

The Ancient Ones

Chapter 11 – Enster Island

“Galla smiled a lot and if anyone asked, she reported that the chaos cloud on the hill was still just a cloud and that it hadn’t moved away from the hill. She did set alarms at night though, around their entire camp site. Just a few magical firecrackers, to be set off if anything strange and large came close to where they all slept. There was no telling with chaos clouds; sometimes they could become a full on storm.”



The boat might have remained some distance away from the Muddy’s Island all night, waiting for the dull glow of first light on the rift. Tejan couldn’t be sure, but the first yell about a boat arriving was before she’d had her piece of fruit which she called breakfast. Long and low, Sökkelf told her the boat was the kind used for collecting shellfish in shallow waters. The boat had sails and oars and was painted mostly white. The crew were waiving at the people on the beach, but it was Sökkelf who said what she was thinking. He said it quietly, even though they were some distance from the others. “Nice boat.....But it will only hold a third of us.” Said Sökkelf.

“We knew this might happen.....They know we might have to send for more boats.” Said Tejan.

“I can’t see anyone volunteering to remain.” Said Sökkelf. “You wait.....There will be trouble.”

So far there was enough food and drinking water, but even a fool could tell that wasn’t going to last. Tejan wouldn’t have volunteered to wait for the next boat and she assumed the passengers of the Angel’s Gaze would be no keener than her. Some had children with them, heading for a new life on the other side of the Sacred Sea. Cuddled up under a blanket one night at the far tip of Muddy’s; they’d decided on the way they’d deal with one boat and too many people.

“There are whole families sleeping under the stars on Muddy’s.” Said Tejan. “They’ll be uncomfortable and hungry waiting for more boats, but they will survive.”

“So, what do you propose we do ?” Asked Sökkelf. “We know the trouble makers, the ones likely to begin fighting over space on the boat. Are we going to take their weapons from them ?”

“I did think about that, but it would just start the violence much sooner.” Said Tejan.

They knew the answer; they’d both talked it over several times before. If it hadn’t been for the families, Tejan might have been happy for matters to become a blood bath. They had no responsibility to keep idiot passengers safe, especially from their own stupidity. It was the children though; they had to be kept safe.

“Say it.....Recite the plan, Tejan.” Said Sökkelf. “I know you want to.”

“You sent for the boat, so it’s ours.” Said Tejan. “We definitely won’t be waiting for other boats to arrive. We decide who goes with us and the families come top of the list. There will be no mercy shown to any who try to use violence against us, or the crew of the boat. I’m sure you and I can deal with a few aggressive passengers. Once they realise we mean business, most will wait for the other boats to arrive.”

“By mean business, you mean killing the malcontents if we have to ?” Asked Sökkelf.

“Yes.....I mean killing anyone who tries to harm us.” Said Tejan.

Time had passed and the boat had arrived, the long and low shellfish fishing boat. Tejan had no doubt that the malcontents had worked on their own plan to grab the boat. The people walking

around with swords on their belts had names, of course they did. Tejan simply wasn't interested in their names, just whether they intended harm to her and Sockelf. There was one particularly large Dredger hybrid though, whose sheer size made his name memorable. Fussle was his name and Tejan was sure there was Shelzak in him somewhere; something big Shelzak and toxic in his ancestry. Fussle had kept out of the fighting on the beach, but since then he'd become a bit of a bully. If he started anything against her or Sockelf, Tejan would have no hesitation in removing Fussle from the land of the living. Sockelf and her were there as the boat dropped anchor. If there was going to be trouble, it would happen soon.

"The boat is here, but there's not enough room on for everyone." Someone said.

"It's a shellfish boat.....We can get them to send more of them." Said Sockelf.

A few people almost snarled at the admission that Tejan and Sockelf weren't going to be waiting on Muddy's for the next boat. Tejan could appreciate how hard it was to tell people to relax, while you were getting on the first transport out; she'd been there a few times before.

"Who makes the decision?" Asked Fussle. "Who decided who gets to leave on this boat?"

"As we agreed.....I'll be making the final decision on that." Said Tejan.

Fussle had always had a blade, but he'd acquired a better one from somewhere; probably by bullying a surviving crew member of the Angel's Gaze. Not always good to swap an old and well used blade for something new and untested. Fussle was playing with the hilt of his newly acquired blade.

"I never remember agreeing to that." Said Fussle.

"I don't remember that either." Said one of his gang.

"It's the way it will be, Fussle." Said Tejan. "I'll decide who leaves on this boat.....Get used to that idea."

Things seemed to be going well, with Fussle sort of shrugging at her a few times. It was obvious he wasn't happy, but made no attempt to stop her getting families onto the boat. The crew on the rescue boat helped them, though they quickly picked up the atmosphere on Muddy's and began to carry weapons.

"I think this might actually work." Said Sockelf.

Tejan had told him several times about her theory on deities who looked after a person's luck; good and bad. She'd spent some time explaining that verbally taking good luck for granted, was often punished. After all, that was the only way to explain much of the day to day madness they saw. Yet, Sockelf seemed to have forgotten their discussions. The punishment of the deities was instant, savage and merciless.

"No, get them off the boat." Yelled Fussle. "For all we know, they paid you to go first, Tejan. We're on the first boat, me and my friends."

"Yeah.....No paying for places on the boat." Said one of his gang.

No paying to go on the boat was taken up by Fussle's gang and a few of the people left standing on the beach. The families on the boat looked very nervous. Some were swearing by the Nine Divines that they hadn't paid anyone to go on the rescue boat. When Fussle made his move it surprised Tejan, it definitely surprised the families on the rescue boat. Fussle cut the throat of a woman on the beach, someone queueing to get on. She appeared to be a random kill, designed to terrorise everyone on the boat.

"Everyone off the boat." Shouted Fussle. "I'll decide who gets a place on the boat."

Many of the children were crying and a few of the adults. As if resigned to obeying the bully, most were beginning to pick up their things and get off the boat. Tejan knew the moment had come. She had to act, or the beach would soon be a scene of carnage and chaos.

"No.....Everyone stay where you are." Yelled Tejan.

She leapt off the boat, relying on the soft sand to cushion her landing and muscles still massively improved by her time in The Damned. Sockelf followed her; she caught him clambering off the boat out of the corner of her eye. The particularly mouthy member of Fussle's gang came around behind her, but Tejan deliberately ignored him. If she couldn't rely on Sockelf to watch her back, she'd be in trouble, but she did trust him; completely. There was a yell as Sockelf killed the gang member, though Tejan deliberately ignored what had happened. The balance of power on the beach had just shifted away from Fussle.

"We can talk about who gets on the boat." Said Fussle.

"Too late for that." Said Tejan.

He was huge and smelled bad, though there was no excuse for that. Fussle was living on the beach with his gang, right next to the ocean. He came at her and Fussle had to be close to eight feet tall and wide with it. Heavy, but he still seemed to be able to move pretty fast. Sockelf was there, watching her back; so she could concentrate on dodging blows from Fussle's bright shiny sword. Once she knocked his blow aside with her own blade. Mainly though, she just dodged and made him run after her. As Tejan suspected, the massive hybrid was soon breathing hard and sweating a lot.

"You've got skills.....I'll give you that." Said Tejan. "No stamina though."

Why Fussle chose that moment to get a kind of rage anger, no one was ever likely to know. Sword held up to strike at her, he came at her like an angry Roruss. No dodging this time, Tejan moved towards him and drove her blade into his abdomen. Pure blood Shelzaks had armour plates under their skin, but Fussle was far more Dredger than Shelzak. Her blade went in deep and Tejan twisted it around a few times. Internal organs of hybrids were a bit of a mystery to her, but scrambling anything essential was likely to kill Fussle. He died and fell to the ground. It didn't surprise her that none of his gang seemed keen on avenging his death. The beach was actually surprisingly quiet, considering what had just occurred.

"Those on the boat, stay on the boat." Yelled Tejan. "Families get on next, especially those with children. Others can claim a place as long as they ask me nicely."

"And behave yourselves.....No more violence." Shouted Sockelf.

Hmmmm, there was a lot of irony in that statement, but Tejan chose to ignore it. She'd tease Sockelf about it later, preferably in bed and in the post coital glow.

"You heard the lady." Someone yelled. "No giving her anymore crap."

It took a while to get everyone together and bring their things onto the boat. When the boat pulled up the anchor and left Muddy's, it was close to having as many on board as was safe. Sadly, there were still a lot of people left on the beach.

"We'll send boats to pick you all up." Sockelf yelled.

Tejan had said it many times to lots of worried faces on the beach. The truth was that whether the boats arrived wasn't really up to her; it wasn't up to Sockelf either. It was really all about how the selfish boat owners felt about going to Muddy's, to pick everyone up. There had been violence.....Tejan wouldn't have been surprised if the rescue boats never arrived at Muddy's. The children were all safe though, even two who'd run away at one point.

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Galla had sensed something about the island a couple of miles in front of the Morning Tide. Not a bad feeling, but there was a definite focus of chaos on the tree covered island. Not that chaos was always a bad thing; much of her magic was based around chaos. She'd already sent Bird to investigate, with instructions to be careful.

"I'm not telling you how many years I've sailed these waters." Said Enster Tilly. "I rarely come this way, but others do. I've never seen or heard tell of an island at this spot."

"If it turns out to be a place of magic, they'll be calling it Enster Island." Said Galla. "It's traditional to name such places after the captain of the ship which discovered it."

"Enster Island indeed." Said Enster. "I must admit though, I don't hate the idea."

"Or maybe Tilly Archipelago, if there's a chain of small islands." Said Galla. "We'll know more when Bird returns."

"I prefer Enster Island."

By the time Bird returned they could see it looked like just one large island; where no island had been seen before; at least according to Enster Tilly. Lots of trees close to the beach and even a large hill in the centre of what everyone was beginning to call Enster Island. Bird had flapped his wings a long way to get there and back. He had learned quite a bit though.

"There's a lake by the hill." Said Bird. "Lots of fresh water.....Fruit on the trees and I saw creatures moving through the trees. There may be good hunting on Enster Island."

Enster had stopped objecting to people calling it Enster Island; or pretending to object. Once an idea gets up a good forward motion, there's no stopping it and Enster knew that.

"Well Captain, are we dropping anchor to explore Enster Island?" Asked Galla.

"Of course we are." Said Bird

"Bird is right, of course we are." Said Enster. "A mysterious island where no island should be....If nothing else it'll be a boost to morale when my crew need it."

Seren and Itzel didn't need the ship's boats to get ashore. There they were, soaring over the island, diving down to look at the wooded areas. Bird was good at looking over an area, but even Galla had to accept that two dark angels would do the job better. By the time everyone settled down in camp for an evening meal, they'd know everything there was to know about Enster Island.

"Of course, the big question is how long we stay here." Said Lilleth.

"We're not on a timetable." Said Enster. "And we've no idea how long it'll take us to cross this part of the sacred sea. I like the idea of getting as much water and provisions onto the ship as we can."

"It is your ship.....I've no objections to spending some time here." Said Seren.

"You're unusually quiet, Galla." Said Adamaz. "Are you happy to be on Enster Island for a few nights?"

There was still the area of chaos near the top of the hill, which seemed to defy explanation. Apart from that, it seemed an almost idyllic spot for a little rest and recuperation. Someone had caught a creature in the woods that resembles a rock hopper and it tasted good; after being in the cook pot for a while.

"My concerns are slight and probably unfounded." Said Galla. "And as Seren said, it is Enster's ship."

"That's decided then, we'll spend a few days here." Said Enster.

Galla smiled a lot and if anyone asked, she reported that the chaos cloud on the hill was still just a cloud and that it hadn't moved away from the hill. She did set alarms at night though, around their entire camp site. Just a few magical firecrackers, to be set off if anything strange and large came close to where they all slept. There was no telling with chaos clouds; sometimes they could become a full on storm. Water barrels on the Morning Tide were filled from the fresh water lake and sacks filled with fruit from the trees. Slightly unripe fruit of course, to make it last longer. Someone had suggested taking a few live creatures from the forest with them, but Enster had said no to that.

"Been there.....They escape and shit everywhere." Enster had said.

Privately she'd told Galla about crews making pets of furry creatures intended for the pot, which was worse than them escaping and stinking the hold out with their bodily excretions. Galla had looked at Bird, her rather annoying pet and decided he wasn't that bad to live with. Galla's alarms went off on their third night on Enster Island. The clamour began with a clattering noise and was joined by Bird screeching that something was coming down the hill, several somethings.

"That damned Bird." Muttered Galla. "I'd put him in the pot if I hadn't had him for so long."

Dressing required a lot of patience and the ability to keep calm. At least three people yelled through the flap on her tent, only to be told to go away. Galla filled one pocket of her robe with lesser powders. They'd kill most mortal creatures, but nothing too large, or too magical. Into her other pocket went two major powders. From her experience they'd kill anything and everything; Galla had even used one to send a senior chaos enforcer into the void. A nice magical blade down her belt and she left her tent, about ten minutes after Bird had started screeching.

"They're here.....The chaos creatures are here." Yelled Bird.

Seren went over her head, wings beating like fury. There was a large bang from close to the hill and Lilleth ran from one side of their camp to the other. There was a lot going on, it appeared to be a large battle was going on. Galla had learned that the best way to deal with a large battle, was to concentrate on whatever might be intending to do her harm.

"Crap." Muttered Galla, as her fingers opened a lesser powder.

Jangar Beasts could come in several sizes; a few experts suggested they weren't a single species. Small Jangar were small furry creatures who could be domesticated as pets, or farmed for meat. There was a certain smell about small Jangar, but many learned to love them. Large Jangar Beasts didn't have an odour, they stank. Used as beasts of burden pulling carts, even those who owned them rarely cared for the bad tempered brutes. Four legged and dangerous was the usual description and two of them were running in Galla's direction. The snorting probably meant that they intended to kill her. The blood on their huge paws indicated that they'd attacked others before finding Galla. All that lethality on four legs, yet Galla wouldn't have seen them without her ability to see in the ultraviolet back wash that filled the rifts.

"Mindless brutes." Muttered Galla.

Galla needed to create a minor spell of immobility to go with her powder, though the immobility didn't need to last long. There was a gap between the noisy, stinking beasts, which was useful. Galla let them get really close before using the immobility spell. It worked, her spells always worked.

"Foul beasts.....You won't hurt anyone else this night." Galla muttered.

The two heavy Jangar Beasts were stopped in their stride for a while, the vapour in their hot breath hung motionless in the air. Galla used a little of her lesser powder, sprinkling it into the palm of her hand. She blew some of it into the nostrils of one Jangar, before blowing the remainder into the nostrils of the second. It was all the kind of double magic she'd won prizes for in her youth. Galla walked between the beasts and had got a few feet past their dung coated tails, when the immobility spell stopped working. There was a snort, as they must have realised the creature on two legs they'd intended stomping to death; was gone.

"Particularly mindless brutes." Muttered Galla.

The two huge Jangar thundered on for a few paces, before Galla's powder worked. Their breathing became quite noisy, as a green caustic phlegm began to come out of their noses. A minute later they were dead on the ground. Their deaths had been fast, but not painless. Now she had time, Galla called her pet.

"Bird.....Bird." She shouted. "Are you still alive?"

He was there, flying around her before landing on her shoulder. Galla had run out of Nesh Bugs, but she had some finely shredded rock cropper in a box. Two tiny pieces and Bird looked happy.

"Good Galla.....Good food." Said Bird.

"Be careful, I sense chaos magic at work here tonight." Said Galla.

"I am always careful." Said Bird.

"I know, but the Jangar are very large and you are very small." Said Galla.

"Then I will be extra, extra careful." Said Bird.

He was gone into the night, leaving just a squawking sound behind him. Galla walked through the camp, looking for any wounded requiring her healing skills. There was one of Enster's crew lying in a pool of her own blood and dead; she'd been dead for a few minutes. Something had stomped on her chest until she was dead. Galla didn't know her name, but she was one of them, so she grieved for her.

"They won't call this place Enster Island now." Muttered Galla. "Hell Island maybe, or the Island of Death.....Maybe even Chaos Island."

Something came at Galla on two legs. It was covered in fur and had the stink of a Jangar about it. Yet it walked like a normal Dredger Hybrid. No magic, she used her blade on it; stabbing over a dozen times until it was dead at her feet. Chaos could do that, creating grotesque chimera that nature would never create. She kicked the beast to make sure it was dead.

"We need to leave this place at first light." Galla muttered.

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Rayan Morresa knew Tandalla well, but only the places the public were allowed to go. She knew the inside of the Main Temple too, but only as a late night burglar; she'd almost been caught once. It had just been for a look around though; a wander along corridors to gain knowledge that might be useful if the speaking crystal in the library was broken. Miscah Harran had been able to enter just about everywhere in the temple as an honoured guest, as had N'Faddy; his wife. Actually N'Faddy was linked to the now dead Miscah by children; an arrangement generally acknowledged as being as long term and legally binding as marriage. Rayan just hoped she wasn't about to get N'Faddy killed; leaving her children as orphans.

"There." Said N'Faddy, while pointing. "The portal is in the building made of yellow stones. Miscah used to use the portal when he was working early, or particularly late. Of course, I remembered the words to activate the portal."

"Of course you did." Said Rayan. "Will the building be guarded?"

"Sometimes there was a single guard, but not always." Said N'Faddy. "Unlike the library portal, few use the portal into the temple; most use the front door."

"Let's hope they haven't upgraded security." Said Rayan.

N'Faddy knew the simple magical key to the outside door. She pressed two fingers on a particular part of the doorframe and said two words. There was a click and the door opened. Down the hallway, second door on the left and the security hadn't been changed. There weren't any guards in the portal room. Just half a bottle of ale and a crust of bread, to show a guard had probably been there during the night.

"Good, no guards.....We might actually survive coming here." Said N'Faddy.

"I will help you and your kids get to safety after we leave here." Said Rayan

N'Faddy gave her a long gaze and obviously believed her.

"Where ?.....Where will you take us?"

"Let's talk about that when I've done what I came here to do." Said Rayan.

N'Faddy pressed her hand on the wall, in a place that looked like a grubby mark on the plaster. Two long words in Old Imperial and a swirling portal opened in the centre of the room. It seemed they had to be quick.

"The portal isn't active for long." Said N'Faddy.

Luck ! Rayan had given up trying to understand it, or who might be driving it. Some believed in deities who controlled luck, but Rayan had never taken to that idea. The solitary guard in the hallway where the portal took them, could have been anywhere else in the temple; it was a very large building. But there he was, looking at them as if he didn't quite believe what he was seeing. The word had obviously got around about Rayan being a spy, maybe N'Faddy too. Before he could yell for help, Rayan had used her strong hands and fingernails to rip out his throat. N'Faddy gasped, but otherwise she seemed to take the whole thing in her stride.

"We need to move his body somewhere." Said Rayan.

"There's a cupboard."

Into the cupboard full of cleaning things he went; they even used a mop and bucket to clean up the guard's blood. As soon as someone opened the cupboard, the guards would be everywhere. For the time being, the hallway looked clean and tidy; definitely not somewhere where a Kveld had ripped the throat out of a guard.

"Do you know the way to speaking tube from here ?" Asked Rayan.

She was cool and calm, looking around and then pointing towards a set of double doors. Rayan doubted if she'd have taken everything so coolly. Death was dramatic and dark, unless you were used to it. Rayan was beginning to suspect that N'Faddy hadn't always been a quiet and seemingly docile mother.

"Through the doors and straight on." Said N'Faddy. "It's quite a way."

It had been bad luck; they walked carefully and silently for a good fifteen minutes, without seeing a guard; without actually seeing anyone. It may well have been the time the clerics of the temple went to pray; but Rayan wasn't sure. Eventually they were stood in front of a heavy looking door made of some kind of hardwood. There was the sound of voices coming from the other side of the door.

N'Faddy leant towards her and whispered in her ear.

"If I die here.....Look after my children."

It was a crazy thing to ask. Many would say yes and not mean it. Rayan wasn't even a hybrid in the usual meaning of the word, yet she felt a lot of empathy for N'Faddy. When she whispered back at the worried looking Ubari female hybrid; she meant what she said.

"I will, I give you my word." Said Rayan. "Just don't die."

"I'll try not to."

Three distinct voices on the other side of the door, they were outnumbered. On the other hand; Rayan always said she was worth at least half a dozen well trained hybrids in a fight. Rayan pushed the doors and they weren't locked. Her blade was in her hands as she strode into the chamber beyond the door; N'Faddy was following her.

"Relax and don't go for your weapons." Yelled Rayan. "You've no need to die here."

So of course they did just that, people always did. The clerics in the room began getting noisy and agitated, while waving their weapons around. Everyone always seems to assume they can win a fight if the numbers are in their favour, which just isn't true. N'Faddy killed the first cleric with a sword strike to the neck so powerful; it nearly took his head off. He lay bleeding to death on the floor, which greatly agitated the two survivors.

"Kill us and a Roruss will come for you." One of them yelled.

Roruss were rare, staggeringly rare and said to be indestructible. Rayan would have said they were a myth, if she hadn't seen one with her own eyes. The chances of two low level clerics being guarded by a Roruss were too absurd to calculate.

"Yeah.....And I'm the ghost of Nigon." Said Rayan.

Rayan preferred her hands, nails and strength to a blade. She grabbed the cleric's head and twisted until it almost came away in her hands. There was a loud gurgling sound; before the cleric died in front of her. That left just one enemy, a female cleric, which might give N'Faddy a few issues.

Females didn't like killing other females; there were even books on it in the Great Library in the City of the Lost God. Rayan had read one, during one of her night time raids seeking information.

"N'Faddy I know you." Said the female cleric. "We've seen each other in the temple, my children know yours. Don't kill me.....I won't say that I saw you today."

Crap of course, the cleric would be telling the guards everything, the second they left the temple.

Leaving her alive was a huge risk, but N'Faddy might not see it that way. N'Faddy used a small assassin style blade on the cleric, jamming it hard into her left eye. The blade penetrated the brain. A bloody and brutal way to kill an enemy, but it was said to be a fast and painless way to die.

"Well done." Said Rayan.

"She knew my kids." Said N'Faddy. "They'd have never been safe for the rest of their lives."

Rayan agreed with her totally, but that would have to be a conversation for another day.

"Do you know where the speaking tube is from here ?" Asked Rayan.

"Yes, this way.....It's in the room used for assorted paraphernalia like that."

Through the door opposite the one they'd come in through and into another hallway. N'Faddy entered about the third door on the right, which was grubby room; full of dirt and dust.

"This chest; we'll need to get it onto a table." Said N'Faddy.

A heavy chest, they lifted it together and placed it onto a large and sturdy looking table. Whatever else the speaking tube might be, it wasn't something that could be accurately described as portable. Rayan lifted back the top of the chest, to reveal a complex device, attached to a long piece of tubing.

"Lift it out of the chest, it'll be easier to use." Said N'Faddy.

As they lifted the device, there was the sound of talking from further along the hallway. Time definitely wasn't on their side; the dead clerics would soon be discovered. How was the device powered ? Rayan had no idea, but N'Faddy twisted two dials and there was a low buzzing sound. She handed her the end of the thinnest tube.

"I set it for Faal's quarters in the imperial palace." Said N'Faddy. "If he isn't there, I can set it for other key places, but you mentioned Faalíh Ha'adask."

"What do I do with the tube ?" Asked Rayan.

"Hold it to your mouth and talk, quietly.....Easy as that."

The speaking tube contraption worked. First there was Jenda talking to her, Faal's assistant. Once she realised the importance of what Rayan had to say, she went and fetched Faal. The problem was time ticking away, when anyone might discover them, or those they'd left dead in their wake.

"Hello, this is Faal.....Is that really Rayan Morresa ?"

"It is, I was given the phrase My Aunt Rose to prove my identity."

"I know your voice anyway." Said Faal. "What have you to tell me ?"

There had to be a limit to what she said, Rayan knew anyone might be listening in to her conversation with Faal, Magician from Gateway and trusted member of Muzzie's inner circle. Plus she had promised N'Faddy to keep the conversation short.

“Two mornings ago, I witnessed what looked like the entire Tandallan armour pour out of the gates of the city. By what they were carrying, I’m certain they were heading for Nara-Unadaris. They obviously mean to take control of the portals.”

“You’re sure about this ?” Asked Faal.

“I am totally sure.” Said Rayan. “Tandalla are making their move against the empire.”

“Thank you, I will inform the emperor.” Said Faal. “Do you have a means of escape from Tandalla ?”

“I do, thank you.”

There was a click and Faal had gone. N’Faddy was holding an apothecary’s hammer in her hand and looking at the speaking tube contraption; her meaning was obvious.

“Yes, make sure no one else can use it.” Said Rayan.

N’Faddy hit the device several times, causing a small flash of light and a little smoke. Once again the guards had been alerted in some way; there was the rumble of running feet over marble floors.

Rayan grabbed N’Faddy’s hand, pulling her to her feet.

“Come on, we have your children to get out of the city.” Said Rayan.

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