

## The Ancient Ones

### Chapter 7 – The Angel’s Gaze

**“They left him to feed, all of them. By the time Adamaz was feeling back to his old self, he was on his own in a far corner of the cave. There was the usual husk at his feet, which he was used to; though others said it was a dreadful sight. Adamaz had been in the cage for years, gradually getting weaker. Now he was strong again, very strong. By the time he went to check on Jelran, he had a definite happy strut to his walk.”**



Maya watched Uula Podda fly over the Village of the People, like some huge powerful bird. Uula was fully grown now and knew the common tongue of the rifts as well as Maya, maybe even better than she did. It had been over five hundred years since Maya had taken Uula into the mountains, intending to reach the other side of the Sacred Sea. Five hundred imperial years was nothing to Uula, the mere blink of an eye. To a Dredger woman like Maya it meant she should have been old, maybe even dead. Just being Uula’s constant companion had worked some kind of magic though and she looked like a young Dredger woman of little more than fifty summers.

“I’ll never tire of watching Uula soar across the sky over the village.” Said Tareq.

“Most of her kind never mastered flying.” Said Maya. “Our Uula really is a one in several million.”

The village was a cleric village, the kind of place that flourished in the Menderan Empire, or so she’d been told. How had several hundred clerics arrived on the edge of the Sacred Sea and decided to make a home there ? No one was sure, but ask one inhabitant of the village and you’d be given at least four theories. One thing was certain; the clerics had arrived five thousand years ago and now numbered at least eleven thousand. Like Maya, Tareq was a born healer, which had often brought them into each other’s company. As can happen, they fell in love and now lived together in a house near the woods behind the village. No children yet, but Maya felt no need to rush into having offspring.

“You mentioned that a golden Ancient One laid the egg Uula hatched out of.” Said Tareq. “According to legend, all golden Ancient Ones could fly, though some flew better than others.”

“Some would say creatures so huge have no need to fly.” Said Maya. “On those long legs.....Even at a steady pace, Uula could cross the entire first rift in a matter of days.”

“Imagine a hundred of them armed and running.” Said Tareq. “No wonder our ancestors were terrified of them.”

“Your ancestors maybe.” Said Maya. “The Dredgers always had a good relationship with the Ancient Ones.”

It was a sore point and Maya wished she hadn’t mentioned it. They both wanted children and there were records of Clerics breeding successfully with Dredgers. It wasn’t guaranteed though; they did originate on different worlds. It was one of those problems they both preferred to talk about on another day. Always another day, but never that day. Galla would know of course, but Maya hadn’t seen her in five hundred years.

“Here she comes again, get ready to duck.” Said Tareq.

Uula came again, from way out over the ocean. Maya was sure the creature who’d called her mother since she could talk; was laughing as she flew over their heads. Light green scally skin and long

wings, Uula looked very little like the Ancient Ones drawn into the ancient books. Galla had shown her several drawings and Ancient Ones had been long legged cumbersome creatures. Powerful, but incredibly ungainly.

“She’s laughing.....I can hear her laughing.” Said Maya.

Maya hadn’t been sleeping well recently; she knew it showed in the darkness under her eyes. She had the feeling someone was coming, on their way from the City of the Lost God. She was rarely wrong about such things, but whether they were coming as friends or foes ? Only time would answer that question.

“She’s dropped a fish in front of the house.” Said Tareq. “A massive fish, it’ll keep you and I fed for a week.”

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It seemed that the home port of the Angel’s Gaze was Nara-Abash, but few of the crew came from that city. It appeared that wasn’t rare and one of the crew had told her that most of them came from the group of islands they were currently heading towards. Instead of a ship’s crew deep in anxiety about family and friends, they seemed to be just curious about the attack on Nara-Abash.

“Bugs can’t swim and the islands are a long way from the mainland.” Said Sockkelf.

No one mentioned knowing about the children of the Hive Mother and Tejan wasn’t going to tell them. The bugs might well be looking for her and some blame might well come her way.

“The islands do look beautiful.” Said Tejan. “I seem to remember the captain saying we’d be here for two days to take on fresh supplies.”

“They’re sort of named after the Nine Divines.” Said Sockkelf. “We’ll be landing at Monazin Island.”

They were still sharing a bed, an arrangement that Tejan had no intention of stopping. Sockkelf was polite, charming, witty and very knowledgeable for someone who wandered the rifts. Best of all he didn’t ask about the way parts of her body didn’t look like the usual Dredger female. For a start, her belly button was in totally the wrong place.

“Five miles east of Monazin Island is Estrin Island, then Sevril Island.” Said Sockkelf. “You get the idea....All beautiful, lush and a little bit of paradise. I was born on Tomma Island, which is the largest and about fifty miles east of where we are.”

“Will we stop there ?” Asked Tejan.

“I hope not.....I owe a few people quite a bit of money.” Said Sockkelf.

He said it with a grin and Tejan decided he was the perfect partner for her trip to find and kill the two young Algarians. Travelling alone always made people curious and despite telling herself not to, she was developing a fondness for Sockkelf. She just hoped that being with her didn’t get him killed.

“We’ll soon be entering the harbour at Monazin Island.” Shouted one of the crew. “We’ll be here for two days.....If you go ashore, make sure you get back on time.”

“Do they ever leave anyone behind ?” Asked Tejan.

“Rarely, but it has been known to happen.” Said Sockkelf.

The island had buildings close to the shore, but Sockkelf told her the main part of the town was a little inland from the coast. Everywhere Tejan looked was a mass of lush green vegetation. It really did look like a little bit of paradise. As usual, there were several large flying creatures circling the Angel’s Gaze. No one reacted to them, so Tejan felt safe in assuming they were harmless.

“We should get in the queue for the boats to go ashore.” Said Sockkelf. “If you want to go ashore ?”

“Of course I do.....I’ll swim if I can’t get on a boat.” Said Tejan. “This place is so beautiful.....By the way, what are the large flying creatures ?”

“Screech.....Some say they’re the souls of dead seamen.” Said Sökkelf. “The more sensible notice that they follow ships and feed on what is stirred up in their wake.”

Tejan had bought new clothes in Nara-Abash. Not anything that feminine, but her skirt and top weren’t covered in the dirt and sweat she’d accumulated on her other clothes. They were in the ship’s laundry, hopefully being made wearable again. She’d brushed her hair that morning and had actually looked at herself in a mirror. All in all, she’d liked the image smiling back at her.

“Come on.....I can handle a long queue for the boats to go ashore.” She said.

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Every morning there seemed to be a stronger flow of air coming straight at them. Yet every night they made camp in the caves, with no real idea about how long until they were out in the open again. Lilleth and Galla both said that it would be soon, but the darkness seemed to be their home for night after night. Adamaz tried not to get depressed by it all, but he was still weak and would have given his left arm to get out of the dreadful, seemingly endless caves. Early on yet another morning underground and Bird had been sent out to scout ahead by Galla. Witchlight glowing on his back, he returned to them with what might be good news, or bad.

“Cave creatures ahead.” Said Bird. “Big ones.....Nasty ones.”

“How many of them ?” Asked Seren.

“Many.” Said Bird. “Claws they have.....Sharp teeth and brown fur.”

“I don’t like the sound of that.” Said Adamaz.

“There is only one path now.” Said Galla. “This cave will lead us outside.....We must take it.”

Adamaz wanted to mention all the times there had been a promise that they soon find the exit to the caves, but there was no use in falling out with Galla. Besides, he might get the chance to feed on the large cave creatures. He’d have preferred to drain bandits, but the creatures would do.

“We can fight.” Said Dava.

“Yes, don’t stick us at the back of the action.” Said Jelran.

“Big nasty creatures and lots of them.” Said Ash. “You may get more action than you can deal with.”

“Big ones.....Nasty ones.” Said Bird, again.

It seemed a fight was inevitable. Adamaz had a quick and quiet conversation with Seren; asking for two of the largest creatures to be left alive.

“Wounded maybe, but for my needs they need to be alive.” He said.

“I understand.....I’ll do my utmost to get you two suitable living creatures.” Said Seren.

Bird went on ahead again and for a while, it looked like Galla’s feathered pet might be wrong. No sign of big and nasty creatures; no sign of Bird for that matter. Galla insisted she’d know if her pet died, though she refused to give details.

“Trust me Adamaz.....Wherever he may be, Bird is very much alive.” Said Galla.

Stopping for lunch was something everyone liked, one of the few activities to bring a smile to every face. It was only a few minutes after Seren had called a halt to eat lunch; when Bird came hurtling into where they were all settling down to eat.

“Behind me.....Big.....Very nasty.” Screeched Bird.

The growling and snarling came before they could see the creatures with dark brown fur. Bird was right, they were large and they did look very nasty. Sharp teeth and claws, not the sort of creatures to turn your back on, or try to ignore. Dava and Jelran got their wish; the biggest of the brutes went straight for them. Adamaz wanted nobody to get hurt, but he also had a real need to feed again. His need was so strong that it was giving him a constant throbbing headache.

“You’re right Bird.....There are many of them.” Said Ash. “Too damned many.”

Seren used her blade and claws to cause dreadful wounds on the creatures, but even she wasn't immune to being hurt. Adamaz noticed blood in several places on her arms and legs, but the wounds weren't slowing her down.

"Dava.....Dava needs help." Yelled Itzel.

Seren was already moving and Galla had a nasty looking battle spell in her half open hand. Adamaz knew they'd never forgive him for feeding while the fighting continued, but he was still so weak. Drawing the life energy out of even one of the creatures, would make him virtually unstoppable. Adamaz held the wounded front leg of a truly huge creature.

"Your life force will be mine." Muttered Adamaz. "What made you as you are, will soon be mine." He'd hunted in the slums of the City of the Lost God, never intending his victims to suffer. He'd drained them slowly, almost gently. Adamaz drained the creature fast and by the way the cave beast yelled, it was painful. As he stepped away from its lifeless husk, Adamaz felt as though he had the brutality and strength of one of the cave creatures. Dava was receiving help, but she still looked outnumbered. Jelran had been knocked unconscious and lay on the cave floor.

"To Dava.....The Algarians must live." Yelled Adamaz.

He felt fur grow in places he wasn't expecting and his long fingers now ended in claws. Usually he just drained the life force from the Dredgers in the City of the Lost God slums; now he seemed to have drained something else, something of the beasts. Adamaz easily spun around one of the creatures, before ripping out its throat. It fell dead at his feet, blood still bubbling from the ghastly wound.

"I never knew you could do that." Said Seren.

"Neither did I." Said Adamaz. "Useful though, I can see it being useful."

Itzel got to Dava first and stood between her and the creatures. There were those who considered Itzel to be too timid. They should have seen her then, cutting and hacking with her blue steel blade. When Seren and Adamaz began attacking the creatures from the rear, they must have known the fight was lost. They ran back the way they'd come, but not until Galla's spell had turned one of them into a ball of fire.

"Again, Galla." Yelled Ash. "Don't let them get away."

"Such spells take time to build." Said Galla.

Ash was away, running after the creatures with his blade held high. He could run fast, though that wasn't a surprise to Adamaz. Podd had told him his apprentice was stronger, faster than he looked. "Quite a fighter too." Podd had told him. "Did I tell you how he saw off two senior members of the Guild of Assassins?"

Podd had, several times, usually after a few too many beers at Muzzie's bar. The beast Ash chose to fight was one of the biggest. The other creatures kept running, but feeling Ash's blade across his back, made that one turn and fight. Ash was all over the brute, using his blade like a professional fighter and Adamaz had seen a few of those in his day. It had to be instinct surfacing from somewhere; Ash had lived in Podd's bone yard since being small. Some would say Ash was still small, but he was cutting the creature to pieces. By the time Adamaz was stood next to Ash, the brute was dead.

"Well done, marvellous." Said Adamaz.

"Miraculous I'd say." Said Lilleth.

"If only you'd left him just alive enough for me to feed on." Said Adamaz.

"Might have been a her." Said Lilleth.

"True.....Difficult to tell with all the fur." Said Adamaz.

By the time Adamaz was helping get Jelran to his feet, Dava had a surprise. She kicked the brute at her feet and it gave an unhappy grunt. Its eyes were closed, but it definitely wasn't dead.

"This one lives, Adamaz." Said Dava. "I cut it deep, but it's still breathing."

"Bless you Dava.....Could I have some privacy to feed." Said Adamaz. "I've been told it isn't a pretty sight."

"Of course." Said Dava.

They left him to feed, all of them. By the time Adamaz was feeling back to his old self, he was on his own in a far corner of the cave. There was the usual husk at his feet, which he was used to; though others said it was a dreadful sight. Adamaz had been in the cage for years, gradually getting weaker. Now he was strong again, very strong. By the time he went to check on Jelran, he had a definite happy strut to his walk.

"I can see you Algarians needing a lot of healing." Said Adamaz.

"I'm feeling fine." Said Jelran. "Apart from a sore head and a few bruises."

"He'll live." Said Galla.

No one in their group had died, nor had they been that seriously hurt. Seren had the most wounds, mainly because she'd put herself in the centre of the battle. It seemed weird in some ways, but sensible in others. They ate the lunch they had stopped to eat. As most ate, Galla healed those that needed her healing powers.

"I smelt it on these creatures, I can still smell it." Said Lilleth. "These creatures are of the forest; they smell of trees and open spaces. They probably come into the caves to hunt. We can't be far from the entrance to the caves."

"Close.....Very Close.....Bird felt the wind." Said Bird.

"If we carry on after lunch, we're likely to arrive at the entrance in the dark." Said Seren. "I think we should make camp here, while Galla works on healing everyone. Then tomorrow we leave early and come out of the caves in the light of morning."

"Doesn't worry me, I can see well in the ultra violet wash." Said Adamaz.

"Not everyone can." Said Dava.

"I'm so fed up with these caves." Said Jelran. "Let's eat and then carry on until we're outside. I don't care if it's dark when we leave the caves."

"I tend to agree." Said Chenad Gurd. "My Dredgers spend a lot of their lives digging in places like this, but there is something about these caves. I know it's not a vote, but I think we should carry on after lunch.....Let's get out of these dreadful caves."

Adamaz wished he'd said something similar, but it was a bit late to say so. For one thing, he'd look a bit silly if he suddenly changed his mind in public. Seren muttered to Itzel until she thought everyone had taken long enough over lunch.

"We'll carry on now, until we're out of these caves." Said Seren. "I tend to agree with Chenad, there is a bad feel about these underground chambers and passages."

"Great news." Said Dava.

It wasn't a quick journey, Galla had told them they were likely to come out of the caves when the first rift was under full darkness. The caves were wet and the breeze which smelled of the outside; simply served to make Adamaz even more morose. Bird arrived with the good news, barely a few minutes before they saw it for themselves.

"Not dark.....Light out, full light." Said Bird.

"Can't be.....My calculations are never wrong." Said Galla.

A statement she'd need to revise to rarely wrong. No one was worried about Galla getting it wrong, they were all too happy to see bright light pouring in through the entrance to the caves. There was light rain falling as they left the caves, but no one was complaining.

"I give my gratitude for this rainy day to the Nine Divines." Said Lilleth.

"I never thought I'd be so happy to see light and trees, lovely green trees." Said Adamaz.

There was a fairly rough looking path leading down from the entrance to the caves. It cut across a large area of grass and into woodland. It was a beautiful day; there were even coloured blooms on some of the plants beside the path. No sign of the creatures who'd attacked them. Bird said he'd looked over quite a large area and they appeared to have left the vicinity.

"Some blood.....Edge of woods.....No creatures." Said Bird.

"I'll take a look over the wider area." Said Seren.

They'd been underground so long that Adamaz had forgotten that Seren could fly; and fly very well. He watched as she took to the air and headed for the woods. Everyone waited and got a little wet in the rain, though it really was very light rain. Ash even sat on the wet ground. When Seren returned she brought the news that she'd flown ten miles; following the path through the forest.

"No sign of any hostile creatures, or people." Said Seren. "There is a large shack just before the path turns a little north of east. If we hurry, we can probably shelter in the shack when darkness arrives."

"It might belong to someone." Said Dava.

"All shacks tend to belong to someone." Said Seren. "We'll only be borrowing it for one night; just to keep the rain off."

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Tejan and Sockelf had explored some of Monazin Island, though mainly they'd kept to looking around the few fishing villages. The beaches were wonderful, the swaying trees were incredible. Best of all, nothing had attacked them. According to the locals who spoke a form of Old Imperial, there were no dangerous wild creatures on Monazin Island.

"A few bugs that'll bite you." They'd been told. "But nothing that'll kill you."

There had been dangerous wild beasts once, but the settlers had decided they had to go. There was a stuffed head of a wicked looking predator on the wall of the general store. It was all teeth, claws and judging by its muscles a lot of brute strength. The current owner of the store was very proud of the head.

"Last Monazin Beast to inhabit the islands." He'd told them. "My great-great-great grandfather hunted it down with a bow and arrows."

It seemed hard on the Monazin Beasts, but then again; Tejan wouldn't have liked to have them running wild in the place she called home. The news settled one thing though; what to do on their final night in the islands.

"Wow, that was a vicious looking brute." Said Sockelf.

"Oh, it definitely was." Said the store owner.

Tejan waited until they were out of the store and alone, before telling Sockelf her idea.

"I'm fed up with going back to the Angel's Gaze, or a small room on the island." Said Tejan. "There are no wild creatures; nothing will eat us in the night. Let's take food and a couple of blankets and sleep on the beach. A quiet beach, a long way out of town."

Would he like the idea? It was beginning to appeal to her so much; she might do it on her own if he said no. She needn't have worried, dig below the surface and Sockelf was as crazy as her.

"You and me on a blanket, miles from anyone." Said Sockelf. "That sounds a wonderful idea."

"Typical man, you're just thinking about sex." Said Tejan.

“Of course I am.....Aren't you ?”

“Now that you mention it.....Oh yes.” She said.

Noisy sex in a ship's cabin on the Angel's Gaze tended to cause sniggers and sex in lodgings on the island was even worse. They could make as much noise as they liked on a quiet and isolated beach. They took dried food and fruit with them and ate their evening meal under the swaying trees.

“The sound of the waves.....I'm glad you had the idea of coming here.” Said Sockkelf.

Tempting to ask him if he had another name besides Sockkelf. Even more tempting to ask a little about his life before she'd almost dragged him onto the Angel's Gaze. For all Tejan knew, the man she was sharing a bed with might have a wife; maybe even a few kids. He didn't act like a man with a family; but she'd met a few before who'd failed to mention it. The problem was that she had the kind of life where personal questions sounded like a request for some kind of commitment. She wasn't ready for that; not yet anyway.

“I suppose we can trust the locals.” Said Sockkelf. “They may think mentioning a few remaining Monazin Beasts, might be bad for tourism.”

“Well, if it is all a lie.....We'll soon find out.” Said Tejan.

The sex was wonderful, with no one there to watch them, or hear her groans of pleasure. Tiny crabs ran across the sand in little crab hordes, but they didn't bother the two lovers. Occasionally one of the large flying creatures circled them, but it seemed more out of curiosity than posing any kind of threat. They only really spoke when they needed a while to recover from their eager and energetic sexual activity.

“One day, I'd like to build a house right here, right on this spot.” Said Tejan. “Then we could live here all the time.....If you like the sound of that idea ?”

“Fine, though I'm not sure what my wife would think of the idea.”

Had she read the situation that wrong ? If she had, they should drum her out of the fighters for hire club. Not that such a thing existed, as far as Tejan was aware. When she looked he was grinning at her.

“Got you.” Said Sockkelf. “Yes, a house on this spot sounds a great idea.”

“You got me.....No wife, no kids I assume ?” Asked Tejan.

“No, not even a pet rock hopper.”

An affectionate kiss led to touching, which became yet more sex. Tejan always wondered why something so simple and repetitive as penetrative sex, was so addictive ? Never boring either, she was yet to hear anyone say they were bored with sex. Bored with your partner was a different matter; half the people she knew seemed to moan about that.

“Harder.....You won't hurt me.” Said Tejan

They slept for intervals between the sex, not so much by mutual agreement, as fatigue. When Tejan's eyes looked upon a bright beautiful morning, it felt more like coming to than waking up. No complaints though, as sexual partners went Sockkelf rated a nine and a half, maybe even a full ten. She prodded his shoulder a few times.

“Wake up; it's a beautiful morning in paradise.” Said Tejan.

“It is beautiful.” Said Sockkelf. “I can see the tiny crabs heading our way again.”

There was a shadow flying over them, though it wasn't really a shadow. That flying shadow was joined by another and both of them landed on the beach. No hurry the large almost adult Children of the Hive began picking at the crabs, eating them as though the tiny crustaceans were some kind of delicacy.

“Get your blade ready.....These things aren't friendly.” Said Tejan.

“These are the Children of the Hive who attacked Nara-Abash, aren’t they ?” Asked Sökkelf.

“Yes, they are.....These two are almost fully formed adults.” Said Tejan.

They were looking at her with obvious recognition, though Tejan had no idea how they knew her, the paid mission she was on, or what she looked like. They knew her though, even Sökkelf could see that.

“They know you.....How do these things know you ?” Asked Sökkelf.

“These things as you call them will be fluent in the common tongue of the rifts and Old Imperial; so be careful what you say in front of them.” Said Tejan.

“How do you know these things so well ?” Asked Sökkelf.

Questions, questions, but she had brought up the subject of knowing more about one another.

Telling him how she earned a living might mean him taking the next ship to anywhere she wasn’t likely to be. She wasn’t averse to a little honesty, but not when two large children of Ginnda-Aanash were sizing them up.

“I will tell you everything, you have my word.” Said Tejan. “Not now though.....Get ready to fight for your life.”

They were both naked, but had pushed their sword upright into the sand, in case something unpleasant turned up with death on its mind. Tejan grabbed her blade and threw Sökkelf’s so that it landed at his feet.

“I am no enemy of Ginnda-Aanash.” Shouted Tejan. “I am Tejan, once a senior member of the imperial guard; the damned. Leave now in peace, or you won’t leave here alive.”

The Children of the Hive made noises while feeding on crabs, but nothing that sounded like a language. When one of them spoke in Old Imperial it was quite a shock.

“We were told you’d be good, one of the best.” Said the daughter of Ginnda-Aanash.

“Sadly for you, we have our orders.” Said the other large child of the hive. “You must die here.....Today, now, right away.....Your moment of death has arrived.”

“Well, you can try and kill me.” Said Tejan.

“I will stand with her.” Said Sökkelf.

They tapped their pointed legs on the ground, which was mostly sand. There had to be enough sound for them to hear, it was obviously their way of planning for battle. There was no warning when the larger of the two daughters of Ginnda-Aanash leapt at her, Tejan hadn’t expected one. There was a rumour in the ale houses in the City of the Lost God. It was said that Ginnda’s oldest children, the ones who could fly; needed a lot of blood flow to their wings and the muscles which worked those wings. It sounded true and being honest, it was the only edge Tejan had.

“Their wings, Sökkelf.....Hack at their wings.” Said Tejan. “The wings are their weak point.”

“We have no weaknesses.” Shrieked one of the Children of the Hive.

The slightly larger of the large spider looking creatures came straight at Tejan, as if wanting to kill her quickly; without suffering too many wounds to its wings. The slightly smaller one took to the air, flying around Sökkelf, trying to attack him from behind. Sökkelf looked so relaxed, but Tejan had seen him use a sword before, he was no novice. Tejan moved in towards the one attacking her, a trick which always seems to work at unsettling an opponent. A sharp pointed spider leg grazed her cheek, but did no real harm

“After I kill you.....I might go back to the City and kill Ginnda-Aanash.” Yelled Tejan.

It should have been calmer, it couldn’t be the first time it had heard threats against the Hive Mother. The huge spider went crazy, seeming to lose all discipline. As it tried to get Tejan’s head between its jaws, she ran her blade down the length of its left wing. The wing looked to be made of grey skin,

which came apart as her blade hit it. The wing was held together with struts made of something like bone. The struts fared no better than the wings; her blade cut straight through them.

“You can’t kill me.....I am of the hive.....I am stronger than you.”

It had a pale liquid as blood, with a slight green tinge. A lot of its blood was now soaking into the sand. The tiny crabs seemed to like the blood; they were swarming all over it. Not that the spider was finished, it came at Tejan with its front legs, with their sharp pointed ends.

“Goodbye.....Now you die.” Said Tejan.

One of the pointed legs caught Tejan in the left shoulder. Silly really, she’d been over confident. Confidence can be good, but like many things, too much of it can be fatal. She yelled and the child of the Hive moved in to ram its other sharp leg into her body. Tejan had been trained by the best; she’d also known pain far worse than a deep wound to a shoulder muscle. She stepped in again, it almost always worked. The spider wasn’t expecting it, nor did it expect her blade slashing across its body; before severing its head from its shoulders.

“More blood tiny crabs, feed well.” Said Tejan.

One of the spider’s legs was twitching and might twitch for a while, but it was just a reflex, the child of the Hive was dead. Tejan turned towards Sockkelf, just as he plunged his blade deep into the body of the second spider. Sockkelf had a few unpleasant looking wounds, but his enemy was dead. Tejan gave him a hug and kissed his cheek.

“Can you walk back to the town ?” She asked him. “You did very well, but now you need a healer. Actually, we both need a healer.”

“I’ll make it.” Said Sockkelf.

Tejan collected their things and realised there were good things about an isolated beach and bad ones. She’d need to support Sockkelf all the way back to town and it was a long way. There was also a bag of their things to carry. Her training in the Damned had been good, but it hadn’t included getting an injured boyfriend back to town.

“You gave me your word.” Said Sockkelf. “Explain how the spiders knew you ? Tell me how you angered them ? Tell me how you usually earn a living ? Tell me, tell me.....Everything ?”

It had felt such a long way getting to the beach, but getting back seemed to take no time at all. As Tejan saw the first building on the outskirts of the town, she realised she had told Sockkelf everything. Her rather strange upbringing, her training with the Menderan Imperial Guard, the Damned. She’d then moved on to tell the man she was sleeping with about her jobs for various crime families, most of them on Algaria. Of course, much of what she said pointed to something unpleasant and Sockkelf asked the question.

“Are you responsible for the spiders attacking Nara-Abash ?” He asked.

“Yes, I probably am.” She replied.

That led to admitting to being on a job, looking for two Algarians that someone wanted killed. Tejan admitted they were young, but kept mentioning that they were young adults. Her employers wanted them dead, someone important in the City of the Lost God didn’t, simple as that. It was sad that the good people of Nara-Abash had ended up in the middle of it all. By the time they were outside the house of the healer, Tejan had run out of things to say. It had been a catharsis for her and now she felt purged of so much tension, stress and guilt. The guilt might return, but she thought the stress and tension were gone forever.

“Are you going to stay with me ?” Asked Tejan. “You could probably get a job on the crew of a ship going to just about anywhere on the Sacred Sea.”

“Do you want me to stay ?” Asked Sockkelf

“Yes, I do.” She said and she meant it.

“I’ll stay.....You need someone to watch your back.” Said Sökkelf.

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