days earlier. Bitterness and constant nagging guilt tormented her for that awful thing she had done.

Aeva gave her the cold shoulder, spoke to her only when needed. Nash, after that night, had began to start up his passes and flirting with her. He left her after Torrolf nearly lost his life in Icecrown Citadel. Poor dwarf just started tagging along with her after things went right. His wife, in Ironforge, had left him for some richer dwarven man hellbent on his kid being a paladin.

So much bullshit, all in so little time. Why now be the era of constant threats the strange duo hadn’t a clue, but it took their joys from them. They had only the beer now.

“Torrolf, sir. D’you think I fucked it up?” she asked from out of the blue.

“Oh, uh… I dunnae, knife-ears. I lost m’wife and she took m’boy with ‘er. Ye probably just acted on some instinct. Drink yer ale now. Git drunk and drown yer sorrows. That’s what we do back home. No’ that I got one,” Torrolf grunted, raising the flagon to his mustachioed mouth and guzzling it down. He looked like an animal, the only thing differentiating him from it being the gradual loss of his dwarven accent.

“Hm… Fuck ‘em, then, yeah?” she chuckled weakly, sipping some more of the strong drink. The dwarf nodded, hailing a bartender for another two flagons. “Good point. More shit’ll help me handle that. They don’t need me, I don’t need them! Hell, do I want to get my hands on Royce though…”

Torrolf coughed, sputtering and choking on his ale. “Y’what?!” His eyes widened. He slammed down the mug and raised a finger to lecture her. “You ruin yer good almost-weddingness with Petrovsky, git caught with another woman by th’ Treehugger, and I’ve walked in on ye with ‘em all Light-knows-how-many-times, and now ye wanna sex up Ivan’s soon-ta-be? Th’ hell’s wrong wit’che, Silverblade?” The dwarf sighed, shaking his head and drinking more to quell the growing anger.

She shrugged, draining the cup as she had bothered to listen to him rant. “I think that’s a later story. Now try drinking me under the damned table again. It’s a lot more fun to get drunk that way.”

Nash grunted something as he swept Tay off her feet since she kept faltering in her step. “You’re not going,” he stated, not bothering to give her a reason why. Tay knew exactly why he wouldn’t be letting her leave, not until the alcohol got out of her system. Still, something in him said he was
keeping her prisoner in his home. But he did it so she could be safe. She told him in the past that she’d not be safe ‘til all her father’s bastards were dead and gone.

“Hey! I can walk, damned Treefucker!” she hissed. Tay began squirming and trying to get out of his grip. She never remembered Nash being stronger since the last time she’d seen him.

“Been listening to my sister, I see.”

“Where is she, anyways? And why are we the only two who get you to speak more than three or four words?”

“She needs to visit. And it’s because I--”

“Gotcha, you giant. Now put me down.”

“No.”

“Fine. I guess I’ll stay another week or so. If it’s any longer something’s wrong with me.”

She heard Nash let out a quiet ‘mhm’ and listened to him laugh--Well, felt the vibrations from his chest, anyways. Maybe, just maybe, she could settle down and have a life here. Away from everyone else and everything else. That would be good for her. Nash was a good man. But--

**No,** she thought, *Nash deserves better than me.*

He leaned down and kissed her again, which she accepted, letting her thoughts scatter in the wind. Like so many books she’d seen Royce read, it turned into the weird parts where the characters gave into their desires.

“See? You get me tonight, too, Treefucker.”

Out of nowhere came a female voice, one neither of the couple thought to hear anytime soon.

“Shit, Treefucker’s *home*? Now I have to pay for the peacebloom this time!”

“Shit, Treefucker’s *home*? Now I have to pay for the peacebloom this time!”
A week and a half later, Nash’s sister Lehoanna remained with the couple. She stayed mostly due to the fact that she had little money to pay her brother back for the amount of peacebloom she’d stolen from him in the past. Nash made sure to get her to help him in his normal routines. This, he told her, would be how she could pay him back. He did make sure to keep her away from the small garden out back, though.

“I remember you when you were younger. You and my brother,” Lele blurted when she saw the other woman approaching from her left. “He said you left him for a human when those bug-people started coming over the wall again.” She looked up from sorting the wood into which logs would be used to set up another part of Nash’s hut.

Tay groaned almost silently, wishing he’d not said anything about their relationship to his sister. She’d be prying and asking for details about it. Prying and reminding her of all the things she had forced him through, all the way up to now. Maybe now she could explain and try to smooth it over with her side of the story—the one not riddled with bits and pieces of the full truth she refused to tell. One day she would, though.

Can I meet one person outside my family that I’m taller than? And not fucking humans, those don’t count, she thought. Glancing down at her shoulder, she spotted another mark on her, which promptly caused her to cover it up with another one of Nash’s stolen shirts. Heat flooded her face as she hoped another one wouldn’t show while she spoke. For extra measures, she pulled the sleeves all the way down.

“It wasn’t exactly like that, Lele—”

“Lehoanna. Only my brother calls me that,” Lele corrected.

“It’s not exactly the way you think. We split up in agreement that we should—“ Tay stopped, coughing nervously as she thought about what words to use, “—split up to, uh, focus on ourselves…” Talking to Lehoanna proved to be a mistake as she tried to explain, but found herself trailing off.

“Oh, that’s your side, huh. I think I’ll determine the truth of it when I see how you treat him, Taylande,” she retorted.

The priestess bit her tongue, trying now not to screw up what might be a good friendship between the two. “It’s Tay, actually. Anyways, I need to head up to Lor’danel. I owe your brother something and there’s supposed to be a fellow I’ve to meet real quick. Could you let him know for me?”

Lele grunted, giving her brother’s lover a brisk, curt nod. She took the time to pause her work, which she’d almost finished in the time Tay had spoken, and made sure to watch where she went off to. She didn’t trust the priestess. Woman had left a trail of broken hearts and a ruined half-elf behind her to follow. Find that half-elf, one would find the priestess.

She finished up her work and brushed off the small bark chips, spinning on her heel and marching over to where her brother sat. She glared angrily at him until he noticed. He didn’t, due to being so far into meditating. Lele cleared her throat loudly.

“What?” he asked.
“Why are you even with her? What’s wrong with you in the mind, Treefucker?!” Lele spat. “She wrecks your emotions, cheats on you, and all this other crap and you take her back? Are you a special kind of stupid, big brother? I don't care if she is one of the few who don't make fun of your lisp, SHE. HAS. HURT. YOU.”

“You will be quiet right now. I love her, and had I not taken her into my home she would have died. When she got here she nearly entered shock. She wouldn't have made it much longer if I’d not intervened. And now, she’s- Never mind it. You get my point. Smoke some peacebloom, and pass me the joint since we both need to calm down.”

Lele lit one up after rolling it together for her and Nash. She didn't let up, taking in a deep breath of the stuff and passing it off to her brother. “I'm calmer. What do you mean when you say she’d’ve died?” Lele asked, raising a brow and turning her gaze to him.

“She had some large bruises and cuts on her, ones not completely healed. Tay forgot to treat those. Her hand she tended to but… what she fought, and what it gave her--” he paused, sucking in more of the addictive peacebloom. He huffed out, smoke filling the gap of space in front of him. “--she wouldn't have lasted long. I said shock kicked in.”

“But why not heal her and send her off? It's not like she’s going to stay! And give me the damn blunt before you use it all!” Lele snapped, ripping it from his hands.

“She won't be leaving me, not anymore.”

“Why do you say that? Because she promised?” Lele asked, aggressiveness gradually seeping into her tone. “Because she hasn't run off and fucked another woman? Because she swears she hasn't gone and cheated since the half-elf? Or is it--”

“She is pregnant with my child and that is why she won't leave!” Nash barked. A glare stretched across his face, so awful they seemed to bore through one’s being. Terrifying could be used to describe him when he got this way. When Nash got mad, the fool invoked the fury of a wild bear.

Lele dropped the blunt on her pants. It singed her clothing, though she largely ignored it as she tried to process what her elder brother just told her. The blunt had burned a hole through her pants. Nash took note of it, mentally reminding himself to mend them later.

“You… What? How long? There's nothing there!” she questioned.

“She doesn't know. The child's been there for nearly two weeks. It'll be so tomorrow. The bump will begin showing up later--should, anyways.”

“When’s she gonna figure it out, brother? Will you tell her?”

“No. Tay’s smart. She’ll know in a month or so. Maybe earlier, but who knows?”

“Here, you should smoke up while you can.” Lele picked up the blunt and passed it to Nash.

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Meanwhile, Tay wandered about Lor’danel hoping to spot the damned mage she should have met with two weeks ago. The military would be pissed, possibly throw her into one of their jails for abandoning her post. This is what happened when she thought she could be happy. Surprise visits from assholes and people who wanted her head. She grumbled a series of curses under her breath, not able to help wondering if the mage had left already.
“Oi, fuckass,” hollered a low, tenorlike voice in terribly pronounced Darnassian. Tay took in a deep breath, withholding the urge to slap him as far as he could go. She’d told him over and over that the pronunciation he used meant that and not ‘asshole’. Human never listened, though.

She turned to meet her old colleague, who had since lost a leg and wobbled around on a peg and leaned on his own staff. She had lots of reasons to not go on boats, the mage’s loss of his leg being one.

“Ivan, how’re you holding up? And have you received word from the higher-ups about the old Righteous Dorei?” she questioned, cracking a smile. The use of their group’s old nickname made the mage, Ivan, grin a little bit. Royce started calling them that in Outlands. Mostly due to their meeting many a religious figures.

“Shitty. Still numb over what you did to Royce, and how you’re why I lost my leg. Not gonna stop blaming you. And yes. While we wait for a signal, we are on cleanup duty. And if some dumbass from the Darkshire or Redridge Squadrons gets captured by another wolfrider, we play rescue. They want to see you within the next month, or you're in trouble.”

Ivan kept a steady glare on her, putting his weight onto his right side and reaching into a pocket. He removed a sealed letter, stamped with the wax seal of the Alliance Lion. “Something for Nash,” was the only explanation she got. He huffed when she took the letter from his hand, allowing him to shift his weight back to how he could normally stand.

“I'm here for the next week. Get your friend-with-benefits with you. If you're not here in that time, you're on your own.”

Tay offered him a taut smile. “Well, nice to see you too Ivan. I think I'll get a local mage. If you'll excuse me.” With that, she turned into the inn and purchased a room plus two bottles of the Darnassian wine Nash had previous to her drinking all of it.

Gilneas. It loomed in the distance. Why she’d been the only one sent to this Goddess-damned place made no sense. Yes, send the elven priestess with drinking problems and a reputation for bedding women! Her gaze had been fixed on the horizon since she boarded this ship, thoughts swimming.

Yet always still, those voices in the back of her mind persisted. Bombarding her with doubts and insecurities galore: like her scars, her facial tattoos (she needed them changed terribly), and her guilt over bedding that one. Damned. Draenei.

*You were drunk,* she would keep telling herself. It never worked. The draenei had been the only one who let her release all those pent-up emotions. She couldn't stop asking herself if something more could have come from that. If she’d just… left Aeva, never come back. But no, she couldn't put Aeva through it. Instead, getting caught cheating had been her grand idea.

“Milady priestess, we near their harbor. I’d suggest clearing your quarters in case a few must use it,” a sentinel recommended.

Tay grunted. “It's been that way forever. A hammock and a satchel’s all there is.”

“Understood. I assume you’d like t--”

“Go, please. I need a moment to think before I start my duties.”

The sentinel nodded once, making a couple of rounds on deck before heading to the captain,
wherever the fool normally stayed. Tay waited a moment before heading off near the entrance to the lower deck of the ship. She cracked open a skin of ale. It grew to be the one thing that blocked out all of her rash decisions, making her numb as she got more and more tolerating of the stuff.

“I can't believe I'm letting some of the Gilneans use Buckbeak if they need. But oh, wait. I'm being forced to,” she mumbled to herself. She lifted a skin that hung from her belt and uncapped it, proceeding to down its contents as quick as she could without heaving up her stomach. Even though she’d been drinking since the Qiraji decided to return, she still had some troubles keeping the ale down. Wherever Torrolf got stationed while she stood on this boat, she needed to find him and slap him. Then proceed to drink him under the table.

A horn sounded, their signal to ready themselves up for docking. She’d drink ‘til she lost her lunch later. They told her to be ready to heal the wounds of those who board the ship. From what she gathered, something awful happened in this pitiful nation of humans that demanded their attention. Something with wolf-men and Forsaken, they said. Forsaken she could handle. Wolf-men not so much.

It didn’t help that she’d been half-drunk when she received her orders. Wolf-men and Forsaken, humans getting pulled into their mess. The nation’s distress had become known to the kaldorei well into the invasion, or whatever they’d been dealing with for the past couple of months. Most likely the peoples would be wiped out when the boats arrived. If they were lucky, maybe a few stragglers would have lived to see the, erm, clouds of rain the next day.

Tay groaned, once again asking herself why the higher-ups chose her to go. Why not her cousin? Why pick her, the one who had no experience with wolves and people turning into wolves? They should have sent Nar. Nar fought in the Satyr War. Nar had dealt with the druids using some stupid scythe that warped their minds. Nar fought alongside them. Nar watched their being sent into an eternal slumber by Stormrage. But no, send in the inexperienced, drunk-off-her-ass, hotheaded priestess who wasn’t even that much of one. Smart move.

When they had landed and the great vessels halted, she realized she vastly underestimated the wolf-man thing. Every other person had that underlying reek of dog, and half the peoples were shifted into their feral forms. She knew she’d be drinking later.

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Hugin sighed, scratching at his mustache that had been itching like hell since his last shifting. Elves were showing up. Orcs and walking corpses invaded their homeland. But he was not a fighter. He was--nay, is--a healer. He helped behind the shelter of the main camps, aiding by repairing the men and sending them off again.

He watched and watched as one surly-looking elf woman scanned every single one of his people like tools to be used and discarded. His father always said to beware the man who looked at good folk with that in their faces. But Jacob Bishopp had died years ago. Something about this elf screamed at him to approach her.

Hugin would find a way to reach her and speak to her. Maybe the elf-woman had some training in the healing arts. Light knows he needed a mentor.

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Tay surveyed the area and directed a glaive thrower here or there. Perhaps the military said she needed experience in something stupid and sent her here to learn. She wouldn’t. She’d be drunker than all fucking hell next morning. Tay also made a mental note to watch the Gilnean fellow that
kept eyeballing her.

If he wanted sex, he could go to another woman. She had a strict rule of only human women. The only man she could truly say she’d loved so far had been Nashathel, and they called him away to Hyjal. Damn, she missed that grumpy druid. Too bad they sent him off to Hyjal to help with whatever damned thing happened up here.

As she strode off the ship and into the town, she took more time to survey the peoples that stood in the small square. Pathetic, the lot of them. She’d bed half the women before they reached Rut’theran. Her eyes searched about for the ones she planned to do first, hoping to save the better-looking ones for when their vessels neared their destination.

“Whatever the fuck you want from me, don’t look here. Better explain to me right now why your ass kept staring. Now,” she hissed in his face, spit flying.

“Jus’... Calm down, dammit, and I’ll say!” he growled.

The underlying scent of dog made Tay want to cringe and back away. Why did dogs always have to be a problem for her? Oh well. She’d tolerate it as long as he didn’t try killing her, and as long as the women were good in bed. She shouldn’t be thinking this stuff, though, while confronting the wandering-eye-man. She let him go, hands sliding into her robe to grip her blades. Silverblade and Ellemayne would be ready.

“I’m a priest. Needin’ a mentor, is why. You looked the sort of a holy person. A-are you? G’oh, shit, my name you’ll need. Hugin Bishopp, m’lady, at your beck and call,” he introduced, offering a slight, sincere bow. Him--a priest. He’d be far better than her, but she couldn’t accept an apprentice. No, no, not now, not ever, not in a thousand-thousand years would she accept one. She could not train somebody, even if they begged and begged and begged.

“M’lady, please. I’m needing one so terribly. I am not a fighter, my father made sure to point it out and sent me onto the streets. Please,” he pleaded once more, mustache seeming to bristle with anxiety.

“...Talk with me after we deal with the iszera dun’a and en’thal quenat in your lands. You don’t want to be trained under me, too, as you’ll be one of Varian’s many damned tools to be sent out, fucking human king. But if you still want it we can talk after.”

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Buckbeak came back to kaldorei lands with an injured haunch. One of the feral bastards had clawed him when they fell from not maintaining a firm enough grip. First timers. He would be resting in Rut’theran until he was well enough to fly again. Tay remained angry at whatever bastard hurt her friend, even if he refused to speak a damned word to her. She also hoped she didn’t invite the one who hurt him to her bed, while on that boat.

He became her apprentice. Hugin Bishopp, student of an elf. And a damned arse of one, too. He
made a point to call her that, most of the women she’d bedded on the return voyage calling her that at some point or another. When she returned, she learned she had been called to Stormwind effective immediately. One mage offered to conjure a portal to the city, though it took them a couple of hours for the portal to remain steady.

“Tay! You’re here! But what about Torrolf and Aeva?” came an all-too-familiar voice. Amelia Royce. What a delight it’d be to see her again. Such a sweet girl, and Ivan showered her in so many gifts and displays of love she thought the poor girl would explode from it all. Tay knew she would, but mostly from the constant doting he displayed.

“I’m here, all right. Last I’d heard, Torrolf went to the Highlands to help his Wildhammer kin. I thought he said that his mum was Wildhammer. Aeva went with him at the request of those paladins. Although I think she’s serving under the banners of the Alliance and Argents. Anyways,” Tay waved a hand, dismissing the thoughts. “What’re we doing?”

“Claiming us a strip of land off Stormwind’s coast!” Royce bubbled. So perky, the polar opposite of Ivan. Him being a grim and quiet magus, and her a happy, sweet rogue, how did they even come to meet? Were they both from Ivan’s home? Or was Royce a child of that one lost kingdom, that one that now belonged to the Banshee Queen?

Tay lost that faint smile, instead it being replaced by a glower. Why couldn’t she have dragged Hugin along, given him a taste of just what they did? No, she had told him to set up a home in Darnassus atop Teldrassil. So damned smart. Give the man a lick of all her bullshit. But he’d done as she requested, waiting patiently for orders to come about what to do. Damn that worgen, damn him for being such a dutiful and loyal man.

She couldn’t blame him, though. She had shit to do.

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The boat riding, the constant lapping of waves, so much of it she hated. So. Much. Water. She didn’t feel particularly fond towards that, only going in when she had to. Tay preferred flying.

One night, though, they’d been drinking. But she didn’t drink that night. Something kept telling her to not do it, and so she trusted that gut feeling, hoping it would prove her right for trusting it. This night didn’t feel kind, and Royce had gotten drunk as hell. Ivan had been helping above deck, so she offered to take her back to her room.

“Tay… Tay… I want you to love me,” she breathed. The elf grinned, thinking it would be okay for this night. Ivan wouldn’t have to know, Royce would most likely not even remember, and Tay hadn’t had any pleasure since the women from Gilneas. Oh, how they moaned her name. She could elicit that reaction from Royce, but decided to go on the safe side.

Ivan wouldn’t have to know. Ivan couldn’t know. Not at all. Not ever.

“If you ask nicely, perhaps,” she purred. She wanted to make Royce scream, scream to where she’d be forced to shove a hand over the human’s mouth, make it like that night in Northrend, like the draenei had. “My only thing is that you don’t be loud enough for people to hear. After all, Ivan could walk in at any moment.”

“Then fuck me already. He hasn’t for so long,” Royce begged, so clearly drunk off her ass. Tay grinned an awful, impish grin and brushed some of her hair from her face. She pulled Royce into her own personal cabin. Mostly, she’d stocked ale into it and a small bed large enough for herself plus a small person. Like Royce.
Tay began to undo the buckles that bound Royce’s chest harness to her, fumbling and getting them off with Royce’s help. She roughly shoved Royce back into the bed as she continued to strip off the clothing that somehow now felt like they were smothering the two women. So many layers, so much blocking them from having fun.

Royce reached up as soon as she’d slid her pants from her body, grasping onto Tay’s collar so greedily, so hungrily, like a predator yearning for its food, and slammed their lips together. Tay savored it, stealing a glance down low to find that Royce hadn’t been wearing anything underneath those pants.

She took this opportunity to slide a hand up the human’s thigh, pulling a quick gasp from her. Tay grinned through the kiss, pulling apart and sliding a finger into Royce’s nether regions. She leaned back onto the small mattress covered only in a thick blanket which doubled as Tay’s traveling cloak. Tay flicked out her tongue, letting her finger slide in and out of Royce painfully slow. She knew the other woman wanted her to go faster, but Tay wouldn’t do that.

She ran her tongue down Royce’s neck and to her bare breast, Tay dragging it across the exposed nipple. Royce gasped and begged for more, voice steadily rising until Tay stopped altogether and slammed her hand over Royce’s mouth, leaving her breathing heavily.

“Remember,” she growled, “Ivan could walk in at whatever moment he pleases and see you sprawled across the bed with me all inside you. Hush.”

Royce nodded, trying to grind her hips against something, anything at all to spark her release. Tay eyed Royce and lowered herself to her knees, level with the human’s exposed legs. An idea came to mind. Tay stood, clicking the door to her room quietly closed and returned to her previous position. She silently begged the Goddess for Ivan to not walk in.

Tay leaned forward, shooting Royce a glare indicating to be quiet as she prowled forward. She buried her face in between Royce’s legs, using her tongue to lick and tease and work wonders on Royce. And neither objected.

She felt Royce’s legs tightening around her head, sending a quick tremor of pain through her head. Royce’s hand she felt tangling through her messy hair, trying feebly to hold Tay in that position for as much pleasure as she could want. How good Royce tasted to her. She did as much as she could to prolong their encounter, dragging out as much as possible by pausing when she thought Royce might spill over.

Eventually, Royce’s release happened as Tay would stop and wait for the pleasure to die down before starting up again. Tay had only stopped now because she felt tiredness creeping up on her like a shadow in the dark.

Tay pulled herself and the other woman under the blanket, choosing to risk being caught by Ivan. He wouldn't mind once she’d given him the excuse that his wife wandered into the wrong bed. Yes, it would work.

Tay woke the next morning, half-dressed in the band that held her breasts (fair in size, but not too much of a bother) and pants she had stolen from an old lover. Royce had remained curled up next to her, one arm draped across Tay’s abdomen and head resting on the elf’s chest.

She drifted back off, waking again to a bell shrieking and cutting its way through her rest (mostly nightmares). Royce was already up and dressing, daggers of hers shoved into the belt. There went last night’s meal, but Tay could see she moved about with a slight limp. She’d done her job.
perfectly fine.

The bell came ringing through again, this time causing her to get up and grab Silverblade and Ellemayne into a hand. She shot out from her small room, not bothering to throw a robe over her exposed torso. They’d seen woman before. They could handle some more. Besides, she gathered they were too preoccupied with the Horde to care.

Ivan stood in front of her, fuming. “You had sex with my wife?! She’s nearly two months pregnant and my lover, AND YOU BED HER?!”

“We don’t have time for this, you fucking mage! Last I checked, we have orcs to kill!” Tay spat back, not awake enough to get into a pissing match with a human who proved more stubborn than an untrained saber cat.

Now she really, really wished Hugin had been dragged along.

Horde began to board the ship, roping in here or there and laughing as they screamed their bloody war chant. “Lok’tar ogar!” she heard one screech before it cleaved off the head of one soldier. Her eyes darted around as she hoped to find where Royce had run off to.

No. Oh, no. Tay ran, dodging between blades until one caught her left side. This pulled a quick scream of pain from her as she spun around and met the snarling face of an orc. Their strength still surprised her, even if she’d been fighting them since Silithus happened.

She ducked and tried to dodge to its side and take it out, failing and earning another slice on her back from some nearby orc. Tay turned, slashing at the fool who forgot how to move away from the angry elf with shiny blades.

“ZIN NA’O!” she cried, driving Silverblade into its skull. Tay caught herself referring to the dead male as an it. They were not things, no more than she was. The orcs, they had lives and families and something to fight for, along with their personal gains. She felt loathing rise up in her, so high she didn’t note--

The orc behind her gave a cry, jamming a jagged piece of something into her right shoulderblade. Well, at least the orc didn’t shove it into her dominant side. Silently, Tay offered up a prayer to Elune before she let Ellemayne come out and taste the blood of the fool. She kept going, hoping no other orc would try to come after her. She jinxed herself.

One ran up to her. And another. And another. Three of the bastards ran up to her, forcing her to abandon the use of her daggers for Elune’s Fire. She hated using that on things that weren’t demons or undead. Hell, she hated orcs but knew they didn’t deserve all that damned agony the fire could inflict. Save that to the unnatural things.

The first one swung an axe at her, and Tay quickly hooked one dagger in the curve of the orc’s weapon, rendering it immobile until he broke it away. She kept that blade up, Ellemayne free to be used to gut one of the bastards that came near. One made that mistake, and she swung low, nicking their leg and drawing blood. Not even close to a major issue.

Tay concentrated, hoping to send a blast of Elune’s Fire through the blade. She struggled to maintain her position with the axeman, shoving back at him and kicking her leg out at the third member of the party. “Zin na’o, k’laen iszera dun’a, o--” She got cut off in the middle of her prayer, getting winded when the axe broke free and the pommel slammed into her stomach.

Elune’s Fire directed itself through Ellemayne and seared through the orc. A bloodcurdling scream
arose from their throat as she took this chance to slice their neck. They fell to the ground, sending the remaining two into a rage she struggled to fight against. Silverblade found its way wedged into one’s leg, remaining there until she could remove it. For now, all she had was Ellemayne, the legendary Reaver, and Elune’s Fire.

Fear and adrenaline pumped through her veins as she struggled to act against it. She remembered enough from her father’s brutal beatings that adrenaline would not help her. She’d only been lucky when he tried to steal her face. One time it had helped. Not again, she didn’t trust it anymore. Luck just happens. Now, her life depended on it. Not like before, when that woman had been watching herself. Tay still had that cloak. She’d have to get it soon.

The axe orc dropped his weapon and went for the blade in his thigh, providing a quick opening. She rammed Ellemayne into his chest. It did not kill him. She began to hiss out a string of curses, each one getting progressively more and more offensive. Only Elune’s Fire. Tay roared out loud, screeching something rapidly in Darnassian. She slammed her fiery palm into his face, burning the orc--no, frying was more appropriate.

Silverblade and Ellemayne she ripped from the orc’s dead body, quickly dispatching the last member of the trio that made a fatal mistake in fighting her. She felt sore, having strained herself to hold out against the axe that had pressed down into her wrist.

Tay ran for Royce, who now got cornered by three other orcs. She would not stand by herself alone. Tay began to run through the crowd of fighting, Ivan beginning to scream behind her.

“Run faster, dammit! Run faster!” he screeched. He roared something else, but she didn’t catch it. A large, suctioned tentacle slammed into the side where Royce once stood. Time seemed to pass by so quickly to her, and she turned, running to go after Ivan--

Who lost his leg when the boat’s mast came tumbling down. It got trapped, and the ship broke into two. Maybe she could save him, save him and rush to Royce’s rescue and they’d be safe to live their lives. She could save them, she could do it, she could do it, she could most definitely--

The sea monster slammed another limb into the ship, pulling it down under the waves. Tay slid into her cabin. Well, what had been her cabin. She grasped tightly to the cloak she kept on her. She’d grown attached to it, taken it with her wherever, like it had been an essential weapon to keep and hone for years.

She would never be quick enough to save those she cared for. She would never be quick enough to save her fellow soldier. She could never be fast enough. Not in a thousand-thousand years.

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The day Royce died had been the day Tay quit bedding women and riding on the sea. She’d resorted to keeping her bed open to only Nash and Aeva, and, she silently added, to that draenei if she ever came back. Tay couldn’t count on one hand how many women she’d bedded, and how many had tried to keep her for themselves. She didn’t want to be tied down, and never once subjected herself to be the pleasured one. The only exception: the draenei.

Her trek back to Nashathel’s had been littered with various noises that placed her on edge. She still couldn’t shake the feeling that Ivan watched her as she took the pathways and some backwood trails that veered off from the main roads. She had a letter and alcohol to give to him, and those backwood paths seemed like the quickest route to take.

She proved herself right, smirking ever so slightly, even with one wine bottle in her hand, the other
tucked under her arm, letter right there with that first bottle. Nash would be pleased. So would she later that night, if Lele weren’t sleeping inside the small home with them. That would complicate the matter and he still insisted they could use the cave only a little ways off.

However, Tay still dwelt on the hostility in Ivan’s voice. He’d been right so many times. And this time, he was right. She caused Royce’s death by not being fast enough. She caused Ivan to lose his leg by not bothering to heal his wounds after infection had set in. She’d chosen her cloak over him.

*Selfish bastard,* she thought to herself as the guilt began to settle in her gut like a stone. *You filthy, selfish bastard,* Tay beat into her mind as she edged open the door to her lover’s home.
The Burn

Not even a week later, Tay found herself half out of her mind from the peacebloom one eve and swore to never touch it again. That is, once she’d sobered up enough to think correctly. The stuff had muddied her senses too much. She swore to Nash it was true. Instead of smoking it, she suggested, she can stick to the alcohol plus some debt she’d owe to Nash after drinking all of his. He reluctantly agreed.

“So… when you two are busy poking, mind keeping it down a bit? I need my beauty sleep, and your loud moaning is no help at all!” Lele exclaimed out of nowhere while they all sat inside occupied by something. “And how many times did you go at it before I got here?”

Tay’s face darkened in color as she looked up from one of Nash’s old learning books on herbs, turning to stare at him. His face had turned an equally dark color. “I’m not answering any of her questions, surfas,” she hissed through gritted teeth. She stood and moved outside to get away from the snooping little sister who spied on them while they were, ah, occupied. She’d rather pit the siblings at each other’s throats than have both at hers. Goddess knew she had too much of that.

It took her a scant few moments to find a comfortable-looking tree and scale it, nestling herself between the branches. While she did this, she could faintly make out their hushed, angry whispers she could only assume to be about Lele—no, Lehoanna’s—questions about Tay and Nash’s… relationship. She could wait out this strange chat between siblings in a tree and with a good book.

Inside, Nash gaped as the door halted back it’s closed position. He looked over at his sister, who conveniently had a smirk on her mouth. Lele threw herself back onto the chair and waited for those rushed answers to spill out. She wanted them. Their roughhousing kept her up when she tried to go to sleep. Lele couldn’t differentiate the moans and that made it even worse for her. Or better. Either way, she got to make a good joke out of it.

“I…” Nash stuttered, trying to form some semblance of an answer.

“Am waiting,” Lele concluded.

“What?” he asked.

“You said ‘I’ and I said, ‘am waiting’. What do you think I said?”

“Smartass,” he grunted, “I, uh, it’s Tay. And… well, a lot. S—Wait, why are you even asking this and why am I telling you?!!” Nash glared, lips pulling together in a thin line of silence. Now he asked the questions and got the answers.

“Because you love your little sister and I need more sleep. Next time, do it in the cave like you did that one time,” she innocently chimed, smiling. Her face was the picture image of innocence and well-meaning. Like hell she’d ever mean well since she knew how to break the arm of a plated-up sentinel like it were some butter spread.

Nash sighed and shook his head, standing up from his position to take a quick stride to the small cabinet near the sofa-slash-guest bed. He had some dry, hard foods in there he could store easily, along with some salted fish, most of which consisted of salmon from a nearby stream. He bent down to open it, pulling a few nuts and dried berries plus some smaller strips of said fish for a small meal.

“You can feel free to have some. I don’t need to say that after you devoured all your food after the
peacebloom and then ate all my damned moonberries the next time. Anyways, you’ve never told me. How’s min’da?” Nash questioned absentmindedly. He chewed on a few of the nuts and berries, only throwing in some fish after he’d downed the former of the two.

Lele froze, eyes glazing over with anger. She turned slowly to face her elder brother. He took a quick note of how her face became a mask of conflicting rage and pain. She growled. At him. Her only sibling. Nash knew, in this moment, he was royally fucked. Lele took a threatening step towards him.

Nash, terrified for one of the few times in his life, backed up and fell helplessly into a chair. He didn’t say a word. The assortment of foods in his hand he shoved into his mouth, not wanting a single crumb to go to waste. He watched as she reached for something to throw, like she always did. Oh, but her throwing things meant it would be an extreme fit of anger. Nash forced himself from the chair in case he had to run or tackle her to the ground.

“Our mother is dead! Do you want to hear the story of how I was the only one who stayed with her while she died? You fucking ass! That damned disease she got melted her brain ‘til she could barely speak! And when do you think this happened?” she screamed, hurling a heavy book of herbs towards his head.

He ducked, but barely. It hit the back wall with a loud thud as it fell. “During that Cataclysm!” Lele screamed at him. She grabbed an empty clay pot, throwing it too. Nash fell to his side, heaving himself up after it shattered against one of the house’s supporting wall beams. “Where were you?” she screamed again. Another small clay pot, this time one that he used to grow his indoor silverleaf for a local alchemist. The plant freefell, Nash rushing over and grabbing it up, laying it gently on the cabinet before Lele threw something else.

“Lele--” Nash started.

“Do not call me that!” she screeched at him, picking up his only decorative vase. She now stood near his bed, having moved around his home. Nash tried to say something to stop her from throwing it. “Mother cried out for you, brother! In her last moments she called out for us all, but mostly for you!” The vase spun towards his head.

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The front door opened. A figure, short (to Nash) and quick, rushed towards him and straightened her form, shoving him roughly into the wall as half the vase slammed into her fist as soon as she extended it. Lele spat once again at Nash, “She died while you dreamt of happy flowers in your Emerald Dream!”

Nash sighed, an utterly defeated and anguished look in his eye. “Please leave for a few hours, Lele. I need to think on this…” His little sister glared at both him and the newcomer, stalking out the door and slamming it shut. He turned to whoever had taken the vase meant for him. Nash prayed to the Goddess that his sister would come back so he could apologize sooner rather than later.

“Tay, you’ve got glass all over your hand. You’re bleeding again…” Nash groaned worriedly.

“I know, and it hurts. You’re not though, right? I’m more worried for you.” She scanned him up and down, eyes narrowed as she took her time to make sure he’d be alright. Tay tucked her bleeding hand under her left arm.

“No. Just emotionally. Step outside, though. You’re getting help whether you like it or not.”

Tay groaned and followed him out with no complaints. He made her wait near the edge of the house as he turned round back to grab Elune knows what. She waited for as long as she dared to wait for, slowly getting impatient. One thing she’d have been glad for in those early years stuck
with her father would be a lesson of patience. She shifted uneasily from one foot to the other, eventually trying to move around her injured hand.

She grunted, quickly pulling it into a fist to try and ease the pain. She only ground her teeth together, hoping to distract herself. Tay looked around the corner and waited for Nash to return. He didn’t. A growl sounded from her throat as she made her way around the back of the house and hoped to find him.

“Sit your ass down, you moronic woman!” Nash glared and pointed to a small bench he’d set up near the house. Tay obeyed. She laid her hand on her knee, waiting for Nash to either place a salve on it or heal it with his druidic skills.

Nash removed a small handful of clean bandages he’d found lying in a hollowed-out, moss covered hole in his cave’s wall. Thankfully he’d also had some of the herbs useful for treating injuries. If his love hadn’t waited like he’d said to, the juices from the plant would be ready to apply. But now she’d have to wait a bit longer, which bothered him. What if the wounds got infected? What would happen if it caused some sort of irreparable damage? What if--

He forced the thoughts from his mind, focusing on the poultice. “Tell me the story behind that small burn on your ankle, the one you think nobody ever notices,” he said, hoping this would prove to be a good distraction.

“...I-oh. It’s a long one,” Tay tried to warn, thinking he wouldn’t ask.

“Oh, and I have time for it.”

“If you insist. This is the beginning of how I got my ass into some deep shit. It’s awful, disappointing, and I can’t believe I’m telling it to you.

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She refused to go back to Vashj’ir. She’d be damned if she ever did. Why would she ever go back to a place that caused her to lose someone she cared for. She would not let herself care again, not after she’d lost Aeva, lost Nashathel, Royce, and that special, strange bond she had with Ivan. She lost them all. All of it her own fault, too.

“Hugin, get off your ass. We’re going to Hyjal. No questions.”

“Yes, Master! I’ll be right with you, just need my staff ‘nd I’ll be set,” Hugin replied, jumping from his chair and grabbing the satchel that lay beside it. He took two lengthy strides to where his staff rested in the corner of his small house, in the crook of a wall and a bookcase. His house, the standard unit of lodging in Darnassus, rested on one of the northernmost areas within the Craftsmen's Terrace in the city.

“Don’t call me master. You know I hate it and I’ll make sure you never hear the end of the angry lecturing that’s been going on in Stormwind about “the end” and all that crap. Now hurry up,” Tay spat, storming off towards the portal connecting Rut’theran to Darnassus. Hugin came up behind her at a jog, just barely keeping up with his mentor’s long, angry strides. He didn’t shift as it became too uncomfortable.

The duo marched through the portal with ease, Tay putting on a facade. She flipped from her agitated walk to her prideful, arrogant swaggering of purpose and ‘look at me’. That damned impish, uncomfortable smirk crossed her face as she acted like everything with her was a-oh-kay and nothing for her had ever gone wrong. A man stepped out from the building that sheltered the hippogryphs as she swaggered on over, pulling out a small bag jingling around and nearly
overflowing with various coins.

Hugin eyed his mentor curiously. She never acted like this, not since he saw her about as drunk as anyone could get on that boat to Rut’theran. He followed the two elves that now spoke in hushed Darnassian about the magnificent beasts resting in their perches. The male led them both to one certain one which seemed to have a constant scowl pulled across its face.

He stared at the bird whose eyes now opened, scanning the room. The eyes landed on him. Immediate discomfort. Hugin shifted from foot to foot, hoping it wouldn’t say a single word. At all. Not near him, at least. He already had to get used to all these Goddess-damned--

_Master Taylande’s in your head too much, Hugh! he told himself. And quit callin’ her master! You know she doesn’t like it. Call her something like… like that one elvish word you call your teacher._

“Hugin, if you’re trying to comprehend something about Buckbeak, just say it instead of frying your brain,” Tay said, pulling him from the trance. She looked back over at the hippogryph--Buckbeak, Hugin gathered--and grinned sweetly, scratching under its chin. “I don’t care if you hate it, your soft feathers are comforting. Talk to my damned apprentice, too.”

“Rodne lakhos,” Buckbeak grunted. Tay glared at the beast, which, from the voice, Hugin gathered to be a male of the race of bird-beast-things. All this new stuff complicated things for him. Why couldn’t he go back to being a filthy street orphan in the Gilneas City sewers and the more… ‘trashy’ areas, to put it lightly.

“He’s not ugly, he’s a… Gilnean. One cursed with the worgen thing,” she reminded Buckbeak. Buckbeak only turned a conspicuous eye back to his partner’s apprentice, who once again shifted his feet under the intense gaze of the bird.

“Uhm, ma’am--”

“Shan’do, Hugin. I thought I told you that.”

“Shan’do, then. Alright, I can say that. Shan’do, does he know any Common?” he asked.

“Yes, actually. Enough to be conversational in your backwards language, but he refuses to use it and stick to his standard Darnassian,” Tay replied. She held up a finger to tell Hugin to wait on replying. She turned over to the keeper of these hippogryphs. While she spoke, Buckbeak kept his eyes trained on the anxious Gilnean. “And now how long ‘til he can fly again?”

A faint reply of something in Darnassian came, but Hugin ignored all sounds to focus on the strange beast that his shan’do had picked out as her personal ride to here and there. The two were locked in an intense staring contest, waiting like two predators for one to give.

Hugin thought he would lose, no matter how many times this would go on. But he felt something about this beast stir in his chest. He liked this bird, Buckbeak. Buckbeak had the patience of a lion and the inquisitive look of a traveling scholar seeking as much knowledge as he could before he had to return from whence he came. Perhaps he could come to trust Buckbeak.

“Maybe you and I’ll come to like each other, ah? For now we can just stare at each other. Dunno if you got that all, but it doesn’t matter. I’m gonna be stuck traveling around with your owner, though,” Hugin breathed so quiet only Buckbeak could pick it up.

Buckbeak gave a knowing nod before turning his head, tucking it into his feathered wing to get some semblance of rest. Hugin nodded back. He knew the bird didn’t catch it but it didn’t matter to him.
“Alright, Hugin. C’mon. We’re gonna be using this beautiful woman here. Her name’s Lani’zin. I wonder who she’s named after, if glory is in her name. Maybe someone’s mate?” Tay theorized, turning back to her apprentice. “I, apparently, only have enough money for one hippogryph to be used for now. The tender here says her owner won’t mind anyone using her, say the man needed her stabled while he went off to do something.”

Tay and Hugin saddled up, the latter of the two being loaded with all of their satchels and supplies. Lani’zin carried the bulk of their food, water, and sheltering supplies but none of it seemed to hinder the lovely beast. She flew them on, dutifully.

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She made a mistake coming to this mountain. So many cultists. If only her big sister were here, she’d be completely safe from any and all harm that would dare come after her. Now she found herself alone, without Aeva to help. They were always a duo growing up. The two half-blooded sisters of Alterac. Their mother endured being called a whore, a cheater, a disloyal wife, and so many other things just for the sake of the family.

But now she descended into the burning village now occupied by Twilight’s Hammer sympathizers. Her fear made her heart pound violently as she burst into a sprint to try and track down and save as many of the peoples here as she could. Even if her skills included the healing arts with some martial training, she wouldn’t do very well in an environment of skilled psychopaths. This, truly, would be her greatest mistake, she decided---

As she got slammed into the side of a burning home. The glimpse she got made her heart skip a beat. Erik, one of her bestest friends from childhood. With these… these… monsters.

“Aw, look! Little Alexis Petrovsky,” Erik spat into her ear. “You know, I wanted you that whole time we spent there. And at every offer, you turned me down, little love. Big brother and sisters aren’t here to help you. Sad. You’re mine now.” His voice went from contempt to pity to such anger in so little time. He sounded like a ravenous beast who’d not eaten in so long, just finding their prey.

Alexis realized she would be the prey for this hungry wolf. “Erik, I told you why! I told you--” Erik shut her up quickly, pulling out a knife and holding it to her neck. He forced her behind another building where not a soul could see, nor would they dare follow.

Erik forced her to the ground, an awful grin spread across his face that revealed all his teeth. He shoved his meaty forearm against her throat. She could barely breathe. His knife dragged down and cut away her robes, through her underclothing. The tiny blade dropped a couple inches above her head. Where he could see the temptation in her to grab it, but he’d be too quick for her.

One sweating hand ran down her breast, squeezing it so tightly she cried out--or tried to. His forearm prevented anything beyond a strangled croak. That same hand squeezed again. A cruel grin spread across his face. She’d be shaking now, if she could move at all. His hand made a filthy trail down her body, down to her waistband. He hooked one finger on both pants and undergarments, yanking down with such fierceness that both materials went down with a loud ripping noise.

“You’ll take me, and you’ll take me as many times as I feel like.” He jammed his thumb inside, molesting her. She’d waited for whomever she would marry to take her, not wait for her to be violated by someone she thought she trusted. She wanted her sisters, her brother, the man who raised her as his own, to help her from this awful awful feeling.
Erik added more of his fingers, the feeling worsening as she felt stretched, crushed, claustrophobic, like too many people had entered the Cathedral crying out for their wrongdoings to be pardoned, to be blessed, to asked for children or something else. But it was nothing like that, not this Light-awful feeling. Eventually, his whole fist fit in there. He kept it moving in some unholy way that she’d not thought existed. But it did.

Something wet trickled out. No, it couldn’t be her bleeding. That had passed already. This--Erik had done something with his hand to make her bleed. He removed his hand. Even though he removed it slowly, it still hurt so badly. Tears were leaking from her eyes. If this was what Erik had aimed to do, to make her cry in pain, he succeeded. The cruel, awful man she once called a friend succeeded in making her feel reduced to nothing.

He inserted his… other limb… in her. No. No, no, no. This could not be real. This had to be a dream. Everything about this seemed so, so unreal that it had to be fake and an awful figment of imagination. Why would Erik do this? They were friends. They were such good friends once…

“LASSAN AUS MIN, K’LAEN EN!” cried someone nearby. A savior, perhaps. But also possibly a simple adventurer. Erik stopped. He pushed himself up, an urgent and terrified look on his face. Good. Maybe he’d get something done to him that made him fear for everything in his body.

The voice of another screaming, crying woman sounded from nearby. Not for her, then. Never would it be for her. The sickening sound of something wet splattered somewhere--whoever had screamed, they’d killed an attacker. Alexis dared a peek at who had done this, hoping they would come for her next.

A night elven woman. Her amber eyes glazed over with anger as she turned and looked straight into Alexis’s own eyes. And then turned away. Why? The elf saw, looked straight into her eyes, and turned away. Damn her to as many hells possible. “Hugin,” the elf commanded. “Search around. I’ll meet you here whenever I’m done finding as many survivors as possible. I expect you to aid as many as you can.”

“Yes’m!”

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Taylande saw the woman, the fear, the hope, mingled in those eyes. They were too familiar. That damned gaze, and how the first person she’d seen with those eyes looked at her with such a hatred, such pain made her turn away in shame. Hugin would find that woman, help her. She knew he would. That’s why she told him to split up.

She felt her guilt reaching down and rooting itself in place. Tay would let that linger, like she always did, even though she knew it would eventually bother her. It became her own fault that she dealt with all those bottled up emotions. But right now she had a job to do--find survivors in this sorry mess of a village and keep them safe from Twilight’s Hammer, direct them into groups together and make their way to a base camp nearby.

After this she’d drink herself into a stupor, she swore. Tay removed Ellemayne from its sheath, raising the blade up for her to inspect. She had slowly grown attached to this blade over the years she possessed it. Strangely enough, the blade would shift into a plain-looking dagger when it would be hanging from her belt. The looks on peoples’ faces when she pulled that dagger out were absolutely priceless. Now, she figured she could do the same to these Twilight assholes.

“Where the hell are you assholes hiding,” she stated, switching back to her standard Darnassian. She tossed Ellemayne from hand to hand, finally settling it in her left. Tay could have easily used it
in both hands, but had grown up being more proficient, more lethal, with her left. “Goddess, let’s hope I actually make it through this day.” Tay easily called upon Elune’s Fire to her right, thinking it to be armed and dangerous, using both hands instead of just one.

The bright, white fire burned and flickered over her own hand. It burned so bright the ground ahead of her got illuminated in its fierce glow. It acted as a magical flare to melt away those hidden in the shadows. A small part of her pitied the assassins who thought they’d have the upper hand in this skirmish. Twilight lackeys, though, proved to be some of the biggest fools in the world.

“Come out, come out, wherever you are you little assholes,” Tay taunted. She refused to switch to Common for them to understand. An arrow flew out from nowhere, followed by a fire she barely managed to dodge. That flame singed the bottom of her robes, slowly eating it up. Thankfully she’d chosen to wear some pants that day, along with a pair of old leather boots she’d, erm, ‘borrowed’ from the Alliance barracks before setting out.

“Don’t burn my boots, ande rodne, iszera, xaxxas!” Tay spat. “I’ll get into shit with those annoying marshalls!” She began to mutter something else, shooting a small blast of the pure heavenly fire still perched on her hand like a songbird. It struck something, as whatever the flame hit grunting in pain and came rushing out with a sword draw.

Ellemayne already met the blade, hooking it to where the user would have to fight to get their weapon free. Tay’s free hand flew up onto their face as she hissed at them “Ishnu Elune, ande thero tor rifa ande ilisar!” The fool who rushed her screamed, the pain of the fire forcing them to loosen their grip just enough for her to yank down and disarm them.

The moron fell at her feet, dead. “Well, I overdid that just a tad bit,” she sighed. She cast her eyes to see what manner of person hit her and found—an orc. That caused a grin to spread over her face. It always seemed to be orcs involved with every threat. Be it the Lich King, Illidan, whatever, there would always seem to be an orc or two hidden among those ranks.

She turned, raising Ellemayne to meet the next cultist who came to fight. Ellemayne pointed at whatever Tay looked at as she turned in a circle to anticipate just how many Twilight’s Hammer would come after her. As she made another move to scan the area, she heard so many footsteps come at her from all directions but where she looked. Heavy thuds were among them, meaning they had ogres, too.

Tay spun around--

Someone slammed into her so hard they both went rolling. Her grip on Ellemayne tightened enough to where whatever her knuckles hit, they busted open. She would not lose this blade! She recalled that slip of paper she found with this blade, what it said. Tay still had that in her satchel, though the writing faded with the amount of times she pulled it out and read it, sometimes running a thumb or forefinger over the text.

_The blade is Ellemayne. May it serve you well in all of your endeavors._

“What is your problem, Taylande?!” a woman hissed. “Do you want me to go to min’da and tell her I let you die on my watch?”

“I don’t have a mother,” Tay grumbled, the sting of the woman’s words striking her core. How many women had she bedded that ran to their mothers about that awful thing of casting them out of her bed she’d done?

“Yes you do. You may not know her, you may not want to, but what of the woman who raised
“No. She’s my sister. And who the hell are you trying to tell me that my mother’d be worried? How the hell do you know my name, too?”

“My name is Eraenia Mistdancer. My mother--or mothers, I should say--keep tabs on your sorry ass. The bad part about this is that they can’t watch you all the time and I’m stuck on temporary leave to keep you from getting killed.” The woman’s fierce eyes had that same silvery color that Nar’s did. Dusky, dull, but still beautiful. The shadows under them indicated she had lost some amounts of sleep due to what she did.

Strands of her twilight blue hair fell into her face out from a ponytail, grimy and matted with dirt to cover up the color of it. Camouflage, most likely. Tay studied her face as much as she could before Eraenia turned away, pulling up a dark green hood that concealed her face. Tay didn’t get a good look at the markings tattooed on her face. The former yanked the latter away, dragging her through some of the dried brambles that scattered the now desolated village. “What the hell do you do for a living? Stalk people and drag them through bushes?”

“No. I’m a sentinel because it honors my mothers and their sacrifices. What do you do for a living? Kill psychos and teach Gilneans to be assholes?” Eraenia retorted angrily. “I kept you alive when you fell into that coma during the Third War. I’m not surprised you don’t recall me, but for now you’re going to help me with this mess. An elemental lord is back, so for now you’re helping me deal with this.”

Tay followed the woman, all the answers swimming around her head. Since when did Nar have a daughter? And with whom? She’d have a bone to pick when she saw her sister again.

She also had to get rid of that guilt. She should have helped that woman, but she didn’t...
Eraenia sat restlessly, gaze wandering to this or that as she tried to stay patient for the next phase of the plan for Hyjal. She had been trained to wait still as a branch when it came to hunting, to scouting, to doing anything but waiting for orders. She asked herself just why in the world she kept watching over an ungrateful little… *brat* of an elf. A sigh escaped her lips without any warning.

“You’re doing it because k’laen min’da asked you,” she whispered to herself. Eraenia stole a glance at her charge, who lay sprawled out on the ground nearby with a small line of drool trailing from her mouth. Good Goddess, the girl slept like the dead too, with a snore so loud Eraenia twitched from a paranoia that made her wonder if the enemy had found them.

Hyal’s trees in this southern area had burned up, offering little in the way of cover. This added to that paranoid feeling. If only Taylande would shut her snoring up. Eraenia’s eyes scanned back over to a well-hidden incline at the base of some hills. The burnt-out, hollow branches and trunks of those deadened trees would have once covered this path from the eyes, but now it no longer did any good.

The dried up soil crunched underfoot whenever one chose to make their way across the land. It made spotting the untrained sneak too easy, even for an amateur tracker. Skeletons of bushes lay atop this awful dirt, now more a fine charcoaled sand than dirt. Plants refused to grow down here, unlike at the base of Nordrassil, where life flourished as far as the eye could see. Looking up, one would only see the sky covered in dark clouds. All the work of the Twilight’s Hammer. They would pay.

Boots crunching along the path made Eraenia’s ears perk as she removed an arrow from the quiver that hung on her back. She stood as far up as she dared, nocking the arrow on the bow. Her grip on the handle tightened up while her other hand drew back, fletching close enough to where she could see each individual feather’s strands. Her breathing steadied as she focused her aim on the figure now standing at the foot of the trail.

Faintly, her ears picked up chatter of someone relaying information. She stared at the figure she’d seen approaching, guessing this person to be a human, most likely male. Who he gave the information to, she couldn’t tell. Eraenia raised her eyes to hopefully pick out just who the hell thought they could escape her eye. She’d been trained by two of the most skilled people in the damned world. That were not Kyena Stormbow.

Nobody could outmatch that woman. Every time she came by the house she lived in, she would stare at the woman. One of her mothers would tell her not to hide and stare, to come up and at least say a hello. She did, a couple of times. She always remained too shy. “Myn’ra, shal’nar Kyena, I’m going to take Raeni to her sister real quick,” her mother would always say.

But today was not one of those days where she would shyly stare and wait. Today was the day she would be killing Twilight lackeys who had no idea the evil they worshipped. At this point, those fools were not people. It did not matter if they lived or if they died. The world, however, grew cleaner and cleaner with each Twilight death. She reminded herself before she chose to release the arrow. “These people are not people. They are monsters to be purged from kaldorei lands,” she whispered. Raeni lied to herself.

The arrow flew. The human fell. The head pierced a vital organ, slaying that damned lackey instantly. Whatever other fool had been standing there stepped over the body, turning, getting onto a knee. They inspected the wound, which Raeni now saw to be through the man’s chest (good, she
got his cold, dead heart) and stood back up. They turned, pulling off a hood. Her partner in crime.

The other figure, her friend, her companion, her sister, gave her a thumbs-up. A grin plastered across the distant woman’s face as she pulled the hood back up, melting into the shadows again. Good. Their ruse still kept working. And the Twilight’s Hammer still remained too damned stupid to realize this plan had been set into motion. They still thought completely different people kept attacking at intervals.

“Eraenia…” Tay grumbled, having just woken up. “Whas going on? How long’d I sleep?” She yawned, pushing herself up and rubbing her eyes. Raeni let out a quick “shh” which quieted her charge faster than she’d anticipated. Tay grunted weakly and she began to feel around for her daggers, wherever she’d placed them. Her hands ran over the bare ground multiple times before she gave up her attempts on finding Ellemayne and Silverblade.

Tay could do without Silverblade. After all, that one she owned. That one increased her fear of sleeping and losing it gave her the chance of starting over, but she felt so incredibly vulnerable and small without it. Ellemayne she did not own. She’d use it ‘til she found the original owner. Her father had stolen this blade. As strong as she felt with this blade on her, she knew that it was not hers. Tay would miss this blade, and also simply didn’t want to find the owner and explain she lost their weapon.

“The blade is Ellemayne. May it serve you well in all of your endeavors,” Tay muttered to herself. She finally pushed herself off the ground, grogginess slowly fading out of her sight. She blinked a few times, gaining her bearings. Her weapons lay just a couple feet away, next to Eraenia. Tay crawled over and grabbed Silverblade, tucking it into her belt as quick as she could. As soon as her hand wrapped around Ellemayne’s hilt, it changed from that simple-looking hunter’s dagger to the razor edged blue blade she’d grown familiar with.

“You talk about the Reaver, one of the Moon-blessed blades. Why?” Raeni inquired, shifting around and staring curiously at the latter of the two blades Tay possessed. Tay glanced down at it, a frown stretching across her face. She’d not heard of this story. Nar had mentioned two sister blades blessed by Elune Herself, but never their names or anything beyond the fact that they were legendary.

“I don’t know what you mean. Here, you can look at it if you want,” Tay replied, hesitating as she handed it over. Raeni took the blade, both watching while the blade shifted into a simple seax knife, one most Sentinels had as a backup in case they lost their primary weapon. Tay’s eyes went wide and she stared, dumbstruck, that her seemingly unassuming blade had changed forms when it changed hands.

“It is. Well, since min’da never told you the story, I guess I will.” Raeni stated, a smirk present on her face. She pulled her hood down, that dusk-blue hair out of its ponytail, barely even brushing Raeni’s shoulders. The underside of it, Tay now noticed, were shaved, as to provide a more effective way to intimidate the lesser folk. “I’d settle down for just a few minutes.” Raeni cleared her throat once.

“Back before the Kaldorei Empire stretched across this world, when it barely started, there lived twin sisters, born to an unassuming mother. People were eager to get their names, since twins hardly ever were born to mothers. They shared one feature that set them apart from the average set: amber eyes. You, Taylande, know exactly why amber eyes were highly desired. And I hope you also know that’s a small part of why you have the memory of those beatings on you.”

Tay’s body tensed up. She’d ask Eraenia after this story. It bothered her, how someone else knew what she’d told so few about. But she sat, letting the woman continue on. “The peoples got the
names of these twins, whom they all preached would be destined for greatness. Tor’landa and Lan’reli. Rauv’dris Tvaelin. Azshara called upon all willing to fight for their peoples against the trolls, who were invaders. That’s… not true, I’d think, as the only nation that existed was the Troll Nation. Ugh. Trolls.

“Tor’landa and Lan’reli had two blades, one for each sister. Tor’landa carried a mighty sword into battle, while Lan’reli wielded a simple dagger to defend herself; the dagger you have now. Before they engaged in the major battles, I’m told, that the two sisters prayed to Elune to bless their weapons in the upcoming fights. The Goddess did more, taking these simple, elf-forged blades and reforging them into far more useful weapons.

“Different stories say different things. Some of them talk of the Goddess working day and night, postponing the battle while She toiled away to give the sisters that which would win their peoples their nation. Others say She came down here, placed some of Her own power in the weapons. And there’s also a good handful who just say the blades were blessed, no detail added. Believe any one of them. I think the first one is true, though.

“These twin blades came to be known as Jai’alator, the Noble Blade of Elune, and Ellemayne, the Reaver. Tor’landa eventually was called the embodiment of the Night Warrior, Jai’alator the deadly instrument used to slay all who opposed her on the battlefield. Lan’reli was called the Mother Moon’s embodiment, since she preferred the more gentle arts of healing more than the fighting of her twin.

“They were dubbed Moonblade, in honor of the Goddess blades that secured the kaldorei their empire. The peoples wanted them to rule, from the stories min’da told me. But it just might be some storytelling on her part. Tor’landa and Lan’reli declined, instead letting Azshara take the throne. We can see how that worked out. It’s why we’re stuck in a burnt-out crisp of a home and I’m telling you children’s stories.”

Tay sat for a moment and let all of the information sink in. She wielded one of the only two legendary Goddess blades, and the sister to it was most likely being used by one of Tor’landa’s line right now. But why, then, did she have Lan’reli’s blade when her descendants should be in possession of it? Her father had dared to steal away an ancestral dagger? Damn him. Now she really needed to return this blade.

Raeni grinned at her, nudging her head in the direction of the trail she’d been watching while her charge slept. She’d have as many words with her mother as possible once she got out of this hellhole. Which reminded her she should probably write her mothers when she got the chance. She’d not written either of them since--Raeni would sort that out later. When Tay wasn’t waist deep in shit. And when her mothers wouldn’t kill her for getting Tay killed.

Their boots crunched against the ground, Raeni’s making hardly any noise. Tay, despite being trained to keep quiet in nearly any situation, could be heard a mile away. The senior of the two women shot back a glare, one sign to keep the noise down lest they be spotted and captured by psychotic cultists. Tay made her footfalls lighter, matching the Sentinel’s in noise. This would not be one of her normal missions. Not when a damned sentinel dragged her along.

“You missed the one I shot earlier. He didn’t even see it coming,” Raeni said, breaking the silence, “And I thought, from all that min’da told me, you would be one for kicking the shit out of cultists.”

“Well, I can’t do things my way when some stranger I hardly know barrels into me and says they’re going to be traipsing around the mountain with orders from Nar, who I haven’t seen in well over two hundred years.” Tay made sure to keep her voice down in case more of the Twilight lackeys were lingering about, hoping to get some kind of information. She reminded herself to
switch into her standard Darnassian and ask about how the sentinel knew about her scars.

Before she’d had the chance to ask, she had the misfortune of being tackled to the ground. Tay struggled to get up, Raeni rolling off her as they lay on their stomachs in the bushes. With a single hand, she got shoved to the ground by her mysterious protector. She tried getting up again, another hard shove she caught unprepared knocking the wind out of her.

She took in short breaths, trying to take in some air before she got shut up again. She watched Raeni’s hand fly down to her belt, removing a dagger that looked like it could be used to slice bread one moment and kill a man the next. Tay eyed the weapon with a slight fear. Mimicking Raeni, she reached down and wrapped her hand around Ellemayne, the blade shifting into that all-too-comfortable razor edge. A grin spread across her face as she felt that calm and relaxation when she held onto something that she knew like the scars on her back.

Voices came down the trail while they waited, Raeni carefully and noiselessly drawing back her hand. Tay knew exactly what these voices meant, and they were either allies or potential enemies.

“What do you mean, you don’t know where the damned elf went? How can you not?! She’s seven Light-damned feet tall, Bishopp!” a man screamed. He had a Stormwinder’s accent.

“In my shan’do’s defense, she tends to contribute a lot in these wars in her own way, with her own insane plan of ‘rush it’. I’d say give her as much time as she needs in here, since we apparently can’t keep elemental lords in their own domain! Leave her here ‘til the damned Firelord’s not trying to kill us all and--”

“Your teacher, Hugin, took my wife. That knife-eared bastard is why my wife, and my child, are rotting at the bottom of the fucking sea! I don’t care if she helps, if she lives, I don’t care much about what she does. The reason I want her is to kick her ass. This fake leg’ll be good to beat her with.”

Tay’s gut tightened and her eyes went wide. Hugin and Ivan. Oh, Goddess she hoped Hugin would be smart and keep leading the man off-topic. She ruined that man and she ruined nearly everyone in her old unit. Hell, the only one she hadn’t fucked up somehow was Torolf. She just wanted to drink him under the table. But no. Those days were gone, him and Aeva sent up to the Highlands to deal with Twilight’s Hammer. Ivan still recovering from his loss of a leg, he couldn’t even serve. Royce--oh, Elune, Royce. Tay killed her. Tay killed her all because she bedded her when she knew she shouldn’t have and damn herself for it.

Her expression contorted into one of fear and loathing. Raeni looked over, whispering so only she could hear. “What’s wrong, Taylande?”

“Nothing. Just go back to what we’re doing,” she murmured.

The two men continued to argue, finally making their way down and out of range of the two females waiting in cover. Soon as they were out of earshot, Raeni stood up and briskly marched up the hill. They could see Nordrassil from here, but were located somewhere near a shrine to one of the ancient demigods.

Tay had read plenty of stories regarding the demigods and how they came to aid in the defense of this world against the Burning Legion. She hoped to meet one, back before she realized the only people who had the pleasure of meeting them were druids and the most famous of the famous legends. Like the Moonblades.

She followed the sentinel up the hill a few feet farther, closer to a couple of burnt trees for who
knows what reason. When the woman stopped, Tay nearly walked right into her because she kept staring up at the World Tree, feeling so small.

“Tell me what’s wrong. What kept bothering you when you heard those two men?” Raeni persisted, worry in her eyes.

“Bishopp is my apprentice. He’s looking for me, and so is Ivan. I--,” Tay muttered, casting her eyes down to the dirt road to try and answer the question, “Something happened that caused some bad blood to run between us.” Shame and guilt prickled all over her body. She lied. She remembered in full detail just what the hell she had done.

The eyes of the woman she could have saved came into mind, and she remembered how similar those eyes looked to Aeva’s. She destroyed that woman, then let the poor girl she could have saved get destroyed by someone else. Maybe those voices were right. Maybe all she could do was ruin, destroy. Maybe she was born to be a destroyer, in one way or another.

Tay composed herself before she let all those bottled-up emotions spill out for everyone to see. “It’s in the past though. What I want right now is for you to tell me just how you know about what the fuck Fanarol did to me!” she spat, poison seeping into her tone.

“Who do you think gave your savior information on where you were when that all happened?” Raeni retorted, monotone.

She stayed quiet, staring at the Sentinel with anger and hate burning in her eyes. Raeni turned on her heel, striding off with her head hung low. Tay followed, unsure if she should be grateful or angry at this new information.

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For so many days that Tay lost track, they ran missions against the cultists as they slowly took them out while waiting for the fight against the Firelord to come. Every single mission, every time she went out on her own when she could, her heart pounded so loudly in her chest she thought this would be the reason she had to annihilate an entire camp of them. And possibly die.

This time, Raeni crouched beside her, bow drawn and arrow at the ready. “They are people no longer, Taylande, not like you and I. Not when they fight to bring an end to everything. They are animals.” Tay eyed the sentinel, now understanding how she killed without any remorse. Perhaps using this approach would make her more effective.

Raeni kept on lying to herself. No matter how many times she tried telling herself that these were not people, it wouldn’t work. These people had been mislead, gone so far now that they couldn’t get all that crap out of their head. She hated how she tried to make them out like they were nothing but monsters, rabid dogs to be put down. Her mother would get that way when it came to demons, or actual rabid animals that had no chance at being domesticated.

But never once at people.

She bit back all that anger at herself, forcing her eyes to train themselves on a man. She realized how she had loosened her grip on the arrow, surprise briefly crossing her face. Raeni hardened her expression again, pulling back until she would release the arrow to let it find its mark.

One arrow went flying, going through the neck of an outlying human. They saw all kinds of peoples within this group. It bothered Tay, how this many people from so many different places could come and want to end their world. But now they would do what they could to keep this place
clean of those who would do Hyjal and Nordrassil harm.

As soon as she recovered her senses, Raeni already held another arrow in her hand. She placed it into position, drawing the string back. Tay watched her hold it in place, waiting for a signal for her to run in and cause some problems. Today would be different, because as soon as she moved in the sentinel would run in after her.

Five minutes passed. Two arrows. Five more minutes. Two more arrows. By now, the cultists were noticing. Anger surged up in Tay and she began her advance. She palmed Ellemayne in her left while she channeled Elune’s Fire in her right. A grin spread across her face as she strode in, putting on that cocky mask of hers.

“Today’s not gonna be a great day,” she muttered to herself. These were people. No matter what Raeni said, the cultists were still people. Misguided, but still. Part of her would regret this, but part of her would savor it. She blocked off her emotions. They’d get in the way.

She waited and waited for any one of them to come at her. In moments, three came after her. A blade came slashing down on her as she parried quickly with Ellemayne. She sent a foot towards one male, hitting his less desirable area. The third one she would have problems with. The damned human lady stood as tall as some of them men, but Tay still had a foot on her. She had a damned battle axe on her, making the situation even worse.

Tay sent out a stream of Elune’s Fire as the woman raised the axe and swung it with as much strength possible. She jumped out of the way, ramming and elbow into the first one. She’d not be able to deal with these two. Dealing too much in her more rogue-ish skills caused her to lose some touch with her normal tactics. More came.

Paying too much attention to the ones in front of her left her back vulnerable. Something hard and heavy slammed into her back, knocking the wind out of her. Tay’s breathing sped up as she rolled onto her back, slicing at whatever legs she saw. They’d underestimated the amount of cultists here.

Feet slammed into her sides, preventing her from trying to hamstring any one of them again. Pain seared through her body, especially in her ribs. Dammit. If Raeni would jump in whenever, they might have a chance. Tay spat at one of them, earning her another hard kick in the side. The feet subsided and she pulled herself up, biting back any sounds of pain to deny them any pleasure.

Tay saw around seven of them. No, they’d not underestimated. These assholes were just strong. Strong and uglier than the burned trees. Raeni fired an arrow through the skull of one of them, bumping their numbers down by one. Tay growled and began a quiet prayer. Even though her path seemed to require prayers more than anything else, she never did quite find time for it.

“Goddess help me right now,” she muttered, channeling the Goddess’s holy flames and sending it towards one of them. Tay rushed at another one. Ellemayne ripped into the orc’s stomach, dragging through and leaving a wide slice for all his organs to spill out. She got swarmed, slamming fists here or there and jamming her blade wherever it would fit.

Soon, Raeni pulled out her weapons as she cast her bow off. Her expression remained neutral during the whole ordeal, and she rammed her blade into the injured to keep them from killing Tay. Her mothers never said anything about injured. They’d all had their fair share of scars and bruises.

Four were down already. The remaining three scattered. Tay hugged her sides, not bothering to sheath her weapon. She limped to the bodies, making sure each actually was just a corpse now and not one lying in wait. Raeni did the same, her face still expressionless.
“I’m still wondering why I didn’t run away from you when I had the chance, you know,” she said, trying to break the silence that permeated the air like a sickness.

“Mmh. Possibly because I mentioned min’da,” Eraenia deadpanned.

Tay trudged around in a circle, thinking it would be a distraction from all the pain that drummed against her ribs, her chest, her head. Goddess, she’d taken a beating. The last time she’d endured anything similar to this… well, when her father would take out just about everything on her. Those scars he gave her would never go away.

A dirtied hand stretched out lay on the ground near her right leg. One jagged, broken, and rustied dagger rested just an inch out of reach. The owner of the hand stretched out, grasping it like their life depended on it. They weakly raised their hand, jamming it in the inner side of the elf’s leg and ripping downward. Tay cried out, bent over and clasping her leg tightly. She quickly grabbed Ellemayne and stabbed the head.

“Taylande! Sit down so I can see the wound,” Eraenia commanded. Tay lowered herself to the ground, putting as much pressure on it as she could. Raeni jogged over, stopping when she reached her charge and got onto her knees, pulling torn and bloodied fabric away.

“It’s bad, isn’t it? Let me just heal as much as I can and you can do whatever later,” Tay managed through clenched teeth. She’d beat herself up later for that one little cultist being allowed to slip through her field of vision. But that person was only a person, doing what they believed in doing. No matter how many times she reminded herself of it, she’d just beat herself up over this.

“Yes, it is bad. It could get infected.” Raeni poked once at the wound, pulling a grunt of pain from Tay. Her ward could close up most of it, just not all.

Tay inhaled and exhaled slowly, lips moving in a silent prayer. She placed one hand over her calf, where most of the damaged occurred. Another scar to add to her collection. A small light seemed to radiate from her hand as she ran it slowly over the length of the injury. Most of what looked awful to the eyes now looked like raw skin. But her ankle still bled.

“You’re going to have to cauterize this damned thing aren’t you?” Tay asked, this time with only a trace of pain. Raeni nodded once, wrapping a cloth around it for her and Tay to limp back to their camp. There she could start a fire and have fewer questions. She tried to control the rest of the pain in her body, concentrating only on making it back with Raeni for her to burn the rest of this damned pain closed.

They made slower than normal progress. Tay limped as fast as she could back to where they needed to go. Once they reached their destination, five minutes were used to start the fire. Raeni removed her dagger, placing half of it in the flames as she waited for it to heat up. Tay watched the blade heat up. Eventually, Raeni removed it and pressed the red-hot weapon over her ankle.

“Goddess! Why’s the burning always the least painful part compared to the rest of it,” she grunted. Tay could easily answer that question. Because as a child she’d grown used to the pain of the hot metal on her body, because the beatings were always so strong. Because she should’ve been dead, but something had kept her running and she never understood why. Possibly because Elune had plans for her.

“Yes, yes, Taylande, it hurts. You’ll be staying in Darnassus ‘til the rest of you is recovered. You don’t leave to fight until everything’s gone.” Raeni had lines of worry stretched on her face.

“Let me guess, you’ll be escorting me there, too, because Nar demands it?”
“No. This I’ll be doing because it would make me feel better knowing you don’t sneak away.”

“Dammit all, fine,” she sighed, glancing down at her still-pained ankle.

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The bandages on her hand got removed for a new salve coating and wrap. Nash had extracted as many details as possible about what had gone on to cause that burn on her ankle. Tay, naturally, tried to avoid telling him about it. He somehow weaseled his way into getting her to give the whole story, not the omitted version of it.

Part of her felt better about finally getting over her habit of lying. She’d finally told the truth about Jaron. She told him the truth about Elariel. And he still stayed. He stayed and tried to make sure she’d be okay. It felt good, having someone actually care.

“Thank you,” Nash stated, “for telling me. Even if you kept trying to distract yourself and spent a good three days telling me.”

Tay grinned at him, casting a glance down at her hand. She hoped the cuts and marks where the vase bits had been would heal up quick. She’d need it, if the military would be giving her orders. And hell, she thought she had made it clear that she wouldn’t join their asses again. But Draenor had happened. Garrosh had happened. And Garrosh had been killed. She could have left them if she wanted, but that sense of serving had kept tugging at her.

If she recalled correctly, Ivan had said he’d been in Lor’danel for a month until he would be departing. But if she went with him, he would drag her straight back to them. She could wait. She’d pay a local mage who’d been to Stormwind enough for them to eat for a month. Nash knew this. It should have said so in the letter he’d been given.

“Shit. I’ve got to see if there’s a mage in Lor’danel,” Tay groaned. She didn’t want to leave. No, not at all. Even if it meant she’d be in more trouble the next time she went to that stone city.

“You’re going to go now?” Nash sounded surprised, a slight edge in his voice. As much as she loved that druid, she’d never understand why he always sounded like this whenever she left. Hell, she still couldn’t get over the fact that he decided to help her sorry ass after she went and played games with his heart.

“Yes, because if I don’t, my superiors will be pissed and I’ll probably be sent to the farthest reaches of Nagrand again.” Tay made a disgusted noise at the thought of going to that strange place. The last time they told her that she’d be serving a tour in this new place, they told her the commander she’d report to needed more men in that orc-infested place.

“Since you are, you should probably read what else came with that letter. They’ve officially discharged me from service, so says Aeva. She wrote you something.” Nash went over to the envelope had a flap peeled up. The wax seal on it had been broken off, most of it residing on the lower half of it. He removed two slips of paper from it, glancing at which one was directed to him and which one to his lover. Nash placed one of them down, opening the letter still in his hand and handing it to Tay.

Her eyes skimmed over it once, twice, before she finally read the whole thing.

Tay,
I hope this letter finds its way to your hands. A little while after I had been deployed to the Highlands, I decided I’d write you... something.
I understand if you have any feelings of resentment, as we have both caused bad blood to run between us in the past. Things happened that will never be mended no matter what happens. We both contributed to it, and I know we both know this, no matter what it is Torrolfg keeps insisting. I still care for you, but I’m not sure in what way.

Those heated nights we had, when we would fight, when we would reconcile with a drink and a laugh, I miss those. I miss you, Tay. You may not feel the same way as I do, but just know these things. I want to be your friend again. Just that much, at least.

If you’re able to, if you’re reading this, meet me at the Slaughtered Lamb in Stormwind. I’ve spent nearly all my nights there since our unit was split apart. Oftentimes, I find myself staring at a mug of ale, as similar to Torrolf’s old brew as they can get, and asking myself how to start saying my apologies. I feel that I’m ready to start them.

You may not be alive or wanting to see me, but do visit me somehow. Just once. I have things I desperately want to tell you in person. You’re the last one I have left, so please, this once, just be alive for me.

*Ama noral’arkhana,*

*Aeva*

“She still signs her letters with ‘saved by magic’. Back when I played showoff and Ivan’s magic saved us from being bugfeed,” Tay said, laughing afterwards.

“You don’t need to remind me. I was there. You really did make a show of trying to get her into bed with you,” Nash reminded her. When he spoke to his sister after the Alliance campaign in Silithus, she asked him about that. Lele had asked him if he liked that his now-lover was getting into other people’s trousers. He’d only said he liked her being happy.

Lele always seemed to know how he felt about matters, even when he himself did not. It’s what he always appreciated most about his little sister, how she could read his thoughts. If only she’d not thrown a fit and stormed out on him, she would have been here and made a quip about him and Tay. He wouldn’t go with her, no matter how many times he begged Tay to let him tag along for this. When she went, he’d go out to reconcile with his sister. Or, he’d try, anyways.
Tay arrived in Stormwind within the week. She’d told Nashathel she should be back in a couple of weeks. Thankfully, she had been wrong and spent more than her estimated time at Nash’s, as Ivan was nowhere in sight when she walked back to Lor’danel to take a portal and not a boat to Stormwind. Boats took too long, and after Royce she would panic if she even got near one of those damned things. She’d ride one when she had to, only then.

Her first stop, she determined, would be the Slaughtered Lamb to see if Aeva said she’d be there since their unit split, and since Tay left the military. But she had to reconcile with Aeva, see if the paladin had moved onto a better woman. She didn’t want to face her old comrade if she’d not recovered from the wounds Tay had left her with when she departed.

She shouldered open the door to the musty tavern, scanning around the vicinity to try and spot the paladin. Her eyes landed on the corner where a woman hunched over a mug of ale sat. The woman had a dented old sword strapped to her back and sat in the normal commoner’s clothings with a pair of military-issue boots on her feet. Aeva. Tay still knew her old comrade too well to not recognize her in a public setting.

Tay didn’t bother with that cocky mask anymore. She cast it off when she left the Alliance’s service. She hated serving them after they tried to say what they did in the northern part of Pandaria had been for a greater cause. As far as she knew, slavery would never be part of a “greater cause”.

“Taylande Silverblade, my old lover. Or is it Moonblade now? You’ve changed since I last saw you. Your hair’s not long anymore,” Aeva greeted as Tay slid into the chair across her. The back of her neck tingled at the use of her full name. Only her mother called her that, no one else. And her mother had died months ago. Why she even kept the journal full of her history she had no clue, but her mother had once asked to be filled in on what happened to her. She assumed a sense of honoring the promise kept her from tossing it out, but she’d never truly know.

Tay smirked at the paladin, trying to cover up her own discomfort. She pointed at Aeva’s hair. “And your hair’s shorter since the last time I saw you, old friend.” Aeva snorted, clenching her fist around the mug. She raised it to her lips, taking a long drink. Tay’s eyes lingered on those lips. She remembered how she’d once kissed those lips. It seemed so very long ago. But the last time she’d been with Aeva had been during an interlude when her old organization, the Dawn, hadn’t a single thing that demanded her attention. Tay, during that week, had her own time to do whatever it was she pleased. And she’d chosen to see Aeva, bed her once again and break her heart once more the next day.

Aeva glared at her now, eyes narrowing. “Moonblade or Silverblade? Which is it? I need to know this so I can address you properly if we remain as allies.” Allies. Not friends, not casual acquaintances. But allies. A wise choice of words, Ivan would have been whispering in his little sister’s ear. Ivan could burn in whatever hell he’d go to.

“I- It’s just Tay now. I stopped going by Silverblade because that name got tarnished for me. So I would assume that yes, it is Moonblade now. What’ve you asked me here for? I’m close to getting my ass handed to by military officials,” Tay replied. Aeva gave her a stern look that had once meant something to her, but not anymore. She only wanted to be casual acquaintances with the human now.

“To find out just why you left in the first place, Taylande Moonblade.”
Damn Eraenia for making her stay out of commission. Damn Eraenia for causing her to nearly miss striding into those Firelands and dealing with the damned elemental lord Ragnaros. Damn Eraenia. But she had her orders. Her orders were to recover before doing anything else that might cost her her life. She obeyed only because it meant her sister, Nar, still lived and was keeping tabs on her.

She missed Nar. Her elder sister had been the only one who tried keeping her safe by whatever means necessary. But then Nar left. She’d planned to see her again, ask just why she left. Why her sister left without any explanation, stranding her at the temple in Winterspring. No, she scolded herself. Winterspring is home.

Perhaps, when she met with her elder sister again, it would be at home. She could hardly call Ashenvale that, after what her father had put her through. Winterspring she could call home because her sister brought her up there, taught her what she needed to know to survive. After what Nar had taught her, surviving became as easy and familiar to her as counting the seconds between when she carved off her father’s face.

“Tay, shan’do. I’ve come to get my orders from you. What do you need from me during this?” her apprentice asked, his tone stiff and formal. Hugin had been distancing himself, spending more and more time at the Temple in Darnassus than anywhere else. Tay blamed herself for it. He’d raised hell to her after she’d been stuck in Raeni’s home for a few weeks. She knew she should have helped that woman. The guilt still gnawed at her.

Tay glared out over the seas as she stood near the ship’s edge, raising a skin of ale she’d smuggled with her and taking a swig out of it. So much mist, as far as one could see, covered the waters. When her apprentice interrupted her thoughts, she had been dragged back to the present, as her thoughts were scattered elsewhere. She just wanted to focus on the water and mist. Not deal with him and his burning glare.

She didn’t want to get involved with his training anymore. She didn’t want to get involved with anyone or anything now. She just wanted to sit and drink herself as far into a stupor it took to get rid of that damned guilt. If it took her supply of the ale, she’d drink it all. If it took her a single skin, she’d drink more. If it took her a whole Goddess-damned reeking tavern, she’d drink it dry. As long as that guilt went away with it.

“Shan’do.”

“Hugin.”

“My orders.”

“Do whatever the fuck it is the oh, so, high-and-mighty commander says. If he says fight the first Horde you see, fight the first Horde you see. If he says shove a branch up your ass and fuck it, do it.”

“Fine.”

Tay stood there for a while longer, drinking. And drinking. And drinking. She drained each skin of ale she had on her, casting them off her person as she stumbled to her tiny room. A cot so small her feet hung over the edge and a couple of shelves below it to store her things. That’s all her room consisted of, and it smelled of piss and blood, none of it hers.

A sudden rattling of the ship caused her to fall out of the cot, slamming hard onto the floor. She’d
throw the fool who fired a cannon off this thing once she found him. And then another noise came. But this time, it rocked the ship. Screaming followed.

Tay’s eyes narrowed into a glower, hand immediately going to the blade at her side. She stalked up deck to see what had caused this, when another cannon fire went off. As a receiving splash sounded not too far away from the ship, she began her sprint upstairs to see just what had gone on.

The worst-case, she determined, would be some unknown threat that wasn’t the Horde firing on them. The best-case for her would be the Horde. She’d rather deal with that than Hugin, who had kept side-eyeing her with a mix of emotions. If she ever got a moment of peace and quiet, she would make sure to say something to her apprentice. And, perhaps, try to get a letter to her sister, if she could.

For right now, however, she remained focused on figuring out who could be attacking. She sincerely hoped it would be the Horde. Tay stumbled around, trying in vain to focus on where to go. She shouldn’t’ve been drinking, she knew. It could possibly get her written up. Again. Hell, if she did get that again maybe they’d finally kick her pathetic ass out of the service.

She stumbled around a few more steps, finding the pathway that led straight to the main deck of the ship she’d been stuck on. Tay gripped whatever she could as she made her way up, explosions from this or that rocking the boat and nearly throwing her to the ground. Hopefully, this time she didn’t misplace a blade when it came time to fight.

“Shan’do, run!” Hugin screeched, shifting into a more wolven-looking form. Tay had completely forgotten her apprentice had the Curse since he always tried to remain in his human body whenever possible. Men streamed down below to man as many of the cannons they hauled. Tay made the mistake of looking up, seeing a Horde gunship.

The gunship flying above readied another projectile, aiming at the hull of the ship. Something inside, most likely the constant voices that tormented her, told her to dive off the ship and swim for land. She didn’t listen. Instead, she made sure to look for her apprentice and anyone else who might be in the most serious trouble.

The Horde fired.

Tay sprinted towards Hugin, barrelling into him which perhaps saved his life. Afterwards, everything became a haze of blue, fish, and air bubbles rushing to the surface.

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“Get everyone to that structure ASAP!” cried a man.

“But sir, the injured--” a draenei, by the sound of the voice, pleaded but got cut short.

“We will tend to them when we are safe from the filthy Horde! Now move!”

Tay felt something jostle her as whatever it was picked up the pace. She didn’t dare open her eyes. Everything in her screamed like she would if she’d branded by her father again. Whatever happened after the Horde fired, she didn’t remember. She didn’t want to remember. She just wanted to forget and go on with ruining her life.

Somebody said something, but she didn’t catch what had been spoken. Her father would beat her if she didn’t listen and repeat what he had said. She still felt that fear surge up inside when she heard any mention of him; however, even thinking of him caused it. Even though Tay had carved off a good piece of him and repeated it when Nar caught him in the woods once, that fear would linger
and warp itself into an intense anger. If, perhaps, she’d not been so damned weak.

Another jostle and she found herself coughing and without breath left in her. Whoever—or whatever—carried her had been a bit too rough at the moment. Why did they drag her body with them? She would only become counted as another casualty. She refused to be counted as so again, like last campaign.

“Apologies, Shan’do,” mumbled a rough, husky voice. She felt herself fall back unconscious.

“ALL HALT!” the voice cried. “Deposit the injured here. Those able to will trek farther into this… place… whatever it is.”

Her eyes peeled open. Hugin, in his worgen form, hovered over her as he laid her onto the ground. His brow furrowed as he gave Tay a once-over and raised his snout to sniff the air around them. He loosed a low growl, raising a clawed paw to fend off any unwanted visitor—or attacker.

“Hugin… the hell happened?” she rasped.

Her apprentice shushed her quickly, raising his head and scanning the area. “Hugin. Tell. Me,” Tay demanded, watching him closely. She saw him swallow nervously. She glared, the expression intensifying with the time Hugin wasted to stall from giving her any answers. “You will tell me.”

“Can’t.”

“Why? You’re my apprentice and do what I say!”

“Don’t know how to tell you, Shan’do. Too much went on after you tackled me.” Tay glared again, shoving herself up and giving the area a once-over. Hugin shyly lowered his head, pivoting to steal a glance at where his mentor might possibly be staring off at. He wasn’t lying to her, that’s for sure, but he still felt that way. A twinge of guilt poked at him.

Tay shoved herself off the ground, groaning a little. What happened? Why did she feel so weak? She’d be having words with her apprentice after this. Damn that commander for having her go out here and fucking her up. Perhaps she would have some words with him after this mess got sorted out. For now, she needed to recover before running off and disobeying orders again.

She gave Hugin a warning look to not stop her, whatever she planned on doing. Tay held back a smirk as she strode off to find the commander of this damned operation. That must have almost gotten her killed. Lovely, a human almost killing her! Where had she heard that before?

A soldier ran up to her, motioning to follow them wherever. This soldier, however, looked familiar. Like she had seen them somewhere before. But it didn’t matter, not at all. Every single one simply followed their orders like mindless drudges forever enslaved. She followed, more reluctant to do so than most others would be.

“The commanding officer, Doren, would like to see you, Master Sergeant,” the soldier monotoned. Tay had been swiftly reminded of her ranking, and the soldier most likely did it on purpose. To remind her she would always be obligated to answer the calls of the officers. Tay reminded herself she’d now need to work hard so she didn’t have to answer the stupid humans. If experienced determined rank, she commanded them all. But then, her sister would command her. If Nar even served the Alliance today.

Tay made sure to not step on the human’s boots, taking note of their clothing and how it didn’t shine in the warm sunlight like the rest of the soldiers’. Only plate and chain did that, give off that
gleam. This human wore either leather or cloth. She leaned forward a tad, taking in a quick whiff of them.

Her eyes widened as she realized this human didn’t exactly fall into the “human” category. How had she not noticed before? That had been the first thing she’d gathered on her apprentice had been the doggish smell of him. She assumed she lost a bit of her touch on that, after drinking too much. How her fath--no, Fanarol--would beat her for doing so.

Oh well. As long as it meant she lost connection with him, she’d be happy to drink ‘til she forgot. And hopefully that would be soon.

“We’ve arrived…” the soldier stopped, turning and giving Tay a rather feline smirk. The soldier’s kind always acted more wolfish, most disliking cats to an extent. Another off thing about this soldier. Tay made a mental note to watch this one. Then, the soldier picked up her sentence again, “By your leave, Silverblade.”

Tay eyed her strangely. “Shaha lor’ma. Ande’thoras’ethil, lahkos’min.” She turned around, seeming to feel the eyes of the Gilnean on her. She tried to ignore it, striding cockily into Doren’s lounge.

“You called for me?” she asked, placing a had reassuringly on whatever blade she’d stuck on her side for the mission. When she gripped the handle, her hand withdrew. That feeling she got when she held it came flooding through, but it seemed to be amplified. Something in this place did not feel right.

“Sir,” Doren hissed.

“I’m sorry?” she replied, though it sounded more like a challenge. Good.

“You will address me as ‘sir’, night elf. I want you to help ready this place for when the Horde attacks. The King would demand it if he were here,” he spat.

“And you, sir,” Tay mocked, “will address me as kaldorei.”

Doren rose, trying to look tough compared to the elf opposite of him. He failed at looking intimidating, due to his soldier being over seven feet tall. He could pick out the elf trying not to laugh. “You’ve got your orders, kaldorei. Now GO!”

Tay let out a bark of laughter, shrugging and spinning on her heel. She made sure to add a slight swagger to her walk just to anger Doren. She followed that same path the Gilnean forced her to follow, making her way back to her apprentice.

“Hugin! Come here.” She noticed her apprentice remained within his wolven form, seated near the edge of the old fortress the shipful of soldiers had chosen to reside in. Hugin didn’t move, merely raised his head to gaze at her. “Hugin, even though he says to help build, I’m not doing it. Something’s not right about him.”

Hugin’s eyes widened, even though he expected his mentor to disobey orders. “What will we be doing, then?”

“Nothing, because I don’t feel like helping that ass.”

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An alarm sounded, calling for most everyone to report and prepare for an attack. “Great, there goes
the rest of my night,” Tay grumbled, removing Silverblade and Ellemayne from their sheaths. She rushed over from where she and Hugin had been resting, whipping her head around to look for whatever damned orc had decided it’d be smart to fight them.

She sprinted to a small group of dwarves and human, all of them standing around trying to search for any Horde rushing them. A human aimed their bow at something moving nearby--

And was filled with bullets. Tay raised her head to the sky, seeing the gunship that had fired on their own vessel. She realized this had been why she had barely any recollection of what happened before reaching this abandoned fortress.

“Run,” she spat at the others. Tay made a beeline to find Hugin, who no doubt would be trying to heal the wounded. Why had she reminded him about that? No, that was selfish. She shouldn’t be that way, not in the middle of chaos. “HUGIN!” she screeched. Her main priority would always be those closest to her, and in that case, right now it was Hugin.

She kept running, dodging whenever a bullet trail made its way towards her. Hugin would not die this day. “Dammit Hugin, if I lose your ass to this I’m going to raise hell to you!” she muttered. Tay pushed herself to run faster, trying to pick out the worgen in the midst of the chaos happening in the area.

A nearby explosion sent some soldiers flying. Tay’s heart began to pump faster, forcing her to run, run until she found her apprentice.

He stood just outside one of the barricades, healing one of the wounded. The man didn’t have a selfish bone in his body, Tay mused. She began again at a sprint, hoping to keep him from the harm. Whatever fool tried to kill Hugin would be met with a rude awakening.

Tay watched as a Horde spy snuck in, daggers raised, head straight for her apprentice. No. She had jinxed him. The spy’s daggers dug into the worgen’s back, pulling a screeching howl from him. She surged forward, summoning a huge bout of Elune’s Fire and slamming her blade into the spy’s side. She grinned, delighting in the revenge she dished out onto the bastard.

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Tay dragged Hugin through the woods, hoping to keep him out of the way. Thankfully, he had shifted back into his human form before losing all consciousness. She needed to keep him away from that now. Hugin couldn’t tough out as much as she could. As long as he stayed safe, she didn’t need to care about anything else.

Other soldiers had fled in this direction. It only made sense for her to find them and keep him under watch in case anything else happened. She had healed him as best as she could before taking off. Hugin would have some lingering pains after that, but for now this was the best she could do after using most of her energy running and fighting.

Perhaps camping out would be better. It would ensure they didn’t get caught in any more crossfire, but Hugin needed others to watch while she got forced to carry out orders before getting into more trouble with higher-ups in the military. She didn’t want to serve after that, but until the opportunity to resign arose, she had to.

“Hugin, Hugin,” she whispered, gently shaking him. He didn’t respond, but Tay knew he lived. She heard his steady breathing. He’d not die this day. She should never have taken him on as her apprentice, what with all the havoc she got dragged into. And this havoc had resulted in him becoming one of the injured when it came time to count casualties.
“Dammit,” she muttered, heaving him along to find wherever the others went. “I just need you safe, then we’ll be set. If you even have any damned family, I’ll be dead because I let you die.”

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When she arrived, some other survivors came and took Hugin. Tay, once more, had been summoned to meet with Doren. Why had he survived? Wasn’t it a commanding officer’s duty to stay and fight beside his troops? Her stomach tied together into knots. Doren didn’t embody the Alliance’s ideals, and it became obvious by the fact that he’d lived.

When she arrived, Doren only smirked at her. “Good to see you still live, kaldorei. I heard about the unfortunate situation your worgen… companion,” Doren paused, emphasising the word, “and the situation he found himself in.”

Tay glared. “He is my apprentice. There is nothing between us.” She kept the look up, trying to appear larger than this puny man. Which, for her, took no effort at all due to her height. She leaned forward on her heels just a tad bit, clenching her fist around one of her daggers. “Your orders for me, human.”

“Sir,” he hissed through clenched teeth. “You can help watch for any more Horde filth that tries to attack us. I have enough soldiers searching for natives. If there are any.” Doren pointed to the door, eyes narrowing as he waited for the kaldorei to leave his office. Tay gave him a sharp look, turning and storming out of the room.

He waited a spell before exiting to retreat to a secluded cave he’d found not far from the small cluster of tents that served as their temporary base. The Horde would not find him. He would be safe, then report back to his king about the traitor elf that let most of their men die. If he did so, finally the Alliance would finally destroy the Horde.

Doren would be a celebrated hero, then. If that damn elf would stop reappearing.

Tay made her way to the medical tents to see just how her apprentice was faring. She’d make sure he got sent back to his new housing in Darnassus. The man, though more on the youthful side in human ages, had obviously been forced through some rather… tough situations that made him appear older than he seemed.

“How is he?” she asked one of the healers there. Tay pointed at Hugin for more clarification.

“Still in need of rest, Master Sergeant Silverblade,” the healer answered. “Is he required for some task? If so, Captain Doren can wait.” The healer gave her a stern look, about ready to see her out of the tent to allow Hugin rest.

“No… No, not at all. I just want him sent back to Darnassus as soon as possible. That’s all I needed, healer. I’m stuck on watch in case you or him need to see me. Though, that’s doubtful. Farewell.”

Tay turned and left the tent, stuffing one hand into a pocket in hopes of finding one of her hidden daggers. She decided instead of watching, she would sit and sharpen her weapons. Whatever Doren planned, she hoped it failed, and that the Horde found him.

She stood where the watchmen were placed, only a short distance away from another one. Tay removed both a dagger and a whetstone from her inner pockets, beginning the sharpening process. If one of the others noticed and tried to stop her, she mentally rehearsed her reasonings for it. Being so loyal to the Alliance, she knew they’d understand moreso than Doren.
“Hey, elf! Your task is to keep you eyes peeled, not slack. I can report you for insubordination.”

Tay rolled her eyes, straightening her posture. “Would you rather me be fighting an intruder with dulled blades, soldier? Or do you think it’d be better for me to sharpen them now to be ready for later?”

The soldier paused, then nodded for her to continue. He returned to his watch, making sure that what the elf said was true. Tay let a slight smirk come across her face, stealing a glance at the fellow every once in a while.

For hours, she kept up the sharpening, sometimes barely doing one and pulling it out later to make it seem like she had multiple blades hidden on her. In truth, she only had around four extras, in case her main two were shattered or lost. Ellemayne only needed a little bit of this, Silverblade requiring it more than the others.

When she looked up, dusk had settled. Swinging her head backwards, she saw the shape of a worgen limping towards her among the other wider shapes of… bears? Were these the natives? And why did they carry wood along with them and let them drop to the ground?

“Shan’do. The healer told me how a group of soldiers came back with natives. The healer said Doren promised to help them build housing. I’m confused at how far apart they are setting the foundation. Perhaps speaking to one of them might help?” Hugin suggested. “Should I do so?”

“No, Hugin. You’re still injured. I’ll do it. Just take a seat and run if any trouble starts up. No arguments,” Tay ordered. She strode up to one of the bear-people. Furbolgs, perhaps? She took note of the black and white patterns on the fur.

“Greetings. Who might you be? A native of this land?” she asked.

The bear-furbolg turned, giving her a non-hostile smile. “Yes. Pandaren. You are a… soldier?” it asked in broken Common.

“I am. Taylande Silverblade, at your service. And you?” she asked, giving the Pandaren a slight bow.

“Tae-hyung, a strongman. A… pleasure,” he answered.

“Tie-hyung?” Tay asked, making sure her pronunciation was correct. The Pandaren nodded. “Thanks to you. Are there more of you coming than this small lot?”

“Yes! Captain promised housing,” Tae-hyung said. Tay furrowed her brow briefly, already questioning what motive the Captain Doren had. Something bad would come of this, she predicted.

“I will leave you to your work, Tae-hyung.”

Over the next week, more of the pandaren flooded in to help build their housing. Tay watched them whenever she could, curious to learn more about their culture and the way they lived. She interacted with them before Doren assigned her to play watchman or scout, asking to be taught some of their language in exchange for them to learn more of the Common tongue.

She started to notice how some of the smaller ones, their children most likely, lagged behind the others. Sometimes when one asked for some water, soldiers flat out ignore their requests. Tay made sure to give them some afterwards. She knew far too well how it felt to go without water for a long time. They didn’t need to know that.
“HORDE INCOMING! RING THE ALARMS!” screeched someone. Tay reached into her pockets, removing Silverblade and Ellemayne. She motioned for Hugin to begin running and hide within the forests nearby. He refused, instead readying his staff and searching for those in need of help.

“You really don’t understand how to be selfish, do you?” she muttered, watching as a Horde platoon ran forward and began slicing off… bonds on the pandaren’s legs. The Alliance was enslaving them. No wonder they received no water. The anger in her chest welled up, sending her to help the enemy.

She sliced the ropes on those who had them, using her daggers to pry apart the metal chains binding their legs to a ball. After her time with Aeva, she knew a fair amount of Thalassian for it to be considered a second language. The woman always told her their mother knew it and taught all her children.

Tay made her way to one of the Horde soldiers. A sin’dorei, no less. Immediately, she switched over to Thalassian. So they didn’t attack, she raised her hands in a gesture of peace. The sin’dorei lowered their blades, but only enough to not attack immediately. “Sin’dorei, I am not with them! Not anymore. This is not the Alliance I joined! If you find Doren, kill him and tell the survivors to inform the king of his defeat. I refuse to serve.”

The sin’dorei had a look of surprise spread on their face, mostly due to hearing a kaldorei speaking their mother tongue. “I… yes, kaldorei.”

Tay smirked at them. “Taylande Silverblade, mercenary for hire. I am not their dog.” She gave a mock bow, now so different from her stiff and formal one she gave to everyone. She continued her aiding of the natives until she found Hugin and had him follow her. If not serving meant she lost her apprentice, she knew he’d be better off without her.

Everyone was.

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“So you left us because you found out that we were having pandaren help us build a base and destroy the Horde for good?” Aeva asked, laughing incredulously. She raised the mug and took a swig larger than Tay ever remembered her ever daring to take.

Then, she realized the paladin was drunk. She’d realized the reason Aeva knew of her Moonblade status had been because she made them change up her enlisted name to it after she had learned of how damned the Silverblade part of her was. Tay narrowed her eyes and stared at the woman, a mix of shock, disappointment, and horror all on her face at once.

“As far as I recall, Petrovsky, enslaving the natives is not what this Alliance did whenever I first joined it.” Tay’s face became a mask of anger as she stared at her former squadmate and lover. Even if Aeva had been drunk, she never acted like this. She must’ve drank herself stupid every night she’d had off.

Aeva leaned forward, slamming the mug down on the table and roughly grabbing Tay’s shirt collar. She jolted the elf forward, hissing at her, “And as far as I recall, Silverblade, being someone’s intended does not mean fuck your ex!”

Tay flinched. She’d been trying to fix herself. She would try to make it right, even if it meant losing her old comrade. Tay stole a few glances around to make sure nobody overheard their heated chat. It did not seem that way. Good. Her former lover’s words hit her harder than she ever
remembered them doing so. She had to leave.

“I’m... I’m going to go now. The last thing I need right now is getting court martialed due to offense on an officer.” Tay shoved herself up from the table, chair sliding backwards with a loud scrape on the wooden floors of the inn. Aeva glared daggers at the other woman. Her knuckles slowly turned whiter. A smirk spread across her face.

“Fare you well, backstabbing, knife-eared twat,” the paladin spat. Tay almost flinched. All she did was raise a hand in farewell, scanning the room and seeing some curious eyes turn their way. She knew Aeva to be correct. The woman hardly ever seemed to be wrong.

“Silverblade got shattered. She doesn’t exist anymore.”

Tay exited the tavern, displeased and not daring to look back. She did not expect what she saw when she stepped outside.
Hugin had tracked his drunken mentor down after she went off into the woods in Pandaria. She had left him to his own devices after splitting from the military. He’d been told her resignation had been met with some anger and outrage, but overall accepted. Hugin had journeyed back to his homeland, spending a good majority of that trip there trying to recover any sort of memento of his family. Of his sister and his brother. He shoved those thoughts away, lest he have a breakdown in front of strangers in an unfamiliar city.

After an entire war and half of another one had passed Hugin decided it to be time to find out what happened to his mentor when he couldn’t find any of his family keepsakes. Even if his parents turned him onto the streets, he still cared for them. He traveled to Stormwind, this being one of the few times he’d set foot in the city. His first stop, he had decided, would be to one of the Mage Quarter’s taverns. The Blue Recluse yielded no results, one sympathetic patron directing him to a less… desirable tavern.

When he stopped outside of it, he saw why they called it a less desirable place. The exterior of it had an eerie look to it that sent chills down his spine. He smelled more of it with his worgen curse, that dank smell seeming to flood his nose. Why his mentor would go here, of all places, when the Recluse was only a short walk away--

“Shan’do Taylande,” he huffed in surprise.

“H… Hugin,” Tay croaked. She felt a weak smirk spread onto her face. Not once did she ever think her apprentice wanted to see her again. But here he stood. “I didn't think you even cared to drop by.”

He stepped forward, face twisting into a glare. “I have enough to say to you, shan’do. I’m pissed at you and care too much to see another friend of mine throw their damned life away. I need to talk to you about a lot of shit.” Hugin clenched his fist, taking a whiff of the air. His eyes widened slightly, fist loosening before finally tightening up again.

Hugin raised his fist and punched out in a straight line. His arm remained bent at the elbow in case she tried snapping it the wrong way. Hugin’s fist connected with her jaw with enough force to leave a bruise. Tay didn’t bother to try dodging his throw. Hugin pulled his hand away, shaking his hand and nursing it in his left. “I'm surprised you’re sober this time, you arse,” Hugin quipped.

Tay’s hand flew up to her jaw, covering it while her face contorted in pain. She groaned but didn’t bother speaking. Hugin glared at her and she could see through her narrowed eyes. “Devurved ip, I knoh.”

“Damn right you did. You were too damned drunk to talk about this. Do you know any Petrovskys? Because I met a gal with that surname in the wake of the Cataclysm,” he hissed. Tay nodded. “Good. Her name was Alexis Petrovsky. Half-elven gal in her mid-twenties. Prime of her life. Raped. Said you watched and did nothing! Is it true?”

Tay hesitated, rubbing her jaw a moment longer. She reluctantly pulled her hand down, the beginnings of a large bruise up the left side of her face easily visible. She didn’t answer, prompting her apprentice to take a deep breath, his normal signal for possibly changing to his more lupine shape. “Yes. I was engaged to her sister. You can guess the rest.”

“Why didn’t you help the lass? She did nothing wrong to you, so why? I thought the Goddess
smiled on those who aided others?” Hugin whined.

Tay laughed bitterly. “You should probably know that the Goddess prefers throwing rocks at me while I try to run from them. I don’t know why I didn’t help.” She looked away, shame rising in her chest and tightening her lungs.

“You of all people should know that nobody deserves that kind of trauma. I saw the marks on your back, shan’doo, during the Landfall when you nearly--”

“We don’t talk about that.”

“But shan’doo, I’m only saying that I saw them--”

“We don’t. Talk. About. That. Forget you ever brought it up, if you mention it to anyone I will make sure you don’t have a pleasant life. Enough people know already. I don’t need more. Just--just don’t, please, don’t.”

Hugin’s glare softened. He had a neutral look on his face, then sighing and shaking his head. He decided to drop it, not bothering to ask any other questions about matters related to what he saw on her. “Tell me about what happened after you ran off, yeah?”

Tay chuckled weakly. “Fine. Only if I hear about you, but we need to make it quick. Walk with me ’til we reach Stormwind Keep. One thing that happened is that they’re calling me back. They made me work during Draenor, after I had some… odd encounters during the Landfall issues up to the Draenor crap. I wrapped up my relations with old lovers. Alexis’s sister, Aeva, in particular.”

He furrowed his brow, confused. As they walked, Hugin looked his mentor up and down to make sure nothing else seemed odd about her, aside from being sober. “That explains the reek of some dirt… is that smoked peacebloom? What the fuck, I thought you were clean?”

“I only tried it. Hate it, don’t see how Nash smokes it,” she responded.

“Oh, so that’s the bloke’s name? The one whose smell’s all over you? Goddess, you elves are bad about that. The ones in relationships. Finally met a gal, too. Gilnean, worgen, fine with my lack of, well, that kind of attraction. Don’t need it.”

Tay nodded. She had met some people who were like that, but didn’t think any differently of them. “Lucky woman, then. I assume you’re not planning on having a family any time soon?” she asked.

Hugin laughed, nearly walking into one of the trees planted to give the human city some greenery in the greys and browns and whatever strange color they decided to tile their roofs. “Not unless we’re both ready for it. She’s a good woman.”

They spent the rest of their walk in silence. The feeling of their presence eased their consciences enough. Tay appreciated the fact that her apprentice knew when to quit talking and what to address. She’d have to cover up the bruise, though, lest she enter the military’s major building looking like she got into a fight.

When they reached the Keep, Hugin paused. “So, I’m seeing your arse again, yeah? Can’t really say I like the idea of losing another close, erm, elf.”

“Don’t worry, I plan to give you some hell later,” Tay laughed, wincing a little bit. She rubbed her jaw again. A dwarf dressed in golden armor, designed more for ceremony than for close quarters fighting, stormed forward and stared up at the two.
“Oh, Torrolf. I didn’t recognize you underneath the clean armor and groomed beard,” Tay commented.

“Shut up. C’mon. They already want’cher head. Git in ‘n’ give ‘em yer report on what’che did this past, uh, whatever time,” Torrolf droned, grabbing her right wrist and dragging her into the room.

The dwarf led her down the long corridor leading to the Keep’s throne chamber, instead turning left.

Inside, five people consisting of two dwarves and three humans sat at a table looking exhausted. One of the humans removed his eyes from whatever document rested on the tabletop. He blinked, snapping his fingers and causing the man next to him to pick up a writing utensil and everyone else to straighten up.

“Silverblade. Moonblade. Whatever the hell you’re going by. Report, now. Nothing will get changed--”

“I thought I told you I resigned when you tried justifying the enslaving of natives during the Landfall campaign,” Tay hissed. She glared daggers, standing before them with her arms folded behind her back. “Since I keep hearing you’re going to be giving me something, it’ll be my last. Only this once, and it better not be something stupid.”

“Moonblade, give us your report. We have heard from a third party that you finally met your mother?” they asked.

“I refuse to tell that story. Everyone’s got one they won’t share. This is mine. Now let’s get this wrapped up, because I’m not stopping no matter how much you complain.”

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Silverblade got rammed farther into an eye socket than she’d thought it would go. The only problem would be pulling it out of the feral worgen’s eye before more decided to attack her. For whatever reason, the ones in Duskwood were getting increasingly agitated. Tay turned around, checking to make sure nobody behind her had been injured. She sure had, though not physically. She, if asked, joked her pride got hurt from helping a family travel from Redridge to Westfall. Even though she joked, it remained slightly true.

“Sire, nobody is injured? None of the, erm, dorei?” she asked, struggling with the last word. The merchant she’d traveled the roads with gave her a strange look. Tay shook her head and sighed. “The smaller humans. The tiny things that take around twenty years to mature.”

The merchant eyed the dead worgen closely, thinking it would twitch back to life any minute even though it had a blade enter its skull. “Y-you mean children, milady elf?”

“Yes, whatever it is. Children. Common’s too clumsy of a speech. But are they alright?” she asked again. The merchant nodded once. He reached into a pocket and fished out a small sack of coins, holding it out for her to take and use however she pleased. His hand shook slightly, revealing with the quiet jingling to hold a lot of money.

Tay stole a glance behind them, making sure the small stagecoach packed full of various wares remained undamaged. She caught a glance of one peeping child’s head as they stole a glance at what was going on outside. She didn’t blame them for wanting to know, since she herself as a child tried to steal away to discover more of way lay beyond the ominous woods surrounding her father’s house. Never would it be a home. Not in a thousand-thousand years.
“No. I told you, I’d escort you and only needed some meals. Keep the money. Besides, we’re just outside of Darkshire and it’s where I need to leave you at,” she responded. The merchant only stared at Tay with wide eyes, then shaking himself out of that small trance. He shoved the coins back into the pocket he’d removed them from, patting it a few times to reassure himself it was there and not disappearing immediately.

As they made the last few steps into the small hamlet, they nodded each other a farewell. The merchant made his way to the blacksmithy and saw his elven escorter moving to the inn on the other side of the square. The striking of a hammer rang faintly outside of the doors as he paused, stealing another glance back to the inn. Something about that woman intrigued him. He turned back, shouldering open the door to the smithy and preparing his coin purse to buy some of the armors for later sale.

He checked behind him as the door to the smithy stood open, seeing his stagecoach and children inside pulling over in between what he assumed to be the town hall and inn. They would be safe. His mind wandered over to the possible thought of the elf woman having a child and that’s perhaps why she agreed to travel with them through the expanse of gloomy, eerie forest south of Elwynn. He shrugged and made his way into the blacksmithy. Perhaps he’d find that elf another day.

Inside the musty inn, Tay made her way to the cowled figure tucked into a corner near the fireplace. She’d heard rumor of a mage in the town after being stuck moving through Westfall and then at Raven Hill. After enough traveling the Eastern Kingdoms, she had decided to return to the only place that felt like a home to her after the storm of events that seemed to catch her at every turn.

She could have taken a boat, but after nearly drowning twice and causing the death of Royce and loss of Ivan’s leg, stepping on one tended to result in panicking and flashbacks to those awful days. Tay had to be drunk and stupid to get on one of those things. Most of the time, she was the former, which would have helped had she any coin to spend at reeking taverns.

A mage seemed the better bet for her now. She would find one of those fellows and compensate them after a portal or get them drunk enough to conjure her a portal for free. Tonight seemed like she might have to resort to using the second of the two options until she could honestly obtain a portal here or there. Oh, if only she were a mage. But they caused the sundering of the world, from what she’d read, so she remained happy as what her father had made her into.

“Whatever it is you do, kaldorei, your portal is free. No need to worry,” said the mage, whose voice sounded baritone. Tay gave them a curious look as she took her seat across from them. “But tell me, why are you all of a sudden going to Darnassus? Have you ever set foot in the city?”

Tay’s hands, though they rested in her lap, moved to her blades carefully. This mage already seemed a bit too odd for her liking. They asked questions she didn’t want to explain, but she decided she’d humor them with the answers they sought. “Once, right before I got sent to the ass end of Azeroth. After Northrend I just never found time to go to Teldrassil, just Kalimdor’s various locations. I’ve decided to go to Darnassus to see the new Temple of Elune, possibly make a life there. I’m not too sure yet.” Tay lied about the first answer. The second was the truth.

She could have sworn the mage smirked under the hood they wore, hearing a small puff of breath from them. Something about this magus made her want to run as far away from them as possible. Perhaps even take a boat to Teldrassil. Tay chased those thoughts away, hoping to make some conversation with this fellow before getting possibly murdered by some demon in disguise that planned to possibly destroy the world.
“Who are you, dun’a en?” she questioned them.

“What?” they asked.

“Unknown other man. Whatever your title for unknown people is. Myster... y....” Tay gritted her teeth and resisted the urge to slam her face on the nearest hard surface. She spoke too much in her native tongue since she began her traveling that she’d fallen out of practice with the common tongue. “I hate your language.”

The mystery man (or woman with an exceptionally deep voice) laughed. They threw their head back in a violent manner, obviously entertained by the woman’s words. “That is... not what I meant, but I see why you call me that. You don’t know me. I’ve, well, heard of you. An Ivan Petrovsky has told me of you, due to Kirin Tor matters.”

The grip Tay maintained on her blades tightened as she stared at this person. Their hood remained on their head despite the laughter, and a perpetual mask of darkness remained over the opening. This person, whoever they were, disturbed her enough to rely on both her blades. Perhaps even her own magical skills her elder sister taught her.

“Do not worry yourself. I only plan to open you a portal to Darnassus. I’m feeling generous tonight,” they answered. Tay’s grip only lessened slightly. She still had a bad feeling about this stranger. It could have just been her overreacting, or perhaps her own mind playing tricks that her father was out to get her again. She kept waiting for another attack. Her father hadn’t done this crap in some time, and it felt about the right moment for him to do so.

“Where do you wish to meet, then? For the portal, I mean,” Tay hastily added to the end. The mage raised their head to stare at the ceiling and pointed up. “Your room?” They nodded once. Something told her to be on her guard when she decided to arrive for her portal. Another part of her said to take the next damn boat to Darnassus instead of trusting this fellow. But nearly getting killed scared her less than riding a boat.

Tay stayed in the main parts of the inn as the stranger made their way to the stairs. She watched them as they continued about their business. Not once did the cowl fall off their head or that black mask of nothing lift to reveal their face. She almost growled in frustration, but then recalled other patrons were seated within the room.

Her hand went to the dagger hidden on her body, Ellemayne specifically. Something about Silverblade warranted it only be used in emergencies. Like the feral worgen, jumping out of the shadows and attacking that merchant and his wares and children. But she didn’t see the use in getting rid of that Goddess forsaken thing just yet.

After a few moments of time had passed, Tay got up from her seat and went to meet this mage. If she could get out of there sooner rather than later, she would feel a great deal better than she felt at the moment. She found herself hesitating after reaching the top of the steps, one of the doors to the rooms closed, her signal the mage waited for her inside.

Tay turned around and went back down, leaving the inn soon after. She looked around to make sure nobody followed her. The feeling in her gut remained, though she couldn’t seem to shake it off as she decided to travel to Stormwind’s harbors.

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She regretted making the choice to ride a Goddess damned boat again. She had spent the entire journey belowdecks, only daring to come up when night had fallen and the larger of Azeroth’s two
moons hung high in the sky. When it rained she only buried her face into her knees, covering her ears with her arms. Every time that happened, though it did rarely, her chest ached for days after.

When she had entered the city proper she made a beeline for the Temple, hoping to find even a temporary peace within. Tay reached the Temple doorway, sentinels on duty remaining as stoic and unmoving as they always seemed. She took a glance in and counted the amount of peoples within. A little over twenty. She went inside, keeping close to the walls as she stared at everything inside, eyes lingering on the statue of Haidene and a couple chatting quietly near it.

“Goddess, please hear me this once. I ask much of You, never paying my respects. I humbly apologize. I ask You this night for some guidance in my path. I feel I have lost my way. I ask of one thing this night, some kind of a confirmation that I have not strayed. I would be eternally grateful. Even if after this one night you no longer grant me aid, the simple confirmation would be enough. I shall bother you no more, Goddess,” Tay mumbled as she stared up at the statue with a sense of confusion.

For the first time since she could remember, she felt like a lost and scared child again. She found herself falling to her knees and bowing her head in prayer. Despite her formal training as a priestess, she never truly put her skills to use. This had to be the first time she had prayed since leaving the Sisters of Elune. Tay may have done a few pleas here or there, but none so much like what she did here.

Perhaps she could change, given some time. But it seemed so far off because of her actions towards others. She decided to not have contact with the two she hurt most, using them for her own personal pleasures and pursuits. She got off her knees, instead sitting, back pressed against the stone perch lining the temple walls. As her eyes began to wander, she noticed a human standing across the chamber, arms crossed and staring at her peculiarly.

Tay’s face felt hot. The human, a female, had curious piercing green eyes. While the woman watched her, Tay looked away and absentmindedly ran a hand through her traveling satchel. She decided a skin of whatever booze she had on her would work if that stranger decided to bother her. She silently admitted to herself change wouldn't happen because she got caught in a vulnerable position by a good-looking human girl.

Tay found a skin of human ale in her pouch. It would have to do for now, seeing that Darnassus had fruity wines and a lack of strong dwarven ale. She’d have to tolerate weak kaldorei piss-for-wine and this skin of possibly Alteraci in origin extra bitter until returning to the Eastern Kingdoms. Already she found herself in a bad mood. She took a deep drink of it, almost reeling away at how very bitter humans defined the “extra” part. It tasted more like something a so-called witch brewed in the mountains of Redridge.

“Better than nothing, and you can get drunk off it,” she grumbled to herself. Tay drank it until she drained it, then shoving the empty skin back into her satchel. She knew better than to leave something related to alcohol in the Temple of Elune. That would have given her unwanted attention with priestesses and possibly a night in a jail cell.

“You know you shouldn’t drink within the Temple, sister?” asked another woman. Most likely kaldorei, due to the term of respect they constantly used in each other's presence.

Tay only shrugged, staring at the statue in the center of the room. “Sometimes a drink does more to calm me than this place.”

“You're a woman of faith, I take it?” the woman guessed.
Tay didn't say anything yet. She turned her head, glancing up to see who bothered her while she tried to ignore the eyes of others on her. The woman wore her hair in a long braid draped over her shoulder. Tay saw it was the same color as her own pine green, but the woman’s facial tattoos were of the blades, like her older sister Nar’s. Just like her sister’s, the intricate designs of swirls and other patterns within the borders of the tattoos.

“Not as much as my sister, milady. She was the religious one, said it helped with her troubles praying before the altars helped. She trained me in the holy ways. I never did utilize the healing aspects of it,” Tay answered. “Before I get struck down for not introducing myself, Taylande Silverblade, sellsword, mercenary, whatever you want to call it, at your service.”

The woman smiled, crossing her arms and standing straighter than a board. She stole a look at the young woman next to her, then returned her gaze to the center of the temple. “No need for formalities. Priestess Landrelia Moonblade.”

Tay's brow furrowed. She'd heard that name before. It came up enough when she still trained with Nar. “I remember you, Priestess. From Winterspring. I was still small and idiotic, but I can remember encountering you. Did you ever have dealings with Nar Bladesong?”

Landrelia opened her mouth to answer, then paused. She took a moment to collect her thoughts and recall what she could. “I believe I recall someone of that name. What is it about her you’d like to know?”
She needed a drink. She needed one now. As nice as the priestess had been in offering her lounging for a day or two, the woman neglected to mention the utter lack of alcohol. Goddess, how her hands shook and shook and shook and shook. Her breathing got irregular as she went out one night and purchased as much fruity shit wine she could tolerate.

“You should cut back on that, sister,” someone told her. “Not good for you. Leave the drinking to pandaren and dwarves. Maybe the occasional human.” Her head processed Darnassian with a Common speak word here and there. Why not stick to simple Darnassian? Last time she checked, she looked glaringly like a kaldorei. A drunk one, but still kaldorei.

She laughed bitterly. “I’ll drink ‘til I black out, my friend.”

“Then perhaps you’d like to take a bottle along with you? And cut back. You've developed an addiction to this. Drop it,” the person responded, tone becoming icy. Their last words grew colder than the Lich King’s frozen throne.

“Yeah, no. I’ll do that when goblins become druids and dwarves are sober.” She smirked at whoever suggested she lighten up on her drinking problem. Stealing a glance at whoever said that, her double vision made out the shape of the priestess from last night. Her stomach tied into a knot. This would not end well for her.

The priestess--Lan something--raised a hand. Perhaps the woman would smite her with the Goddess’s fury? “Your mother would be ashamed of you, Taylande.” She flinched at the use of her full name. It had become too often that she flinched at her own name, especially when she drank. But she couldn't help it. Torrolf got her hooked on shitty dwarven brew and that ass for a father of her’s made it into her own personal torment.

The priestess raised her hand, slapping the drink out of her reach. Wine spilled over Tay's clothing and the ground nearby. Her face knit into an expression of anger. She balled a fist and raised it, swinging in a wide, drunken arc easily countered by the priestess with a backhanded slap in the face. The priestess then flashed something bright in her eyes, dazing her. She fell backwards and thumped hard onto the floor.

“Cut back on it. I'd think you would want to honor the wishes of your mother, even if you've not seen the woman in a forever,” the priestess sighed.

Tay growled, breathing turning loud and heavy. “I don't have a mother. I never met her, never heard anything about her but a fake name and a fake story about her.” She barely made out the tilting of a head and raising of an eyebrow, that blinding flash still somehow disorienting her. Somewhat like the time she got an orc’s knee rammed in the side of her head, only she didn’t feel like collapsing into a heap.

“Oh? Would you mind my asking about it?” the priestess responded. Internally, Tay rolled her eyes. Everyone asked about it, so she might as well get to explaining right then and there. She hauled herself into a seat at the bar.

Her arms crossed in a defensive position. “Well,” she started, “My father’s an asshole. He lied to
me. Said my mother was a woman named Val’riin. Then later on some woman… Kel--Ki--Kyena. Yeah. Kyena something or other. She saved me when he tried to kill me. All I’m saying.” Tay waited for the pity most people normally gave her.

Instead, the priestess smiled softly. “A respected general of the sentinels saved your life. Perhaps you are more important than you think, Taylande?”

Tay laughed audibly, shaking both from alcohol and the feeling of how much of a lie that statement was. “No, no, no, no. If I was important, I wouldn’t have been dropped at a temple like I’d asked.” She shook her head and balled her hands into fists to stop the tremors. Pushing herself from the seat, Tay huffed and began to stride off. The priestess followed her, remaining close but at a respectable distance.

The pair walked together in silence. An unexpected turn to the left and up a ramp brought them near Temple grounds. Tay halted on the far edge, a wing of the small gardens nearby. She took a deep breath moved a few steps farther. The priestess stood back, watching. Tay sat down on the edge of the great platform the Temple stood on, letting her legs dangle off the edge.

From her angle, lanterns hung in windows to illuminate homes in the Tradesman’s Terrace and farther back to the Craftsman’s Terrace as well. The darkest patches remained in the Cenarion Enclave, as the druids typically never picked up on the trends. The lanterns had to be some strange new habit. Possibly to let the diurnal races see in the city at night.

At this moment Tay savored the peace as she viewed the city. She could see some few kaldorei moving about, everyone most likely congregating in the Temple for a monthly holding of Shan’surfal. A holiday to honor the dead. Slowly, lights began to blink out within the city, and some stragglers emerged. They all made their way to the Temple. Shan’surfal, then.

Tay spotted a few priestesses walking out as she slowly sobered up. At least she’d not gotten blackout drunk this time. The few were then followed by many others, mostly civilians plus some still-armored sentinels, holding small paper lanterns with unlit candles. Behind the large host followed ceremonially-dressed sentinels and priestesses, all either armed or holding an ever-burning candle within a simply decorated metal candle holder. It bore symbols of Elune and many other demigods on it, all on a silver background.

She slowly pulled herself up from the ledge, watching the procession. They were all heading the same way. Everyone walked in unison, careful, graceful, feet falling together in a perfect invisible rhythm. The sentinels and priestesses with the candles all reflected the light as it fell onto those in front of them. Together, the two last groups parted as some draenei had been allowed to join in the group. Their in-step march never broke as the newcomers quickly adjusted.

At the head of the parade, those who led the group went through the portal to Rut’theran. Most likely to loose the paper lanterns on the sea. Slowly but surely everyone went through the portal to the last soldier remaining out. A moment of silence for the dead. A night of remembrance. Tay looked up and saw the full moon peaking through the treetops.

Shan’surfal, the night of the full moon every month. Every month, when the White Lady was visible in her whole glory to everyone. And yet here she stood, drinking herself to death. She could honor the fallen.

Tay glanced back at the priestess who followed her. Landrelia. That was it. Landrelia watched her with a curious look in her eye. Tay ran after the procession and didn’t look back. At Rut’theran, they most likely had extra paper lanterns. She saw the draenei who joined didn’t have one. The lanterns would be there. She thought they would. They might be. But she ran, rushing through the
The priestess she’d seen at the head of the group raised her hands to silence quiet mutterings and some weeping in the group. Tay’s heart squeezed as she remembered the deaths she caused, the brother she’d been forced to kill, and all those she served with who fell to the Legion when they assaulted Nordrassil. Somehow, still in her drunken state, she functioned enough to remember the pains of it.

*You might be shit, but everyone has their dead to bury and honor,* she told herself. Tay spotted a few of the paper lanterns some couple feet away from the hippogryph master on the island. She trudged forward and grabbed one.

The High Priestess Whisperwind sanctioned this every month. Just so the peoples could honor the fallen.

“I welcome you all to this Shan’surfal. Another welcome to our draenei allies who have joined us on this sacred night, to honor their dead with ours. Elune and the Light are here tonight, with us in their own ways. I ask we all set aside any kind of resentment towards our deities, and that we speak in the Common tongue for a better way of communication this night. I shall introduce myself, along with the sisters of Elune at my side.

“I am Priestess Gladepetal, and on my left are Elder Priestess Liarra Riverstride, Battle Priestess Winterstar, and Moon Priestess Emistra Wildleaf. To my right, Elder Priestess Mellian Dewgather, Battle Priestess Bladesong, and Moon Priestess Falisa Ravenstrike.”

Upon hearing the name Bladesong called out, Tay felt her heart fluttering. Could her sister possibly be here? It had to be. The only Bladesong she knew was Nar, and she’d not seen Nar since her sudden leaving only some two centuries or so before the Legion assaulted the World Tree. It had to be.

Someone’s eyes rested on her. Tay looked up front to the line of priestesses that stood up there, but they all faced forward, stony eyes on the crowd. The hoods on the cloaks they wore were pulled up just enough to mask their eyes from the peoples. The center priestess who led the ceremony wore hers down, blanketed across her shoulders in a decorative symbol.

She watched as the sentinels fanned out, all forming the shape of a crescent moon around the outer rims of the island of Rut’theran. They broke formation at the portal leading straight to Darnassus, then picked up around the end until they reached the docks. From the Stormwind dock to the Exodar dock, the crowd stood. Tay joined the group near the back, along with the draenei.

“Excuse me,” one of the draenei whispered to her. “But would you like to join your people?” She glanced up and saw a very muscled draenei male with dark blue skin and light blonde hair that rested in three braids, two on each shoulder and one down his back. She spotted the beginnings of a burn near his collarbone and saw the three deep ridges across his nose. Possibly from Outlands and orcs, but she’d not ask.

“No, my friend. I’ll be fine back here. What is your name?” she asked quietly in return.

The draenei looked ahead. “Ka’vaan. Now hush, the priestess is starting again.”

Ka’vaan was indeed right, the priestess had started speaking.

“Brothers, sisters, honored allies, tonight we are here to pay our respects the shan’surfal: our honored beloved. This is a night of remembrance, of peace, of honoring the sacrifices made for the
peoples and of those who passed on. Anyone may join, but you don’t have to perform the ceremony to honor the fallen. You may do so in your own right. As this line goes on, six people may come up and get your lantern lit to send off to the waters below the White Lady’s visage. Recite your names so Elune and the Light may hear. For those who have not seen, the Battle Priestesses Winterstar and Bladesong will demonstrate.”

Winterstar and Bladesong stepped forward, passing their candle holder off to the Elder Priestesses beside them. Tay glanced backwards and saw Landrelia waiting by the portal, a faint smile on her lips. She whipped her head around, hair whacking Ka’vaan in the arm. “Sorry!” she whispered, a headache racking her. Tay tried to ignore it as the priestesses demonstrated.

Only known by their surnames, the battle priestesses Bladesong and Winterstar picked up a paper lantern and let the elder priestesses light them. The duo stepped forth, Winterstar kneeling in the water that now rose above her waist. Bladesong followed afterwards. Winterstar held the lantern and issued out a string of names, those of her shan’surfal, then let it drift off to the sea. Bladesong did the same, her paper lantern following the first.

They returned to where they stood in between the elder and moon priestesses, taking the candle holders. Together, the six priestesses held out the candles for those first people. Six kaldorei stepped forward and lit their candles. Each moved to different spots. They muttered their chain of names, their lanterns leaving their hands. After they were done, the six returned to the back and each row of lanterned hands moved forward.

As the night went on, the sea filled up with lanterns, all illuminated by the Mother Moon. The sea reflected the lights in the water, giving of a brilliant display that those in Darnassus might have seen had they just looked down.

Tay’s row took its turn moving up. She had been positioned to where the lantern she held was lit by the Moon Priestess next to Bladesong. Tay controlled her breathing and masked her fears as she entered the water once more. Why had she chosen to do this when they had people going into the water? She knelt down, breath beginning to speed up as she recited a couple of names of those who fell in the Third War, of her second mentor Soraciel, and of Royce.

She quickly retreated from the water, taking her place behind the many rows that now stood facing the waters. The Priestess Gladepetal instructed the other six priestesses to turn around to the water, their backs to the crowd. Each one set the candle holder at the food of the water and they took a step back. In unison, they lowered their cowls and raised their heads to the sky, moonlight reflecting off their faces.

Purples and blues and greens and whites of their hair shone on their head, each having it pulling to a braid, ponytail, or something else entirely. The Battle Priestesses each had vibrant purple hair, turning pale in the moonlight. The upper part of their hair had been pulled into ponytails. Nar did that with her hair, but it had been dyed green like pines, like Tay’s hair. Like Landrelia’s hair.

It couldn’t be Nar. Her hopes were dashed.

“Brothers, sisters, honored allies, we shall close this with a prayer. To Elune, to the Light, to our shan’surfal. Priestesses, aid us in this prayer.” At that word, the Moon Priestess on the very end of the line, Wildleaf, started. She echoed the words the High Priestess Whisperwind once said to the peoples during a prayer.

“Darkness held us close when we did not know the light of Elune. When we cried for guidance, for Her radiance, the moon shone upon us. Her light enabled us to see, to know, even when the moon did not shine down on us at all times. And it is to Her light we return.”
Winterstar spoke next. “When the wars came, many fell. They fell so we might live freely under the light of the stars and Elune once more. Azshara betrayed us, Stareye betrayed through inaction, but we fought. And so we survived.”

Then came Riverstride. “It is to Her we give praise, and it is Her we have always trusted. Elune gives us the power to heal, to mend, to smite those who would threaten our lands and our world. And so we fight.”

Tay noticed how Priestess Glatepetal remained quiet. She had never attended a formal Shan’surfal, but she knew most of what went on from what little she recalled in her studying as a priestess. Deep in her, she thought she sullied the title of priestess, shamed it, like she did her own family name.

Soon, Dewgather spoke. “Whenever silence fell and the Long Vigil began, Elune’s light guided us through the times. Through the hardships each of us endured, we had faith enough to make it through the night. And so we lived.”

Bladesong. Tay hoped beyond hope it was Nar, her sister. “As the Third War started and our isolation to the world ended, we were forced to take up arms to fight once more. The Sisters of Elune mended our wounds and nature itself rose again to aid us like it had before. Ten thousand years ago, events such as those shook the world and we rose again. And so we endured.” It was Nar. Her sister.

The one called Ravenstrike seemed to end the prayer. “When our times draw to their conclusions, it is to Her we return. Elune, guide our shan’surfal to Your side. May they rest peacefully among the stars and watch over us as we continue our survival, our fights, our lives, our endurance. So that we might one night join you.”

Their eyes closed. Priestess Gladepetal turned around and raised her arms, a motion for them to join or repeat this closing line. “Anu’dorah; We remember. Zin-al-Elune.”

The echoes of many kaldorei voices, possibly some draenic, echoed her. “Zin-al-Elune.” The crowd dispersed after that, some buying a ride to Darkshore and others returning to Darnassus through the portal. The sentinels waited as the priestesses walked through and followed them into the city. Before the last one on the right side of the island left, she stopped and stared at both Tay and Landrelia, giving them a curious look.

Tay stayed behind, watching as her sister strode right past her with her head held high and didn’t even look at the scrawny runt she’d raised as her own. Part of Tay was angry, but the other part told her to sit and cry. But she couldn’t. She wouldn’t.

Landrelia approached her after everyone had cleared out, placing a caring hand on her shoulder. Tay turned to look at her, the serious look replacing whatever other expression she’d worn earlier that night. She wanted to run or lash out or do something, though she didn’t and instead restrained herself from doing so.

“What is it?” she asked.

Landrelia pat her shoulder once, squeezing it gently. “That woman. You looked rather distraught when you saw her. If I am intruding too much, I apologize, Taylande.” Tay shook her head. “I will listen whenever you speak.”

“She’s my sister. Nar Bladesong. I haven’t seen her in a while and I thought she might want to speak with me. But all she did was walk off so… whatever. She’s… never mind it.” Tay shook her head and bit back drunken tears. She had sobered up enough in that water, but a throbbing headache
remained.

The priestess nodded in a silent understanding. Tay shrugged her hand off, taking in the sight of the sky one more time before she turned and stalked off to the portal leading into Darnassus. She had to pray at the Temple for an hour or two. Hopefully alone.

“I should introduce you to this Gilnean. Perhaps you’d get along, since she can act as sour as you,” Landrelia responded.

Without looking back, Tay laughed--actually laughed--and answered in good humor, “Thank you, I’m glad you noticed my sourness.”

Chapter End Notes

((DISCLAIMER: Shan'surfal is a fanon holiday made up by a collection of guilds on MoonGuard-US. I've simply expanded on the idea they brought to life through the roleplaying community. All guilds are primarily kaldorei.)
“I am only suggesting you stop drinking so heavily! There is no reason to lash out!” Landrelia emphasized every word that left her mouth. Tay picked up one of the few shatterable belongings she had, hurling it straight for the senior priestess’s head. Landrelia easily ducked out of the way. Her expression darkened at the childish reaction Tay gave her.

Tay screeched back an angry answer as the small porcelain-like thing shattered against the wall nearby. “And you seem to think I give a shit about myself or anything else!”

Tay froze for a moment, resolving to back up and hope she escaped the wrath of the priestess. She glanced behind her, to her sides, hoping she’d have a quicker escape route than she had at the moment. Currently, she had no escape route, and Landrelia easily backed her into a corner of the small house they’d been stuck sharing for a few brief days after the Shan’surfal. Tay fell back onto the bed Landrelia lent her for the time being.

“I have only suggested you lighten up on it. It has impaired you enough already. Try to change it, just this once. If it doesn’t work for you I will leave you to your life and let you drink yourself to death,” Landrelia hissed, a stern edge to her voice. She sounded almost pleading.

As Landrelia stared at her, Tay looked away. She’d always been unable to hold the cold looks people gave her. Shame welled in her chest as she realized, for once, how horrid she’d become. How horrid, much like her father, she said she’d never turn into. Sickness, disgust, at her own self threatened to rise up into her mouth.

“It’s not like I have a reason to do it. I always thought I could do whatever and whoever I wanted, when most of my family rotted away in the earth,” she retorted. A wicked smirk spread across her face. She thought it would encourage the priestess to leave her to her debauchery.

Sadly for Tay, it did not deter the senior priestess. “Then I will give you a reason.” Landrelia’s expression changed from one of seriousness, of business, of a soldier’s face, to one of compassion, care, things Tay had grown up without. Landrelia had gathered enough about the girl’s past, just enough to understand it might have been why she filled her life with such violent delights.

Landrelia removed from a drawer on a stand next to her own bed a thick book bound in leather. It had a lock fastened around it, one she easily undid with a key she then hid once more, and opened it up to one of the many gnarled, ancient pages within. She then offered Tay a quill, plus an inkpot, for the book. She took a moment to watch the girl, and then pointed within the book at one of the passages inscribed on the pages the book remained open to.

Tay glanced down at it, then laughed. “The fuck is this supposed to be?” Oh, Goddess, how dwarven she sometimes spoke! “I’m not signing some book and saying ‘Oh Elune, let me repent for the filth I’ve drank! I’ll never touch it ever again!’ I’ll stick with the drink.” Tay made to close the book, only to be stopped by Landrelia.
“It is the purpose you seek. I have received word that the Keeper of a group I have been working with has been murdered. We need people to help us, to work with and find the murderers. They killed our leader on the night of Shan’surfal.”

The words came falling out of Landrelia’s mouth, causing Tay to freeze. As awful as she acted, why would someone kill another on a night of remembrance, of peace? Tay glanced between Landrelia and the book. She dipped the quill into the inkpot, signing her name at the bottom of the book’s right page in large, sprawling letters. Underneath, she wrote it down in the Darnassian runes, making it only slightly smaller than her name written out in the Commonspeak. If it came to the point where she killed the killers, she wanted her name to be noticeable enough.

She glanced back up at Landrelia, who smiled with approval. “Cut back on the drinking enough to be sober when we do our work, though.”

“Who currently leads you?”

“Another priestess. Cydris, with her sister Faelysia as a sort of…” Landrelia pondered her choice of words for a moment. “A second-in-command, if you will.” Landrelia took the book from her lap, along with the quill and inkpot. She blew gently on Tay’s signature to dry it. With a simple squeeze of her hand, she closed the book with a quiet thump. She replaced all items to their original locations.

Tay glanced at where Landrelia had replaced the items, suddenly beginning to second-guess her choice of signing. Leaving the Alliance military for… a smaller group, most likely an extension of the standing Kaldorei Sentinel Armies. She began to question just where her life took that downward spiral into chaotic drunkenness. Oh, right. When she murdered Royce.

“Will we be meeting any time soon?”

Landrelia nodded once. “Yes. Within a month. We can provide you with a house to return to after some long missions--”

“I don’t need a house. Just get me enough knives, ale, and women and I’ll be happy,” Tay answered after cutting the senior priestess off.

Landrelia bit back an angry retort, trying to keep her calm with the girl. Somehow, she wondered if Tay would ever truly get out of this slump. She couldn’t have always been this way. There was another Tay, and Landrelia wondered if she might find that Tay once again.

“We can provide the weapons. You’ll be on your own for the next two things.”

Tay thought on it a moment. “Fine, house and weapons.”

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Within the month, the group Tay signed up with met. She noticed the priestess Cydris almost immediately, concluding the woman to the priestess’s left and dressed in hunting leathers to be Faelysia, Cydris’s sister. And oh, how enchanting Faelysia looked! Tay smirked and swaggered up to the woman, putting on her charm and hoping to Elune she wouldn’t be called out.

“Excuse me, but I believe I’ve seen you somewhere before. I’ve not been one to forget faces, milady,” Tay introduced.

The woman gave her a mildly confused, yet intrigued, look. The left corner of her lips twitched upwards as she held back a smirk of some kind. “Oh, you must be Taylande Silverblade.”
Her brow furrowed in surprise. “Do you recall me or has someone else mentioned me before?”

The woman took the opportunity to toy with Tay for the moment being. “Yes, actually. A priestess of our order has kindly informed me, and anyone else who happens to find women attractive, to never let you in our breeches.”

An incredulous look spread across Tay’s face. “I’m sorry? And who would dare spread this falseness about me? I wouldn’t dare try that on anyone, let alone a woman as enchanting as you are.”

“I’m simply jesting, my friend. Although we were, in fact, warned you happen to have a drinking issue. That may perhaps be a problem. My sister, Cydris, is a bit of a ‘hardass’, as the dwarven folk would say, when it comes to relaxation in the way you do it,” she said. “But allow me to introduce myself properly: I am Faelysia, as you may have already guessed.”

Tay smirked and took the opportunity to take all the sights of Faelysia in. The other kaldorei sported a very shapely body, one Tay could get used to sleeping with. After all, the women she typically took to bed were human, and much smaller and more lean than most kaldorei women. Somehow the woman reminded her almost of Petrovsky.

“And I,” Tay began, bowing as she made eye contact with Faelysia, “am Taylande Silverblade, at your service.” She took a chance to glance at her clothing, all of it deep maroon colored with intricate patterns based off of some old imperial design from when Azshara was queen of every bit of dirt the Alliance and Horde occupied. The outfit included a long robe and breeches that weren’t exactly skintight, but not exactly loose either. The kaldorei, she had concluded some time ago, still did appreciate some formality when it came to their clothing.

Faelysia only grinned at her. “Enough people know the name Silverblade to know it means you’ve arrived. You have made a bit of a name for yourself among the Alliance.”

Tay raised an eyebrow. “Have I now? And what, exactly, is that name? If you know it.”

“They’ve named you the Silver Bladed Demon. Mostly due to the tales of you spinning around in a flurry of steel and fire on the battlefield. I do hope, my friend, that I get to see some of this in our journeys together.”

Tay smirked, and took the opportunity to flirt just a bit more before the meeting would be called to start. “Well, someone certainly does seem eager. I can’t wait now to--”

Cydris. “If I may have everyone’s attention, the meeting of this guild of peoples shall be started.” Tay groaned quietly and held it in while the meeting continued. But nobody seemed to listen.

Landrelia spoke out, her voice ringing loud and clear across the group. “Everyone, to order!” Tay bit back a smirk when she noticed the touch of envy on Cydris’s face. Cydris cleared her throat before she spoke on.

“As all of you most likely know by now, our former leader, Keeper Unas, was found murdered in his own home last week. It occurred almost a month after Shan’surfal. We have recovered what we believe to be the murder weapon, a ritual knife. Also found was a patch of cloth from someone’s robes, purple and lined with silver, much like the ancient kaldorei used to do.” Tay could almost hear Landrelia’s offense at being called ancient. “And an indiscernible journal was also found. So far, it seems to have no meaning.”

Tay couldn’t help but snort. Nothing had no meaning. She knew that as well as anyone. She let her
gaze wander towards someone she’d not noticed before. A small speck of a human. Gilnean, actually, as she’d heard someone say. Valliona Lark. Tay already like the sight of her.

She quickly flicked her gaze back to the priestesses leading the meeting. “Keeper Cydris, what do you propose we do?” Faelysia questioned. Something about this huntress told Tay she loved to be in a good fight. Tay hoped this group would get to fight, despite being a force of peace as Landrelia had told her.

“We should find out whoever these murderers are and hunt them down. What if they end up targeting someone higher up? Someone like the High Priestess. If they’re within the city, they’re most likely anywhere as well,” Val had spoken up.

*Someone with a bit of a fight in them. I like her,* Tay thought immediately. She saw Faelysia nod in agreement. Cydris looked back to Landrelia, almost a silent question if they should continue on. Landrelia merely nodded. “I believe we should start with decoding this journal. It’s written in a strange tongue, one I know the High Priestess herself could not even decipher.”

Tay rolled her eyes. This woman spoke so much and so highly regarded Tyrande Whisperwind that it disgusted her. So many kaldorei women named their daughters after the High Priestess it sickened Tay a bit. Knowing the old stories, she hated how everyone acted like Tyrande’s name would be one of those to be celebrated and revered, much like the Moonblade founders. *Tyrande was named for Tor’landa, she isn’t original,* Tay thought.

Cydris continued on. “She sent us to a draenei priestess, Phebenora, whom the High Priestess hoped had come across something like this. The draenei would not touch the book. She claimed it was written in some form of demonic. As much as it disgusts and pains me to say it, we must seek out the aid of a warlock. And a powerful one, at that.” The Keeper looked around the group. “Are we all in agreement?”

At that, everyone broke into heated debates and discussions on whether or not a warlock should be summoned to aid them. Tay had no means to join the discussion, instead keeping an eye on the small Gilnean. She watched as the little woman snuck a few fruits from a nearby bowl in the area. Tay decided to engage her in conversation. She took the opportunity to sneak around the group and appear just in front of Val.

“Stealing again, are we?” she asked as a joke.

Val glanced up, cramming another bit of apple into her mouth. The corner of Tay’s lip twitched up in a devilish smirk. Somehow she felt more than saw how Val noticed that little tidbit. “I won’t tell anyone.” Tay plucked up a grape from the bowl and popped it into her mouth. “Mm, I haven’t had one of these in a while. I’d much prefer it if this was one of those fruity wines here in Darnasses. Or even some dwarven ale. Aaah, that shit hits the spot.” She couldn’t help but smile, satisfied at the mere thought of it.

Tay heard Val grunt in disgust. “You’re a filthy fuckin’ drunk, Taylande Silverblade. Don’t you have better things to do than harassing me?” Val spat at her as she shoved a loaf of bread into her pouch. Tay’s eyes widened in surprise at the use of her name that way. She was… not used to that sort of a response.

“Damn, you’re testy tonight, aren’t you? Not eating enough?” She decided to have some fun in teasing the Gilnean, crossing her arms over her chest and grinning that Silverblade grin. Somehow Tay felt like she knew the Gilnean wanted to punch her into oblivion. She took the chance to stare intently at Val, study every bit of her the way her father had taught her to do. Before, of course, she carved his face like a pumpkin during the human holiday of Hallow’s End.
Val gave her a nasty glare. “Fuck off, Taylande.”

Tay opened her mouth to answer Val with some witty comment, but a screech from seemingly out of nowhere cut her off. A hush fell over the group gathered as they waited for someone to break the unnatural silence.

Landrelia spoke. “We absolutely must figure out who is behind this, the threat they pose to not only our people, but to Azeroth as well. If they are killing our people, then you all know they will not stop. We must be the ones to put an end to this. I know of a warlock by the name of Ophelia. She will be arriving tomorrow to aid us in deciphering this… foul book. For those of you who greatly oppose this, you are free to leave. We will not, however, forget this.”

Not a single person in the room moved yet.

Landrelia forced a quick smile, then nodded. “It seems we are in agreement, Keeper Cydris.”

Tay couldn’t help herself and glance back to the Gilnean. “Anar-Elune, little Val. It looks like we’ll be having ourselves an old-fashioned investigation!” she exclaimed quietly in a childish tone. Tay knew the Gilnean wanted to say something but didn’t as they both saw Landrelia approaching.

The two women immediately went silent and straightened their posture, waiting in silence for Landrelia to speak. “Valliona, we may have need of your skills if we find what I think we will in this journal. You may have to play the role of a spy and reconnaissance for us in the field. You will be informed by me if we do need those skills.”

The elder priestess made move to walk away and discuss more with Cydris, but something kept her there a moment longer. Landrelia removed from her robe a sack overflowing with provisions. “This should be enough to keep you fed, at least until we figure this out, Miss Lark.”

Tay saw how Val eagerly grasped at the satchel, almost greedily ripping it from Landrelia. If the woman noticed, she didn’t say anything. “Thank you, my lady priestess. Elune athala dal.” Tay whipped her head over just in time to see Val smile contentedly. “Is this to be my new beginning, though? Right back to where I started.”

Landrelia smiled, almost in a sad way. “There are many things we wish we could do, Valliona, but our fates weave a different story.”

With that, Tay turned and stormed out of the meeting.
Hunting

Whatever other meeting with the warlock Lan had mentioned, Tay didn’t recall any of it. She’d been too drunk—then later on too hungover—to remember. She figured everyone else could handle it. Tay would stick with harassing the little Gilnean woman.

Tay promptly did that every time the group met up, which so happened to be today.

“So we’re, what? Traveling to Felwood now?” she asked no one in particular.

“If you’d stop getting drunk, Tay, you’d remember. Yes. What would your mother think of you now if she saw you?” Landrelia answered.

Tay glared at the woman. Everyone knew her mother was a… touchy subject for her. As was her father. Or anything regarding her parentage, truthfully. For the other woman to even mention her parentage…. Who the hell did this woman think she was? Certainly not her mother. After all, it couldn't be this Val'riin character. Landrelia? No, far too old.

Before getting lost in her thoughts Tay brought herself back to reality. "Why does everyone seem to think it a good idea to bring up my parents?” she asked no one in particular.

"Because you're a bastard, Taylande Silverblade!” Val called as they flew. She detected a hint of mirth in the Gilnean's voice. Tay gritted her teeth and focused on flying on the back of the gryphon supplied to her for this excursion. She'd forgotten for a moment how high in the air they were. "Taylande, if I were you I'd look forward instead of down.” Val seemed to be enjoying the ride, at least.

Tay hadn't exactly taken a liking to this trip. They'd decided to bring in a warlock woman—who also happened to be Gilnean—by the name of Ophelia to decipher some unholy book written in Eredun. Or, that's what Tay recalled as she soberly rode on the back of the winged beast. She'd been too drunk to really remember the next meeting, aside from demons and Val nearly transforming into a worgen.

As time wore on, Tay noticed more of their company sleeping in their saddles. Tay pulled a flask from her satchel she brought with her and uncapped it. She took in a deep breath of it, sighing happily as she raised it to her lips. Eventually the only one who remained awake with her was Ophelia. She didn't bother to make conversation, so Tay stuck with her flask.

"Goddess, if everyone stays asleep for any longer I think I might just have some fun drinking up here," Tay chuckled quietly. She glanced around to make sure no one saw her drain, then toss the empty flask down to the mountain range where Darkshore met Felwood. She expected a day, perhaps a day and a half, at most for the ride.

As she raised another flask to her lips she realized she'd lost count of how much she'd drank. She shrugged once and went to down it. The consequences would be dealt with later. Someone cleared
their throat next to her. She glanced over to see Landrelia had awoken. *Shit.*

"Don't bring my nonexistant mother into this, please," Tay groaned as she struggled to keep her speech un-slurred.

That brought a soft smile to Landrelia's face. "I won't, if you don't want me to. I just worry for you, Taylande. And I know your sister, Nar, worries for you--"

Tay bristled at the mention of her sister's name. "*Don't bring her up. Don't.*" She glared, fury in her eyes, and turned away from Landrelia. Truth be told, she didn't know how to feel about Nar still. She said she had to leave for something. Something to do with family and keeping her safe. It had been too long. Tay hadn't heard anything from her since. Did her sister tell the truth?

*Or did Nar just abandon me, like my mother did?* Tay didn't understand. Perhaps she was simply unlovable, or destined to be hated. *Maybe you deserve it after what you did to the ones who used to love you.* Tears welled in her eyes, and she tried to keep them hidden.

"Taylande, child, I apologize for that. I'd had no clue…" Landrelia trailed off. Tay could practically taste the sorrow, the confusion, all the mingled emotions coming together to make some sort of pity. For her, of all people. She made a small shrug for Landrelia to continue. "I've come to regard you as a daughter in this short time. If you'd like, you are welcome to stay with me as long as you need."

"I don't think I would be a welcome sight in front of your friends," Tay argued. Bitterness and resent permeated her words.

Landrelia shook her head. "On the contrary. I keep mostly to myself. I know you think 'friends' as in those of the Sisterhood. If anything, I hear they regard you as more of a prodigy who simply… underutilizes her full potential."

It almost made Tay sick. People thought good of her, thought she didn't use her skills to her best ability? Tay laughed bitterly. "Tell you what, Landrelia. If we get back from Felwood I'll agree to be your daughter since it's what you imply."

Tay wiped the tears from her eyes, blinking rapidly to clear any others from her face. She turned to face the senior priestess to find a smile gracing her lips. "I would like that, and I'll hold you to your words. Promise me you won't drink too much during this mission, though."

A groan escaped her. "Fine."

Tay swore she saw Landrelia smile faintly at that. Almost one of longing and sadness. Did Landrelia hide something from them all? Tay hadn't ever seen a woman smile that way unless she had lost a loved one previously in her life. She waited a moment, letting her gaze hover on the senior priestess. But yet, nothing. Landrelia gazed almost wistfully out at the smallness of Darkshore and the ever approaching Felwood.

She turned away and left Landrelia to her own devices. Tay's head hammered, yearning for another sip of ale. Depending on how their trip ended she considered buying everyone a round of drinks once they got into the nearest tavern. Perhaps then she had a shot at getting Val to loosen up for once. Maybe one day soon, but when that day came Tay would make sure to mark the occasion.

Not much time had passed. Maybe a couple hours at most. Tay rolled her eyes as the passage of time crawled along at the pace of a snail. She took the time to survey each member of their company again. Landrelia, Ophelia, Cydris now among them, and herself all were awake now. Val
still slumbered. Tay sidled her gryphon up to Val's, reaching out and carefully readjusting her so she didn't plummet off her mount. She eyed the sleeping Gilnean for another moment before leaving.

Tay glanced once more at Val from a distance. Don't get attached to her, idiot. Remember what happened with the last one? She flinched at the thought of Aeva. Goddess, she needed a drink now. What possessed her to do that?

"Taylande?" The question pierced her thoughts. Tay found her hand resting on her satchel, fingers reaching and poking half in, half out. She glanced around the company to find Landrelia staring at her with a worried look in her eyes. Tay furrowed her brow, suddenly confused.

*I have seen those eyes before.*

She cleared her throat with a cough and blinked her eyes out of that sudden trance. "I… yes, Landrelia?"

"You should try to rest. I think you're the only one who's gone without sleep. You'll need the rest."

Tay nodded once. She settled in to relax before allowing herself to drift off. A pit of dread formed in her stomach at the thought of sleeping sober. But if Landrelia wanted her to, and if she ever wanted to keep her promises, she had to try.

*The house became a burnt-out husk and she found herself within it, cowering in a corner. Her breaths came short and fast. It misted out in front of her just as it did in Northrend’s icy reaches. This, she could tell, was new. She’d been here many times before. Too often, in fact, and she dared not admit that to anyone."

*She stole a glance down at her body. How her knees, scrawny and knobby, dug into her chest. How her hands shook violently with every little movement. How painfully thin she was. Her thoughts began to go through her head. First, slowly. And then all at once, in the same way healing magics flowed through when she set her hands to a wound.*

Goddess, no, I cannot be back here again. Please, please, place me anywhere but here. I cannot return to this, she thought. But Elune did not listen. Nor did She seem to hear the prayers of one of Her children. The frantic begging. The panicked breaths. The strangled, almost silent, murmurs of fear. All rippled throughout the shell of the house.

*She dared not bring her eyes to the windows. Or, rather, what remained of the windows. Something primal urged her to look. She already knew what awaited her on the other side of the frames. Always the same beast, always in the same position. That primal urge took control of her and she pushed herself onto her knees. Crawling towards the window, she resisted it, tried to stop her movements, every single shuffle of the way.*

*Taylande grasped the tattered curtains and dragged herself to her feet. Elune, please, help me,* she pleaded silently. But Elune still didn’t hear. Taylande’s eyes gazed out over a vast, lush forest full of life. Nothing outside the house changed. Only the house had. And at the edge of the treeline sat the saber, waiting patiently. It wanted her to return. It dragged her back into this nightmare every time the ale didn’t flow through her veins.

“There is a little lamb lost in dark woods. In the husk of the only home it ever knew.” *The speech seemed to come from the saber. But that would be impossible, even here. Blacker than night, than the darkest depths of the oceans she’d nearly drowned in, but it could not speak. It never had. It served only as a… placeholder. For something far more terrible and interested in her than some fellow at the taverns.*
“Y’knath k’th’rygg k’ti mrr’ungha gr’mula.” The voice echoed again. It drew Taylande out of the house. She began to scream. “No, no! Get away from me! Leave me be, I’ve nothing for you! Please, stop! Stop!” she begged. Her lungs grew tired, her throat raw, and voice hoarse. She screamed and cried out for anyone to save her. Nobody heard. Her pleas fell on deaf ears and her voice gave out. Each time her mouth opened no words came out.

She prayed and prayed the voice would not echo across this hellscape once more. All color drained from the trees, the ground, and the cloudless sky above them. Taylande gazed at this sky and hoped for any sign of Azeroth’s twin moons to show. Any hint of the moon would restore some faith in her. Even a single star would.

“I ongg za ywaq qvsakf.”

Again, the voice. The words were translated into her mind. Whatever watched her, whatever wanted her, it made sure she knew. The saber turned on its hind legs and wandered deeper into the forest. Her feet commanded her to follow. Taylande struggled even though she knew at this point it was useless.

The saber stopped at a clearing where a tall, broad-shouldered man stood in the center. “Gul’kafh.” The voice echoed once more. It forced her to watch this stranger. He did nothing. He said nothing. The man stood there, still as a statue. Taylande couldn’t peel her eyes from him. As she tried the man came to life. It seemed the more she struggled, the more it made her stay to watch this. The more she moved, so too did he.

“No… no! My sons are already being utilized. Their movements will fortify you as well. What they do will help herald in a new servant for your glory.” The man paused, almost waiting for something. He began to nod frantically before falling to his knees. He assumed a position similar to one of prayer. “Yes, I swear. I swear it on Azshara’s divine beauty! Her Magnificence’s servant will be upon us soon.”

The man stood up. He gazed upon some unknown thing that caused him to shake violently. Taylande had enough fight left inside of her to move her arm and attempt to swing out towards the saber. Whatever it wanted, it would not find her easy prey. “From my father’s line, yes. I promise. The moment your influence touched Silverblade when Girehon had control of it…” The man trailed off.

His gaze shifted to someplace far away from where they were. A new voice entered the scene. A woman’s voice. “Please, keep her safe! Keep my daughter safe!” Someone pleaded for a daughter. Not unlike how Ivan did to Tay. That woman still buried her regrets in the ale.

“I… I don’t understand. I will return soon, I promise--”

Tay gasped, taking air into her lungs like a drowning man. She glanced frantically around. Cydris, Ophelia, and Faelysia were gone. Only Landrelia and Val remained with her. “Lan…” Tay started. She let the words hang in the air as she marveled at how small she sounded. She began to hope the senior priestess didn’t hear her.

“What do you need?” Landrelia asked. Tay groaned quietly.

“How long did I sleep?” she responded, coughing a few times as she willed her voice to work.

Landrelia smiled softly. She eyed Tay’s position in the saddle, how she clutched the reins tightly to her chest. Tay remained slouched in the saddle as well. In Landrelia’s eyes, it told her how much Tay had needed the sleep. “For some couple hours. The other three went on ahead after Ophelia
insisted she arrive early to prepare. And in case you wondered, Valliona has slept the entire time.”

Tay twisted to get a better look at Val. Indeed, she hadn’t moved from when Tay had made sure she stayed in the saddle. Content, Tay nodded once and leaned back to get more comfortable. She could feel Landrelia’s eyes still on her. She tried to ignore it and instead focused on the sky in front of them. This journey already lasted too long for her. She wanted land. And fast.

“Why do you still stare at me?” Tay asked. The senior priestess’s eyes bored into one when they wanted to.

Landrelia furrowed her brow. “Did you sleep well? I’m concerned for you, Taylande. I thought I’d told you?”

Tay’s blood froze. The inflections of her voice were too similar to the ones she’d heard in the nightmare. The sun rose over the mountain of Hyjal and cast a golden light on her face. “I… somewhat. Just some bad dreams here and there. How soon until Felwood?” Tay willed her voice to stay steady and prayed Landrelia wouldn’t notice it.

Landrelia, in fact, noticed how Tay’s voice remained too… constant. It seemed more calm, eerily peaceful for someone of her character. Landrelia didn’t push it, knowing if she asked Tay would retreat in on herself. “Soon. We are almost there. Just give it a little bit more time. And if anything bothers you still, please, feel free to talk to me. I’m always going to be here for you.”

Tay nodded once and let her hands go nearly limp. Too many thoughts rushed around in her head for her to care what Landrelia thought. She needed time to pull herself from the nightmare.

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“Vaaaaal…” Tay nudged the Gilnean as she slept in the saddle still. She nudged her a few times, but it didn’t work. Tay tried another, slightly rougher shove, although that failed to rouse Val. She groaned frustratedly. “VAL! WAKE UP!”

Val jerked up in her saddle and rubbed at her eyes. “What the fuck was that for? Why’re you yelling in my ear?” She shot Tay an angry glare. Tay only smirked at her before letting it fall from her face.

“Oh good, Wolfy’s up. We’re here, and your warlock friend wants to find that ‘special place’ to draw some dumb circle.” Tay jerked her head towards where Landrelia stood. The senior priestess had all the directions. Before Val had any time to respond, she strode off to meet Landrelia and discuss where they would head next.

Tay followed Landrelia and Ophelia around for half the day before the warlock finally chose a small valley between two hills lined with trees. She glanced nervously at each treelines, half expecting that fucking blacker-than-black saber to come out and lure her. The seven eyes on its head unnerved her. Lighter than its coat, but still black as ink. And reflecting a light that never shone in her dreams.

“I ongg za ywaq qvsakf.”

Tay swallowed nervously, hand moving to her belt. Time slowed to a halt as she reached for Ellemayne. Her hand found its hilt and a familiar fire seemed to flare through her body before it dissipated as fast as it appeared. Ellemayne formed, molded itself into that jagged edged, cracked, blue-hued blade she’d grown so accustomed to seeing.

Oathbreaker rested on her back. As Ophelia chanted the summoning ritual Val leaned over to her
and whispered, “You should use that staff on your back, Taylande. Spells would serve better here.”

“I’ll be fi--”

“Do it. Trust me on this. Don’t care how old you are, what you’ve gone through right now, I asked Landrelia about fighting in case things went wrong. So if you can’t trust me, trust her,” Val cut her off and bit back.

Tay grunted, hesitating before putting Ellemayne back. Her hand missed the feel of the weapon already. She pulled out Oathbreaker and remembered the night Nar had left her.

Oathbreaker at the ready now, Tay waited for a moment before allowing herself to channel Elune’s Fire. The silver glow of that divine flame tipped her staff, and she let it burn there. Her light in the dark for now. It calmed her as she waited for this Goddess-damned ritual to end.

“You are Vastrah! I hold your name, and I command you to tell me what this says,” Ophelia demanded. Tay’s eyes whipped to the summoning circle where a succubus stood, unamused at what played out before her.

The succubus raised one eyebrow and cocked her hip. “Is this about your girls again, Ophelia? I can’t find them any more than you can. Leave me, because I want peace.”

Tay saw Landrelia bristle at the demon’s words. “Peace? Is that what you really want, xaxas?” Landrelia summoned Elune’s Fire to her fingers. Her eyes widened as she wondered at just what the senior priestess thought. She of all people should be controlling herself. Tay didn’t like working with demons or warlocks any more than the next priestess, but sometimes she found working with the enemy sometimes helped.

Cydris stepped forward and placed herself in Landrelia’s path. *What the fuck is the Keeper doing?* Tay thought. If anyone would be doing this, Tay expected it to be herself. Not Landrelia. She offered a silent prayer to Elune this would end well.

She saw Cydris glare at Landrelia. Ophelia chimed in, “Priestess, calm yourself. We need her cooperation. All your outburst is doing is giving her what she wants.”

The succubus inspected her clawed hands and flicked them outwards. It offered the two of them a smirk. “What do you need me to make out, Ophelia dear?”

Ophelia turned and removed that accursed book from her bag. “This. We’ve reason to believe it may contain a missive from those who ah, murdered the previous Keeper of this group. It’s been some time since I’ve studied Eredun, so I’ve made out some of the words in it.”

The demon rolled her eyes and leaned forward with a sigh to examine the book. Her eyes narrowed as she read through before they went wide. Vastrah jerked back inside her prison. “Leave me. Send me back. Now.”

Ophelia furrowed her brow and scanned the book again. “What is it? Nothing jumps out.”

“This is a missive, but not from who you think. Leave this be, and do not continue on this hunt.”

“Who are they?”

“Disciples of Nilan, apparently what he’s calling himself now.” Tay listened intently, unsure as to why this Nilan fellow seemed so dangerous. “I know this demon lord by the name of Maelor’kanas. Sounds Nathrezim, yes?”
Ophelia nodded, vigorously motioning for Vastrah to continue on. “Well, what’s this got to do with...”

“Let. Me. Finish.” The demon harrumphed and crossed her arms. She rolled her eyes and held out her hand, an image materializing in her palm. “Maelor’kanas as I knew him. Died on Argus, since some Eredar lord murdered him for his power. Had Maelor’kanas not intervened, I’d be dead as well.”

Tay chuckled. “Aww, how cute. Demonic asshole had a little demon lover,” she mockingly cooed. How in the Goddess would anyone want to be with a demon? Everything about them was… wrong. It’s why Tay took to killing them instead of treating with them like a blasted warlock.

“All of us do, Taylande Silverblade.” Tay’s mouth opened to respond, but she didn’t know how to. How in Elune does it know my name? she thought. The demon continued on, “Shocked, I see. Your name is in this book a great many times. Along with a description of your look, down to the very subtle bend in your left leg that isn’t present on the right one. Oh, and it also details all of your movements and interactions for the past, oh... five hundred years.”

The demon glanced away and Tay was left with a look of shock on her face. She turned to Val, who cast her an uneasy look. “What the fuck,” she whispered to the Gilnean. Val shrugged, clearly shaken by the information dump on Tay given to them by the demon.

“As I was saying,” the demon continued, “the Eredar took his name after murdering him. His face, as well.”

Ophelia let a mix of surprise and confusion dawn her face. “Vastrah, what’s all this have to do with the cult?”

The demon Vastrah took a step towards Ophelia and the book and pointed at a passage. “I never answered your question, but this series of runes here will. This is Maelor’kanas’s name. He’s written to them to hunt down a pair of priestesses in Nilan’s name.”

Tay looked over at Val again. Worry lined their faces. “We have a pair of priestesses,” she whispered to Val.

Val’s eyes went wide and she shook her head incredulously. “No fucking shit, Detective!” the Gilnean spat back.

Ophelia grew tired of the demon and what they discovered. She was… angry, to put it lightly. “Go back from whence you came, demon!” More chanting, and the succubus had seemingly disappeared. Only a lingering scent of brimstone remained to mark that a demon had been present there.

“This name will get us nothing. It isn’t his true name, and I’m not powerful enough to summon and Eredar Lord,” Ophelia stated.

Landrelia leaned over to study the book. “Surely we can do... something, at least.”

Tay noticed Val’s eyes widen. She could tell the Gilnean held back a laugh. Ophelia had a similar expression, though lined with anger. “And what is this ‘we’ business?”

“You’re not staying?” Landrelia sounded confused, annoyed, almost. But it could have just been the overload of information still hanging in everyone’s thoughts. Tay didn’t think anyone would be dumb enough to leave when they’d just discovered all of this. Things seemed to only get more interesting--and more dangerous--to her from now.
“‘Am I staying?’ Hell no, I’m not dying over this!” Ophelia snapped back, more angry than she intended it to be. Tay noticed the slight flinch the warlock made as she heard her own words. “Look, here’s my advice. Go back to Darnassus. Hide, change your name, buy some glamors, and get far, far away from everyone.”

Landrelia hissed at her, “You coward.”

Ophelia let out a forced laugh. “You call me that…. Vastrah is a powerful demon, not the kind to scare easily. If that scared her, all of us should be terrified right now.” Ophelia turned on them, grabbed her things, and skulked off towards her horse. Everyone watched as she left, growing smaller and smaller until they no longer could see her.

“Wait, Ophelia!” Val called, rushing after her. Tay didn’t think the warlock would hear. She faded away into the distance like a coward, pretending that this demonic threat would go away if they all just… hid.

Tay was tired of hiding. All she had done since she arrived at that temple of Elune nearly a thousand years ago had been hiding. She wanted to come out into the world, do deeds, trample an angry rush of orcs, and make a name for herself outside of being “the Silverblade”.

The Silverblade bore too much of a weight for Tay to carry around. It couldn’t be the only title she held. She needed to change that, even if it meant her death in the process of it all. Maybe then she’d be hailed as something more than a fucking Silverblade.

Val came back soon, angrily wiping tears from her eyes. Tay pretended she didn’t see any of it, knowing better than to poke fun at the Gilnean during a time like this. The last time she’d done that, it had been to Hugin, and he transformed into his worgen form and disappeared for the entire day. She cast her glance to the treeline again. The thought of the saber still lingered in her mind.

“I’d like to apologize for how I behaved earlier, Valliona. It was… unkind of me to use such harsh magics on you,” Landrelia said, filling the empty air with words. Her words hung in the air for a moment. Tay bit her tongue and refused to speak.

Val answered her, almost a moment too late to keep this from getting awkward. “It isn’t your fault. You were only trying to do some damage control, Lan.”

Tay sighed loudly. “Val, just accept the apology from our favorite goody-two-shoed priestess and move on.” She turned to face a hippogryph the druids in Felwood had sent out to them. She’d sent her gryphon away out of fear of it becoming injured. After Buckbeak’s injury, Tay couldn’t exactly afford injuring another flying animal. Although Buckbeak wasn’t exactly just an animal to her.

Tay glanced back and saw a smile on Val’s face. “I accept your apology, Landrelia.”

All of them mounted up and began their flight back. Tay listened in, knowing she was eavesdropping, as Landrelia spoke in Darnassian so fast she couldn’t keep up with it. This is what you get for speaking the Common tongue so long, dumbass, Tay thought.

“Jai’alator, asha shanna haru?” Landrelia asked her hippogryph.

The hippogryph answered her immediately. Tay turned to where her upper body faced Landrelia’s direction, and she looked on with a pit of fear forming in her gut. She watched as Landrelia went pale and began to speak in the Common tongue. “If their base is in Felwood--”

Val spoke before Tay had a chance to. “We’re right where they want us.”
Tay let that shock settle into her body as she thought to herself. *Oh, fuck.*
"We return to Darnassus. We tell the High Priestess about this. She'll send Sentinels to aid us with this, she'll have to," Landrelia called from her hippogryph. The words rang out loud and clear. The entire group heard them, and they hung in the open, a heaviness in the very air.

Tay didn't know how to react. First the dreams, now a demon cult hunting them down, following them. Following her. A numbness settled in her chest. Alcohol and women couldn't drown this out or fill that nothing in her chest. She was overly aware of Val and Faelysia's eyes on her. She didn't care. Not anymore, not in the way she cared about surviving this past century.

She let them watch. Let them think what they wanted.

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Landing at the docks, their group leapt from the mounts and sprinted towards the portal leading straight into Darnassus. Tay sprinted, pushing herself to her full speed with Landrelia at her side. They'd survived the first round. Now, they had to survive Tyrande Whisperwind.

Tay had interacted with her once before. She wasn't too fond of Tay. Now, the latter hoped she wouldn't be remembered.

As they sprinted through the city they reached the stone bridge leading to the temple, they slowed. Tay hadn't realized Val in her worgen form until they strode across the bridge. *Draw yourself up. You bear Silverblade and Ellemayne. You command the room to look at you. So act like it. Rise to your full height. Stone face,* Tay told herself. She took a deep breath and strode nearly half a foot behind Landrelia's right side.

Val being taller than Tay unnerved her, however. The guards at the temple entrance stopped them in their tracks. Tay waited a moment as they barred the way. Landrelia stepped forward and mentioned their tidings. Apparently, the High Priestess was holding some important meeting. Tay glared and rolled her eyes. *More fucking orcs, I'm going to call it now,* she thought.

"Valliona. They'd like to know if you'd wait out here while we speak with Tyrande." Landrelia's voice cut through the silence. Tay whipped her head to where Val stood, still in her worgen form. The Gilnean nodded absently, and the guards saw to it that Val stayed away from the spiraling ramp leading to Tyrande. Tay glanced back behind her, back at Val. Back at where she now sat on a ledge giving her a view of the moonwell. And for a moment Tay envied her.

When they reached the High Priestess herself, Landrelia fell into a low, graceful bow. Tay bowed, although stiffer. "Priestess Moonblade, Priestess--" Tyrande started.

Tay cut her off. "I mean no disrespect, High Priestess. I'd prefer to be addressed by Taylande instead of Silverblade. But we come bearing news you need to hear urgently. If we could skip the pleasantries."

The High Priestess’s eyes widened at Tay’s words. Then her lips curled into a curt smile. Tyrande nodded her head towards Tay and then to Landrelia. “Sister, if you would continue and deliver the report our friend speaks of.” Tyrande looked to Landrelia and awaited the delivery of the report.

“I thank you, Taylande, though your words could be a bit more… polite,” Landrelia addressed her. Tay mentally rolled her eyes, aware that she shouldn’t show such disrespect in the presence of the
High Priestess herself. Landrelia smiled softly at Tay before she looked to Tyrande to deliver her report. “High Priestess, our order traveled to Felwood to decipher the book we found. With the aid of a warlock we have discovered the contents of it. A cult has been… following Taylande’s movements.”

The High Priestess stopped Landrelia for a moment after. “Sister, when you say you worked with a warlock, this concerns me. What exactly occurred when you worked with this warlock?”

Landrelia cleared her throat. “With the help of a demon, it was able to decipher the remainder—”

“A demon? Landrelia, you realize how this sounds? You serve Elune and Her peoples and you admitted to working with a demon? I’m sorry, but I cannot help you in this. Dangerous or no, working with those unholy fiends isn’t something I can comfortably let pass.”

A look of disbelief crossed Landrelia’s face. “But High Priestess, surely you must understand—”

Tyrande interrupted her. “That you consorted with demons and warlock to get the answers you sought, and admitted to it? I’ve told you, sister, but I will not help with this.”

Landrelia clenched her jaw tight, along with her fists. Tay glanced down to see the senior priestess’s knuckles going white with fury. The woman never acted on her urges, although now Tay thought she might just do that. But she understood where the reaction came from. The High Priestess didn’t even bother listening to the rest of it.

Rage welled in her chest as none of the three dared to make a move. They all watched one another with what was almost akin to suspicion. Tyrande, not bothering to help or let them finish their recounting. Landrelia, furious beyond belief that the head of the entire kaldorei peoples wouldn’t help. And Tay… she didn’t know exactly what to feel and at who.

Finally, she snapped. “Listen here, Tyrande. I don’t give a shit if it goes against your morals, or this, or because ‘Elune said so’. I care about keeping this cult away from me, away from our ancestral homelands, and away from every innocent between here and the Dark Portal. If you can’t be bothered to pull your head out of your own ass to help us protect our people, why the hell are you even calling yourself our leader? You may speak for the Sisterhood, but don’t you dare say you speak with Elune’s voice.

“You know as well as I do that you were only given her favor and that is why you are High Priestess. And then you people wonder why I went and joined an army of humans and dwarves. Fucking dwarves, Tyrande. Do you know how bad they smell after a battle? At least they can understand doing something for the greater good. But I guess you wouldn’t, since you’re so damned suspicious of anyone who isn’t a kaldorei that you had our companion wait for us to deliver this.”

Tay glared daggers at everyone in the vicinity. She knew the two sentinels that flanked the High Priestess stood with their grips on their weapons tight and their eyes wide. Both Tyrande and Landrelia stared at her, appalled at the words she spat out. Perhaps this would cause Tyrande to grow a brain and do something for the greater good, then.

Landrelia reached out and placed her hand on Tay’s shoulder. Her grip was iron, unshakable. Tay could feel her fingers digging deeper and deeper into her. She knew to fear what Landrelia had to say to her in private. All to keep demons away from everyone, though, right? Tay thought.

Tyrande opened her mouth to speak. “Priestess Taylande Silverblade, you have walked on thin ice the moment you left us after the Third War. You have spent the past decade on a tightrope. When
you have a moment, come speak with me privately. I have something I’d like you to hear. Only you, might I add.” Her words were razor-sharp, icy.

Tay made sure to fight the flinch that came with the tone. She knew all too well what accompanied the words the High Priestess gave her. Some kind of scolding and stripping of this or that. Oh, well. It wouldn’t be the first time for her. She forced a smile and bowed once. “By your leave, High Priestess.” She spun on her heel and stormed out with Landrelia next to her.

Lan’s iron grip made her slow down to an almost leisurely pace. “The words you used to the High Priestess will be remembered, and may not help us the next time we need her aid. Though I am no fan of hers you would do well to remember the rank and influence she carries, Taylande.” Landrelia took her hand off of Tay’s shoulder, and suddenly she became aware of the tension left there.

She’d judged Landrelia wrongly. It seemed she’d been proven wrong, and that the senior priestess also shared a strong dislike of the High Priestess as well. “She should realize that kaldorei aren’t the only people, though.”

Off to her side, Landrelia let out a huff. “If this is because of how you feel about Valliona…”

Tay froze and heat flooded her face. “I- I- What? I don’t even know what you’re talking about,” she exclaimed, crossing her arms. Tay purposely faced the other direction, knowing a smirk grew on Landrelia’s face right now.

“Please, Taylande. I see how you look at her. Even when all of us were poised to slay the demon, any time it taunted us you would turn first to Valliona. And while she slept might I point out you making sure she wouldn’t fall off.” Landrelia knew. Oh, Goddess, Landrelia knew.

The blush on her face deepened. “That’s just… me… being a good friend. Yeah. I look out for her because we can’t exactly afford to lose anyone else.” Tay took a chance and turned to face forward. Val stood with a kaldorei man, taller than herself and with hair the same color as her own.

A pang of… something hit her in the heart. Tay ignored it. Pretended Val didn’t stare at this man like he was half divine. They strode closer, Tay picking up bits of the conversation happening. Something about a woman he searched for, and another little bit about this woman’s eyes being silver with little flecks of gold in them. Tay’s right ear twitched, and she reached up to stop it. She accidentally pinched herself doing so, and let out a quiet hiss of annoyance.

“How’d the meeting go?” Val asked them. The man was gone. She stared at the two kaldorei almost impatiently, her arms crossed and her brow furrowed.

Landrelia shook her head. Tay knew the senior priestess once again clenched her fists out of habit. After what happened with Tyrande, Tay knew she wouldn’t be hearing the end of it later that night. “For fraternizing with a warlock, we will be receiving no aid from the Sisterhood. Or any kaldorei forces, for that matter.” Tay let out a breath she didn’t realize she’d been holding. She silently thanked Elune that Landrelia left out what she’d said to the High Priestess.

“Let’s go, then. Get some rest and relax a little, and meet up in a few days to discuss the next course of action we take. We could use it after how everything else went down,” Tay recommended. “That is, of course, if we all want to.”

Val nodded once and started for the door. Landrelia flashed her that motherly smile she’d sometimes give them, catching up to Val quickly. Tay stayed a little ways behind them, though not too far away. They’d barely made it to the middle of the bridge leading up to the Temple before
Val stopped suddenly.

“Landrelia…” she started.

The senior priestess paused, looking down to the small woman. “Yes, k’laen shalla?”

“Do you know a man by the name of Kalendris?”

Landrelia’s eyes seemed to glaze over at the mention of this name, and Tay strode forward to make sure nothing happened to her. Concern crossed her face, and she stole a glance at Val. The Gilnean shared the same expression as her, flicking her gaze to Tay’s. Tay looked back to Landrelia immediately.

The utter stillness of Landrelia terrified her. She seemed to be turned to stone, unable to move, without any way to break free. A surge of panic took Tay in the heart and suddenly she was reminded of those nights trapped with her father. She balled her hand into a fist and grasped at the satchel she carried on her belt. Material, physical. She was not with her father anymore.

“I… no. I wish I could say otherwise, but I do not, Valliona. Why?” Landrelia answered as she finally came to herself.

Val nodded slowly. “I was only curious, is all. That man I spoke to seemed like someone you might know.”

Tay sighed softly. “If any of you need me, I think I’ll see myself to the Warrior’s Terrace and spar for a while. I want to put off seeing Tyrande again for as long as I can.”

She saw Val open her mouth to ask but left before any questions could be asked.

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“Cydris, Keeper! It’s good to see you once again. Where’s your sister?” Tay asked, waving a hand in the air in greeting. At the Terrace, multiple sentinels, archers, and other kinds of kaldorei fighters ran about doing this or that. Cydris knelt beside an archer who sat on the bench.

At the sound of her compatriot’s voice, Cydris looked up from the slice on the archer’s ankle. How a soldier, and a bowwoman, of all people, could cut their ankle with their bowstring…. Cydris ignored the ideas of whatever games and challenges the younger soldiers came up with for fun. Instead she raised one poultice-smeared hand to greet Taylande.

“I’ve been wondering where you went to, Keeper. I saw you in Felwood and then the next moment you were gone.”

Cydris offered the other priestess a smile and turned back to continue her work. “Faelysia and I told Landrelia we’d allow you to deliver the report. We wanted to return here earlier so that we might recruit others help us with our cause. Part of me thought it a slim chance that Tyrande would allow us aid. Tell me, were my suspicions right?”

Tay answered with an uneasy laugh. “Tell you what, spar with me and I can fill you in on the details. And have your sister join, wherever she is. I need a challenge and both of you should know about what happened with that meeting.”

“Faelysia is nearby. She should be near the fletcher getting a new quiver for the next mission.”

While Cydris wrapped up tending to the archer, Tay found Faelysia exactly where her sister said
she would be. She took the opportunity to sneak up on the other woman and did so expertly. By the
time she stood right behind her, Tay knew Faelysia had no clue she stood there. Tay stood up
straight, slowly, and snaked a hand about her waste.

“I could have taken you out right now, Lys,” Tay joked. Faelysia jumped and turned around,
laughing a hearty laugh that brought a smile to Tay’s lips. “Hurry up, your sister promised me I
could take you both on at the same time. I also have news about the meeting with Tyrande.”

Faelysia’s eyes widened and she dug some coins out of a satchel on her belt. “Fletcher, have these
arrows delivered to my home by the Cenarion Enclave on the morrow. Something came up. Your
payment is right here and it’s double the original price.”

Together they arrived back where Cydris waited, already in clothing that allowed her better
movement. “Shit, give me a moment.” Tay ran behind a diving cover for soldiers who needed to
switch into more agile clothing, quickly changing from her priestess’s robes to something more
befitting a common fellow.

She stepped back out in leggings that hugged closely to her body and an old shirt that was nearly in
tatters. Tay removed Ellemayne from its sheath at her side, laying her other belongings off to the
side where no one would find them.

“Alright, sister, let’s hear what occurred between you and Tyrande,” Cydris started, taking up a
stance of defense with her staff.

Tay held Ellemayne out in front of her. Faelysia drew a sword and immediately charged her. Tay
dodged the attack easily, sidestepping and keeping Ellemayne out to parry any incoming attacks.
“Well, putting it simply, she won’t be aiding us. Or any kaldorei military, for that matter,” she
answered as she let rushed Faelysia and feinted to the right.

Faelysia fell for it, leaving her left side wide open for Tay to pop with her fist. “Ah, good thing I’ve
got a new batch of arrows waiting for me. Sister, what else happened?”

Tay turned to Cydris, who advanced on her with her staff out. Upon reaching Tay, she raised her
weapon horizontally and struck out with the bottom. Tay ducked and rolled on her side, all too
aware the sisters might play a flanking maneuver on her.

“Tyrande decided to make Val wait because she wasn’t kaldorei like us. Which--” Tay stopped
short, taking the opportunity to slice the padded chestpiece on Faelysia and drive a fist into
Cydris’s breast. “--pissed me off. She says we helped a warlock, so it’s grounds to not help us at
all.”

At that moment Tay felt the edge of the sword bite into her left forearm. A shallow cut was left
over, sending Tay ducking for Cydris. However, her path was cut off by Faelysia again. Her elder
sister came up and swept Tay’s feet from under her. All the breath was driven from her lungs as she
rolled herself to the side to avoid another shallow cut.

She sprung up and raised Ellemayne again. “Are you finished with sparring? I believe we’ve beat
you,” Cydris laughed.

“Let’s go another round. I feel like testing myself a little bit,” Tay answered with a laugh.

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A couple days later, Tay found herself in an inn with wine as her only company. By the time she’d
gotten herself halfway drunk, another woman walked in. A human, no less. Tay decided to
approach her. The woman was oddly receptive to her advances before Tay realized why. The human woman’s cheeks were flushed with color, meaning she’d come in drunk already.

*What would Val or Landrelia think of you right now?* A slight pang of guilt shot through her heart, though she brushed it off. Those two were fine on their own. They weren’t her family, just some more people she worked with. Friends, yes, though not close friends like some people had.

“Please, lady elf, take me already! I’ve been lonely lately, and I think you’re the answer to that!” the woman giggled. Some of her words slurred together, though Tay couldn’t exactly tell the difference between what was or wasn’t slurred.

She spun the human around before pushing her against the wall and kissing her. Moonberry Juice still coated her lips. Both had spent too much time drinking every possible fruity thing in the inn. Tay didn’t particularly prefer it, but drank it this time only to indulge the little human woman. Dark chesnut locks fell down onto the human’s shoulders, with even darker, half-lidded eyes staring up at her through the haze of their drinking fest.

“Come along, my lady, and we’ll have some--”

“Tay! Taylande Silverblade, get your drunk ass to the meeting point! Shit just came up!” Val screeched across the inn. Before long she felt those small, firm hands grasp her arm.

The other human woman whined in disappointment. “If you want her, she’s mine for tonight!” This woman went to slap or throw a fist at Val, but a quick flash of steel deterred her. “But I…”

“Don’t know, don’t care, doesn’t matter.” Val half dragged, half supported Tay as they made their way to the gate of Darnassus. Finally she decided it wouldn’t work, and then shoved Tay in front of her. Any time Tay slowed, she felt an elbow in her back that urged her forward.

At one point, Tay heard a wolfish growl behind her. *Good job, idiot*, Tay thought to herself. That growl she’d earned urged her on a bit more than the elbow in her back had been doing. Before long Tay found herself stumbling up the steps above the gate. Every here and then, she’d pause and get help from Val to make her way up the next step.

She shouldn’t have indulged that human. When she reached the top, Tay saw Cydris, Faelysia, and even Ophelia up at the top. “Good, she’s here,” one of them said, an edge to their voice. Tay saw a flash in front of her eyes that sent her hissing and stumbling back to sit on a stool. She rubbed groggily at her eyes, like she’d just rolled out of bed. Val shoved a skin of water in her hands. Tay knew better than to argue right now, and began to sip at the skin. She’d learned from chugging water after the last time someone had given her this treatment.

Everyone began talking at once, discussing this or that, and what plans they had for this or that. The room grew too loud. Her mind wanted to break out of her head. Everything pounded against her skull. A combatant had to be slamming their knee into her head right now for it to hurt and ache this bad.

“*LANDRELIA IS GONE!*” Val screeched. The room fell silent and angry eyes landed on her.

Tay quietly thanked Val--no, praised her--for silencing the pounding against her skull. She wanted to reach out and hug her for the miraculous act. With the intensity of the room, she didn’t think it would ever have stopped on its own. She began to tap her fingers against her leg. Pretend nothing else existed except for Val’s voice as the Gilnean began to address the room again. Cydris beat her to it.
“What happened, Val? How do you know this?” the Keeper asked them.

Val raised her voice. Tay raised her head to observe the Gilnean. “The same cult that slew Unas came and took her. They left us another note in Eredun. With some more in Darnassian.” Val withdrew a nearly three-foot long braid from her satchel. Green, with some strands of dark blue intertwined here and there, green just like Tay’s own hair. She spotted some bits of blood near where the scalp would be. Her heart seemed to stop. Landrelia… gone. It was real.

Tay reached out her hand, almost desperately grasping towards Landrelia’s braid. The last bit of that astoundingly motherlike priestess. And now she was gone. Just like that. Tay fell back into her own mind, tried to pretend this wasn’t happening.

She paced the room, frustratedly trying to figure out what to do. The voices in her head swarmed every thought she had, and she couldn’t determine what would be the right choice. Finally, she stopped and glanced at the priestess sitting on the ledge of the moonwell opposite her.

“Thero’shan, take a break. You pace so much, you might wear a hole in the stones,” the priestess joked with a soft smile in the student’s direction. The student snapped her attention to the priestess, and the latter regarded that look with a sense of curiosity. She’d seen that look before on a saber. She would have compared the student to a deer, but this girl never showed any trace of fear on her face. The student heaved a sigh, flopping herself down next to the priestess.

“I apologize, Shan’do Moon--I mean, Landrelia.” The student regarded Landrelia with a focused and serious look. She studied every bit of the priestess's facial tattoos. Twin blades, with gorgeously intricate swirls, lines, and other patterns within. Green as emeralds, just a shade darker than their shared pine green hair.

The priestess regarded the student calmly. A flash of worry crossed her face for a moment before disappearing as quick as it had come. “What troubles you, Taylande?” Taylande cast her gaze to the floor, suddenly more interested in the smooth stone floor of the temple they sat within. Landrelia waited patiently for Taylande to answer. The girl needed to be shown that her thoughts, her voice, mattered.

“Well… I have a sister. She wants to take me away from here, train me personally. Teach me what her shan’do before her taught her. I’ve asked her before, though she never directly answered my question. Finally I asked her to at least consider it, and she answered me. But…” Taylande trailed off, suddenly closing in on herself again. Landrelia had a feeling she knew where this would lead.

“You don’t exactly want to leave, do you, Taylande?”

Taylande nodded. “Yes, I do.” She turned and looked Landrelia in the eye, the first time she’d ever done that to someone. The first time since Kyena Stormbow saved her and took her away from her blasted father’s house in the woods. “This place is my home, the only one I’ve ever really known.”

Taylande’s thoughts went to Kalandra, the other novice priestess only a couple hundred years her senior. The girl had gone above and beyond to make her feel loved and wanted in the temple. When so many gave her the looks that almost confirmed they knew who her father was, Kalandra was always there to help her. Taylande didn’t want to leave that behind.

Landrelia scooted closer to the student and wrapped a motherly arm around her shoulder. “Taylande, little alor’el,” Landrelia started. Taylande noticed the nickname the senior priestess had given her. It sent a feeling of warmth through her chest, one which brought a slight smile to her face. “There isn’t a single place in the world that you go where your friends will not be with you. And wherever you go, Elune will always be with you as well.
“Do you have a sister as well, Shan’dor’el’?“ Taylande asked quietly. She didn’t have the courage to raise her voice like she normally would. The fight inside of her hadn’t exactly gone out, but seemed more… subdued. She failed to notice how Landrelia froze at the mention of family.

“No, I do not, ther’oshan. I don’t have any family. No sisters, brothers, parents. Not even children.” At the mention of children, Landrelia gave Taylande’s shoulder a soft squeeze. Taylande wished for a brief moment her mother was Landrelia, but knew that would be impossible. Perhaps Landrelia could adopt her as her own?

“Is that why you joined the Sisterhood?”

Landrelia shrugged. “It could be, Taylande. I guess I’ll never really know. It’s one of those choices I made that I know I don’t, and won’t ever, regret, though. The Sisterhood is a family in its own way.”

A pang of sorrow ripped through Taylande’s chest, and she leaned in closer to Landrelia’s motherly embrace. Every night she prayed she would learn something about her mother. “I never knew my own mother. My father lied to me about her, and then after that everyone told me she was dead. There’s no records on her, either. I even triple-checked them.”

Landrelia’s heart broke at hearing that. She hugged Taylande a little closer. If she ever had a daughter, she would want her to be Taylande. The poor girl had gone through enough already. “I’m more than certain your mother would have loved you more than anything. I bet she’s smiling down on you for taking the path of a priestess. She would be so proud of you. Perhaps one day I’ll pray to Elune for her blessing to adopt you as my own, little alor’el.”

Taylande beamed and looked up at Landrelia. “Do you think I should go with my sister then?” she asked, with an edge of uncertainty.

"Absolutely. Go with Elune’s blessing, my ther’oshan. It would be good for you to learn, explore, especially with family."

"Thank you, Landrelia."

“They want Taylande or they’ll burn Teldrassil?!” Cydris’s shrill shriek catapulted her back into the present. Tay didn’t register anything but her name. She felt so… empty. Purposeless. Useless. Just like she’d been with the Righteous Dorei of the Alliance Military.


Tay found herself completely present with the group assembled. She could still feel the wine in her system, but after that all-too-sobering revelation about Landrelia, she figured she’d be able to string together a coherent sentence. “Did… urgh. Did they say why they took her?” she managed.

Cydris looked down at the note in her hands and shook her head. “It’s filled with a bunch of taunts and references to things I do not understand. I… Forgive me… Taylande…” Cydris trailed off. Tay could almost taste the uncertainty, the fear, in the Keeper’s voice. She knew the Keeper would ask something of her almost, or absolutely, unspeakable. At this point now she wanted the Keeper to just hurry up and ask it. Although she knew it would be to use to Tay as the bait to lure these cultists out.

Val stomped in front of Tay, as if to shield her. “No. No! Absolutely not! We are not using her as bait!” Val spat back at them all. The absolute aggression in her voice scared Tay. Did this Gilnean
care about her? Did someone, in all this shit, actually care about what happened to her enough to argue against using her as the bait?

Tay watched Cydris’s eyes nearly pop out of her head. A horrid idea, using her as bait, but Tay didn’t exactly care what happened to her. “No! O-of course not. I was suggesting we--”

“Yes, what exactly were you suggesting, sister?” Faelysia seemed to hiss at her sister. It seemed Tay could add a tally of another person who seemed to care about what happened to her. The thought of people worrying, caring, about her caused fear to grow in her gut and her heart to freeze. If she did die….

Tay noticed Ophelia had departed. She guessed the warlock showed up only to observe before determining whether or not to stay and help them.

Cydris spoke up again. “We make it seem like that. We don’t actually give her up. If we can pull that off, we’ll have a chance at sending them back to the Nether. But the warlock woman refuses to help us again, and we need this Eredun translated before we do anything exact.”

Tay saw a smirk cross Val’s face. “Don’t worry, I know a fellow who can help us convince her to translate it.”

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Within a few days, Ophelia returned. She promised to translate the document and nothing more. The group assembled took their seats, Tay finding her place next to Val. She fidgeted next to the Gilnean, watching everyone. Tay tapped out patterns to this and that, old prayers, songs, and so on. Every person who joined remained suspect to Tay. She watched each of them come in, studied their movements, what they wore, how they walked.

Val tried to make some conversation with her while they waited. “I’m glad to see you out of the bars, Taylande. How’s that going for you?”

Tay only shrugged. “Mmh. It’s going, I guess.”

She caught a glimpse of Val nodding her head appreciatively. “That’s good. Your daggers, though. I know you carry those on you all the time. Where were they forged? I want to meet the smith and ask them if they could make me ones like that. Or swords, at least.”

Tay shrugged again. “Dunno. Just kind of stole them from my father.”

“Damn. I hope that smith is still alive, then. They make quality work. I’m kind of jealous of anyone who has steel this good. You know of anyone else who’s good at weaponmaking that you could refer me to after this?” Val asked, attempting again to make conversation.

Another shrug. Val finally gave up, and Tay’s eyes followed as an older woman stepped into the room. Ophelia. She’d returned, finally. Tay waited patiently, watched with almost dead eyes and a tired expression. She hadn’t slept for some time. She barely understood how she functioned right now.

Ophelia paused by Val. “I hope I’m making the right decision in doing this.”

“Thank you. Here’s the letter.” Val’s voice had a soft tone to it. Light, almost pleading, almost relaxed. Cydris stepped up and handed the letter off to Ophelia.

The warlock opened it immediately and began to skim the page. Before even a moment had passed,
she closed the letter and looked coldly at everyone assembled. “They’re taunting you all. They say you’ve all fallen right into their trap, and soon they will come for Taylande.” The ice, the thinly veiled anger in Ophelia’s voice cut Tay to the core.

“No, unless we get to them first.” Tay could tell Val reciprocated the anger in an almost wolfish growl.

Ophelia snorted and crossed her arms. “Easy there, you dog. They’ll leave you in peace as long as you give up Taylande to them. It’s all something about reclaiming these Hands of the Queen, as they phrased it. Whomever, or whatever, took Landrelia has wanted her and Taylande for a very, very long time.”

Tay rolled her eyes and snorted, crossing her arms. “Lovely. Fucking perfect. I thought I was done being chased all over the fucking world for my blood.” Tay growled frustratedly and threw her hands into the air, dejected. “They say when they’re coming or what?”

“They’ve detailed it would be in Felwood, in an abandoned barrow den the druids abandoned. As far as timing goes, they’ve said nothing of it.”

Tay closed her eyes and took a deep breath. She balled her hands into fists, trying her best to calm down. “Fucking. Great.”

“Do you know anything else about these demons? Anything on why they’d want you or Landrelia?” Ophelia pressed.

She saw Val shoot the warlock a death look. Her heart seemed to warm a little at the gesture of care the Gilnean showed. Tay narrowed her eyes, shooting Ophelia a look to tell the warlock she was pressing just a little bit too much for comfort. “I don’t know. I only know Landrelia from my time as a novice. She was my shan’do in Winterspring until my sister came to take over the remainder of my training. But she was like a mother. Mother henned the girls there, me especially.”

Tay tried her hardest to conceal the fear and the pain in her voice.

Val noticed it. She noticed the look of concern flash across Val’s face and how she leaned forward a little bit in her seat. She really does care about you, idiot, Tay thought to herself. Her expression softened at seeing Val’s.

“Were you threatened while living at the temple?” Ophelia pressed.

Tay only shrugged. “Not that I know of.”

The warlock nodded once, and stood to leave. As she passed by, Tay bolted up from her seat and grabbed hold of the warlock’s hand. “Wait a moment,” Tay commanded.

“Why wait?” Val demanded.

“There might be someone who would want to know where Landrelia went. Someone who might help us in finding her. But—”

Val huffed, and then let out a low growl. “But what, Taylande?”

“But, I royally pissed her off the last time I saw her,” Tay sighed dejectedly. She bowed her head, trying to think of any other alternatives to this. “I don’t think she wants anything to do with me, and she probably isn’t even on Kalimdor anymore. She might be in Pandaria still.”

Val shook her head and turned away, fighting back the swell of anger in her chest. “Then we’ve
just got each other. We’ll have to go back to Felwood for this. Are we all in agreement?"

Many people stood and left, shaking their heads and claiming they couldn’t lose their lives over this. Other claimed family they had to get back to, and others simply admitted to being cowards. So many people left, and Tay’s heart sunk to her stomach like a weight in her chest.

“I’ll be bait, then. Just so we can bring my shan’doo back,” Tay chimed in. She glanced around and saw only six of them remaining. “I guess it’ll just be six of us doing this, then.”

At that moment, a redheaded young man entered the room with a swagger in his step and a smirk on his face. “You got room for a seventh fellow?”
“Tyrande, whatever you have to tell me, I feel like it can wait,” Tay spat with her arms crossed. She had too much on her mind to deal with the High Priestess’s bullshit. Landrelia had just disappeared and she’d agreed to let herself be used as bait to try to find her shan’doo. Tay leaned against the wall of the temple. Her mind raced along, thought after thought, and yet here she stood, waiting for the High Priestess to pass more judgement of her. Like she hadn’t dealt with that enough already.

The High Priestess stood straighter than a board, glaring at Tay from across the room. “You have made sure to avoid me even if you’ve nothing better to do. I know more than enough of your recent… activities.” The way she seemed to spit out the last word like a rotten piece of food made Tay curl her lip in anger.

“So what? Do you really think I’d want to come see a bigot such as yourself?” Tay knew she pushed the limits of patience the High Priestess had. At this point, though, it was more of an afterthought. Like an inconvenient chore. “I don’t exactly care what you have for me. I want to find Landrelia right now. Not deal with you.”

Tyrande’s jaw clenched tightly, though she remained the picture of diplomatic serenity. “Taylande Silverblade, from this moment I strip you of your rank within the Sisterhood of Elune. Until you can sort out your struggles with alcohol and those around you, you are not welcome back in the order. Prove to me one day, and I’d prefer it soon, that you deserve your spot with us. I have been too lenient with you.”

Her words came like a slap in the face. One Tay knew wouldn’t be entirely unexpected, but it still stunned her nonetheless. “And who do you think you are, that you can snoop in my life like that?” For a moment, the look Tyrande gave her reminded her of Landrelia. That soft passing expression of hurt thinly veiled with stoicism.

Nearly all of the older kaldorei seemed the same. Still thinking of the old ways, trying to act like the old ways were still around as far as publicly speaking to one another went. How frustrating it was! Not every one of them knew about the days of Azshara’s damned empire, and they fought to bring an end to it. Yet some parts of the Queen’s influence still lingered in their world.

“You’ve proven yourself unfit for duty, Taylande Silverblade. I will see to it you receive your last amount of pay for the services you’ve given to us.” Tyrande stopped, hesitating for a moment. She finally turned around and took a couple of steps away before stopping. She raised her eyes to the statue of Haidene in the middle of the Temple’s great moonwell. The light of the night’s full moon filtered in and cast the interior in a soft, blue-purple glow. Tyrande spoke again, this time soft enough so only Tay could hear. “I remember the days of the old empire as if they were only a moment ago. The horrors of that war still echo through my mind, the same as they do for Nar, Kyena, and for those they love.”

“What’s your point, Whisperwind? I’ve somewhere to be,” Tay snapped at the High Priestess.

“I know your lineage. Most now do not, as the younger kaldorei haven’t heard the legends aside from the names here and there. Your line is renowned for their skill with magic, and also their cunning. The first Silverblade used it to craft his forge, all the weapons he made, and even convinced Azshara to pass many laws with his wits and magics. You’ve great and untapped potential in you, Taylande. I would like to see you utilize it instead of squandering it. Many people would do anything to possess what you have.”
Tay glared at the High Priestess as she strode away. She grunted in frustration and stormed out of the Temple. She had a woman to find, demons to kill, and a Gilnean to keep alive. She didn’t have any time to deal with the ramblings of the High Priestess.

She made her way to a nearby inn where Val had taken up residence while they waited to leave for Felwood. Storming in there with her head held high, Tay shoved patrons out her way when she entered the crowded and buzzing inn. “Val! Val, where the fuck are you!” she cried in anger. “I want to move on Felwood already, I’m tired of waiting!”

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On the back of Seranthi, Tay led the assembled group through the dead forests. The Cenarion Circle tried so hard to revive this burnt-out husk of Ashenvale. Tay remembered how it looked before the demons came. Before Illidan led them through here. Rage welled up in her chest as she remembered what the Betrayer had done to their homes. She shoved it down, swallowing and taking in a deep, shaky breath.

*Focus on the task at hand. You have to find Landrelia,* she thought. She searched fervently through the barrow dens in Felwood. For nearly an entire week they’d done this. Every little cave or tunnel system they saw, she stopped them so they could search. Landrelia might be anywhere. Tay had to find her, wouldn’t stop until they found her.

The sun began to set, and Tay knew as well as the rest of them they would have to make camp, rest, because of the humans in their company. They wouldn’t have much time to reach the last campsite that had been more fortified than the open clearing near them now. She heard Val take in a deep breath and shift uncomfortably in the horse’s saddle. Ophelia on her own mare, a gorgeous but easily frightened beast, twisting and rubbing the reins until the leather would be worn down from all that fidgeting.

“We need to turn back. It’s too dark, and too open. We won’t make any progress searching for her like this,” Ophelia moaned. Tay reined Seranthi in, turning the great cat around to follow Ophelia as she already set out towards their original camping ground. She watched the group in front of her carefully as she could. She didn’t trust these woods or anything within them.

Tay recalled faintly the memories of riding a saber of similar stock with Kyena on the night she’d been taken from her father’s house. The almost loving hug of protection. The warm smile on her face any time Tay would ask about something. A hot tear fell from her eye, carving a small path down her cheek. More burned behind her eyes and she quickly wiped them away before anyone could see. How she wished she could go back to simpler times.

“D’you think we’ll find her?” Fear and sorrow permeated her voice. Each word threatened to crack, until the last one actually did. More tears threatened to spill out from her eyes.

She could feel Val’s worried gaze on her as she fought against the rising tide of emotion she felt. Each new feeling sent waves of fear rolling off her. She was willing to bet if a demon attacked, it would be because it smelled her. Seranthi knew her master well enough, already padding silently over to Val’s horse. Seranthi, compared to the horse, stood nearly as tall as it did. Tay would have smiled at the flash of surprise on Val’s face if she could.

“Yeah. We have to, Tay,” Val answered softly. Tay opened her mouth to reply, but found she couldn’t. She shut her jaw and leaned down to press her cheek against Sera’s fur. The great cat let her rider dig her trembling fingers into her fur, felt the tears trickle out and be absorbed into her fur. Seranthi didn’t mind. Tay took a moment to compose herself before she dared open her mouth again.
She breathed in deeply again, trying to mask her feelings. Her voice came out as a hoarse whisper. “When I was in Winterspring, she did everything she could to make sure I was safe. She was like my mother.” Tay sobbed, quickly covering it by heaving down a couple of great breaths. Fear gripped her heart tighter than any of her dreams ever had before. Despite all her nightmares, each terrible and sickening one, this had to be the worst.

Val didn’t say anything about Tay’s weeping. She only nodded in understanding. “I understand. She was a mother to me as well. Back in Gilneas I was an orphan. I didn’t know my mother. Not really. Just a few scant memories of the woman.” Val’s voice was soft, softer than any silken bedsheets she’d been tied up in, softer than even the softest saber cub freshly cleaned after arriving from their mother’s womb. It brought a sense of peace to her.

At least you’ve got some semblance of a memory of your mother, Tay thought enviously. She didn’t share those thoughts aloud. Didn’t want to. It might cause her to lose Val as well as Landrelia.

After a few more minutes of pacing silently side by side, Tay reached out and twined her fingers between Val’s. The Gilnean returned the gesture with a gentle squeeze of support. Her thoughts calmed, and for a moment, she could think clearly. And then her heart seemed to constrict in her chest. She’d let her thoughts drift over to Landrelia again.

“Back when I was still in Gilneas, before I got bit by a feral one,” Val started, “I did have a family. We were just a group of orphans, street rats. The gutter trash, I guess you could say. From the time I was thirteen until we left, Light, how old was I then?” She let her thoughts drift as she did the math. From what Tay remembered, it had been a few years since the kaldorei liberated the Gilneans. “Nineteen, when we left. But they were my family until then. They’re the ones who taught me how to steal and how to fight with a sword.”

As Val began her tale, Tay untangled her hand from Val’s. The sudden emptiness seemed almost like a punch in the stomach. Harder than what her father had ever given her. She choked back a sob that rose in the back of her throat. She couldn’t let Val know how she felt. Couldn’t even let her suspect those feelings.

Val let a weak smile creep onto her face. “Embry, he was with us sometimes. He had a sister, fiery red hair just like him and she came from the Blackwald. She could always make you smile, always gave fun facts about the Blackwald or the queer folk who lived there. Then later on, she got with a fellow named Lincoln. It helps me to think they ran off and got married, had a little girl with wit and hair fiery as her mother’s.

“Then we had Aster and Millicent. Aster, you should know, was a Hawthorne, shoulda been a lady like her mother.” Tay’s lip twitched up in a faint little smirk as she noticed Val’s accent slip up and go slightly Gilnean. She didn’t say anything about it, though, just let the Gilnean talk about her family. “Aster wasn’t because fighting older brother got her kicked out of the inheritance, and so her and Millie parented us instead. Keep in mind Aster’s also my cousin, too. Aster also had a little girl named Opal. Sweetest girl I ever knew, and she only aided in us getting more money to scrape by.

“These twin girls, Emma and Noira, were also with us. Blonde-haired, brown-eyed, clever, sweet do-gooders, I guess you could call them. They were the youngest of us all, aside from Opal. I loved all those girls so fiercely. If they were here, they’d be celebrating their twentieth birthdays soon, I think. I can’t remember exactly. It’s been too long, and so much has happened since those couple of years ago.”

Tay noticed how Val paused. She concluded the Gilnean might be getting to some more… painful memories, or some more of her family who had suffered too much. More than they should have.
Just like her own sister had. For the briefest of moments Tay was thrown back to her nights in the temple learning with Nar, and a little bit about Nar, as well.

Nar flashed a crooked grin in her direction. “C’mon, Taylande, you want to hear more about Tor’landa at this hour?” she asked. Taylande sat on her bed with a smile larger than life and nodded her head eagerly. Nar heaved a sigh and sat on the bed next to her. “Well, fair enough. She is where your name comes from, after all. You were named for a dragon, Taylande.”

Taylande laughed and playfully shoved her sister. “Well I know that! Tell me about the time she stormed the enemy’s base, and turned the tide of the war! When she saved the one she loved the most.” She curled her hands into fists and lightly pounded on her bed to urge Nar to retell her favorite stories.

“I’ll tell you instead about the time I saved my mother. It’s very similar to what Tor’landa did during that tale,” Nar replied. “Deal, Taylande?” Taylande nodded eagerly.

Val’s own voice pulled her back from the memory. Tay felt tears pricking at the backs of her eyes again, and for a moment she wished her fingers were still intertwined with Val’s own. “We had a pair of boys who were as inseparable as you and alcohol. Dalton and Jonathan, my little brothers. I wanted to make sure them and the twins were protected at all costs.” Tay glanced over, tears blurring her vision, and saw how pale Val had gone. As if she herself had seen a ghost of the past.

“Then there was Connor.” Val took in a deep breath before she’d said his name. Tay watched how her friend’s hand trailed up to the chain around her neck. Before now, Tay had hardly ever noticed it was there. “He had hair softer than silk and darker than night.” The warmth and familiarity with which Val spoke of this man poked at Tay every so often. She ignored it. “And his eyes were the most beautiful, darkest blue I’ve ever seen. They reminded me of sapphires.

“But then I killed them all. Butchered them like animals. I lost them all and now I’ve lost Landrelia as well. I’ve got nobody else left, no more family. And the last one I considered my family just disappeared.” Tay heard Val stifle the sob in her throat. Heard her taking the deep breaths to calm herself, to not cry or weep or sniffle in front of any of them. Just like Tay would.

Tay glanced over at Val, let the silence hang for a while. Any joy had fled from both their faces, and their mounts trudged to their main camp together in silence. They wanted nothing more than to find Landrelia right now. Tay just wanted the one person who treated her with any damned decency there with them again. “You were lucky to have that while you did. I don’t have any family.”

Soon enough, they reached the main camp. Passed through the barricade. Everyone still remained silent. “Ru ley’fa osa dal dieb, Val,” Tay dared to whisper.

Val heard her. She knew the Gilnean did. Color had drained from her face and her eyes had widened slightly. Val just pretended she didn’t hear anything.

Tay pretended she never uttered a word.
The next few days passed by in a haze. She avoided Val as much as she could, staying in the backs of the patrols, looking the other way when Val came around, fought that urge to throw up her meals when Val so much as glanced at her. She could never be what Val wanted. And what Val wanted was obviously her Connor back.

Back at camp, Tay took the time to keep to herself, do some soul searching. She tried to remember what she could of Landrelia, and forget the rest of the world existed. Tay pitched her tent, settled into it, and uncapped a skin of wine. She made do with the fruity wines her people made. Though she more preferred the ale, this would do just as well to get her drunk.

As she reached for her satchel, she realized she’d left it out by the fire. Then she remembered she’d left it there since they put her in charge of their meal for that night. She could cook well enough. Just not hunt well enough. Tay pushed herself to her feet and folded the flap of her tent back--

And stood, stuck to the ground, in one spot.

A ragged, bruised, beaten woman curled in on herself raised her head and looked Tay in the eyes. “Help me,” Landrelia rasped.

Val raised trembling hands up and held Landrelia as she fell into the Gilnean. “How did you escape?” Val whispered, relief and fear mixing together.

Tay didn’t bother for her satchel. She didn’t bother to hear what else Landrelia had to say. “Cydris.” The only word that escaped her lips. Tay sprinted for the other end of their camping grounds, her mind gone blank.

“Cydris!” Tay cried, as she skidded to a halt. Thankfully the Keeper and her sister were only a short distance from Val’s tent. Their camp was placed strategically, not too far apart to be indefensible, but far enough to where nobody had to hear the other’s going ons during their nights.

Faelysia came to meet Tay out. “What is it?” she demanded.

“Get your sister. Landrelia’s here.”

Faelysia turned and pulled Cydris from the tent. The Keeper had just settled in to relax before they were to head out on another search. Tay sprinted off towards where Val and Landrelia were. They reached the duo in no time, transitioning from a sprint to a light jog as they approached Landrelia.

Cydris spoke up immediately. “Shan’do! Thank the Goddess you’ve returned!” Cydris gathered Landrelia into a tight hug, though she pulled back immediately at hearing the battered priestess groan in pain. “I apologize, shan’do. I’d forgotten about your injuries. Please, let me heal--”

“No!” Landrelia cried, recoiling in what looked to Tay like fear. Tay stood off to the side helplessly. “I… No, please. Just let them heal naturally. After what happened, I don’t think Elune’s gifts will work.” Tay noticed Cydris’s worried expression, her hesitation before nodding.

Cydris composed herself and let her expression turn to stone. “We need to feed you, at least. I’ll prepare a stew. In the meanwhile, Taylande, Val, see to it she’s had her wounds cleaned.” Tay’s stomach sunk inside her. She nodded dutifully as she retrieved a basin and cloths for their task.

Val led Landrelia off to a nearby area where they’d be able to aid her without interruption. Tay
went to retrieve water, and returned to where the two waited.

They set to their task, carefully going about it as Landrelia grunted and grimaced in pain the entire way. Tay knew whatever they’d done to her couldn’t be any good. The wounds weren’t exactly inflicted in a common way considering the whip marks on Landrelia’s back. She took moments to study each of the wounds, every deep and biting mark, any little scratch to try to determine all of what had been done to her.

Soon enough they were finished. “Let me get you some fresh robes. I’ll go and get you both food after I get those.” Tay took the opportunity and nearly sprinted away from them, wanting mostly to get away from Val. She used every fiber of her being to not sprint. Instead she strode as fast as she could without running.

Before long Tay found herself back at her tent, searching through the stacks of extra clothing she’d set out. Every night they returned here, so she figured she might as well lay out the fresh stacks and make herself at home. Against Tyrande’s wishes, Tay kept her priestess’s robes in case an opportunity arose that she would need to use their influence. She snagged the white garment from her folded stack and ran it back to Landrelia, even throwing in a cleaned white shirt to wear underneath it if she so wished.

Tay returned to the center of the camp where Cydris finished a stew for them. “Taylande, are you alright? You looked like you’d seen a ghost when I gave you that order.” Cydris prepared a bowl for Landrelia, then for anyone else who came after. Tay took two of them and ignored the question Cydris had asked. The Keeper, however, did not let her go without an answer. “Taylande. Why are you avoiding Val.”

Swallowing the lump in her throat, Tay met the Keeper’s eyes. “I’m in love with the human and don’t want her to know. And I have just seen a ghost. It’s Landrelia. She won’t be okay for some time, so worry about her.” The words came out more aggressively than she’d intended them to be, but she didn’t waste any time in stalking away. However, she saw Val with Landrelia the moment she turned around. Tay shoved the bowls of food towards them and snatched up her satchel.

Tay went to a tree near the camp and climbed her way up it before she perched herself on the branch. She hung her satchel off the end of the branch, opening it up and digging out one of the skins she had inside of it.

Tay drank skin after skin after skin. Thoughts racing, she would glare every so often at Embry stalking the camp, then occasionally at Cydris for not letting her run off without answering. Any time Tay saw Val or Landrelia she looked away, taking a gulp of the wine in her skins.

Before long, night had fallen but Tay stayed up to watch the moons rise over the trees. The Pale Lady cast a pale glow on everything inside the forest. It was almost therapeutic for her to see this. Every time she had a chance to see Azeroth’s twin moons rise something came up to prevent it. Tay glanced at her now empty satchel hanging off the end of the tree branch. Leaning forward, she snatched it up and scampered down the tree.

Tay knelt at the base of it and faced herself towards the moons. She bowed her head, closed her eyes, and began to pray like she used to as a disciple in the temple. “Elune, Goddess, if you can hear me, I beg you to keep Landrelia safe. One of Your children has just returned to us after going missing. She is alone but for us, and scared. Keep watch over her. Landrelia. That is who I beg You to look out for. She needs Your light more than ever.”

She returned to her tent soon after, intent on letting the full force of the wine take over her. She couldn’t be bothered to speak to anyone in her state at the moment. What would they do with her,
have a drunken conversation with her while she struggled to stand upright?

Just her luck, Landrelia intercepted her as she moved towards her tent. “Taylande. I need to speak with you privately, please.” Tay rolled her eyes, stuffing an empty skin into her satchel. “I don’t care if you’re drunk or not, this may be the only chance I get to tell you this.” Tay couldn’t tell if Landrelia was joking with her or what, but she made a motion to Landrelia to enter their tent.

“Wh… what? I’m too drunk right now. Barely managed my prayer,” Tay slurred. She hoped her surly attitude would be enough to drive Landrelia away. She’d promised the other woman she’d drink less, but instead drank more since Landrelia had disappeared. Tay searched the other woman’s face for any sign that she might leave. Instead Tay noticed just how short Landrelia’s hair had become. How it curled in all the places Tay’s own hair did.

Landrelia raised a trembling hand, and a flash of light appeared in her palm. She grunted in pain a moment after and her eyes narrowed. Almost as if she fought herself. Tay closed her eyes and hissed at how bright the light had been, and how close to her own eyes it was. “What the fuck was that for?”

“Sobering you up, alor’el. This is important. I don’t need you dismissing this like it’s some drunken dream you had,” Landrelia deadpanned.

Tay snorted and began laughing. “This already feels and seems like one.” Tay lied. She knew full well her drunken dreams were flashes of running through woods, locking herself into some house that should have been burnt to the ground long ago. Not as bad as when she slept sober, but good enough for her.

Landrelia shot her a look only a mother would give her. It was a look Tay knew well enough from her days at the temple, when Nar shot her that look. This, to Tay, looked almost identical to how Nar did it. The same pursing of the lips, slight raise in the left eyebrow. Tay had only ever seen people share looks like this if they were related. And all she had was a sister who seemingly wanted nothing to do with her.

“Don’t give me that look. My sister gave it to me all the time in the temple.” The two of them sat down on the floor across from one another.

Landrelia couldn’t help but smile. It started out small, but then grew in the same way Tay’s did when she and Ivan would come up with a way to prank Aeva or Torrolf. Tay heart gave itself a tight squeeze as she remembered how the Righteous Dorei fell apart after Northrend. Tay glanced down at the ground, now unable to meet the other woman’s gaze.

“Why do you look so sullen, Taylande?” Landrelia pressed. She rested her hand gently across Tay’s and leaned forward, concern etched all over her face. Tay stole a glance up before looking back to the ground. Landrelia’s face screamed how tired she was.

Tay shook her head. “Just remembering something stupid. Not my entire life, I promise. Just a small bit where I wasn’t as dumb as you think I am now.”

“Oh, little alor’el… I have never thought of you as stupid. You’ve the raw wit of Whiyarmir Silverblade himself, the courage of Tor’landa, and the ruthlessness of Lan’reli. You are anything but stupid.” Landrelia leaned closer and pulled Tay into a hug.

“Why do you keep calling me that? You’re not my mother, and I don’t think we’ve met the criteria for you to adopt me,” Tay responded. She wanted so badly for this moment to stay. She had never felt any sense of family stronger than this night. Landrelia hugged her tightly, like a mother would
a child who just returned safely from a dangerous situation.

Landrelia pulled back and rested both hands on Tay’s shoulders. “Why do you think I would call you that?”

It hit Taylande like a slap in the face.

“No… my mother is dead. Everyone told me such. Nar even told me I wouldn’t want to know her name. She said it was to keep me out of harm’s way.” Tay nearly fell backwards, gripping Ellemayne out of habit. That familiar surge of warmth spread up her arm as she gripped it tightly in her hand. The change in the blade, how it molded to fit her grasp.

Landrelia shook her head. “It’s me, Taylande. I have always been with you. You’ll always have me with you, no matter what happens. It has taken so long for me to remember this, but I want you to know I’ve done everything I can to keep you safe. Kene’thil surfas, ana dorei.”

“Why did you leave me?” Tay whispered, her voice full of emotion.

“I didn’t have a choice. You were stolen from me--”

Tay growled in rage. “By my fucking father!” She curled her hands into fists and looked around desperately for something to hit. Every mention of that man made her blood boil. That man was no father of hers, not after what he put her through. If she could go the rest of her life without ever hearing any whisper of him, she would die a happy woman.

Landrelia’s eyes widened. “No, not at all! It wasn’t your father! Your uncle did it. Him and-- I… him. Your uncle did it. I know your father, Taylande Moonblade. He would give the entire world to be a father to you. His chance to raise you, care for you, and love you, was stolen. As was my chance to.”

Suddenly, Landrelia’s body was wracked with pain. “Lan--I mean, Mother! Are you going to be alright?” Tay found herself sitting by her mother now, tenderly laying a hand on her.

Landrelia nodded. “I-- yes. I’ll be-- fine. I need to go.”

“But I still have to ask you about everything!” Tay fought back.

Her mother waved her off, standing suddenly and staggering out of the tent. “No, not right now! Get some rest, Taylande, please!”

Tay didn’t sleep at all that night.

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Tay felt a hand on her shoulder, accompanied by a rough shove that sent her off-balance where she sat. “Taylande, you idiot, we have a problem!” Val stood over her, expression stonier than Cydris’s when Landrelia mysteriously showed up at camp.

Tay peeled open her eyes to see just how close Val was to her. She jumped back, startled. “Oh! Uh… hello, Val.” Tay plastered an awkward smile on her face.

Val wasted no time trying to think through her words and said what she needed to say outright. “There’s a demon in Landrelia.”

Tay blinked, her face blank, smile wiped off her face. What? A demon, in Lan? she thought. Val
had to be pulling her leg right now. She smirked, shoulders shaking with silent laughter as she reached for her emergency wineskin. Val couldn’t be serious. A demon couldn’t possess Landrelia. She half-drained the skin and wiped what escaped her lips off with the back of her free hand. “So, what makes you think that?”

Val’s expression twisted into one of fury. “It told me, you fuckhead! What the hell are you doing in here?! I thought you’d have been fucking packed already!” Val slapped the skin out of Tay’s hand, sending blood red wine flying everywhere in the tent. The stains were already setting into the bottom frays of her tent cloth.

As Tay watched it set in, she knew she wouldn’t try to clean it later. She shot her nastiest glare at Val then picked up the skin. She looked into it to try to see what remained, then gave up as she emptied the last little drips of drink inside. “I was just doing some soul-searching, Valliona. Nothing to be too worried about.” Tay could even tell her words were a bit slurred, but not because of the alcohol. She grimaced at how she sounded.

Picking up her daggers, Tay looked back to Val, still waiting. “Guess we should get ready for a fight, then?” Tay tried her hardest to mask the anxiety rising in her gut. She needed to keep her wine down before going into whatever this mess would be.

Tay spotted her staff a little ways off in her tent and moved to grab it. Val caught her by the forearm before she could get even a step away. “Tay, this isn’t some little angry imp or succubus in her. It’s an Eredar lord. It’s got its sights set on Lan and you, Tay.”

She gave Val a look of disbelief. How and why would an Eredar lord want her or Landrelia? Val pulled her arm away, and this time it was Tay’s turn to reach out and grab her. She gently grasped Val’s forearm and pulled her arm up into the light where Tay could see it. “Who did this,” Tay demanded as Val yanked her arm back to her side.

Val rubbed lightly at her wrist. She took care to cover the bruises ringing her wrist with her coat. “It’s nothing, Tay. Embry just--”

Fury welled in Tay’s chest. Her expression screwed up into one that matched how she felt. “Embry did this to you?”

The Gilnean took the chance to fight back. “I said it is nothing, Taylande Silverblade!”

Tay swallowed the lump in her throat, and suddenly found an old wineskin that seemed particularly interesting. She clenched her jaw tight enough for someone to visibly see she was doing so. “It’s not nothing, Val. He shouldn’t be doing that if you two are--”

“Tayande. There is a demon out for your blood, and for Landrelia as well, and you’re worried about me? I should be the one worried about you! Light, woman, you’re daft sometimes!” Val spat back angrily.

Defeated, Tay let herself fall back to a seated position on the ground. “What’re we gonna do? Like you said, it’s an Eredar Lord. We can’t go up and nicely ask it to vacate my--Landrelia.”

“We can get help. What about the Wardens? Can’t we get one of them to help us?” Val suggested.

Tay groaned, rolling her head and eyes to the roof of her tent. “Oh, absolutely, Valliona! Because Wardens simply fall from the sky! Goddess, I hate them. They’d gladly lock us away with everything else they guard simply for working with a warlock.” Tay glanced back at the empty wineskin and reached for it. She brought it to her lips in hopes of getting just one extra drop she’d
missed. Nothing. Groaning, Tay tossed it aside. “I’m just… not drunk enough for any of this shit going on.”

Val glared daggers at her. “You’ll be drunk enough once you’re dead, Taylande Silverblade.” With that, Val turned and stormed out of her tent. Tay watched her go, a hole in her heart.

Within a day Val called an emergency meeting. Faelysia and Cydris stood in the middle of their encampment, along with Embry and Tay. There wasn’t any sight of Val or Ophelia just yet. Soon, they emerged from Ophelia’s tent. Vastrah, surrounded by felguard, and then Ophelia came out, followed by Val. Tay glimpsed a large, black, yawning portal still open behind them.

Val, what have you done? Tay thought, eyes going wide. The kaldorei forces in the area would not be happy to hear of this.

Tay glanced around for Landrelia, who appeared suddenly behind her. She jumped at how her mother appeared almost from nowhere. Landrelia shoved Tay out of the way. The former strode confidently towards Val and Ophelia. Tay whipped her head around to look at the two Gilneans, Ophelia the picture of noble Gilnean elegance with her sandy blonde hair pulled tightly into a twist.

Landrelia began to speak. But it didn’t sound like Landrelia from when she spoke privately with her daughter. “You know the price you must pay.” Demonic. Warped.

“We’ll see about that,” Ophelia started. Tay waited for her to utter the demon’s name. She’d dealt with angry, red orcs, a marriage proposal, another marriage proposal, and the jealousy of a mute druid but managed to learn something in Outlands. Speak the demon’s true name, and you’ll have power over it. She thanked every other idiot dealing with demons she encountered out there.

Tay dared to reach her hand behind her. In a light leather jerkin, boots, and cloth leggings she’d grabbed from her tent, Tay didn’t think she would have much protection.

Elune, I beg you to keep me alive long enough to kill this demon. That’s all I need right now. The power to fight it and live, Tay thought.

She grasped Ellemayne in her left, the blade shifting into that almost icy blue jagged weapon she’d grown so accustomed to using. Tay debated using Silverblade for this incoming battle, but decided against it. She waited patiently for Ophelia as time seemed to slow to a halt. Tay mentally urged the warlock to hurry up and utter the name. Hours seemed to pass all in the span of a minute.

Ophelia opened her mouth. “Kazoch.” Tay drew Ellemayne, the dagger glowing brightly. This was new. It never glowed before with Tay. In her right hand she summoned a bout of Elune’s Fire. The flames warmed, eager to jump out at the blasphemous monstrosity in front of them. Tay watched Ophelia take in more fel energies than she thought possible for a warlock, and wondered for the briefest of moments why she drew so much fel. Then she recalled they were in the Felwood, and Tay heard everyone else drawing their weapons.

Landrelia—no, Kazoch—advanced, and so too did the succubus Vastrah’s first wave of felguard. Ophelia hurled green flame at the possessed priestess, which were dodged almost effortlessly in her body. As the felguard reached it, Kazoch stopped. The felguard hesitated, and Vastrah’s voice broke the pause. “A-rul shach kigon, Man’ari!”

Vastrah’s voice spoke of ruin.
“Gor’om hagruul!” Kazoch answered, hate in its voice. Hate in Landrelia’s voice.

Vastrah half-chuckled, half-giggled in a bored way. She gave it a flick of her hand “Achor she’ki,” she answered, monotone.

The felguard all marched forward, raining down a flurry of blows. Kazoch fought back expertly. It sent terror running down Tay’s spine. This thing controlled her mother. Tay rushed to join the fray, but Faelysia’s body slammed into her. She could hear for the first time Ophelia’s chanting and watched as a ring of felfire closed in on the demons and Kazoch. “No! If you go in there, you’ll die, Tay!” Faelysia ran forward, sword drawn, to shield Tay from whatever might come.

Kazoch almost wailed. It began to sway before finally falling on its knees. “Enough…” it muttered. Nothing ceased. The felguard continued their onslaught and Ophelia her chanting. “I SAID ENOUGH!”

Tay watched in horror as Kazoch pushed itself to its feet, then brought its fist to the ground. A shockwave seemed to ripple through the earth. All the felguard in the circle of felfire turned to ash. Vastrah screeched in terror, covering her eyes. Fallout from the spell sent the gathered group diving for the ground.

Faelysia choked on her words, and blood began to spill from her mouth. She stumbled backwards, then turned, trying to find her sister before time ran out. Her hands went to the hole where her chest should have been. She found her sister, met her eyes. And then fell to the ground before taking in shuddering gasps of air. Finally, they stopped.

Another name to add to the list of innocents you’ve murdered, Tay’s mind told her.

Tay made herself watch as Kazoch raised its hand over Faelysia’s corpse. Tendrils of shadow, smoke rose from her body. And then the screams began. Faelysia’s voice, no doubt, crying out in horrible, gut-wrenching agony. It made Tay’s stomach roll over. She let out an audible gag before covering her mouth. Hot tears began to fall onto her dirt-covered face.

The demon grinned in Landrelia’s body. The same devilish grin Tay would wear when she and Ivan pranked their friends in their spare time. Kazoch waved its arms and opened a portal into the Twisting Nether. The portal opened, bringing with it the Goddess-awful scent of fire, brimstone, and fel.

Within the portal an image of an eredar appeared, and Kazoch stepped through. The eredar and Landrelia’s body seemed to fall in on one another. The demon turned and flashed that same look at the assembled group before stepping through. As it stepped through, a flash of light blinded everyone. The smell of smoke filled the air.

Tay lowered her arms and looked around to see if anyone was injured. Nobody was hurt. Good.

But her mother was nowhere in sight.

“Lan… Landrelia. LANDRELIA!” Tay screeched, surging forward to where the portal had been. She tripped and fell to her knees, staring blankly at the ground and everywhere in front of it. Behind her, Cydris wailed in pain and began to sob over her sister’s body. Tay didn’t have to look back to know Cydris held her sister’s corpse to her chest.

Ophelia spoke up behind her. “We can always try again. We--”

Tay heard Val scream. “They’re gone, Ophelia! They’re gone!” Val’s voice grew raw with emotion. She could tell Val tried to hold back, but failed in doing so. Tay let out a sob.
“We cannot give up hope. We have it’s name. I can track the demon,” Ophelia replied, voice full of hope. Not eager hope, but hope.

Val’s voice turned deep and gravelly. Wolfish. “That demon could be anywhere in the fucking world! It could be setting fire to Teldrassil as we speak!”

Tay pulled herself to her feet and half-dragged herself over to the Gilneans now gathered together. “Nobody would dare set the World Tree on fire.” Her voice sounded dead, even to her own ears.

She stood by and watched as Ophelia doubled over in pain, almost clawing at her head. “Gah, dammit!” the warlock hissed. She rubbed furiously at her temples like it might help ease the pain. Within a moment Ophelia was drawing herself back up to her height.

“Are you okay, Ophelia?” Val asked. Worry permeated her words.

Ophelia nodded once. “I’ll be fine. Just the potion I took to enhance my powers. Helpful, as you saw, but leaves me with these Light-forsaken headaches worse than a migraine.”

Tay crossed her arms and bit back a nasty comment. “Hate to break up the moment, but what the fuck are we doing next?” Tay noticed and became all too aware of how close she stood to Val. She uncrossed her arms and surveyed how small their group had grown. Her, Val, Embry, Ophelia, and Cydris. Faelysia gave her life and Landrelia… well, everyone saw.

Cydris untangled herself from her sister’s body and trudged over. “I know of a place,” she monotoned. Cydris sounded empty, as if she’d lost her world. And in a way, she had. Tay knew how close the sisters were after she’d had the chance to spar with them. They worked in tandem, the same way Tay and Aeva used to.

“How close?” Tay asked, taking some initiative to fight back since no one else did.

Cydris looked over her shoulder, a little bit to the north. She pointed in that direction. “Just a little ways that way. It’s short if we take our mounts. There’s sentinels there as well.”

Tay glanced around to everyone. “How about it?” Ophelia nodded in agreement, as did Val and Embry. She turned her gaze to the north, then to their group. “Pack up camp. We leave in an hour’s time. I don’t want to leave any trace for this demon to follow us if we can.”

She turned on her feel and stalked towards her tent to clean out the wineskins. Tay became disgusted by herself at just how much she’d drank on this mission. After this much alcohol, she’d been surprised she hadn’t thrown any of it up like the first time she started drinking. Torrolf had laughed at her for days afterwards. Even Ivan had, and Aeva too. The only ones who hadn’t laughed were Nash and Royce.

You’re the whole reason she’s dead, Tay thought. She flinched at the thought of it. “Tay? Are you alright?”

Embry. A pit of rage unfurled in her stomach. She decided she’d be polite and play nicely for Val’s sake. She nodded. “Yeah, just remembering some of those I’ve lost over the years.” She went back to picking up the wineskins strewn about. “All this has just reminded me of them.”

Tay turned and shoved more skins into her satchel, catching Embry nodding slowly in what looked like understanding. “I’m sure Val’s told you about what happened with our merry little band of ruffians. What’s your story, Tay?”

She had a feeling he wouldn’t go until she told him something. So she wouldn’t sugarcoat any of it
for him. “I was raised, abused, and trained by a man claiming to be my father. Never knew my mother, or anything of her but a fake name. I escaped, became a priestess, then after the Third War joined the military. My whole squad is dead.”

Embry winced. “Awful, isn’t it? How these things play out for us? I won’t get into anything about me. I know my Val’s told you enough about me.”

Tay turned away, curling her lip in disgust. No, she hasn’t. All I did was figure out how you hurt her, she thought. Something about this man caused her stomach to churn. He reminded her almost of how her supposed father would act around visitors. She let him continue speaking, giving him the occasional “uh huh” for him to keep rambling on.

Before long Tay found herself outside of the group again. “Let’s go. I don’t want to waste time.” She shifted uncomfortably, looking at them all standing around. Tay moved to mount Seranthi, then wasted no time striding off on the great beast.

Everyone followed, as she suspected. Tay shifted in her saddle. She gave orders. The Keeper didn’t. Shouldn’t a leader ignore that when they led? Nar had always told her when you were leading a group, you couldn’t let anything influence her, even if it was the death of someone you loved. That you had a duty to the people who followed you. Tay decided she didn’t want to do any more leading after this.

Cydris had been correct in saying the distance between the camp and the outpost was short. They rode at a sprint, each beast winded by the time they reached the outpost, and with daylight to spare. Tay called for everyone to dismount before telling them to dismiss their mounts. As predicted, they were smart enough to move towards the water.

The Keeper stepped forward as the sentinel at the entrance eyed them suspiciously. Cydris explained the situation to the sentinel, whose fingers wrapped around her glaive as she glared. “You want me to let you in here, to help you, after you did what now?”

The sentinel, imposing like a bear, but shorter than Tay, began to spit angry Darnassian right at Cydris. After what she’d witnessed, the Keeper lowered her head and retreated in on herself. Pretended like it didn’t even happen, but yet let the yelling continue.

Val stormed up and began to yell at the sentinel. All the while, she shifted with each word she screeched out. “We are part of your. Military. Sentinel. One of the branches Tyrande didn’t want to help because it wasn’t convenient for her to save the other races! Our order is being hunted down, murdered, left and right and everywhere else we turn by a mother fucking demon. We tried stopping it, Light, we tried hard. So I don’t want to hear you get up on your high horse and talk about how we’re the villains here. I am tired of seeing all of my friends die and I am not letting that happen one more time while I work with your military.”

The sentinel glared at the lot of them. “I should have all of you locked up for consorting with warlocks and demons in our territory.” Val glared down at the sentinel, unimpressed, at the Gilnean finally having shifted into her more wolven form.

Tay heaved a sigh and strode forward. She gently pushed both Val and Cydris back with Embry and Ophelia. “Sentinel. What’s your name, and what battalion do you stand with in the standing army?”

The sentinel looked at Tay suspiciously. “Thalysa Silverspear. I serve with the Kyena’dorei.”

“Master Sergeant Priestess Taylande Silverblade of the Alliance military and Sisterhood of Elune.
Tell me, Sentinel Silverspear. If you are one of the renowned Kyena’dorei, then you know Kyena Stormbow herself?

Thalysa nodded slowly, drawing her glaive from its place at her hip. “Of course I do. What kind of a question is that?”

“What would she say if you denied aid to the kin of Kyena Moonblade herself?” Tay asked with a smirk. She crossed her arms, putting on that cocky mask she always wore.

Thalysa scoffed. “Kyena has no kin such as you. Silverblade? Everyone knows of her hatred for that old family.”

Tay let the smirk on her face grow wider. “I’ll tell you again. My name is Taylande Silverblade. She saved me from the Silverblades, what remains of them. She is why I am a priestess, why I hold rank in the Alliance military. That makes me her kin just as much as you, Kyena’dorei.” Tay allowed herself to spit the last word at the sentinel. She thanked herself that she left out how, with Landrelia as her mother, it made Kyena her aunt of sorts.

Thalysa looked at Tay in a different light, replacing her glaive on her belt. Tay could have sworn the woman had some awe in her expression. “Fine. We will help you. You brought this war to our doorstep, however. Don’t think this absolves any of your crimes.”

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Tay strode around the armory, looking for a better chestpiece than the leather jerkin she had on. Any other leather item would serve her well. She needed mobility. She came around to Val, who held a sword in her hands. “Tay, hey. What’s this say on the sword?” Val asked. Tay stopped looking at all of the tunics they had to direct her attention to Val.

“Arkhana-Shindu’ah. The Spellbreaker. Gifted to Jalora Starheart by Whiyarmir Silverblade—” She stopped before reading any more. Tay immediately let her eyes go to the sigil. Two crossed daggers on a background of flame. She knew what colors should go there. The Sisterhood had books on the histories of the old houses, and other books dedicated to just the sigils of the different houses in the Old Empire.


Tay shrugged. “My somethingth-great grandfather. He made the blade. He founded the House of Silverblade in the days before the Empire, or so they say. This will be a good blade for you. A bit long, but good. How the fuck did the sentinels get a hold of this blade, though?”

She heard Embry snickering next to Val. “This looks like a bastard sword next to you.”

The two of them continued their conversation while Tay stole a tunic off the rack. That, and a newer pair of boots instead of the worn out ones she’d been using since the Alliance had issued them to her. She swore that they had no soles with as much as she wore them. Picking those out, Tay moved over to have Ellemayne and Silverblade sharpened. And Val stood right there.

Tay inspected Silverblade as she waited for Ellemayne, and noticed how Silverblade’s seal fell on the pommel of the blade. More often than not, her grandfather’s seal was always along the blade’s fuller. But, the histories always made sure to point out the Mihrun’serrar was never an ordinary blade. It never would be, considering its legacy.

“So, why’d you freak out seeing your grandpa’s name?” Val finally asked, breaking the silence.
Tay huffed and shrugged, passing Silverblade to the blacksmith at the outpost. She gripped Ellemayne and flipped it around in her hand. “Whiarmor Silverblade was an ass. Not really much else about him.” Tay paused, thinking of what else she might be able to add about the First of the Silverblades. “Well, from what I’ve heard and read, anyways.”

“The sisterhood keeps records on all that?” Val asked, surprised.

Tay nodded. “All that would be lost, yeah. Their records on everything are more extensive than you’d think. You want to know when Azshara took a shit and in what portion of the empire? They probably have a section on it.”

She recalled the times where she spent all day and night in the libraries researching a spell, how it came about, or just to read. Tay smiled at the memory of Landrelia finding her in there one night, asleep on one of the texts. Her mother always had been there. Landrelia was right. “I used to love reading. I spent so much time in the library. Probably read all of the books in there at least once or twice.”

Val pursed her lips, imagining a little Taylande huddled into a corner with her nose shoved into a book. “I can’t read. They tried teaching me but it never worked. Strangely enough, I can write though.”

Tay whipped her head over to regard Val. “You can’t even read Common?”

Val shook her head. “Like I said, they tried. But growing up, I was always more concerned about where the food came from than anything else. At the orphanage, my matron tried to do that. The words seemed to swim across the page, and lessons with me took twice as long as the others there. Emarah, the matron, just said I was a lost cause—”

Ophelia came striding into armory. “Not again? Val, what did you mean when you said not again earlier? To the sentinel?”

Tay took it as her cue to leave. She made her exit swiftly and quietly, hearing Val’s raised voice yelling. No doubt at Embry. After what Tay saw on Val’s wrist, she wouldn’t put it past him to try to control Val. And she even knew there was no controlling that tiny, angry woman.

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Thalyssa stood at the front lines with Tay right next to her. To the sentinel’s left, another soldier. Tay glanced down the line and saw a small force of sentinels waiting for their orders. She, along with everyone else, could hear the warhorns echoing in the distance. Every able-bodied woman or man in range of the outpost would be rushing to its defense.

Off to the sides near the treelines, two armored worgen waited in the shadows. Val and Embry, working together to deal with any demons trying to sneak in. Val caught her eye, and Embry looked over not even a moment later. She nodded to Tay, narrowing her eyes and letting that glimmer of excitement sneak in. Tay offered her a smirk in return.

Demons surged past left and right. Tay knew, with a pang of pain in her chest, not everyone here would make it back home alive. She really had brought the war to their doorstep. And now it would cost innocent lives. “On your right!” Thalyssa screamed at Tay across the singing of blades.

Flames licked at Tay’s right arm. She spun and slashed Ellemayne across a demon’s throat, shoving her blazing hand into the face of another one. The felguard she burned screeched in pain, wailing a great demonic wail. It made her smile how these demons suffered under Elune’s Fires.
“Burn! Burn with the rest of your blasted kin under Elune’s gaze!” Tay heard Cydris cry. Tay let the intensity of the flames increase before she sent the felguard running back into its own ranks.

The flames caught onto other demons and sent a ripple of chaos through their orders. Looking back over her shoulder, Tay saw the Keeper with fury in her eyes as she flung spell after spell at the demonic hordes. Every so often would she throw up a barrier and tell surrounding sentinels to retreat underneath it.

With intense concentration, Tay managed to erect a holy barrier in case any sentinels near her would need the protection. Many flocked underneath its holy energies. While they did so, Tay put a shield of Elune’s Fire around her and waded out into the demon army. She hacked and slashed at whatever came close, not daring to stop until she could faintly hear Thalysa’s voice.

Only then did she run back, and with the perfect timing as well.

“Anar Elune!” Thalysa cried. The battlefield paused. Demons parted and made way for the figure now striding so confidently towards them. “Mush’a Araeshi’rhok. Lende anarae tir min.” One sentinel ran back into the outpost to send out owls to two huntresses some spoke of. A couple other ones scaled trees and took their places in the foliage. They blended in immediately, and Tay could no longer find them in there.

Landrelia strode forward. Swaggering with each step she took. But Tay knew it was not her mother in that body. She grinned that devilish grin Tay had, but would never wear that look with others around her. She stopped a few ten or so yards away from the kaldorei forces.

“Sentinels, how good to see you! But I see you’ve chosen the losing side. Disappointing. I ask only that you let me pass and get my daughter back. I will leave the rest of you in peace!” she cried. The demon in her began to take total control. Her voice was hers, yet also not. It sounded like the two inside of Landrelia’s body both spoke, but with the demon as the clear master of the host.

“Who is her daughter?” Thalysa whispered to Tay.

Tay stared blankly ahead, unimpressed. She raised her free hand and gave a halfhearted wave. “Hi, there. Daughter of Landrelia Moonblade. How are you today?”

Thalysa’s eyes went wide. “This makes you Kyena Stormbow’s niece!”

Tay’s voice remained deadpan. “Yup.”

Thalysa returned her attention to Landrelia. “You xaxas!” she screeched, loosing an arrow at the demon-possessed priestess.

The demon used Landrelia’s body to throw up a shield, deflecting the arrow like one would a gnat buzzing around their head. It began to laugh, its whole body wracking with the shaking, booming laughter only a demon could have. “You’ll absolutely need to try harder than whatever that pathetic attempt was.”

Tay took in a deep breath and let it out in a long, slow sight. She sheathed Ellemayne. Elune, if you can hear me, I am so sorry. “Endu’di rifa!” she cried at the top of her lungs, charging forward. Both hands flared with Elune’s Fire. She felt almost like a signal flare. It made her uncomfortable.

“Oh Taylande. I cannot wait until I get my hands on you!” the demon giggled with twisted glee.

The demon met Tay head on, and for a moment the flames in the palms of her hands guttered out. The light she gave off, gone. Suddenly the flames were there, all along her arms. Tay threw them...
out in front of her and deflected the demon.

She trusted Val to hurry up and attack Kazoch. Tay had talked to her extensively about it the night before. Mainly just about what to do if the demon came up to her, not the other way around. After all, Tay had agreed to be their bait. She might as well have some fun with the role of “demon bait” while she still lived.

The demon recoiled a bit before pushing itself up and leering over Tay. Despite Landrelia being physically shorter than her, Tay knew it used her mother’s magics to rise off the ground to appear larger, more intimidating.

“Look behind you, xaxas!” Tay called in a jesting tone. She let an innocent smile spread across her lips.

It turned around right as Val lunged on top of it from the shadows. Tay knew its eyes had gone wide with fear. It sent sparks of joy all throughout her body, making an Eredar Lord terrified for its own life.

The demon had, it seemed, passed out. Tay let her expression turn to one of stone. She raised her voice loud enough so everyone could hear. “Take the demon and chain it up. Make sure that it is secured. I want it alive. I want to speak to it as soon as it’s awake.”

Within moments everyone had a job to do. Most of the sentinels plus Tay made sure it got back to the outpost without waking it up. Tay kept Elune’s Fire at the ready just in case it did. When they returned, Tay departed to oversee the rest of the outpost. She told Cydris to get in there and bless the chains so they’d have less of a chance of being broken when the demon woke up.

Cydris did as commanded, which, to Tay, seemed odd. She held the rank of Keeper, not Tay. But the Keeper did her job as commanded. Afterwards, Cydris was given leave to find her sister’s body and store it somewhere safely until the time came for her to conduct a proper burial. She would be back before long with her sister’s body in her arms.

Across the outpost, Val and Embry worked with Ophelia in bandaging up wounded sentinels and keeping count on those they lost. Tay moved over there. “Gilneans!” she called in greeting. The three of them looked up at her arrival, Embry immediately returning to his work once he saw her.

“Tay, is everything going alright with the demon?” Val questioned, an edge to her voice. Tay nodded once.

“Ophelia, they need you to set a circle to keep it trapped. They finally realized the value of having ‘the good warlock,’ as they call you,” Tay chuckled. Ophelia shared a quick laugh with her about it, gladly accepting her title. As she made her way to where the demon was held Tay called back to her. “Oh, Ophelia! Stay there, too, I might need your help when it wakes up!”

She turned back to Val and Embry, who talked to her as they bandaged the wounded. Tay got down and helped to heal those injured, wrapping this and setting anything broken where she could. She had little energy after the large expense she used as they’d fought. Thankfully the sentinels were all understanding about it.

“Hey, Val. I want you in there with Ophelia. I think that demon might have some kind words for you after what you did to it,” Tay joked.

She caught sight of a smile on Val’s lips. “Oh, don’t worry. I was gonna go in there even if you didn’t ask me to come watch.”
Embry snapped his attention to Val. “Val, no. I should be in there with you--”

Val glared at him, which quieted his protests. “I’ll be fine. Ophelia and Tay will be in there. If anything happens I just need to jump behind one of them. I can protect myself without you hovering over me all the time,” she spat.

Embry shied away and continued his work.

Tay spoke with Val at length until one uninjured sentinel told them it might be a good idea to check on the bound demon.

Soon enough, they entered the room and the demon stirred in its chains. Tay hung back in the shadows, letting the two Gilneans get in a good word with Kazoch first. “You think these will hold me? Do you know who I am?” it hissed at them. The demon stepped forward, blocked by an invisible wall. Ophelia had the circle prepared and strong, then. “What… what is this! What have you done!”

Ophelia smiled sweetly at the demon, and Val stared at it with an unamused expression. “It’s a portal to home, Kazoch dear. Do say hello to Vastrah for me when you get there!” Ophelia chimed in.

Kazoch snarled and spat at Ophelia, Tay finally stepping up just to see how the warlock was holding up. It stopped the moment it saw Tay. “Taylande. How good to finally see you again. Tell me, is it Moonblade or Silverblade now?”

Tay clenched her jaw tightly and stayed quiet. She wouldn’t let the demon get to her.

“Oh, you don’t like thinking of your dear old mommy do you? Don’t like knowing the truth? Though, I’m curious. Which truth is it that you cling to, little girl? What has your dearest sister Nar told you of your father? Was your mother smitten with Fanarol? Did she run away with him? Or was she stolen and raped--”

The demon got to her. How dare it speak of her mother like that. “SHUT YOUR FUCKING MOUTH.” Tay ripped Ellemayne from its sheath on her belt. “Don’t you dare fucking talk about my mother that way. My mother is gone now.”

Kazoch cackled like a madman. “You stupid girl. Your mother is right here! Just as she said those few nights ago.”

Tay stared at it, unbelieving of what it told her. She looked at the body it used, the body of her mother, studying it carefully. For the faintest moment, she saw her mother fighting back. “Mother?”

“Your mommy has always been with you, girl! That’s more than can be said of your, oh, sooo dear auntie. She left you all alone in Northrend that day at the tournament, didn’t she?” The demon’s tone was unreadable. Tay couldn’t tell if it was trying to be patronizing, or felt actual, genuine pity for what had gone on at the Argent Tournament.

“How do you know--”

“I know everything about my little pawns. You walk a mile north, I know. You eat a new food, or a meal you’ve loved since you were little, and I know about it!” the demon hissed.

“Getoutofmymom. Get out of my mom right now,” Tay spit the words at Kazoch.
Val stared at her with a look of disbelief. “What? Tay, you just said--”

“I know.” Tay glanced back at Val to show her she knew exactly what she’d said, what she’d meant, but made sure not to look too long. Demons could never be trusted. “But this fucker has a habit of ruining families. I remember Nar telling me something along the lines. Remember that, Kazoch?” She screeched the last question at the demon, smiling in its shackles.

It laughed. “Oh, dear Taylande. Come with me. I’ll let you and your mother be together again. She’d love to get to know you. After all, she missed out on raising you. She’s begged me over and over again to let you live. I can have anything and everything I want, all in exchange for your safety. As you can imagine, and know, I can get very creative when it comes to your mother--”

Val interjected. Tay would owe her after this. “You’re gonna die one day, demon. And when you do I’ll be laughing over your corpse.”

Kazoch flicked its gaze over to Val. “It doesn’t matter what you say, you little dog. It doesn’t make her your mother, and it doesn’t make any of them your family. None of them ever were, or ever will--”

“Ophelia send this fucking shit back where it came from,” Tay commanded.

With a quick nod, Ophelia began the incantation. Sentinels stood by making sure nothing went wrong, and if something did, they would be ready. Tay raised Ellemayne up, making it eye level with the demon. Elune’s fire flared in her hands and licked all the way up her arms and down the length of her blade. She would make sure it knew fear before it left here.

Ophelia’s chanting grew more and more desperate with each passing moment. Tay waited for the perfect opportunity to present itself. She would only have a moment, and she needed to make it quick. The moment arose.

Tay stabbed Ellemayne into the ground, letting the blade infuse Elune’s Fire into the air. It made the demon’s prison uncomfortably hot, as Kazoch began to writhe around in its chains. And then Tay shoved her fiery and against Landrelia’s face.

“Renounce this vessel!” Tay screeched in Darnassian. She repeated the words over and over again until her throat grew hoarse, Landrelia’s cries mixing with her own. She struggled to get away from her daughter’s fires, but couldn’t. She tried so desperately to escape, yet she remained trapped in her own body.

The reek of burning flesh filled the room, and then another voice, crying out in pain, joined the cacophony of Tay and Ophelia’s chanting and Landrelia’s sobs of pain. This time, the voice was gravelly, rough. It belonged to the demon. Something large, imposing, red, rose from Landrelia. Kazoch. The rage-red color of his skin was contrasted by an elegant black and gold robe he adorned himself in. His furious gaze fell on Taylande as she ripped her hand off of her mother’s face. For a moment, he saw how disgusted she was when she realized she’d scarred her own mother. On Kazoch’s own face, the matching handprint burn rested on his face. “I will find you again, Taylande! I will find each and every single one of you! Moonblade, Silverblade, you are all promised to me! You are mine!”

And then he was gone, leaving only Landrelia’s limp body bound in chains in the center of the room.

Tay stepped back, face aghast. She stared at her mother’s face, and then down to her own hands.
You did this. You ruin everything you touch. The proof is right there in front of you.

Thalyssa broke rank and stepped up next to Tay. She lightly rested her hand on the other woman’s shoulder. “You should take her to Darkshore, to the moonwell there and let her soak. Elune will surely show mercy to her.”

Tay looked at the sentinel, disgusted. “If you knew half of what my mother has been through, what she has dealt with, you would realize how fucking stupid you are to say that. Only a cruel goddess would bring her back to this shithole of a world. She deserves this mercy.”

Tay stormed out of the building, straight to where they stored their wineskins.

She went to break the one promise she’d made to her mother. After all, why not? Her mother was gone now.
At dusk of the next day, the group set out for Darkshore. To the Moonwell Thalysa spoke of. Tay carried her mother’s body carefully to the hippogryph she’d been lent. She secured her mother in the saddle, careful to keep her on board for the duration of their flight. Tay told them to expect frequent breaks. She informed them everyone deserved it after the hell they’d gone through.

“Embry, do you think you could handle Landrelia’s body when we get there?” she called back to him from her hippogryph. Embry had been lent a gryphon. He looked up from adjusting the saddle on his mount to answer her question with a quick nod. “Thanks. Also, speak up if you need a break from flying. I know not everyone’s comfortable with it and I’m not sure if you are.” Embry nodded once again.

Are you doing what Nar wanted for you? Leading? Or is this what Landrelia would have wanted for you? Tay asked herself. She glanced around at the assembled remainder of their organization. Tay sighed pitifully. They lost everyone along the way and came out with five of them still breathing. Her, Val, Ophelia, Embry, and Cydris. What a meager group.

A moment later she felt a hand on her shoulder. “Do you have her, Tay?” Val asked, her voice soft so the others wouldn’t hear. After Tay sobered up she’d told both Gilnean women not to mention this sudden discovery of her parentage. Thankfully they both agreed.

Tay shook Val’s hand off. “Of course I do. She’s my mother, Val. I’ll always have her.”

The group took off without a second of hesitation. Not too long into the flight Tay found herself wondering why they were doing this.

After Landrelia had… passed… Thalysa saw to it to convince her to bring the priestess back from the other side. Tay had lashed out immediately. Half drunk and half mad with grief, Tay didn’t dare hear her out until she’d thought about her words.

"Please, sister! If we bring Landrelia back she will have another chance. She has had too much taken from her," Thalysa plead with her.

Tay whirled around with fury in her eyes and pain in her chest. “Do you not understand? Bringing the dead back goes against nature. And before you talk about having too much taken from someone, might I remind you of the stories that plague me wherever I go? About my upbringing, my parentage, all of that? I have been hunted down since the very day I was born. My own mother was the subject of more than half. And you heard the demon, Silverspear. She has been through enough. Now get out before I throw you out.” Tay’s voice had dropped to a mere whisper. She could see Thalysa straining to make out her words. Good. Yet still, the sentinel didn’t move an inch from her spot. “I said. Get. Out.”

Thalysa turned to see herself to the door. She stopped, her foot half way across the threshold. She opened her mouth to speak. Her voice came out different. Not the way Landrelia’s had been, but this one in a more… ethereal sense. Time had almost slowed to a halt, Thalysa and Tay being the only two unaffected. “Taylande Moonblade, bearer of Mihrun’serrar and Ellemayne, pawn of two evils, take your mother to the Moonwell to heal her spirit at the very least. She deserves it.”

Shaking that haze from her, Thalysa spun around completely. “You should let it cleanse her body. Prepare her for burial and whatnot. I apologize for my words earlier. Please… consider this path. The High Priestess calls for you after your business has finished.” Tay stared at the sentinel,
dumbstruck, as she left.

Val flew to her right. Tay noticed the Gilnean’s hand intertwined with her own. She didn’t have much fight in her to shake the hand away, barely noticing the tears carving paths down her cheeks as they flew on. Only a sting of the wind here and there made her realize before using her other hand to wipe it away.

“What’s bothering you? You left here and I could tell your mind was somewhere else,” Val whispered, breaking their silence.

Tay shook her head. “Just… lost. No family anymore.” The blank look in her eyes as she stared ahead didn’t help her case. “I finally find my mother and it was too late. She’s gone now.” Her voice cracked, leaving Tay choking back sobs that threatened to overpower her. Val’s hand gave hers a tight squeeze.

Val let loose a deep sigh, leaning halfway off her mount and onto Tay. She untangled their hands to give herself something of a prop. She made sure to get as close to Tay as she could, stealing a glance behind to make sure Embry didn’t see. Her breath tickled Tay’s ear as their mounts leisurely flapped along. “Ru ley’fa osa dal dieb,” she whispered.

Tay’s hand found hers again. This time it was her squeezing tight.

I love you.

She didn’t have the strength to say the words aloud.

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They reached the Moonwell sooner than expected, even with their breaks peppered in here and there. Cydris had herself and Tay switch into the plain, white robes every priestess had for tasks such as this. The moons began to rise above until soon they were the only things in the sky. Cydris and Tay had Embry gingerly carry Landrelia’s body into the water. Everything about it soothed Tay’s nerves. Almost like a parent telling their child everything would be okay.

It reached up to their waists. Despite the well being more than deep enough for Tay, she felt no panic. No fear. Just a constant sense of calm, gentle reassurance. And, strangely enough, a slight hint of sorrow. Goddess, forgive me and mine for everything we have done, Tay thought. She wondered if Elune ever heard her prayers.

Landrelia’s body floated along in the well. Weightless. Tay stole a glance at her mother, looking the perfect image of peace, and then up to the sky. The White Lady, followed closely by the Blue Child. Their light struck the waters of the well. Tay felt the eyes of those behind them look away, relieved their roaming eyes no longer studied every bit of her exposed back. Elune heard her earlier.

Cydris raised tired, blank eyes to meet Tay’s. “Are you ready?” she mouthed. Tay nodded once.

"Zin-al-Elune, An-Quel’min di’shanna Kal, Haey’ra dalah istel’fanah, Ru quasen dal na tor shanna thora’fal qhela au’f dalah Thora’min."

One of Cydris’s hands rested upon Landrelia’s cheek, the other intertwined with the fallen priestess’s hand. Tay followed suit, letting a stab of pain hit her heart as she rested her hand on the perfectly-sized handprint on her mother’s face. Her fault, and something she’d never stop beating herself up for.

Tay didn’t have the same loud power Cydris’s voice had, but carried more emotion with it.
Something she took no notice of, though the others did.

“Zin-al-Elune, An Quel’min di’shanna Kal, Haey’ra dalah istel’fanah, Ru quasen dal na tor shanna thora’fal qhela au’f dalah Thora’min.”

Both priestesses took a pause. Tay willed herself to be as loud as Cydris could be, ready to force herself if need be. Her voice cracked as they spoke again.

”Athala min di shalla, Lende min dalah fal, Shan’e-Elune, Anu min ne shanna sin ana sin, Nos Min’da, Nos Fa’lore, Nos Dorei, Andu-falah-dor, Anu shalla falah fal, Und fal falah shalla, Tor asha ne a’uf shanna shalla nal dalah fal.”

Behind the priestesses, the rest of their group watched with bated breath, eyes squinted. Val tried her hardest to see through the bright rays emanating with the moon’s light. She made out some of the details, though not all. Even Embry tried to see. She knew him well enough to know he was getting frustrated at not seeing.

Val watched the Goddess’s light radiate from Cydris and Tay. She kept her eyes focused as best as she could on the latter, wondering just how she dealt with it. Or if she felt Elune watching over her.

”Athala min di shalla, Lende min dalah fal, Shan’e-Elune! Ru quasen dal na tor shanna thora’fal qhela au’f dalah Thora’min!”

Silence.

Tay knelt down next to her mother, studying every bit of her face. Cydris had taken a knee as well. She offered a silent prayer Elune would show mercy on Landrelia. The woman had been a mother to all of them as this quest had gone on.

“Please, come back. Come back to me. I still need to know things. You know more about me than I do. Please… come back, Mother,” Tay mumbled through clenched teeth.

Landrelia did not answer.

Cydris departed the waters. She motioned for Tay to rest Landrelia’s hands across her abdomen. To give that image of peace.

Tay remained in the waters. That sorrow polluted the air around her. Even the Goddess wept for her most devoted child.

You need to leave at some point, Tay. The world doesn’t wait for you or anyone else. She could hear Nar telling her that. If only her sister could see, those words would be hanging in the air with every spoken and unspoken thing she’d said or thought to Val.

She dragged herself from the water, turning to stare at her mother. Gooseprickles dotted her arms as the air hit her. Val watched her with growing worry. “I’ll tell them at Lor’danel. So she can be buried.”

Tay felt as though she had no energy left for anything anymore. Her mother was just… gone. The pain in her chest evaporated at seeing Val, replaced with an emptiness. “I’ll wait here, Tay.”

Tay didn’t look back as she trudged to Lor’danel.
She had lost track of time, spending most of it at the bottom of a bottle. Stormwind’s tavernkeepers had grown accustomed to her sitting at their bars as the days went by. Some patrons would come by and try to speak with her, and drunkenly she would answer their conversation with bullshit just to drive them away.

Three would-be adventurers came in at one point, and she told them what set her on the path of “adventuring”, as they put it. She hoped it scared them out of ever doing anything of the like.

Someone came storming into the tavern, demanding to find an elf with two knives. She happened to be an elf with two knives and ducked her head down low. “I don’t give a shit, this elf is special-” A woman.

“Jilted lover, eh? Ask that one. Her nose’s stuck in the booze. When you find your ‘special elf,’ lemme know so we can have some fun,” one of the tavernkeeps joked. Her fingers clenched around the tankard.

“Go and fuck a turkey, you washed-up jokester!” the woman yelled. Her footsteps were loud, and they stopped right next to her. The woman--human, by the looks of her nimble fingers--wrapped her hand around her wrist. And yanked.

She wrenched her hand away from the human, her hood falling down to reveal her face. The woman’s expression contorted into fury. “TAYLANDE SILVERBLADE, HOW DARE YOU LEAVE WITHOUT SAYING A WORD!”

Tay quickly hushed Val, glancing around the tavern to make sure nobody watched. Thankfully it was packed and every patron within remained occupied.

“What do you want? And follow me,” Tay hissed, moving into a room she’d rented out. Val closed the door behind her, leaning against it while tapping her foot. “I can’t stay around. I needed to go away after what happened with--”

Val surged forward and slammed her fist into the side of Tay’s jaw. “You think I didn’t want to do the same? You’re my family, Taylande! Do you think your mother would want you doing this? Fuck, you could at least do something useful like hunting criminals or healing people. So why, oh why, can you not stay?”

“Because I’m in love with you. I didn’t want you to see me this way. I’ll go to Pandaria for a bit, or something like that. Or do mercenary work somewhere--”

“I’ve known that first bit for a while. But stay in contact, because there’s still hope for your mother. A priestess told me that a week ago. And you, by the way, have been missing for two and a half weeks. Just thought you might like to know that.”

“Thanks. I was drunk the whole time,” Tay mumbled, taking a seat opposite of where Val stood. She reached a hand up to feel her tender jaw. Tay knew it would bruise later.

Val turned to the door and looked back. “Seriously, at least stay in contact. You’ve been through too much. Do something to keep yourself busy and not drunk. I love you, Tay, you’re some of the only family I have left.”

Val left, leaving the door open.

Silence took over, Tay unsure of what to do. She sighed and grabbed her belongings. As she made her way to the bar where a few bored tavernkeeps stood, she slammed down a small sack of coins in front of them. “This is money to keep me out of the bars. Have fun with your extra coin.”
Tay exited onto the streets of the Mage’s Quarter. She made her way to the docks and boarded the next boat that would take her to Pandaria. Perhaps she would find more of her family there.

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Present day, some months after Tay’s arrival…

Tay had been trapped in the human city for too long. Thankfully they’d given her lodgings, but with the war on Draenor, and their preparations for Hellfire Citadel well underway, it took far too long for her to deliver their report. In her eyes, they imprisoned her in the city. And there was always some SI:7 operative undercover nearby to make sure she didn’t leave.

The five commanders in the military sat in front of her with mixed expressions. “Silverblade, you understand that you still deserted your post?” asked the woman on the council.

The man piped up next. “That’s no excuse--”

Her old commanding officer, Torrolf, raised his voice. “Permission to speak, m’sirs!” he bellowed. Torrolf carried with him a voice that demanded you listen to what he said. Those on the council waved him on. “Speaking with experience as former commander o’th’ Three-Thirty-First, Silverblade’s always got ‘er own code. She’n’t gunnae sit by ‘n’ let injustices like enslaving natives go. Gal’s right t’ desert. I’da done somethin’ too, if I ’ere there. Sirs.”

One of them spoke up. “But Torrolf, you are a commander. You were there for the Second and Third Wars, and then all the ones after. She was… after. Silverblade--”

“Can still hear how you can’t look past your racist views, sir,” Tay hissed, her arms crossed. “You would let the enslaving of the Pandaren people and their children fly, but not my deserting. Goddess be damned, I should have stayed in Darnassus and asked Tyrande to make me a fucking sentinel. At least then I wouldn’t be treated like some pawn used to cover up corruption in the ranks. Or, better yet! Might I request a transfer? I’m sure Commander Wyrmbane would love to have someone with my skillset in his ranks. Especially because I am a kaldorei priestess who could inspire more loyalty in my brothers and sisters.”

A few of those present stared at her with eyes wider than Azeroth’s twin moons. Tay spoke up again. “This is my last mission. I am not returning to work as your chess piece after this. You will have coin from me to compensate for whatever else I may have wasted.” Tay forced a smile on her face, one that could have cut a diamond in two. “Now, where will I be deployed exactly, who will I be working with, what is our task, and for how long?”

The woman shuffled some of the loose papers into order on the desk in front of her colleagues. She stood, striding out from behind the table and neatly placed it into a file. She handed it out to Tay, who reached with her left. Only to be reminded she didn’t have a left. Tay grimaced and yanked it away with her right.

“Dismissed, Silverblade. It has been a… pleasure… to work with you.”

Tay bit back a retort and turned to Torrolf. He jerked to the exit with his head, leading her out. As they departed the keep, Hugin stood at the base of the steps. She’d asked him to come wait for her one more time. He did, like a dutiful apprentice.

Upon seeing her he lifted one brow and stroked his mustache. “Don’t worry, Hugin, I’ve got my assignment. And about fucking time, too.”

Hugin flashed her a toothy grin. He threw his head back in an almost wolfish laugh. “So, now that
“it’s all out of the way. What’re your plans after you return?” Tay only shrugged. He continued on, “Fair. We can figure it out. I’ll watch everything for you, but….”

“But?” Tay glanced down to her apprentice as they returned to the small house in Old Town. Hugin fidgeted with his hands and glanced around the area, clearly nervous. “Goddess damn you, man, what’s your but?”

“What about… you know? How soon is it?” Hugin’s voice lost all joy and mirth. It grew serious, concerned, almost afraid for her. She swallowed, anxiety pooling in her stomach.

“Too soon. Relax still, but Nash won’t be here for it. The last letter I received from him said Malfurion had need of his skills, and his way with animals. The soonest he could be here is in a month or so. I’m afraid that’s what this file will say, though, to leave in a month.”

Hugin nodded. “Yes, shan’do. Let’s say we look at the file together while we sup? I managed to snag some good fish in the Trade District today.”

Tay chuckled and patted him on the shoulder. “Absolutely. You go and set it up, cooking fish can be a ‘bitch and a half,’ as Val would put it.” Her apprentice sped up his gait before ducking into an alley. Tay heard the noises and anticipated his form before most others mulling about the streets of the city would. Hugin reappeared an alleyway ahead in his worgen form. “Fucking cursed Gilneans, I swear.”

She glanced down at the file in her hands. Tay used her stump to bend back the odd flap on the file. Her stomach dropped as her eyes fell on the departure date inked on it.
Step Forward, Soldier

Wipe out any resistance around Hellfire. Clear the path for others to arrive and begin the assault. The final push will be soon, orders to be recalled once forces are fully amassed. Acceptable casualties: none.

Squad issued: 331st, command given to Taylande of Darnassus. Callsign: Silverblade.

Tay sat, dumbstruck. She clutched the papers with her hand. She began to tremble, barely registering the words inked down. Torrolf had relented command of their company to her. Of all people, he entrusted her with this. Yet he would accompany them.

As would Ivan. The resentment in his eyes still struck her to the core. How he glared at her with those piercing eyes. Chips of ice, filled with rage and hatred and… blame. He still blamed her.

Aeva. Drinking in a tavern and still trying to puzzle out how to recover from Tay. What to say to her. What to do without a mission or Tay at her back.

Nashathel. The father of their child. The mute druid who barely spoke a lick of Common, who wanted nothing more than to retire in Ashenvale, or Hyjal, or, hell, even Feralas. Somewhere away from the Alliance.

"Shan'do? Is everything okay?" Hugin strode out from the spare bedroom, back in his human form. Worry etched lines into his youthful face. Rugged and mustachioed, weathered, but still he retained an almost boyish face. He reached out and rested a hand over top Tay's.

Tay let out a ragged sigh. "No…." she croaked. Her voice cracked noticeably. She raised her eyes to meet Hugin's. Her thero'shan flashed a look to her in their unspoken language. Tay let her head fall gently to the tabletop.

He took the seat across from her and waited. In the silence, Hugin glanced around at the bare walls. Only a few candleholders here and there. The lit flames upon the candles themselves guttered in and out, threatening to extinguish without a moment's hesitation.

Tay spoke, finally breaking the eerie silence. "I want my mom back. I don't know what to do anymore. And they're sending me away right after my child is born. I just… what do I do, Hugin?"

"How soon are they sending you?"

Silence answered him.

"How long, Taylande?" She slid the papers over to him and clutched her stump. Her body began to heave and shudder with quiet whimpers. Soon, the whimpers became hiccups. And then sobs. "But you're due a fortnight before this."

From her position Tay nodded. Hugin continued on. "That's… oh, fuck all! I should bring this before the fucking king!" Tay weakly raised her gaze in time to watch Hugin shift into his worgen form. Howling in rage, he slammed a clawed hand into the wall of the house. "This is bullshit," he growled.

Tay shook her head. "Orders are orders. You know as well as anyone," she mumbled halfheartedly. Glancing at the papers again, she saw Hugin's face fall into a dejected frown. He clenched his jaw tightly, tight enough to snap through her priestess’s staff.
“Shan’do,” he growled in that wolfish voice, “they can’t do this. This is… not right.”

She glared at Hugin, giving him a motion to reassume his human form. Hugin shifted at the look. He took his time while Tay let her gaze fall over the papers once more. Accepted casualties: none. Clear out the areas surrounding Hellfire Citadel. She knew it would be a suicide mission. Everyone knew. Nobody neared that damned place without returning dead weeks later.

Tay closed her eyes and fought back tears that threatened to form. “There’s no point in fighting it. Like I said, orders are orders.” Accepted casualties: none. She didn’t bank on surviving this mission. “It’s not like I can go in there and tell them to give me a different assignment once it’s been issued.”

Hugin pounded his fist on the table. It startled her for a moment before she remembered he’d shifted back into a human. “It doesn’t matter. You’ve got a family on the way, shan’do! I’ll march in right now an--”

“Hugin. I’ll send word ahead to Tyrande to make sure you’re stuck with a hardass priestess to teach you and find someone else to watch everything I have. Understood?” Tay narrowed her eyes, giving him a stern look. Hugin nodded dejectedly.

She shoved the papers back into their file and removed herself from the table. Suddenly, the thought of a meal soon seemed less appetizing after seeing inside the reports. No casualties. Nothing good out of this either way, she thought.

Tay moved towards the stairs to get herself some rest. She needed it. Especially since they wanted her to send out letters to the rest of her unit. Goddess, she dreaded taking the command Torrolf relinquished her. Fear settled in the pit of her stomach. As did a sense of pain. Placing one foot on the step, Tay ignored it and saw herself to her room. She needed a rest. She needed--


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Chugging every skin of water Hugin brought to her, Tay groaned loudly this latest time. “Remind me again, after everything that has gone on, why I decided to get back together with my last partner?” she sarcastically remarked.

Hugin only shrugged. He watched as his shan’do carefully cradled her daughter. She seemed… hesitant, almost, to do anything that might upset the newborn. The moment the messiest part of the childbirth had gone, Tay feared the moment the newborn opened her eyes. Hugin had heard enough of how she’d been hunted for them.

The moment finally came. Tay had breathed a sigh of relief when her daughter opened her eyes. Silver. Just like her father’s.

“What d’you think you’ll name her?” Hugin asked, staring curiously at his shan’do’s child.

Tay stole her own glance at the child. Her chest filled to the brim with a mix of emotions, chief among them love. She wondered for a brief moment if her own mother had felt the same. Tay dismissed it easily. After what Landrelia had told her that night, there couldn’t be a doubt in her mind Landrelia loved Tay more than anything in this world. Not even Landrelia’s love for Elune Herself could trump the love she had for her child.

Names raced through her mind. Names such as Nar’s, her mother’s, Fanarol’s, Elariel, Hugin, Faelysia, Nash’s parents. Hell, even Royce. “Faehnia, if Nash likes it. Named for a friend I lost too
soon, and for a father I never got to have.” Maybe Nar was right. She knew Lithmyr and Fanarol both. She told me herself how Lithmyr was the crueler of our grandfather’s sons.

She saw out of the corner of her eyes how Hugin flinched. “I’m sorry, shan’do. If it’s any comfort, my own father was a distant bastard who wanted to shove my brother and I into the guard and my sister into caring for children.”

“It’s a small comfort. You never tell me much about your family, or your life before the fall. Take a seat and tell me about it some. You already know I don’t have a family. While I figure out how to be a good mother now,” Tay requested. She threw in a quick jape at herself, knowing full well she needed the support of Nashathel and Landrelia going into this.

Hugin nodded and took a seat on a chair next to the bed where Tay rested. “Well…” he began, unsure of where to start. Hugin took a moment to think, trying to pan out just what to say and how to say it. He didn’t know what his shan’do would think once he began. “I lived outside the City for a time. But that stopped when I ran away. Couldn’t deal with it at home, really. Bit of a prick for a da’, and mum was just… more focused on him.”

“Why did you leave, Hugin?”

“My little brother ran away. Zackie was a hotheaded boy. But he took off in the market one day and I went after him. I never found him. My sister fended for herself at home, always told her big brother she’d be okay. And last I heard, she’s done well for herself. Mum and da’ died in the first wave. And Zackariah I never found.

“When I left I found two orphaned kids I decided to watch over. We were, ah, street rats. Sort of. Didn’t really steal, just begged and took the odd job or two. The orphans were Tristain and Verik. A sister and brother duo who came to view me as their older brother. Dunno where they are now, to be honest. I’m with you in the boat of not having family. Shan’do.”

Tay looked down at her daughter, and then to her apprentice. “Hugin, ana’dieb. I want you to be her godfather. In case anything happens to either of us. Bandu anu enu.”

Hugin nodded. “I understand, shan’do. Shaha lor’ma.”

She smiled and hesitantly rocked her daughter, so far nameless. “I think you’re one of the few I’d trust you with her. Goddess, I’m still shocked. I never thought I’d become a fucking mother, of all things….”

Her apprentice shrugged once more, smiling underneath his bushy mustache. “Well… you’ll be a better parent than yours were t’you, that’s for sure.” She knew her apprentice had no idea how to respond to her.

“No shit,” Tay sighed, rolling her eyes. She stared down at her daughter, asleep as she held her. A look of regret, tinged with fear, flashed across her face. “I don’t want to leave. I should just… not go on that mission, Hugin.”

Hugin moved closer, taking a better look at the newborn. He wondered if his shan’do would actually do that, abandon her mission. “But… what if they throw me into a cell for it?” Tay continued as Hugin weighed his words.

“If you go on it, you got a chance of returning. Or, uh… not. But I think they’ll cell you for life if you skip it.”

Tay nodded solemnly. “How soon does it say to meet my unit?” Tay pulled a face at those words.
Her unit. They tasted wrong in her mouth, the same way saying she had any family did. She would need to get used to the words. But for now, she used them and bid Hugin to bring her the papers with all of her orders.

Hugin returned not a moment too late and opened them for her. “In just a couple of days. And you’re to leave a week after.”

She gave her apprentice a shaky nod and returned her gaze to her daughter.

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That week came and went, as did any spare time with her daughter. Nashathel was late, as always, and would remain late until another few days or so. Tay took a few deep breaths as she waited for everyone to arrive. Still feeling a bit week from the month’s events, she steadied herself by leaning against a rail nearby.

Ivan was supposed to provide them with a portal straight to Ashran. Once he and everyone else arrived. She waited patiently, and with bated breath, fearing one of the humans would arrive first. Tay observed those strolling along coolly. Part of her asked which ones were arriving to meet her. The other part ignored everything the first part thought.

Eventually, Torrolf arrived with Aeva at his side. “Oh,” was all Aeva said. Tay nodded once in greeting while Torrolf saluted her, Aeva making it halfhearted. She didn’t care, both had to do so under protocols. Together they waited in an awkward silence, Aeva and Tay pointedly not talking to one another. Torrolf remained caught in between.

“So, I assume both ye’r ready?” Torrolf asked. Tay gave him only an “mhm” in answer, Aeva nodding once. “Well, good t’ know neither o’ye’r talkin’.”

“Unless you want me to talk to the commander, sir, I will remain silent,” Aeva forced through clenched teeth.

Torrolf growled in anger at her, “Well, talk ye fuckin’ stubborn, half-bred, ass! I’m no’ ‘bout to stand here in silence an’ listen to yer pissing match.”

Aeva whipped around, fists clenched at her sides. “Then why did you give her the command of the battalion?! I was your second in command all the way up until they split us with separate assignments! And even then, I got stationed with you and remained--”

The former commander held up a hand to stop her. Aeva bit back the rest of her words, trying not to spit back at his insulting demand. “’Cause maybe ye need t’ realize, Petrovsky, that Silverblade needs some sense o’ responsibility now. An’ this’s th’ perfect assignment fer it. Ye already got that.”

*Oh, I understand that responsibility, Commander. Maybe I shouldn’t have hidden it from you, is all*, Tay thought to herself. She cast a stormy look to her former commander. Tay kept her words to herself, though, instead choosing to watch for any sign of those still not present.

“Yes, sir. I just request that this knife-eared fuck--”

Tay rolled her eyes and turned to face Aeva. “I’m your commanding officer now, Aeva. Suck it up. I didn’t ask for this as much as you did. I understand, I’ve been horrible, I completely do. But speaking as someone who has just lost something she just found, shut the hell up and report your dissatisfaction with me later.
“We are here to perform the task given to us. I want nothing more right now than to do this and forget what I’ve just gone through.” Tay’s mind flickered to her daughter. *But not that. Please, Goddess, never that.* “Hate me all you want. I don’t care. Let’s get this over with because I’d like to get out of service as soon as possible. Is that understood, paladin?” Tay spat the last words at her former lover.

Aeva hesitated and stared at her with cold eyes. Finally, she nodded slowly. “Yes, Commander.” Tay flashed her a glare and turned away slowly. Her body wanted to shudder, break down right there. She didn’t need to be reminded again of how she failed at being loyal to Aeva, how she let the woman down and proved she herself was no good.

Soon enough Ivan arrived, along with some other human man dressed for scouting and recon. Together they gave Tay the traditional salute. “Is there anyone else to be joining us?” she asked, glancing around the assembled group. Nobody said anything. Tay sighed, reaching behind herself to cover the stump where her hand should have been. She couldn’t let them see it right now. “Ivan, the portal.”

Ivan regarded her in the same way his sister had. Cold. Tay knew he hated taking any orders from him already, just from that single look. She wondered why the Alteraci had always given her that same cold look. Ever since they’d met.

Ivan opened the portal within a quick second, and the unit stepped forward into Ashran.

*Accepted casualties: none.*
"What would we name her?" Nash mumbled, half asleep. He'd arrived a couple of days after the rest of their unit. Now he and Tay rested together in her tent, struggling to keep their eyes open as the day wore on.

Upon arrival, those commanding Ashran handed her more orders. They would move under cover of night every so often. Carry out stealth attacks. Tay's gut churned, but she accepted the orders, although begrudgingly. Tay had set out the moment those orders were read. This second night she called for a halt, so the humans might rest during their normal sleep schedules.

In the tent, Tay shrugged. "Faehnia? After that friend I lost, and the father I never got?" She heard Nash take a deep breath. After spending so much time with him she knew he thought about it. "What? Not to your liking?" This time she felt him shrug.

"It’s good. Just… you’re Moonblade. We doing another name?" he asked.

Tay adjusted herself so her arms were positioned on either side of Nash to prop herself up. “I don’t follow. What do you mean another name?”

Nash chuckled, a warm and rumbling thing she felt through her body. How she loved it when he laughed. "Moonblades are always said to have secret second names."

“We can do that. After someone in your family.”

Nash nodded and pulled Tay down into a quick kiss. She pulled away to see him smiling up at her, all the love in the world in his eyes. It sent a lance of pain through her heart. Tay knew she didn’t deserve it after what she’d put him through. Especially after Northrend. Goddess, how she regretted it. How she regretted putting Aeva through it.

She knew well enough she didn’t deserve either one of them. Of course, Tay cared for the two of them. She just… made an enormous mistake. Part of her wondered if either of them ever truly forgave her for what she did. And why she’d done it then. Somehow, Tay doubted it. She wouldn’t blame them if they harbored at least some kind of grudge or resentment of her for her cheating on them.

“Maestyn. For my mother?” Nash suggested. He hesitated, knowing Lele wouldn’t be too pleased about it. But he owed his family that much. After all, he hadn’t been at his mother’s side when she needed him. Maesthrin had only Lele with her when that disease stole her away. But he wanted to honor his mother’s memory in some way.


“Am using Shadowgale,” Nash interjected.

“But why?” Tay questioned. This had been the first mention of Nash not using his family’s name anymore. She wondered what inspired that change. “Did something happen in the meanwhile that made you change it?” Concern was etched into Tay’s brow. A small pang of fear settled in the pit of her stomach.

Nash sighed, preparing to get wordy with her. He didn’t want to speak much because his lisp had the chance of reappearing. Right now, however, it seemed he had to throw caution to the wind. He gently nudged Tay off of him. She sat back quietly. In the moonlight filtering through the tent,
“You know why we are Sorrowgales?” he asked quietly. Tay shook her head. “In the War of the Ancients, my grandfather lost his family. Brothers, sisters, all of them. He became a druid under Stormrage. Listened to the gales of wind carry the sorrows and prayers of those who suffered losses as he did. Set out to make it better, told my father he took the name to remember those who sacrificed themselves.”

Tay sat back in silence. “Why not use it now in this war? They’re sacrificing themselves, are they not?”

Nash shrugged. “I want a new beginning. Away from everyone, even those who gave their lives. It’s too much for me, honestly. After this let’s live on Teldrassil. We can start over and won’t have to deal with the Alliance’s wars.” He sounded so eager, and Tay leaned in to give him another kiss. Nash, so excited for a new beginning with her. All as soon as this finished. He reached a hand up, tenderly caressing her cheek.

She snaked her arms around his torso, digging the nails of her hand into his back. Nash gripped her waist and pulled her closer. Tay grew lost in his arms, letting the passage of time halt for a moment with her lover. Her thoughts drifted to times long gone, when she shared her tent with Aeva in the days following Silithus. How Aeva moaned her name, how the paladin’s lips felt against her neck, all of it. Tay let a flicker of a thought enter, why she was reminiscing of her former lover, now, while she was with Nash.

“Oh, Nash.” Immediately she grew sick to her stomach. Tay fought it off in order to let Nash have this brief respite of happiness before they set out the next day. Nash didn’t notice it. Instead, he kept on. His hands found the waist of her breeches and she let him undo the lace, let his hands peel them from her skin, let his fingers draw trails all along her body.

And for the night, Tay let herself forget everything. She told herself with Nash nothing else existed.

Not the mission.

Not the days she spent with her mother.

Not even the time with Royce, or of her death, or Ivan losing his leg in that fateful sailing expedition.

Nothing but her, Nashathel, and the tent obscuring them.

She fought to keep herself quiet. Tay knew she had to at least try. Until Nash’s teeth found the tender spot on her neck, right below her jawline. Nashathel knew all her weaknesses, how to set her off and keep her engaged.

As too did Aeva Petrovsky.

Dawn appeared the next day, and Tay already gathered their belongings and set off to reach their destination. She waited as everyone packed their things. Aeva seemed to purposely be taking forever, so Tay moved over to help. Banking on the half-elf complaining, Tay was prepared to give the woman an order.

Strangely enough, she was met only with a glare from Aeva. Tay debated with herself on making conversation. What would she say, though? Would Aeva even deign to reply? Tay knew she would only find out if she actually spoke, instead of debating as she gathered together more of Aeva’s
belongings. Mostly just a few small, scant journals filled with holy symbols and the occasional article of clothing.

“Why, exactly, are you bothering to help me.” Direct. Curt. Not a question, but more a demand.

Tay shrugged, tossing the final pair of breeches towards her former lover. “Makes us move quicker. Besides, we’ve got a job to do, don’t we?” she asked pointedly. Tay glanced over at Aeva to make sure she heard her words. She couldn’t tell, as Aeva had moved on to rolling up the cover she used as her tent.

“Mhm. And it’s about to get done.” Aeva didn’t bother to add on anything else, instead stared on at Tay to make sure her commander knew she waited for orders. Tay gave a signal to move out. She quickly gave Torrolf command of the map, where they turned, what path to take, so Tay might figure out why Aeva barely concealed the venom in her words.

Walking steadily alongside one another, Tay went to make small talk. “This job… what are you going to do after it?”

Aeva shrugged. “Dunno. Might travel up to the Plaguelands for a while. See Highlord Fordring.”

“Interesting. Is he gathering the paladins or is it more of a personal journey for yourself?”

Aeva stopped abruptly. The others noticed, and Tay motioned for them to head on a little ways and then stop. Just so she and Aeva might have some privacy for the biting words Tay knew she’d be getting. Glaring, Aeva stepped off the trail they followed. Some plants and other kinds of large vegetation shielded them from any prying eyes, and away from any orc parties that might come along.

Lowering her voice, Aeva hissed at Tay, “What is it you want? I already sent you that letter. Talked to you. All of that. Why are you coming back right now? After what you put me through I said I would only remain allies, and that was after cutting you out of my life for Light knows how long. So what do you want.”

Tay flinched. “I wanted to make amends. I realize I’ve been awful--”

“Astute observation, Taylande. I’m surprised you just now noticed it.”

After the interruption, Tay continued. “I get it, okay? You don’t need to go on. I abused and manipulated you and after what just happened, I realize it. I’m apologizing, since I figure I should start somewhere. I owe you that. And before you start up again, just know that I did care about you.”

Aeva stared at her incredulously. “Uh huh. You cheated on me. You told me so many times how you didn’t want anyone else, and then you’re with someone else. Immediately. I actually did love you, Tay. I sacrificed my happiness and what I wanted to do all for the sake of us. Do you remember how many nights we would talk about possibly starting a family? Do you?”

Tay nodded once. “Yeah. I was the one to suggest--”

“Yes, yes you were. And I willingly went along because I thought ‘maybe I can have happiness after all’. Especially after what you told me you experienced, and after what I did. But you were never fucking satisfied. You didn’t know this, but Ivan did. Every single time you’d make me to be the bad guy I would spend so much time crying--no! Sobbing and wondering what I did to make you so angry at me. And this happened at least once or twice a month. I couldn’t go a single month without crying over you.
“Did you know that at all? I was miserable and kept telling myself how happy I was with you. And when you left me for Nash, but still kept on trying to be around me and keep me around, here’s what I thought. I was only good enough when you wanted me. I was only something fun for you. Fucking think about all of that.”

Aeva stormed off towards the unit, back to where Torrolf and the rest waited. Tay’s heart ached and the pain lancing through it grew until it nearly rivaled the pain she felt at her mother’s death. Tears burned in the back of her eyes. She furiously wiped them away, asking herself how she could be so stupid because she didn’t realize that. Tay, trained to be observant, drunkenly priding herself over that, and failing to realize that.

Tay followed after. She found the rest of the unit not too far off from where her and Aeva had another of their spats. Torrolf glanced up, and Tay motioned for them to continue while she followed up in the rear. As they trudged through the sweltering heat of the jungle, Nash fell into step beside her. He shot her a look of concern in their unspoken language.

She shook her head once. Tay put all her focus onto the trek. The farther they went, the worse it seemed to get.

The jungle, hot, humid, deadly, pressed down on all sides of their unit. Torrolf grumbled about Alliance High Command sending the 331st to Tanaan, of all places. Why not send them to the gates of the Citadel? Why not even reinforcing their hold on the Dark Portal? Without any word from Tay, Aeva told him to shut up so they could get on with their mission.

In three days’ time the 331st had reached the outermost gates of Hellfire Citadel. Crouched behind bushes, logs, and other deadly flora, Tay sat faced towards her unit. Her voice lowered to a whisper, she addressed her fellow soldiers. “Rogue, I want you scouting ahead to see of any potential threats to us being discovered. Take out any who might raise alarms or signal of our presence. Return to us as soon as possible with any news. The latest to return, for everyone, is in two hours’ time.”

“Yessir!” the rogue whispered back enthusiastically, saluting as best he could. He took off and blended immediately into the surrounding foliage. Tay knew the eager scout would do his best, possibly better than. She didn’t bother to keep an eye out. From her training as an assassin, Tay understood looking for a shadowstalker was pointless. They would reappear only when they wanted to, never when you wanted them to.

“Torrolf, Aeva, set up a perimeter of fifteen meters. Any who come close should be taken for interrogation or killed. They’re demon blood-fueled monsters at this point. I don’t exactly care if they’re hurt or not. I’ll scout around the area some and meet here within an hour. Both of you, dismissed. Get to it.”

Aeva gave her a curt not and ran off, Torrolf right behind her.

Tay turned to Ivan. The mage leaned against his staff to keep himself upright. He glared daggers at Tay, waiting for his orders. “Hold the ground here. I want someone keeping watch and you’re a mage. Set some kind of magical warnings. But keep this spot safe.”

Ivan snorted and rolled his eyes. “Doesn’t work that way, but whatever works for you. Don’t fuck it up for me again. Like you did last time.” Tay turned away and ignore the comment.

“Nashathel. Sky patrol. Aerial reports of troop movements.”

Nash shifted into a stormcrow, flapping up ever higher into the skies above.
Tay watched as he took off. Soon enough, Nash disappeared in the foliage and clouds hanging heavy above their heads.

She began her patrol and prayed they’d return after her.

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Tay never registered when the orcs found them. All she knew was that she had to return to base immediately. One lone orc--hyped up on demon’s blood, no less--had attacked her.

Ellemayne came from its sheath immediately, igniting with Elune’s flames. Tay spun away from her attacker. She whipped around, seeing the imposing male bearing down on her as she prepared herself to retaliate. He bore a large warhammer in his hands and raised it over his head as he ran at full speed.

Dashing to the side, Tay raked Ellemayne across his exposed ribs. Grunting in pain, he only grew more furious. “Puny elf… You’ll learn soon you don’t play games with the Bleeding Hollow!” he growled. The orc barrelled forward, swinging his hammer in front of him this time. Tay barely made it out of the worst of the blow.

The hammer still caught on her back, although the power in the swing had mostly dissipated. She held back the groan of pain and pulled herself up. Tay sighed and let herself relax. The orc spun around with surprising swiftness, pulling the warhammer back to his left. Tay waited for the blow. She knew what to do. The orc swung towards her with all the strength in him.

The hammer whirled towards her.

Tay dropped and rolled away.

Ellemayne slashed out and drew blood.

The orc scrambled to get away.

Tay held him at knifepoint, backed against the tree. A simple, easy execution. She could so very easily end his pathetic existence. Get rid of this scum. After all, she’d dealt with worse, and dealt with fights longer and more deadly than this. A lone orc against her? Humorously idiotic. “Information or I cut your throat.”

He laughed, low, drawn-out, and rumbling. The wisps of his hot breath barely brushed against her face. “Run, little elf. We’re coming,” he hissed. He began to make gargling noises at the back of his throat. And spat in Tay’s face.

She glared and wiped it away. “What do you mean?” Tay pressed. Ellemayne cut into his throat. A few trickles of blood ran down his throat, staining the light tunic he had on.

“What do you mean?” he answered, grinning wide. Tay wasted no time in opening his throat and turning towards their rendezvous point.

Every branch that snapped underfoot and every leaf that crumpled as she stepped on it seemed an almost silent sound to her. Heart and footsteps pounding in her ears, Tay begged Elune she arrived early. She’d been gone barely an entire hour, but yet they’d already found her. This made no sense to her.

How would they know her location, where to attack? When to attack? Tay’s pulse slowed. Stopped, even. She didn’t know what everyone else’s files had said. She knew that most everyone in the
group had been done some kind of wrong by her, the Petrovskys especially. But they were all here on behalf of the Alliance. All on the same mission to begin the extermination of Iron Horde forces around Hellfire Citadel.

Time slowed to a halt as she ran.

Someone within her unit had betrayed them, given their enemy information only one of them might have known. The rogue was highly unlikely. Nashathel, as unlikely as gnomes learning the arts of druidism. Torrolf, unlikely. Also unlikely to ever be fully healed after his wife left with his son.

"So, what’s your son’s name, sir? You talk about him a lot," Tay commented as she watched her commanding officer remove a small pocketwatch with an inked picture inside. A woman with round features and sporting dark eyes and hair grinned with a pudgy, stout toddler. The toddler looked about as happy as a cat receiving a bath.

Torrolf grinned underneath his large and red beard. “Ah, m'boy’s name is Bolli. Wife suggested it.” He chuckled at the picture before replacing it within the pocket of his breeches. Under the light of the moon, Northrend chilled even more so. But at the mention of his son, his pride and joy, it seemed to warm just a little. “Y’ever thought abou’ kids, Silverblade?”

Tay glanced around to make sure everyone else was fast asleep. Ivan and Royce looked as passed out as they could get and huddled together underneath a pile of furs. Nash remained curled up off to the side, off in his feline form. As odd as he acted sometimes, he did have the right idea. Aeva still lay curled up in her clothing. Good. Nobody else would be able to hear.

Smiling so softly it might be considered a smirk, Tay nodded. “Yeah, I’ll be honest. I’d not mind it with Aeva. I just don’t know if I’d be ready for it.” Torrolf scratched at his beard considerably. "When--if--y’do, Silverblade, lemme tell ye this. Y’go ofta war, ye better live through it so yer babe’s go’ both’er parents. Kids’ll give ye somethin’ ta fight for. An’ ye’ve been through shit, I can tell by yer actions. How ye carry yerself. Yer gonna be a damn good parent when th’ time comes."

Tay had to make sure everyone survived. Everyone under her command had something to go back to. Aeva and Ivan had a sister to return to, possibly even someone else. That eager and spry rogue boy had family. Torrolf, despite his wife leaving him, still had his son to think about, and Nashathel their daughter. She couldn’t let their deaths come to pass.

She arrived soon at their rendezvous point to find orc corpses littering the ground. Ivan hovered off the ground a few feet away, screaming unintelligible words and flinging great balls of fire at more orcs. “You will return to the Citadel and bring the messages of destruction with you! Your kind will fall!” Ivan screeched, his voice not entirely his own.

Torrolf charged forward, a great tower shield out in front of him. Every so often his arming sword would poke out and find its way into the chest of an orc. Torrolf made sure as many of them were attacking him as possible. He noticed her as Tay sprinted forward. Ellemayne flared brighter and brighter as orcs swarmed around.

“Git’cher ass into th’ fray!” he cried. Tay rushed towards him. She could see how he was slowly being overwhelmed by the numbers. One orc hurled their weapon towards his skull. Torrolf barely raised his shield in time to block the hit. As he held that attack off, another orc found a way to slip past. This one buried a dagger in his right side.

Torrolf cried out in pain as Ellemayne found a way in the attacker’s neck. A swift revenge, one Tay felt should have been longer. She yanked her blade from the orc’s neck and held her ground with
Torrolf. “Good enough, sir?” she asked with a hint of sarcasm.

“Not the time. Fight on!” Torrolf roared. His movements grew more restricted with his wound. He didn’t dare remove it. The dagger inside him kept the rest of the blood contained within him. If he removed it now, the 331st would be short one fighter. Tay kept her mouth shut as she shot bursts of Elune’s fire at their adversaries. Ellemayne found more than enough victims to bury itself into.

Before long Tay could hear her commander’s labored breathing. With a great cry Torrolf heaved his shield at another incoming orc. The shield whirled through the air, a spinning metal disk of death, cracking loudly against the head of an orc. His sword stabbed wildly at any other unlucky fighter approaching him.

“Go help whoever else ye can!” Torrolf ordered her. He dropped to the ground and thrust his blade into the crotch of an attacker. Removing the blade and heaving himself up, he fought on, throwing all his remaining power into his swings and stabs. The orcs kept coming, seemingly endless.

Tay sliced the throat of another would-be killer, burning another with a flick of her blade. The screeches of pain echoed throughout the jungle. “But sir, you’re still--”

“That’s a fuckin’ order. I got a dagger in m’ side an’ I’m slowin’. Ye knew this was a suicide mission from th’ start, don’ tche lie t’ me!” Torrolf roared. With a labored cry he buried his blade into the chest of the last attacker.

“Sir, I was told no--” Tay started. Torrolf shoved her towards Ivan as one lucky orc dug his axe deep into Torrolf’s skull. His helmed cleaved inwards and blood poured from the wounds sustained. Even as Tay stared, still barely managing to fight off her attackers, she knew they would have trouble identifying Torrolf. She couldn’t remember her throat going raw, yet it was. In her rage, Tay slashed wildly at those who neared her.

Ivan fell to the ground as Tay reached him. The orcs after her turned on him. Tay knew Ivan expended all the magic in his body. Her gut twisted. She couldn’t be the cause of death for another fucking Petrovsky. She threw herself at Ivan, only to find herself to be a split second too late.

A crude, jagged sword buried itself in Ivan’s gut. Tay reached his body as the last force of orcs turned on her. She saw no point in finding the rogue. Something told her that boy was already dead. He may have very well been the first to die. She’d seen no sign of Nash or Aeva in the chaos and--

No, Tay thought. One of them couldn’t have done this. They wouldn’t. Aeva may have very well betrayed them. Nash might have, as well. But he’d never do that. Nash loved her. But so did Aeva. Nash couldn’t have done it. He knew about their daughter they had to return to. He would do everything he could to make it home to little Faehnia, and would let nothing stand in the way of that.

The same orc that stabbed Ivan straight in the gut removed another weapon. This time, instead of a sword, an axe--most likely a spare--from his belt loop. He raised it and swung downward in hopes of cleaving Tay’s head in the same way Torrolf’s had been. Tay threw up her left arm to deflect the incoming blow. She willed Elune to give her aid in this moment. Tay waited for the holy shield to come up--

But it never did.

Steel bit into flesh, into tendon, into muscle.

Into bone.
Tay let out a bloodcurdling cry. More of her arm lost to servants of the Burning Legion. The orc hollered out in victory. Resulting warcries and whoops of triumph came out. That same one threw down the axe as it bit into her left side. Not deep enough to be fatal, but deep enough to hinder her movement.

She lay there and waited for them to clear out. Soon enough they did. She rested, listening, waiting, for anything else to happen. All Tay heard was shallow, fast-paced breathing. Tay pulled her head around to the direction it came from. The blood poured out from her stump and she knew it might very well kill her.

Tay used her right hand to drag herself in the direction of those shallow breaths. It came out strangled. Whoever still lived wouldn’t have long, she knew. The survivor groaned in pain, loud and almost mournful in its tone. Tay raised her head, seeing who still lived. Ivan, fingers wrapped around the hilt of the blade buried deep in him, blood trickling out from his mouth, glared at her as she crawled to him.

“Y… you… deserved this… bastard,” he struggled. A faint smile crossed his lips. “H-hope you fuck… fucking bleed out.” He began to chuckle. Tay rolled over onto her back, slowly pushing herself into a seated position. She hissed in pain and glanced down to see the blood staining her side. At this point, Ivan’s chuckle had turned into a full on cackle.

She shook her head and groaned, shoving her bleeding stump against her bicep and her right hand against her side. Hopefully it might slow or stop the steady stream of blood as she pondered on what to do. “Yeah… well, I won’t,” Tay rasped.

Ivan still cackled on. “You’re a… a f-f-failure… See you in-in… in hell,” he hissed. For some reason, it struck a nerve. Tay roared and moved at him on her knees. She reached him soon and wrapped her hand around the hilt, resting her hand above Ivan’s.

“Maybe, but I’ll be glad to see you there.” Tay used her last remaining strength to rip the sword from Ivan. He groaned in pain one last time. His eyes found hers through the thick fog of pain. She met his gaze, holding it steady, and dropped the sword. Ivan’s hand fell from the blade and hit the ground with a thud.

Ivan wasted his last breath in spitting a bloody mess of saliva at her. Just like that orc had, but with less blood. Ivan missed, landing it on her shoulder. She didn’t bother wiping it off.

Tay glanced around, now the only survivor as far as she knew. She ripped off a piece of Ivan’s sleeve, struggling to do so. Tay shoved it against her stump, sticking immediately due to the amount of blood. She ripped off more, using Ellemayne to cut through the places she couldn’t immediately rip away. Before long she’d formed for herself a makeshift “stopper” of sorts so she didn’t have to constantly apply pressure and cloth to it on her own. She tied it around her elbow to hold it. And waited.

An hour passed, and no sign of Nashathel or Aeva.

Another hour.

And then another.

Tay couldn’t think. Had no energy to move around, to find help, or even bother finding food. She would simply wait until she regained some of what she’d lost. Her eyes roamed around the clearing at all those fallen around her. Torrolf, Ivan, she could barely make out bits of specific orcs, and even more orcs. That eager little rogue didn’t make it out. A faint outline in the distance, she
eventually made out his corpse by the hilt of a dagger protruding from his back.

A soft glow of light illuminated nearby, alerting her to the presence of… someone. Rustling followed, scattering some insects and causing a gorgeous bug to flutter past her to somewhere else. The faint squawking of a bird called out a distance away, its echoes barely reaching.

“Just… fucking kill me already,” Tay groaned. “We lost. We failed. We’re all dead.”

“But yet you’re still alive,” a familiar voice sighed in disappointment. “Why did you--”

Aeva’s voice cut off. She rushed over to her brother’s corpse, past Tay. Tay heard her former lover begin to whimper, which evolved quickly into sobs. She twisted her head to watch Aeva hold Ivan’s limp form. That same look had frozen on his face. Defiance, twisted pride, and a cocky smile, like he knew she’d be dead as well. Yet she still breathed.

Tay coughed. It grabbed Aeva’s attention long enough. “Did you betray us.” No reply. Instead, more sobbing, hiccupping, and begging for him to miraculously come back to life. Both of them knew by now that no amount of healing would bring him back. Even if Elune or the Light granted either one of them the boon to resurrect him, it would come with its own cost later on down the line. For every life, a death, and for every death, a life. A neverending cycle Tay and Nash would sometimes find themselves debating.

“Did you fucking betray us,” Tay demanded.

Aeva hiccupped one more time. “I had to. One of them approached me. You have to understand, I didn’t want anyone harmed--”

Tay seethed in anger. She roared at the half-elf for this… this… high treason. “YOU FUCKING SHIT! You should have come to me. Should have said something. Anything. But you let that eager-faced--” Tay broke off to groan in pain and touch the wound at her side again. “That rogue boy. He was young, even for your kind. And he’s dead. So is Torrolf. You looked up to him, as you did to your big brother. And look where it got him.”

“They threatened to kill us all if I didn’t tell them what we were here for! They said they wouldn’t, they said so! The bastard held a knife up to my neck and threatened me!”

“You’re from Alterac. You know the stories. You don’t fucking trust an orc. Aeva, I have--”

Aeva had heard enough. “This one wasn’t from the Horde! Have you ever considered the reason I wasn’t here was because the bastard captured me? I can’t even return right now to help. I had no other choice.” The same orc from before, who slammed his axe into her side, returned. With a grin only a demon could sport he stepped forward and pulled the axe from her side.

Tay screamed in pain as he did so. Aeva made a move to aid her, to fight off the attacker. But then Tay noticed the bindings on her hands, how she bore no armor on her person anymore. The woman didn’t even have her sword with her. She didn’t get any further than a couple steps. The orc keeping her there slammed his elbow into her gut, sending Aeva to the ground.

“Even at the cost of the lives of those you love?” Tay retorted.

Silence followed.

Tay knew she struck a nerve. “You’re no better than me at my worst. I actually thought I could escape this and smooth things over with those I’ve wronged. But apparently some of us are still too childish to keep holding grudges. Cut off my hair while you’re at it, hm? Cut it alllll off. Because
you’ve dishonored me, the Alliance, and your brother’s memory! So cut off all of my fucking hair. Do it, you half-elven shit!”

Aeva cried out in anger and frustration, pulling herself off the ground. She surged forward and ripped Ellemayne from Tay’s side. The orc let this happen. Ellemayne immediately shifted into a long, thin thing. The blade curved, glowing a blinding white. The hilt shifted to a dark leather with a crossguard bearing a resemblance to what Quel’delar was often described to have had. Almost worthy. Still trying to prove herself. Not good, but not evil.

Tay could have sworn the blade spoke to her. Aeva slammed the pommel of Ellemayne against the side of her head. Her vision blurred and her head rang out. Before all her senses left her she felt a harsh jerking from the back of her head and the edge of her own weapon pressed against her scalp.

You shouldn’t have provoked her, you idiot. You deserve to lose this connection to Min’da.

She didn’t know whose voice she heard.

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Tay roamed through the jungles for hours on end before she discovered any sign of the Alliance. As she arrived, bloodied and bruised, a few soldiers rushed out to help her. She only took help from one of them. This one ordered the others to set up a cot within their medical building. As they scurried off, the soldiers still at her side turned to face her, a look of concern drawn across their face. She couldn’t make out their face under the helm.

“Lady, what happened out there?” a young woman asked from underneath her helm. She half-carried, half-dragged the staggering elf towards the medical care. It took time as she tried her best to support the newcomer.

Tay shook her head a few times. “Status report on the 331st. Fill me in.”

She swore the young woman expressed surprise at her comment. “They’re… they’re still on their assignment. The commander told us to keep an eye out for them as they should return before the end of the week.” Tay breathed a sigh of relief. “You see anything of them?”

“Yeah, I did.”

As they reached the building, Tay blinked a few times to allow her eyes to adjust to the lighting. Wounded soldiers from every race and walk of life dotted the floors. Their injuries ranged from mild to severe. Tay knew immediately few with any severe injuries would live to see the end of the week. The soldier lay her down gently, next to a kaldorei who rested, passed out. The soldier said something to her about sending in an officer to ask her of the 331st.

Priests and field medics came over to treat her wounds. Tay didn’t focus on it, knowing full well she would have to focus on the pain of them cleaning out the injuries. She grit her teeth as they cleaned out her stump and her cut. It took every fiber of her being to not scream out in pain, or fling off a spew of curses in Darnassian at them. They were only doing their job.

Before they’d even finished, a man marched into the room. He made his way over to Tay, still swarmed by some of those trying to aid her. “Most of you can go see to any others. Now.” While she didn’t have many healers around her, all but one left her side to oversee the rest of the patients. This healer kept his head down and continued on with his work.

“Sir,” Tay greeted wearily. “I’d salute but I can’t exactly do that at the moment.”
The commander nodded once to her, acknowledging her greeting. “One of my troops reported to me you had something on the scouting party sent out?” Tay confirmed his question with a quick nod of her head. “I’d like to hear it as soon as possible.” The commander made to walk out of the tent, but a quick cough from Tay held him there. He turned around and stood above Tay as he waited for her.

Tay kept her voice low as she spoke. “The 331st is either dead or missing in action. Master Sergeant Ivan Petrovsky of Dalaran and Marshal Torrolf Redbeard I found dead. Petrovsky, a blade sticking out of his gut and Redbeard with his skull caved inwards.” The commander motioned for more, knowing the 331st had more to it than just two people. “Knight-Champion Aeva Petrovsky is missing. I found no trace of her. The master druid Nashathel Sorrowgale is also missing. No sign of Sergeant Major Taylande, the Silver Blade, is missing as well.”

The commander stood for a moment in the silence hanging over the room. Occasionally the silence would be interrupted by the crying of an injured fellow, the whispered reassurances of the healers, and a groan or two of pain. He pondered for a moment on the next course of action. Tay had assumed few knew of their stealth and recon assignment, but forgot to assume the commander of one of the more… permanent bases in Tanaan would know.

Of course, he’d have to.

“What’s your name, soldier?” the commander finally asked.

Tay hesitated before answering. “Soras Stormrunner, Priestess of Elune and named for my fallen aunt, also Soras Stormrunner.”

The commander nodded thoughtfully. “I’ll see to it you arrive back on Azeroth before the month is out. We’ll keep watch for those of the 331st you reported missing.” The commander spun on his heel and departed without so much as a glance back at Soras.

Soras watched the man go before the healer at her side eased her down to rest. He coaxed her into closing her eyes, to get rest before anything else. Persuaded by the gentle words and promises of safety and recovery, Soras rested her eyes and drifted off.

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A world away and half a month later, Hugin received a knock at the front door. He tiptoed down the stairs and into the common room. He’d just placed Faehnia to sleep, so he made sure not to wake her. Hugin reached the door in time to throw a coat over himself to fend off the chill of Stormwind. He planned on relocating to Darnassus soon after Tay arrived. He couldn’t stand the constant chilling winds from the north Stormwind--and, by extension Elwynn--caught.

He opened the door to find an old friend dressed in Stormwind colors. She sported a Gilnean tabard over her uniform, just to make sure everyone knew where her allegiance was. “Hugin, my friend. I’ve some news for you before I’m off. Seeing as you’re listed for her next of kin, I… well…”

“Spit it out, Tris. I’ve got a kid t’watch,” Hugin grumbled.

The woman breathed a heavy sigh and forced herself to meet his eyes. “Taylande won’t be returning home. She and a few others are reported missing. The rest are dead.”

Hugin’s face fell as he crumpled to the ground. Tears began to flow from his eyes. He couldn’t stop himself from the wave of emotion crashing over him. “I’m sorry,” Tris breathed. Hugin didn’t hear her words, trying his damnedest not to cry out. He couldn’t wake Faehnia. He wouldn’t be able to
tell the babe about her mother. Not for a long time.

His throat closed up and his chest felt like it collapsed in on itself. His shan’do, one of his closest friends. Gone. Hugin curled into a ball and heaved a large sigh, laced with pain and anger. Anger that she didn’t survive, and pain because she’d never see her child again. The woman, Tris, crouched down and rested a light hand on his shoulder.

Only a short distance away, concealed by shadow, Soras watched Hugin fall apart.

Taylande Moonblade’s heart shattered.

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