

## The Ancient Ones

### Chapter 8 – Ezzel Pinthrad

**“There had been a Pinthrad as clerk to the Sorcerers Guild, since the guild had been nothing but a few magic users meeting in a back room somewhere. It had become a tradition and Ezzel Pinthrad often thought that if it hadn’t been for a little bad luck.....The Pinthrad family would have been hereditary leaders of the guild. Every organisation needed those at the top, those making the decisions. Then there were those at the bottom, who actually did the work. In the middle were those like Pinthrad, who entered figures in ledgers and organised everything.” – The Last Emperor, Chapter 30**



Seren could have broken open the front door to the wooden shack, it was a long way from being the toughest door she’d ever come across. But she had mentioned them just borrowing the shack for the night. Locking it up again when they left required the door to still be in one piece. Galla was passing her hands over the door, looking for traps.

“Nothing.....No traps and a lock I can have open in a few seconds.” Said Galla.

“Just get us out of this continual rain, it’s no longer amusing.” Said Lilleth.

“I don’t think it ever was amusing.” Said Ash.

Only light rain, but Seren tended to agree; they’d been out in it too long and everyone’s clothes looked drenched. Not that dark angels ever wore much in the way of clothing.

“A bed.....I want there to be lots of beds in there.” Said Seren.

“And a wood burning stove.....I beg the Nine Divines for a stove.” Said Lilleth.

Galla spoke the words of a simple cantrip and made one hand gesture over the door lock. There was a click and the door opened. It was dark in the shack, all the windows had outside shutters, which had all been closed.

“Someone open the shutters.” Said Seren.

“I’ll do it.” Said Itzel.

Seren had given up on trying to work out how much daylight was left in the day; they’d been stuck in the caves for far too long. There was daylight though and she wanted to enjoy every minute of it.

Once the shutters had been opened it was obvious the windows were filthy, but they could see the inside of the shack. There were beds, but only enough for half of them. No bedding, but still better than putting their bedrolls on the grubby damp floor of a cave. Much to Lilleth’s delight there was a wood burning stove.

“There are logs outside.....I saw them as we arrived.” Said Dava.

“Well done, Dava.....You just volunteered to collect some of them.” Said Seren.

“I’ll go and help her.” Said Jelran.

Adamaz was giving her the look; the are you letting them go alone look. They weren’t kids though and as they’d both demonstrated quite a few times, they weren’t helpless.

“Well, I wouldn’t come here for a holiday.” Said Lilleth. “But this shack will do.”

“At least the roof doesn’t seem to leak.” Added Ash.

Food was what they had left from the dry food they’d had with them when they’d entered the caves. It was given a bit more flavour with some sliced cave beast, which still looked reasonably fresh. Not a

perfect meal, but it was quick and easy to prepare. Wet clothes were spread on the floor around the stove. People wore what spare clothing they had, even if it didn't quite cover everything. Seren had learned that fighting together can bond a fairly diverse group of people. No one seemed worried about the occasional flash of nudity; including the two young Algarians.

"We're still in unknown territory." Said Seren. "We may still be in danger. I want two volunteers for the first watch of the night."

"We'll do it." Said Dava. "Jelran and I will take the first watch."

Two young humans, obviously deeply in love. It had red flags all over it, but Seren didn't want to discourage them.

"You need to be alert." Said Seren. "Not too much getting up to.....You know."

"We won't let you down." Said Jelran.

"Fine.....Dava and Jelran will do the first watch." Said Seren. "Do I have volunteers for the second watch?"

"I'll do it, if someone will do it with me?" Asked Ash.

"I'll sit the watch with Ash." Said Lilleth.

They were definitely bonding; Adamaz even took a watch with Itzel. Seren doubted if she'd sleep that well in the shack, it wasn't exactly the most secure place her group had slept. Actually she was asleep as soon as her head rested on the pillow end of her bedroll.

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"I was hoping we might visit the island of my birth." Said Sockkelf. "But the captain says we'll come no closer than two or three miles to Tomma Island."

Tejan knew a lot about the rifts, including the names of the Old Gods. Tomma-Goran had built the City of the Lost God and many of the buildings were indestructible from being created by such a powerful deity. Having an island named after him on the arse end of the first rift though; that she hadn't known.

"Another time we'll find a ship that stops at Tomma Island." Said Tejan.

Sockkelf looked at her as if wondering if she was being sarcastic. Being honest, Tejan wasn't sure if she was, or wasn't. Tomma sounded like just another beautiful island paradise to her, but to Sockkelf.....It would always be home; the place where his mother had given birth to him.

"I meant that, we'll come for a holiday or something." She added.

"You'll love it, I promise." Said Sockkelf.

What he thought of her was beginning to matter to her. That was a bit of a red flag in her line of work. Too late to change that though, apart from cutting his throat in the dark and dropping him over the side of the Angel's Gaze. She'd dismissed that idea from her mind almost as soon as they'd become lovers. Tejan was looking forward to Sockkelf's company for the twenty, maybe twenty one days it would take them to reach Windhome Harbour on the other side of the Sacred Sea.

"So many islands in the Sacred Sea." Said Tejan. "Are they all named after deities?"

"No, the one we're about to pass is where I came fishing as a child." Said Sockkelf. "A few of us came here, the fishing was always good. It's called Muddy's after some old timer who lived in a cabin on the island. A bit of an eccentric, he died some time ago."

They moved across the deck of the Angel's Gaze to get a better view of Muddy's island. Not a large island, Tejan couldn't imagine living there alone for years and years. Sockkelf might have been the first to see the ship coming around the island and heading towards them. He was pointing it out to her before the lookout up in the rigging was yelling about it.

"Ship.....Ship off the port side." Yelled the crewman. "Black sails.....Might be Sagurian."

"Who are the Sagurian ?" Asked Tejan.

"A religious cult, who may attack us." Said Sockkelf. "On the other hand they may shout blessings at us as we go past, or even totally ignore us."

"They sound a little unpredictable." Said Tejan.

"Be ready to use your blade.....Just in case." Said Sockkelf.

Tejan remembered hearing about several different chaos cults that had spread right across the rifts. Get them on a good day when their particular demon deity was smiling; and they could be delightful people. On a bad day, they might try to eviscerate you.

"Are the Sagurians a chaos cult ?" She asked.

"Yes, one of the worst." Said Sockkelf

The sleek ship with black sails was heading straight at them, hardly the act of a friendly vessel. There was no shouted announcement from the captain of the Angel's Gaze, but everyone knew what was likely to happen next.

"Prepare for a collision." Yelled one of the crew up in the rigging.

"Collision!?!.....They're about to deliberately ram us." Said Tejan.

"Grab hold of something solid." Yelled Sockkelf.

He was making himself useful, a sure sign that he'd once commanded warriors at some time in the past. It occurred to Tejan that she'd poured out information about herself, yet knew little about the past of the male hybrid she was sharing a bed with.

"May the Nine Divines protect us !" Someone shouted.

Both sides were likely to be calling on the same Old Gods. Did whoever shouted the loudest get their help ? Tejan doubted if it was that simple. It was more than likely that the Nine Divines were long gone; boiled away into the wastes of eternity.

"Oh crap.....Here we go." Said Tejan.

The Angel's Gaze was old, but strongly built. It looked the sort of ship which could survive the worst of storms. The sleek ship of the Sagurians looked more intended for ocean racing than brutal warfare. The prow of the enemy ship hit the side of the Angel's Gaze and there was no denying it had done damage, maybe enough to send the ship to the bottom of the Sacred Sea. In doing that damage, it seemed to have caused its own demise. The front of the black sailed ship was gone, water was pouring inside. The jolt of the ramming had sent a few people into the water and they seemed confused about where to swim to. The Sagurians had lowered large ladders from their vessel to the Angel's Gaze.

"The bastards are going to board us." Said Sockkelf.

"Two can play at the game." Said Tejan. "Come on, we can use those ladders to get onto their ship."

"But their ship is sinking." Said Sockkelf.

"Not for a while.....Not until after we've had some fun." Said Tejan.

It was a crazy idea, but nowhere was safe and it was likely that both ships would sink. Tejan wanted an opportunity to send members of the chaos cult to meet the demon they worshipped. Sockkelf followed her, as Tejan fought her way onto the Sagurian ship. She might have made an unwise choice; the black sailed ship looked likely to sink first. Tejan used her blade on two cult members, enjoying the look of fear on their faces.

"Didn't expect to come across a trained fighter, did you ?" She asked.

They tried their best, but they tried and died. They had good swords and reasonable armour, but very little skill with the weapons they'd been given.

"Come on, let's find their captain." Said Tejan.

"I'll be right behind you." Said Sockelf.

There was a lot of shouting and quite a bit of screaming too. They could have been helping the passengers of the Angel's Gaze into the boats, but Tejan had a need. She wanted payback against whoever had organised the attack. They had taken her idea of how the next twenty or so days would go and ripped it apart. She no longer felt in control, which angered her. The captain of the black sailed ship had to suffer. Even if it cost her life, the captain had to die; preferably slowly. Tejan grabbed a male in clerical robes by the throat.

"Where is the captain of this vessel?" She asked.

He made a muffled sound and pointed, which was enough to give her a good idea of where the captain had his cabin. As a reward, she plunged her blade into the chest of the cleric, before leaving him to bleed to death.

"The captain will soon know they picked on the wrong people." Said Tejan.

"We'll show the bastard." Said Sockelf.

There was an explosion, a huge and fiery explosion. As with other ships crossing the Sacred Sea, the Angel's Gaze carried all sort of freight. Some of it was obviously highly volatile. Up went the cargo hold and up went the ship. The sails were alight in seconds and there was a second explosion. Tejan was knocked off her feet as she still ran towards the captain's cabin. That was her way, once a plan was in her head, she kept to it. The explosion bounced her around, her head colliding with something solid. The next thing she knew was being dragged out of the sea and onto a sandy beach.

"Are you with me?" Asked Sockelf. "You were a bit dazed and confused for a while."

"Still have a huge headache.....Where are we?" Asked Tejan.

"We're on Muddy's island." Said Sockelf.

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They'd left the shack early, with an entire period of daylight to look for the shore of the Sacred Sea. Adamaz had maps which showed the position of a few of the largest towns, but as he freely admitted.

"Fishing villages tend to spring up and become abandoned just as quickly." He said. "Often named after one of the local heroes, when the fishing gets bad; they move on."

"When we find a fishing village, how do we get a boat?" Asked Dava.

Sadly it wasn't telepathy, that would have been very useful. Adamaz had known Seren since she'd been created out of fire, blood and the dry remains of other dark angels. They knew each other and Seren was giving him a pretty good look of, do we tell her? Adamaz shrugged in reply, which meant it was her choice.

"If we can we'll hire a ship and crew to take us across the Sacred Sea." Said Seren. "We'll pay them well and everyone will part as friends."

"And if they won't agree to hiring us a boat?" Asked Jelran.

If the young Algarians were going to act as the group conscience, Adamaz might start reminding them about illegal weapons trading and their part in it. Ash of all people had given him a quick update on the two human members of their group. Seren gave a cough, which usually meant she was going to be truthful; but didn't like it.

"If no one in the village will charter us a fishing boat, we'll take one." Said Seren.

"The best looking boat in the village." Added Itzel.

Dava and Jelran muttered quietly at each other, though not for long. Adamaz had noticed that Dava tended to speak for both of them.

"Fine.....We'll keep our weapons ready." Said Dava.

Adamaz laughed and slapped Dava on the back. Not the sort of reaction she'd probably been expecting, but Adamaz felt it was appropriate.

"I definitely think we're going to get on well." Said Adamaz.

"My Dredgers will do what may be required." Said Chenad Gurd.

As the leader of over thirty tough as nails Dredgers, Chenad's words meant a great deal. Adamaz hoped they'd obtain a boat peacefully. Getting to the other side of Sacred Sea was essential though, even if they had to fight for a boat.

Time was different in that part of the first rift, the period of light was definitely longer. It should have been dusk, but there was still plenty of light; when they came to the shore of a vast ocean.

"This has to be the Sacred Sea." Said Ash. "I've heard of oceans, but never seen one."

"We have, Algaria has lots of wide deep oceans." Said Dava.

"It's.....Beautiful." Said Galla.

"I wonder if I could fly to the other side." Said Itzel.

"I heard there are islands.....Maybe if you island hopped." Said Lilleth.

The coastline bent around and there were huge bays. When they found the village, it seemed to have been deliberately hidden away in a wide calm bay. Quite a large village and there were at least six boats tied up against a long jetty.

"Which boat do we try and hire?" Asked Jelran.

"The best looking one out of the lot." Said Seren.

"I like the look of the one with red sails." Said Ash.

Dark angels might have been a problem, some places considered them to be creatures of evil. As they walked into the village there was a lot of pointing from the children. Some mothers dragged their offspring indoors, but on the whole; Adamaz thought things were going well. There were a lot of smiles and no brandishing of swords.

"Can we talk to them?" Asked Ash. "Do they speak our language?"

"They'll deny having any contact with the City of the Lost God." Said Galla. "But talk to them in Old Imperial and they'll understand you well enough."

Seren had found two young men who seemed eager to talk to a real live dark angel. She returned to tell them she'd found the place where the fishermen gathered for a drink. It seemed the village was called Hunthreads and it was named after a local hero from way back in time. As for the boat with the red sails? That was the 'Morning Tide' and its captain was a local woman called Enster Tilly. Adamaz admired Seren's ability to get key information as quickly as possible.

"So, we're hiring the boat with red sails." Asked Galla.

"Ash has a good eye; it's the best boat in the bay." Said Seren. "If it's for hire.....I intend to hire it."

As with such small out of the way places, the place where the locals gathered for a drink would never win prizes for atmosphere and décor. Adamaz thought it was a scruffy dump, but it was known as Hunthreads Revenge. Revenge for what? He suspected it was revenge for the dreadful ale. They were made welcome though and someone was sent for Enster, captain of the Morning Tide.

"Oh, this ale.....Still, better than going without." Said Adamaz.

"It is fairly grim stuff." Added Lilleth.

Dava seemed happy to drink it, but Jelran was pulling a face after every mouthful. There was a definite taste of something fishy about the ale. Then again, there were drinking in a village where everything probably tasted a little of fish. Luckily, Enster arrived fairly quickly.

"I'm Enster Tilly.....I heard you want to see me." Said Enster.

A short and rather tubby hybrid, with quite a bit of Dredger in her ancestry. There was a way she stood and a certain look in her eyes. Adamaz had seen that look before; it meant you upset Enster Tilly at your peril. As if to emphasise the point, she had a well-made short sword on her hip.

“Is the boat with red sails yours ?” Asked Adamaz.

“It is, best fishing boat you’ll find on this side of the Sacred Sea.” Said Enster.

And may the Gods help anyone who disagreed; though the words came out of her mood rather than her mouth. Enster spoke in the common tongue of the rifts and she spoke it well. With luck, that should help avoid any misunderstandings.

“We’re in need of a boat to take us to the far side of the sacred sea.” Said Seren. “We’ll pay a good fee to hire you and your crew and we’ll pay in imperial gold pieces.”

Enster drank the ale as though she really enjoyed it and then ordered a round for everyone. Adamaz noticed no one left the ale undrunk; it wasn’t good ale, but it was better than going without. Enster seemed lost in her thoughts for a few minutes.

“I’m not against the idea, the best season for Crai-oc fish is just about over.” Said Enster. “We are talking about a journey taking somewhere between twenty three and twenty six days though.....And I always sail with a full crew, it’s safer that way.”

“You’re telling us this won’t be a cheap journey.” Said Galla.

Enster had a slate board in her bag and a piece of chalk. Probably the same slate board she used to work out prices for a hold full of Crai-oc fish when they weren’t out of season. She scratched numbers on the board.

“We’ll all need feeding, your people as well as my crew.” Said Enster. “We’ll have to leave some gold here for our families; they can’t be left to go hungry. Then we’ve got the long journey home.....I like the idea, the perfect off season hire, but I’ll have to charge you.....”

The board was turned so that Seren could see the total, though most of them could also see the truly huge amount being asked. Adamaz began to wonder how long it would be until they were taking the Morning Tide by force. During the time of darkness would be best, when dark angels were reputed to fight at their best.

“We’d want most of the gold before we leave.” Added Enster.

Adamaz had never thought of Seren as someone good at getting a deal. She politely argued with Enster Tilly, even talking about seeing if any other ships in the village would give them a better price. It took a while and the awful ale was beginning to taste better, as Adamaz became used to it.

“It’s a deal.” Said Enster.

She and Seren were shaking hands and smiling, over a price only just over half the amount originally asked for. Adamaz was expecting many things that day, but Seren being someone good at getting a deal, wasn’t one of them.

“When can you be ready to sail ?” Asked Seren

“Two days.....On the high tide the day after tomorrow.” Said Enster.

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The crew didn’t seem to mind her bird fluttering about and aiming mild insults at them. By about the fourth day sailing across open ocean, Galla started letting Bird fly outside when he wanted. Actually, stopping him had proven awkward; the Morning Tide wasn’t a large boat, so they were all sharing cabins as best they could. Her main worry had been the large flying creatures making a meal of her pet, but they seemed to ignore him. The Sacred Sea was beautiful, the warm water an almost impossible shade of blue. They sailed past several islands, but Enster had ignored them all. For some

reason she'd chosen to stop for water at the island they were heading for. Galla assumed it was a known source of safe drinking water.

"I could happily live forever on some of the larger islands." Said Lilleth.

"It is a beautiful part of the rift, but I'd miss my apothecary shop." Said Galla. "Some of the regulars have been friends for a very long time."

Not just the regulars for her powders would be missed, there were quite a few ex-lovers she'd miss seeing. Galla had never been overly burdened with any particular morality about her sex life. She'd been a gorgeous young woman once, with a great many male admirers and a few female ones too. Just as she'd been approaching old age, a miracle of Tomma-Goran had been used on her in return for a favour or two, maybe even three. The details were now lurking in a dim corner of her memory. The miracle had granted her a second youth, an opportunity to be young again, with everything that implied. Her list of lovers had grown again, until she wouldn't now recognise some of them if she saw them on the street. So no, she wouldn't want to live on an island in the annexe of the first rift; no matter how beautiful it was.

"Your pet is getting a bit fractious today." Said Dava.

"Yes, I have no idea what's wrong with him." Said Galla. "I think he might be a little homesick."

As soon as they dropped anchor at an island which looked much like many others they'd passed; everyone was eager to go ashore. Enster seemed determined that no one was going to be injured, or left behind when the Morning Tide pulled up its anchors and left.

"Don't wander, stay close to the boat." Yelled Enster. "No going anywhere alone, but mainly.....Don't wander off."

There wasn't much of an island to wander off on. Galla thought she could probably wander right around high water mark in much less than a day; even with her stiff knee. Bird came back to her and sat on her shoulder. He really did seem highly agitated about something.

"What has got into you now, Bird?" She asked.

"That pet of yours gets crazier every day." Said Lilleth.

Galla tended to agree, but he'd never looked so anxious before.

"He's here, hiding in his hut." Said Bird. "I've felt his presence since yesterday."

It was always weird when Bird started using long sentences, or in fact, any type of sentences. Usually it was a warning sign that something bad was on the way.

"Who is here, Bird?" Asked Galla. "Why are you so nervous?"

"My head hurts, Galla.....Head hurts a lot." Said Bird. "The Lady talks to me.....He needs to be cured."

The Silver Lady, it almost had to be her. Her pet had been her eyes and ears for several years, but all that was supposed to have stopped. According to the Lady, using her pet like that anymore might well damage his mind. Bird was too big to go inside her cloak, but she held him to her breast, trying to soothe him.

"Don't worry; I'll deal with whoever it is." Said Galla. "You're a good Bird; the best.....Tell me where to go to find this person in his hut."

"Straight towards the big tree near the rocks." Said Bird.

Too many going with them might upset her pet, but going on her own seemed a little foolish. Galla waved at Itzel, as the only one of the dark angels she could see at the moment.

"Please come with me, Itzel." Said Galla. "Bird senses something strange and he's rarely wrong."

"Yes, of course." Said Itzel.

If it was nothing it was nothing, but Galla would feel better with a dark angel walking by her side.

"Assuming the worst, how dangerous could this be?" Asked Itzel.

“The Silver Lady talks to my pet.” Said Galla. “She’s asked for someone to be found and cured. I’d keep my blade ready if I was you.”

“I understand.” Said Itzel.

“I’m glad you do.....I’m still totally confused.” Said Galla.

They reached the big tree by the rocks and Bird sent them deep into the interior of the island. None of them knew what wild beasts might live there. Itzel had her blade and strength. Galla held Bird in one arm; as she delved in an inside pocket for her most deadly powder. One sprinkle of it had once killed a senior chaos enforcer, dropping him where he’d stood.

“We’re nearly there.” Said Bird.

“I see it, the small white hut.” Said Galla.

The door was open, with the smell of an unwashed body coming from inside. Galla was getting the odour of a male hybrid of some kind, mixed with a little dirty clothing. Whoever was crouching in the corner wasn’t being held prisoner, he could have left the hut if he desired to.

“Are you hurt ?” Asked Galla. “I heard you need healing.....I am Galla the healer.”

“Galla.....I once knew a Galla.” Said the man.

It was the voice she recognised, even though she hadn’t seen him in a great many years.

“Ezzel ?.....It’s Ezzel Pinthrad.” Said Galla.

“Pinthrad.....Are you sure ?” Asked Itzel.

“Yes, of course I am.” Said Galla. “We were lovers for more years than I care to remember.”

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Lilleth didn’t recognise the tall grubby male at first. The smell didn’t encourage too close an examination, but Galla was holding onto him like an old friend. Galla one side, Itzel the other, they were almost having to carry the grubby male in filthy robes. Bird was flapping above them, telling any who’d listen that he’d been the one to discover Ezzel Pinthrad, clerk of the Sorcerers Guild in the City of the Lost God. Not that the Guild only accepted sorcerers into its ranks, most magic users were welcome. Not necromancers though, the guild drew the line at those who disturbed the dead.

“Is that really Ezzel Pinthrad you have there ?” Asked Lilleth. “I thought he was killed in the caves.”

“He was injured, a bad blow to the head.” Said Galla. “He needs healing, but may never be quite the same again.”

“Weren’t you and him.....You know ?” Asked Lilleth.

“Yes, we were.” Snapped Galla.

From what Lilleth remembered, Galla had good reason to be a bit snippy about her affair with Pinthrad; he had a very possessive wife. A wife who knew people and could have caused Galla quite a few problems.

“Pinthrad.....I am Pinthrad.” Said Ezzel.

Lilleth braved the stink of unwashed male and ran her hand over Ezzel’s head. No hair of course, all the males in his family had been bald in their later years. Instead of a wonderful mind, perfect for the job of organising the Sorcerers Guild, she felt nothing but chaos. Memories had linked together in a hopeless tangle.

“Oh, I get the impression someone hit him hard on the head.” Said Lilleth. “Then they left him for dead.”

“Ran away.....Ran away I did.” Said Ezzel. “Found hut.....Hut is safe.”

“Makes sense, the island has plenty of food growing wild.” Said Galla. “He found fresh water and avoided anyone who visited the island. To his damaged mind, they were all bandits who’d come to finish him off.”

Adamaz chose that moment to come and see what all the fuss was about. He and Pinthrad weren't that close, there was a long grudge between the Guild and the Library. There was also respect though and Ezzel had been part of the team Adamaz was leading to find Maya. Lilleth knew Adamaz would be appalled that Ezzel's mind was so grievously injured.

"I heard, but didn't believe it." Said Adamaz. "You found him, you found Pinthrad. How long has he been on this island?"

"I found him.....Bird found Pinthrad." Shrieked Bird.

"Difficult to be certain." Said Galla. "His mind is scrambled, but he remembers being brought here by bandits. To him everyone is a bandit, so he hid. My guess is that he's been hiding here for about the same time you were locked in that cage."

"Bandits everywhere." Muttered Ezzel.

"I looked into his memories and found hell in there." Said Galla. "He never came to the beach to wash, because there might be bandits there. Whoever left him here can't have realised he'd create his own jail."

"Crazy Pinthrad." Squawked Bird.

"Crazy, Crazy.....I know I'm crazy." Said Ezzel.

"You're not helping, Bird." Said Galla. "Get Ash and go to Ezzel's hut. Tell Ash to look for anything useful in the hut. If he gives you any trouble about it, tell him he'll have to answer to me."

"Will do." Said Bird.

There were times when Lilleth envied Galla her strange pet. It had to be nice to have an assistant with wings, even if it meant putting up with his rude comments. Lilleth helped Galla get Ezzel into the waves and they pulled off all his clothes, using his own ragged shirt as a washcloth.

"I have some new robes in my luggage." Said Adamaz. "I'll get them.....Pinthrad deserves some decent clothing."

"Underwear too if you can spare it." Said Lilleth.

"Anything for an old friend." Said Adamaz, as he headed for the boat.

Old friend seemed a bit over the top, but Ezzel was very clever. If the Pinthrad males hadn't been touched by hereditary timidity, Ezzel might have become head of the guild. They also tended to marry strong determined wives, who probably preferred living timid husbands to mourning dead heroes.

"I think he's about as clean as we'll get him for now." Said Lilleth.

"Keep him in the water to preserve his modesty." Said Galla. "I can use my spells while he's in the ocean. Sadly I have no suitable powders with me to heal a damaged mind."

"Can I help?" Asked Itzel.

"Just hold him and let him know he's among friends." Said Galla.

"Take any power from me you need." Said Lilleth.

"Oh, I will." Said Galla.

It all went on for a while; Adamaz was back with clean clothes by the time Galla was about to call it a night and let Ezzel have some sleep. As was to be expected, just about everyone had returned with Adamaz; all eager to see another survivor of the expedition Adamaz had been leading.

"Well? Is he any better?" Asked Adamaz.

"Do you know me Ezzel? It's Galla.....Do you remember me?"

"Galla.....Of course I remember you; the fun we used to have." Said Ezzel.

Was Ezzel about to speak about the kind of indiscretion that broke up marriages and ended friendships? It certainly sounded like that.

“You must remember Galla.” Said Ezzel. “We used to go over the guild wall and steal the fresh fruit off the trees.”

“Yes, of course I remember.” Said Galla. “How long is it since we stole fruit from the guild ?”

“Not that long, it can’t be longer than a few weeks.” Said Ezzel

Galla looked around at a lot of confused faces, but Lilleth understood; she’d sometimes gone over the wall with them to steal fruit from the guild.

“I was about twelve then.” Said Galla. “Ezzel was maybe a little older.....His memory obviously needs a lot of healing over a long period of time.”

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