

“It’s a shame that our coin buys so little.” Myna looked into her basket. She’d only been able to purchase a bit of flour to feed her two children.

Regan, Myna’s neighbor, laughed a hollow laugh. She was nearly ten years older than Myna and also had two children. Turi, her son, went looking for work everyday with her husband, Llyr. “Even with Llyr and Turi working, I haven’t enough gildons to feed us properly. I don’t know how you survive with only what you can earn.”

Myna’s loss tugged at her heart as she glanced over her shoulder, looking for any of the Lord’s Guard. They used the pretense of hunting for Ancient Ones to also hunt the city’s populace. She was a widow with two small children because of them. Her husband had been returning home when he had run abreast of them. Being drunk and bored, they’d cut Ferris down. “I have no choice.”

Regan patted Myna’s shoulder. “I have a few vegetables left and will share them with you.”

Myna smiled. “I can’t take from you. You have barely enough.” Not that she wouldn’t mind something to go with the biscuits. “It’s terrible that there was nothing to purchase today. I have a few more coins and would gladly have spent them.”

“Each day food becomes harder to find.” Regan pushed her brown hair from her face and wiped her hand on her

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brown robe. “Even Llyr doesn’t have steady work any longer. No one builds, so there is no need for bricks.” She smoothed her blue robe.

“Surely, things must improve. Lord Culain must see how badly off his citizens are.” Myna had hoped to find work today, but hadn’t been graced with luck.

“The four years since Dorjan has had Lord Culain’s ear, nothing has been the same and won’t be soon.” Regan’s tone had a hardness to it.

Dorjan seemed to care for no one but himself and Lord Culain had seemed lost since the death of his lady. Myna understood. At first, the pain had been overwhelming from Ferris’ death, but over the six months since it had happened, she’d had to wall over the part of her heart that ached for him. She had to provide for two small ones. Lord Culain had to care for the whole city. “He mourns.”

“It’s not an excuse to let the city fall into ruin.” Regan

stomped ahead of Myna.

Myna sighed. Of course Regan was right, but that changed nothing. “Maybe tomorrow there will be work and food to buy with what we earn.”

Regan slowed and looked at her. “I don’t know how you can hold onto hope with all that has happened.”

Myna shrugged and looked down the street. She hadn’t realized they’d wandered into a part of the city where they’d never before been. She was near Amunador, where the Ancient Ones had lived before Dorjan had tried to exterminate them. She knew some still lived within the city, but they had blended into the populous and disappeared.

The area ahead of them was forbidden. Great mansions rose from behind green hedges. Anyone found within Amunador was instantly put to death. A tingle ran through her and she felt as though someone called to her. She rubbed her temple.

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Regan placed her hand over her mouth. “We must go the other way. If the Lord’s Guard finds us here...”

Myna placed her hand on Regan’s arm. “No one is around.” She gazed over the area. “The homes look so beautiful as though nothing has changed. They haven’t fallen into disrepair as the rest of the city has.”

“It is forbidden to enter this part of the city.” Regan’s voice was hushed and her face had gone white. “But I hear them calling to me.”

Regan grabbed Myna’s arm. “You’re imagining things. You have had too little to eat.”

Myna stood for several moments, staring at the greenery and the beauty. A warmth seeped into her. Something beckoned to her. Urged her to enter Amunador. Inside would be something to help her and her children. “We must go inside.”

Regan stared at her as though she had more than one head. “We can’t go in there.”

“Why not? Because Dorjan says it’s forbidden?” Myna continued to stare at one of the houses near the entrance. She stepped across the boundary into the area. Peace filled her. A sense of happiness.

Regan grabbed her shoulder. “Myna, you can’t go in there.”

Myna shook her head. “I’m going to see what’s hidden within. Come or stay.”

“I’ll not stand out here on the road alone.” Regan glanced over her shoulder. “What if the guard comes?”

“Then come with me.” Myna walked slowly toward the first house, drawn by a force she couldn’t identify.

Behind her Regan screamed. Myna jumped and spun around, no longer feeling the tug at her mind. Regan stood,

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beating on her arm, smoke coming from beneath her hand.

Myna rushed to her. “What happened?” She could see the terror in Regan’s eyes.

“A terrible feeling of dread swept through me that something evil was about to happen, then my sleeve caught fire when I stepped into Amunador. I told you we shouldn’t go in there.” Tears flooded down Regan’s face.

Myna could feel the peace flood her mind again. She wanted to go toward it. She looked at the house, then at Regan. She put her arm around Regan’s shoulder. “We’d best go home.”