

# #1

She wasn't supposed to be here and she knew it. Not that anyone would see her. She was small and really good at hiding. She just wanted to find the plant books again. The pictures and descriptions inside made her dream of an area where she could run and explore. The tunnels and caverns held no more mystery for her.

She snuck around a bookshelf and saw a young man sitting at a table with books piled in front of him. She ducked back and steadied her breath. No one was supposed to be here. If anyone found her she would be in so much trouble. She turned back and pulled a book from the shelf to look through. The man was a Null. She hadn't really had much experience with them as her tribe didn't really mingle much. She watched him as he sat there reading.

She watched him for a minute, he seemed so intent on what he was reading. Suddenly the man looked up, right at where she was hidden. Her heart leapt into her throat as she slid the book back in place. He was younger than she first thought. Maybe only three or five years older than she was. He tilted his head to the side and smiled.

"You shouldn't be in here you know." His voice was soft and didn't echo at all in the big library. She didn't move at all, just continued to stare at him through the books. "It's alright. I won't say anything. It would be nice to have someone to talk to."

She blinked and slowly came out from behind the shelf. He waited there looking at her. She wasn't sure but there was something about him that seemed different.

"How come you're in here? The Collegium doesn't share their books with anyone. Trust me I've tried." She walked to the table he was at and stood with it between them. He was much younger than she had thought. Maybe the same age as she was.

"I live here. I've never seen you in here before though." He set his book down and looked at her. "Why are you in here, especially so late?"

"I like to read the books on plants. It's the only time I can get to myself. My sister doesn't leave me be. So I come here at night to read them." She smiled wistfully thinking about what it would be like to actually see a tree.

"You're from the Jade Pact right? Do you have your tattoo yet?" His voice was curious with a hint of excitement.

She blinked at him, her hand reaching down for her dagger. "What do you know about the Jade Pact?"

“Only what most people do. Your ancestors made a deal with the Primal Fey and your people serve them in a sense. Your tattoos are a sort of status within your tribe.” He knew more than most did. She pulled her hand away from the dagger.

“That’s true. No, I do not have my tattoos yet. I’m not old enough. I’m only fifteen right now.” She pulled out a chair and sat down. She reached into her bag and pulled out two cups, a waterskin, and a wrapped bundle. “Have you eaten? I have some snacks with me.”

He sat there quietly as she pulled everything from her bag. She poured a sweet smelling drink into the two cups that steamed slightly. “What is that?” He watched her curiously as if he had never seen someone pour tea before. There was no way that was possible. He couldn’t be younger than her.

She paused and looked at him. “It’s tea and cookies. Would you like some? I always have two cups because I keep breaking them while I’m out.” She pushed the cup towards him and unwrapped the cookies to offer him.

“Thank you. My name is Viltis. What is yours?” He took a sip of the tea and sighed softly. “Oh this is nice.”

She smirked. “My name is Kymisha. Try the cookies, they’re even better.”

## #2

All around her eyes burned. It had taken two hours for them to finalize the design. It had been one of the most painful experiences in her life. It was worth it though, she had finally proven herself to the elders. It was about 5 years later than most, but she finally did something to impress them. They had granted her a great honor, why she still wasn’t sure. They found her impulsiveness amusing, but that is what eventually had caused them to realize that she was more. More of what she wasn’t sure, they only told her she was more.

Now in the middle of the night she snuck again to visit her friend. These last handful of years she had done this two or three times a week. Viltis was always happy to see her. Even when she felt sorrowful or angry he had a way of calming her.

He was the only friend she really had right now. All of her tribe members her age kept away from her. She was always in some sort of trouble because of her sneaking around. It was so much fun to hide from everyone and surprise them. But never Viltis, not yet at least.

She knew something was wrong with how the Collegium treated Viltis, she just couldn't figure it out yet. He was strangely silent on the topic and didn't like to talk about it. Kymisha knew that the only way to figure it out would be to work her way into the Collegium. This had been her goal for the last two years. She was still only an entry level clerk, but it was a start.

She found her spot outside and worked her way through the tunnel. She would have to widen it slightly. She knew that she had outgrown it years ago, but she couldn't spend the time working it like she had in the past. She would have to make a point of doing it soon though, the tight space made her lose time going in and out.

Finally she got through and wound through the bookshelves. She knew the route so well now that she didn't really think about it any more. She let her mind focus on where people were while her body just knew which way to go. It had been about ten years since she met Viltis at this point.

She paused behind a bookshelf at the sound of voices. They were kept low but she was close enough to tell that one was Viltis and the other was one of the Collegium librarians. She slowly pulled a book to see the person. She blinked at what she saw. Viltis was now chained to the floor at his table. Anger hot and blinding filled her mind. This was just cruel. Her hand moved down to her dagger as she began to plot how to get him free of those damn chains.

Before she could move Viltis made eye contact with her and shook his head so slightly that only she could see it. She stayed and watched as the man spoke to Viltis and seemed to reprimand him. It was a Libram she hadn't seen before. As she watched she saw the flash of the Collegium bracers. So he was part of the higher levels of the Collegium.

After a time the man left Viltis alone. She dare not move because she wasn't sure if the Libram was still around waiting to see how Viltis reacted. Kymisha waited for what felt like an hour before Viltis looked over again and smiled. "He's gone."

Kymisha came around the bookshelf. "Why are you chained? What happe..."

"You got your tattoos! Wow they're in a very open area. Isn't that like a big deal?" He smiled widely at her.

Kymisha paused next to the table and looked down at his ankles. "Viltis this is a bigger deal than my tattoos." She gestured to his ankles. "Why does it seem like you are a prisoner now?"

Viltis sighs. "I always have been Kymisha. They're just taking stronger measures now." He stood up and rested his hand on her shoulder. "Now. Tell me about your tattoos. Why were you chosen to have them around your eyes?"

Tears welled up in her eyes as she looked into his eyes. They were so sad and happy at the same time. This human was an enigma, how was it that he was always so cheerful? She wiped away the tears quickly and took a deep breath.

“Because I follow Haldine’s ways closely. Because I take what I see and react. Because I embody what it truly means to be part of the Tribe of Haldine. It is a great honor. But I don’t know that I can live up to the expectations of my people.” She reached into her bag and pulled out a waterskin of tea, two cups and a loaf of lemon bread.

“You’re a lot stronger willed then even you know. I like that about you. You tell me exactly what I need to hear, even if I don’t want to hear it.” Viltis sat back down and accepted the tea and slice of bread when it was handed to him.

“I’m actually here for two reasons. One I wanted to share my tattoos. Two..” Kymisha pauses and sips her tea. “I need to cut back how often I’m visiting, for a little while. Obviously I’m not leaving the Cairn. But I have to stay away from here for a bit so that I can complete some missions given to me by the Collegium.”

Viltis blinked at her. “Why do you want to be a part of the Collegium?” In his voice she heard hurt and a small amount of anger.

“To help you. I will visit when I can. I’m not going away forever. You’re my friend and I will not abandon you. I swear.” She felt tears well up in her eyes again. She dashed them away. “I need you to do something though. I’m trying to get to a point where I can visit you whenever I want to, not just sneaking in. So if you’re ever introduced to me...”

“Pretend you’re a new face. I got you. What do you mean to help me though Kymisha?” He sets the cup down and leans in close to her. “You’re starting down a dangerous path you know nothing about.”

“You’re locked in here. That’s not okay. Damn it, we are all locked in here! I want to see trees Viltis.” She sighs softly. “But for now I’ll come when I can. Check behind the books where you first saw me. I’ll try to leave snacks for you.” She smiled. “So, what’s the newest book you’ve found for me?”

#3

She was so tired, all she wanted to do was go home. But there was something more important than that. Viltis’ birthday. They weren’t sure when it was exactly, but they worked together to choose a day for them to celebrate.

The mission she had finished had taken a lot out of her. Working her way through some of the lower levels of the Cairn to find old technology and magic. She never really found anything besides battle scrolls. But they kept sending her down because she was one of few that could get in and out quickly.

She crawled through the tunnel, glad she had spent that night long ago digging it out more. She could move quickly through it and into the library. She knew the best way to move through it wasn't on hand and knees, but no one else would know that and she would have time to escape if she had to.

She worked her way through the bookshelves as usual. She knew the routes of the librarians so well. None of them were allowed to be near Viltis so they never got close. Hell they didn't even go on the floor he was on. It took her now only about ten minutes to get to the floor he was on. When she first came though it had taken her over an hour to get there.

A man's voice filtered through the bookshelves. She held her breath and waited at a bookshelf further away than she wished for it to be. There was no way for her to see who was talking. She heard what sounded like Viltis' voice once or twice responding but she could never make out the words.

Kymisha heard the footsteps walk past the other side of the bookshelf she was behind. She sat there silently for quite some time before she felt like she could move on. She moved ever closer to the spot where Viltis read at night. She paused at the closest bookshelf and pulled a book out to make sure the coast was clear.

Viltis' back was turned towards her. She felt a flutter of excitement as she placed the book back. She peeked around the corner and then began to move silently forward. Right behind him she stood up and placed her hands on his shoulders. "I go..."

She was pushed back so hard the wind was knocked out of her when she landed. She lay on the ground staring up at the ceiling as she tried to relearn to breath. What was that?!

"Kymisha, oh no...Kymisha I'm sorry. Are you okay." He leaned down looking into her eyes as she gasped for breath. "Oh no.....no, no, no..."

"I'm okay..." She croaked out. "Just got the wind knocked out of me." She coughed slightly and finally was able to breath normally again. "You're a lot stronger than you look my friend." She smiled up at him. Tears lined his eyes.

"I thought I really hurt you. Are you sure you're okay?" She reached up to him silently asking for help. He grasped her hand and pulled her to her feet.

"That's what I get for finally getting the drop on you." She coughed again. "Remind me not to do that again."

He laughed uneasily. "You sure you're okay?" Kymisha nodded and smiled. "Come sit down. I wasn't expecting you today. I thought you had a mission."

Kymisha sat down and pulled her bag onto her lap. She rummaged through it as she answered. "Oh I did. I finished it." She sighed in relief when she saw the bundle was not broken. She looked up at him with a smile. "Did you forget what today is Viltis?"

He looked puzzled for only a moment and then he barked out a laugh. "I did actually. Wow is it already my birthday again?"

"It happens every year Viltis. What is it now? Twenty years since I snuck in here and found you?" She pulled the small bundle out and held it out for him. "Happy birthday Viltis."

#### #4

"Now Kymisha, you're being informed about this because your missions will be linked to it. We have something we wish to introduce you to. Do not be fooled by its appearance. It is more dangerous than you could ever imagine." The Librahm, Silas, walked with her towards the library.

Her heart raced as he opened the doors and led her to a familiar location. There he was, sitting and reading as they walked up to him. He looked up and saw the Libram and then her. She noted the twinkle in his eyes as they walked towards him.

"Viltis, this is Kymisha. She will be checking in on you occasionally and leaving more things for you to read as she finds them." The Librahm moved aside for her to fully see Viltis. He hadn't changed very much since the last time they had spoken. He still looked like an adult human. As always she felt at ease around him.

"Hello Viltis. I'm sure it will be a pleasure to work with you." She held her hand out to him. She noted that the chains around his ankles now included a pair on his wrists.

"Likewise Kymisha. It's a pleasure to meet you." He squeezed her hand slightly and winked at her.

"Now I apologize but we really must leave. Kymisha will return in a few days with some new reading materials for you." The Librahm ushered her out of the library. "What you will be doing is locating and confiscating and ritual scrolls you come across. That thing in there will need them."

"Excuse me sir, but why would a human need scrolls like that?" Kymisha glanced back at Viltis before leaving the library.

"Because it isn't human. It's a dragon." Kymisha stopped in her tracks at this revelation. Silas stopped as well and sighed. "Long ago this Cairn was trusted with an egg. We had to do a lot of convincing to the original keeper of the egg. But finally they understood that it would be safer with the Collegium than with them." He straightened his coat.

"So how long has...the dragon been here? Why take the shape of a human?" She felt panic rising in her. The urge to run to Viltis and ask why he never told her.

"It hatched about six-hundred years ago. It only started taking the shape of a human about three-hundred years ago. It was originally aging very slowly. But suddenly about one-hundred years ago it aged to what you see now in the matter of two decades." Silas motioned for them to continue.

Kymisha followed him silently. Silas' voice came to her again. "The problem is that now that it took on this form it seems to have forgotten what it was. We tried a couple of times to tell it but the reaction was...less than ideal. It went into a rage of sorts."

Viltis was a dragon...a real dragon? No wonder he didn't age like a human. Things were a whole lot more complicated than she initially thought. "Viltis is a dragon." she whispered to herself.

## #5

Kymisha was looking through the library, well away from where Viltis was kept. She needed to try to find some information about dragons. She had no clue what they could do other than the stories she had been told about the times before The Fall. But she also knew that through time stories were warped and changed to fit the narrative.

She had to find the oldest parts of the library. Which lead her to the area she was in now. Further down than she'd ever been within the library was where the oldest books were. Some weren't in the best shape any longer, but she could make out most of what they said.

It was times like these that Kymisha wished she could include her sister for this type of thing. The girl had a memory like no one she'd ever met. Nessa could remember the smallest detail of something from years ago, but couldn't remember what she had eaten for breakfast. Kymisha shook her head and focused on what she was trying to do again.

There was nothing here. She sighed wishing she could talk to someone about this. How could all of the information...They moved it to the restricted section. She couldn't get in there, she'd

tried many times. The security was just too high, guards were posted within eye shot of each other and there were no gaps that she could find.

She wandered through the shelves seeing if anything caught her eye to sneak to Viltis. She found an old cart that was covered in dust. Books were piled on top of it so she began to look at them. Inside one she saw illustrations that reminded her of the stories she'd heard as a child.

She sat down next to the cart and began flipping through the pages. She couldn't read this book. The symbols were ones she'd never seen before. She sighed and went to go put the book back, but then she paused. Viltis might enjoy this, he always loved learning new things.

She tucked the book away and opened a few more to find different symbols in two of the other books. The rest seemed to be in common. She picked up the last book in the pile and her heart skipped a beat. Dragons of the Lands this book could help her to help Viltis! Hopefully it would allow her to guide him to realizing what he was.

It hit her then, that was exactly what the Collegium wanted. Maybe she shouldn't try to awaken him until she could get him away from this place. She tucked the book away in her bag and left the library. Maybe Nessa could read the book and explain the details to her. That way she'd actually be able to learn what it held instead of trying to piece it all together herself.

## #6

She had learned now why they kept Viltis locked away. Why they never referred to him as a person should be referred to as. They only saw a tool. A way to reclaim the surface. Something to be handled. She understood now why they were so intent on him complying.

The Cairn was slowly falling apart. That's why so many lower levels were abandoned. She hadn't realized how many were crumbling beneath them right now. She had lost count around two-hundred or so. That many levels held people at one point. That many areas to grow food. Now it seemed food was running low.

This mission was the third one she had lost a shard of her spirit with. Three times she had been brought back through the apparatus. Three times she wondered if she was about to leave the world. Three times she had seen Haldine and what she thought was the surface.

This news changed so many things in her mind. The Cairn was never supposed to last this long. At least that's what she believed. Something caused the lower levels not to be functional. The real question wasn't why, it was how long do we have?

She noticed then, a man following her. Damn she was careless today. She wasn't able to tell anything other than it was most definitely a man. They had a cloak to hide all features. They obviously knew what they were doing.

The cup in front of her had sat forgotten as she had looked through the mirror in front of her. She made a show of stretching and finishing her tea. She stood from the bench and began to walk to her ambush spot. She was known to be a high ranked member of the Collegium now. That meant that groups that wished for it to fall would target her. Right now that actually worked in her favor.

She knew now she needed contact with someone from that group. Someone that could do the things she couldn't. Someone that could take the information she knew and start something that could lead to the surface. She knew it was her calling to do so now. She'd seen it three times just before her death.

Kymisha turned the last corner and slipped into the shadows before her stalker could see. He walked into the ally and paused just in front of her confused. She slipped out behind him and wrapped her arms around his neck. Her dagger pressed against his neck.

"Who are you and why are you following me?" She hissed into his ear. "If you were trying to kill me you need to do better."

She felt a blade press into her back then. She sighed and raised her arms dropping the dagger. The man she had held moved away and drew his blade. "You were saying?"

Kymisha felt her knees be kicked out from under her and she knelt on the ground. She kept her hand raised and laughed. "This is pretty advantageous for me. I need to get a message to someone."

The man paused his slow walk forward. "Say again?" She wished she could see his face, or make out anything about him. He really knew what he was doing.

"I found out some information that I believe the people should learn about." She took a deep breath. "You see I am from Haldine. You should know that means I will do everything in my power for the right reasons. So believe me when I tell you that this information will kill us all if your people in charge don't find out." She felt herself trembling knowing they would either believe her or kill her.

"Spit it out then. We will see if the boss wants to know." Something reflected a bit of light into his hood for just a moment. But she saw it then, his face. However, she knew there was no way from that chance sighting she'd ever remember it.

"The Cairn is dying and the Collegium is trying to hide it. They're doing a damn good job at it too. But I know the secrets. I want to use those to get us to the surface." She looked right into the eyes she had only glimpsed for a second.

Everything went dark then.

## #7

Kymisha worked her way down the alley. She'd been following her target for days. She lost him once or twice, damn he was good. He was just what she needed. Someone who knew the back allies of the Cairn. Through pure luck she'd woken up that night just fine in a tavern inn. That was about twenty years ago. The only information she'd ever been given was a note telling her to "Find the Harbinger." Well she had, and she'd made sure to watch him work before she tried this.

She thought that he may have seen her. She couldn't be sure though. He was the one chance she had to make sure her plan would work. She turned the corner and found a dead end. He was gone, again. She sighed and flipped the dagger in her hand.

She knew he'd come down here. She hadn't been that far behind him. This damn elf was hard to pin down. All she wanted was to convince him to assist her. She needed to not only free Viltis, but she also wanted to get those who wished to the surface.

"You're good, I almost didn't notice you." In an instant Kymisha spun around facing the voice. He stood there leaning against the wall. "Why are you following me?" The Harbinger looked as if he had not a care in the world.

"I need your skills." She stood with her dagger in her hand waiting.

"Everyone needs them. Find me again and we will talk. For now..." He threw two pin spells at her and walked away. She waited for him to turn the corner so the spell would fade. Once it did she took off back down the alley to catch up to him. But he was gone.

## #8

She had him this time. She only had to wait for the right moment. He had gone to sleep only an hour ago. This would be when she was able to prove to him her abilities. He'd already noted her ability to follow a target. Now she had to prove she could snare one. Oh he had been vigilant the first week after they met. But she never ventured too close to him, only kept an eye on him. Now over a month later she would take her chance.

She moved to the building and checked the window for any traps. Knowing him he would have something like that in place. He was such a paranoid person she didn't think he'd take any chances. She was surprised that nothing was there. Slowly she opened the window just in case she had missed something. Nothing happened and she sighed in relief.

She made her way into his bedroom through the window. She crept closer with her dagger out. The Harbinger was asleep on his back. This was her chance. She leapt onto his chest and held the dagger against his throat. His eyes snapped open and locked onto her.

"So I've found you, never lost you though. Will you listen to me or do I need to prove myself more to you?" She looked down at him. She noted a smirk form on his face as she waited for his answer.

"I told you to find me again. Though how you managed to locate my home is impressive." He held his hands out to the side of his body. "Can you please get off my chest?"

Kymisha moved off his chest and removed the dagger from his throat. "As I said before. I need your skills." She tucked the dagger away and leaned against the wall. "I have a friend that is being kept prisoner by the Collegium."

He sat up and nodded. "As you were watching me I too watched you. I've seen you in the library leaving food and drink behind the books. That tunnel you made is really cramped. I stayed once. The human right?"

Kymisha chuckled and nodded. "Yeah. Though to be honest, which I think we need to be right now, he's not human. I've known him for almost two-hundred years." She watched the surprise cross his face. "They're keeping him for a reason. I need someone on the outside that can do some work. I'm technically part of the Collegium ranks and can't do a lot of things I want to."

He nods. "Interesting. I'd love to get to the bottom of how your friend can live so long." He sat there quietly for a moment. "I'm in. How do I fit into this?"

"In time I may tell you the answer to that. For now..." Kymisha pushed off the wall and held her hand out. "I'm Kymisha of Haldine."

"You can call me T for now." He stood and shook hands with her. "I think this might be some good fun we are about to start."

#9

"You know what to do?" T asked Kymisha quietly as they sat in the salon.

"Yes. I need to let them get me again so you can talk to them. We've been over this." She sighed softly finishing her tea. "See you soon."

She stood up and walked out of the salon, it was one of her favorites which was why they started here. She had been sure to visit it every other night for the last five years. T had heard through his network another hit was out on her. She wasn't sure why they kept coming for her like this, when most of the groups knew she was trying to help.

She moved slowly through the marketplace looking at various stalls and making her way to the house her and T had chosen for this. They had given the owner a decent amount of Script to visit with some relatives for the night. They seemed all too pleased to do so. Not for the first time she wondered what T did to give him the reputation he had.

Some knew him as an assassin, others a kind soul, a problem solver, and some, to include the Collegium, knew nothing of him. She pondered over this as she walked up to the door and entered. She paused with the door slightly open and acted as if she were looking at something just inside the door.

She finished her ruse and took the final step in as she started to close the door behind her. It pushed open quickly as she felt a body push her against the wall. The door slammed shut while her face pressed against the wall. Kymisha let out a small sigh and set her hands against the wall by her head.

She knew that this was part of the game her and T were playing. She knew that this was the only way to get the underbelly groups to follow them. They already followed T, for the most part. At least they didn't fight him as much as they did her.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" Kymisha said to the person holding her against the wall. She heard a low laugh.

"And why wouldn't I? You are..." She heard the man take in a breath. "I see..." She felt the pressure against her back move away. She held the smile at bay remembering another time where the roles were reversed and it had been her that was held at sword point. She lowered her arms and turned to face the man.

T stood behind him with a sword pressed against the man's back. He winked at her and she shook her head. He so loved getting the drop on people.

"So I'm going to guess you have orders to kill me?" Kymisha crossed her arms and leaned back against the wall. "What you don't know is I'm of the same mind as you and I'm working to either destroy the Collegium in order to get as many people as I can to the surface." Her tone was bored as she looked upon the man. He was a Dwarf, which shocked her slightly. She'd never meet one that worked with the underground groups.

"Liar! Any one who is part of the Collegium is trying to suppress the truth!" The anger was clear on his face. Kymisha sighed and shook her head.

"So does that mean the spies your group has inside the Collegium are the enemy too? I joined them to help an old friend. He's trapped and I plan on freeing him. Years ago I met with someone from an underground group. I told them the Cairn is dying. They stopped coming after me, for a time. Why are they starting again?" She met his green eyes and saw the shock in them.

"Not sure I believe that." He winced as T pressed the sword harder against him.

"Turn and look at me. You'll probably know who I am." T's voice was quiet and low. She watched the man turn to look over his shoulder. She watched as the shock on his face flowed across it.

"You're him! You're a part of everything. Why would you be working with her?" His tone was full of venom.

"Kymisha speaks the truth. Though I've yet to meet this friend she keeps talking about, I have seen him and know she speaks the truth, on that at least." He glanced at her and she sighed softly. "But I believe in what she's working towards. I plan on supporting her in whatever way I can." T let go of the man and moved to her side. She pushed off the wall and stood next to him.

"You need to make sure that your group remembers who gave them the information in the first place." She said as she pulled a paper from her pocket. "This has information that should assist your group in getting some supplies." She held the note out to the man. "What is your name?"

He blinked at her and took the note. "Why do you care?" He pushed the note into his pocket and shifted his gaze between them.

"Because if we can get this to happen, wouldn't you like the chance to see the surface?" She watched the hope fill his face.

"I'm Hokram Stoneforge. I'll make sure that your letter gets to where it needs to go. But unless the boss says otherwise you will still have to watch your back." He sighed and shook his head. "They're not willing to stop."

T laughed. "Trust me. She watches her back well enough. Not to mention I'm usually around anyway."

“I really hate this tunnel Kymisha...” T’s voice sounded behind her. She laughed as she exited the small tunnel.

“I didn’t design it to make it easy to enter. I originally made this as a child. I’ve had to widen it slightly over the years. But I never thought I’d be bringing another person in with me.” She stood up and dusted off her clothes.

“Well it doesn’t change the fact that I hate it.” He entered the library and sat on the ground in front of the tunnel. Kymisha shook her head and held her hand out to him.

“Come on. It’s time for you to meet my friend. Please keep all questions for after we leave.” She pulled him up as he grasped her hand.

They both began to move silently through the library. She knew the path so well at this point. She’d been traversing it for over two-hundred and fifty years. She knew that T was just as skilled as her, if not more. She didn’t worry about them getting caught at all.

Twisting and turning through the different floors T never said a word. They went down and down through the bookshelves. T touched her shoulder at one point and she paused turning to him.

“How deep does this place go?” He whispered so low she almost didn’t hear.

“I’ve never gone far enough to figure out how deep the library goes. But it does go far.” She waved for him to follow her.

They made it to the floor Viltis was on when Kymisha heard Silas’ voice. She held her hand up and made a motion telling T to stay where he was. She moved through the shelves to make it look as if she were coming from the main entrance. She pulled the two scrolls from her bag that she had held onto for something like this.

She walked towards where Silas and Viltis were then stopped at her usual spot. She casually leaned against the bookshelf as she waited. Silas noticed her and finished his conversation with Viltis. He turned and made his way over to her.

“You’re back early. What is it you found this time?” He stood in front of her and held his hand out for the scrolls. She passed them to him as she waited for him to approve them. She knew he would because it was something that he’d specifically requested. She had held onto them for a time just like this.

“I finally located what you were asking for.” Kymisha said, smiling at him

“Good. It’s been especially moody recently. I wish you luck.” Silas nodded and handed the scrolls back. She nodded as he left. Kymisha looked at Viltis and smiled. She made her way over to him and sat down.

"How have you been?" She watched as he made sure that Silas was gone before he spoke.

"Okay. He's been visiting more often." Kymisha saw that Silas had completely left the floor and knew he wouldn't be back. She tucked the scrolls into the ever growing pile on the table.

"Well I have a surprise for you. I brought someone for you to meet." She watched his face carefully. "He's been a friend of mine for about forty or fifty years now. It's hard to remember the exact time." She smiled. Viltis looked at her questioningly.

"Someone new? Have you mentioned them before?" Kymisha shook her head. "So it really is a surprise then!" His face lit up. Kymisha turned to where she knew T was hidden and motioned for him to come out.

T stepped out from behind the bookshelf and walked over to the table. He pulled a chair out to sit. "Hello." He said as he sat down across from Viltis. Kymisha looked between the two as she sat in between them.

"Hi. I'm Viltis!" He held his hand out to T. The joy on his face reminded her of when she first meet Viltis all those years ago, when she had been but a child. Things had changed so much since that time of ignorance. They shook hands and she relaxed slightly.

"My name is Tyranus." Kymisha quickly turned to look at him. He smirked at her as she stared open mouthed at him. "I figured it was time for you to know my full name too." He laughed at her.

"Oh? What had she been calling you before?" Viltis looked between T and her as he waited for the answer.

"I told her to just call me T. I tend to work with and around people that you don't want knowing your full name." He shrugged as he continued. "I've been helping Kymisha with some of the non Collegium work she's been doing." Viltis looked at her.

"What kind of work Kymisha?" His gaze caused her to squirm a little as she sighed.

"I've told you what my goal is. I plan on getting everyone out of here and to the surface. We can't live down here forever." She sighed and reached into her bag pulling out a sweet cake she had made and a water skin with tea. She reached in a second time and pulled out three cups.

As her two friends spoke with each other she began pouring tea and cutting the sweet cake apart. She passed the tea and cake first to Viltis and then to T. T wasn't his name, she had known that, but finding out his real name was somewhat a shock for her. She had never expected him to tell her.

Kymisha sipped her tea as Tyranus spoke about some of the work the two of them had done. She had told him to keep things light right now during the first meeting. She explained to him that Viltis didn't know how deep everything ran and he was innocent.

"Then she fell over into the cistern and lost the pendant!" T said then laughed. "She was soaked and we had to hide but she left a trail of water." Viltis laughed and shook his head.

"It sounds like you two have done a lot together. I wish I could see some of it." Viltis sighed and finished his cake and tea. "Well as much as I want to keep going there will be a librarian coming by soon. I think you should head out before they get here."

Kymisha sighed, she had known that Silas was having librarians bring things to him. She picked up what they had brought and leaned down to hug Viltis. He froze and just sat there, it was then she realized that she'd never truly done that. She pulled back and smiled at him.

"I'll visit again soon. Take care of yourself okay?" Viltis nodded and smiled. She turned to T and sighed. "I have to go out the main doors. Will you be okay getting back on your own?" T nodded and turned back to Viltis.

"It was great meeting you. Would you be opposed to me visiting without Kymisha?" She felt her heart swell. She hoped that this would be good for Vilitis.

"That would be great. Just make sure you bring a snack and some tea. I don't get much in the way of sweets and tea." Viltis smiled at T.

"I can do that. I'll see you soon then." T looked at Kymisha and nodded before he headed back towards the tunnel. Viltis turned to her again after T had left.

"He seems nice. I hope that he helps you with your goals. I hope you get to see the trees soon." Kymisha nodded.

"I hope we all will get that chance. I'll visit again when I can." She squeezed his shoulder and made her way down the hall. There was a pressure in her chest, how could he not realize that all of this was for him too? As she left the floor she sank down in a small alcove. She let the tears run down her face.

The despair she had heard in his voice had overwhelmed her. He truly believed that she would just leave him here? How could he not realize, after all this time, that he was the reason she began this all in the first place? No one deserved to be kept locked away regardless of what they were.

The tears slowed and she calmed herself. She took a few deep breaths and wiped her face clean. She rested her head back against the wall and closed her eyes.

"So when will you tell me what he is and why you bring him ritual scrolls?" T's voice came from right next to her causing her to jump to her feet and pull the dagger from her belt. Once she saw him sitting in front of the alcove she relaxed.

"It's not the time yet. Get to know him more, visit with him, let him get to know you. Then maybe I will tell you." She turned and walked away from him. "I'll see you tomorrow." She wondered how much of her breakdown he had seen. Did it matter?

#11

"Shouldn't people be notified that things are beginning to fail?" Kymisha stood in front of the table as others around her spoke about the failing water pumps. She crossed her arms and looked at everyone assembled. She'd been at this for over an hour. Trying to convince them this was not something to keep quiet. "If the water isn't being pushed up to the upper levels we will all die. This is not something we can all just ignore." Kymisha sat down when she finished. She saw the faces of the collegium members were impassive.

"Thank you for your candor Agent Kymisha. Your findings, as always, are quite valuable." Triba, the meeting coordinator, said. He was a stocky Sulinari and always had an air of dismissal when he spoke to her. "Does anyone else have anything to add before we continue with the meeting?"

"I do." Commander Bartlet stood up. "Agent Kymisha, if you were to have the ability to move forward to fix this problem, what would your actions be?"

Kymisha sighed and stood again. "I would petition to have the Cairn opened to send a party to the surface. They would scout the surrounding areas to find food, water and possibly build a settlement." She heard gasps and muttering around the table. "Life cannot be sustained here and you all know that. There is less food every..."

"Enough!" Bartlet said loud enough to stop all conversation. "Agent Kymisha what you propose is not something that can be done. The surface is a wasteland that our ancestors abandoned to be safe here in the Cairn." He smirked at her. "Not to mention you've not the authority to suggest something like this." His smug face irritated Kymisha.

"As you stated Commander it was but a hypothetical answer. You proposed a question and I answered it. I would never suggest something so out of my scope." Kymisha sat down. Her blood was boiling.

"Moving on to the next topic." Tirba's voice droned on for what felt like hours. She was only half listening. She knew that she needed to get to the surface. She shifted the way she was sitting due to a numb spot forming when something Triba said caught her attention.

“...it’s a problem we need to figure out how to solve. The lower farms are losing their abilities to grow enough for those in the upper levels. Along with the goblin and troll attacks more and more people are coming higher into the Cairn.” She was fully invested in the conversation now.

“We can send more troops down to clear out the goblins and trolls.” Bartlet offered.

“That’s not the only problem.” Silas’ voice cut through the chamber. Everyone turned to the back of the room. “The dragon is not cooperating with us as we would hope. Agent Kymisha has been able to get it to absorb the magic from scrolls that she has been able to find.” He nodded in her direction. “However it is becoming clear that we will have to find a way to push forward with the plans to clear some of the people from the upper levels.”

“Clear out people? They can’t intend to banish people or kill them!” Kymisha’s thoughts raced as she listened to the people in the chamber talk about how to quietly remove some of the mouths that needed to be fed. “How long have they been doing this?! How long have people gone missing like this.”

“It’s settled then. A team will move out to clear the bottom inhabited level before taking care of the goblins and trolls. This will solve part of the problem for the time being.” Triba’s voice cut through her thoughts.

“I have to tell T before it’s too late.” Kymisha waited for the meeting to adjourn and left as quickly as she could. She needed to meet with T. She just wasn’t sure where to find him right now.

#12

“Wait. Just wait a minute and let me process this.” Kymisha paced around the room while rubbing her temples. “They just pick people from the jail with long sentences and banish them to the surface?” She turned and looked at T.

He nodded soberly and sighed. “It’s been happening more often than it did in the past. It makes sense after everything you told me about the farms and the water.” He stroked his beard while he thought it all over.

Kymisha sank to a chair and held her head between her hands. “I don’t know if we have enough time to get everyone to the surface or not.” She felt his hand on her shoulder and she sat up. The door to her house opened then and Nessa walked in. At first glance everyone always said that they could be identical twins, even though their tattoos were in completely different areas and Nessa’s hair was much longer than her’s. Kymisha pondered exactly how much her and her sister looked alike as she watched her remove her cloak and turn to face her and T.

Nessa startled when she saw them sitting there. "Ky...What's wrong?" She set the basket she held down and came to Kymisha's side.

Kymisha laughed and shook her head. "Work. It's getting to me a little." She smiled at her younger sister and stood up. She turned to T and paused for a moment not sure of how to move forward.

"Tyranus. Pleasure to meet you." T held his hand out and Kymisha smiled at him.

Nessa blinked and took his hand shaking it. "I'm Kymisha's younger sister Nessa. Do you work with Ky?" Kymisha winced at the nickname. Her sister was the only one who ever called her that any more.

"Yes. We work very closely together." T stepped back and looked at Kymisha. "So 'Ky', why have you never mentioned you had a sister?" Kymisha punched T's arm.

"No, you do not call me that." She looked at her sister. "I wasn't expecting you until later." Nessa laughed and shook her head.

"You never pay attention to time when you're working." Nessa shook her head and picked up the basket. "I'm here when I said I would be. You told me you wouldn't have company though." She pulled out food that was wrapped up. "I brought you the cakes you asked for and a pot pie because I know you never cook for yourself." Nessa set a pot on the table and smiled.

Kymisha shook her head. "I'm sorry Nessa. I had some important stuff come up and had to talk to Tyranus. That project I mentioned to you is starting to look a little harder than expected." Kymisha opened the pot and took a deep breath. "This smells amazing!"

Nessa sighed. "If you need me to look into anything please just ask. I enjoy the side projects you give me."

"What is it that you do for work?" T asked as he sat down at the table again. Kymisha pulled three plates down and began to serve some of the pot pie.

"Well I assist in research on farming mostly. But I love to cook and sometimes I look into things for Kymisha because I'm granted access to the library like she is." Nessa sat down as well and smiled at her sister.

Kymisha sat and everyone began eating. The three of them made small talk and T managed to steer Nessa around himself expertly. He somehow managed to keep Nessa talking about herself.

When they had all eaten their full Nessa packed the leftovers into the basket again and moved toward the door. Kymisha followed her outside for a moment. Nessa smirked at her.

"He seems very nice Ky. Is he just a coworker or something more?" Nessa's blue eyes sparkled with eagerness.

"We just work together. Calm down." Nessa deflated slightly and sighed.

"I was just hoping that you had finally found someone to build a life with." She shifted the weight of the basket and shrugged. "Let me know if you need anything."

Kymisha nodded and hugged her sister. She watch her begin to walk down the street before going back inside.

"She could be your twin. If she had her tattoo around her eyes like yours. I'm not sure I could tell the difference between the two of you until you spoke." Kymisha laughed quietly before sobering.

"It's one reason I'm grateful for mine to be so out in the open." She rubbed between her eyes. "She knows mostly everything. She's assisted with a lot of the research I've done on almost everything."

T nodded. "I assumed by how calmly she was talking about many things. Why would you bring her into this?"

Kymisha smiled softly. "Because my family will be one of the first to jump on the chance to go to the surface. Where do you think I got the idea from." T laughed and shook his head.

"Well good. We'll get there, trust me when I tell you that things are in motion." Kymisha looked at him quizzically. "I can't say any more. Plausible deniability and all that, you're still an official." He laughed at his own joke.

"As long as that plan is storing some water for everyone who's going to need it." Kymisha said to T as he nodded in response.

"We started that ages ago after the pumps shut down that one day. I knew something was up so we built water storage. It's not perfect but it could last for a month or so." T affirmed he hopes.

"Food stores?" She began pacing again.

"Kymisha it's all handled." He grabbed her by the shoulders to stop her pacing. "I'm glad you told me about this so that I can start on making sure they're all full. You work on getting them to listen."

Kymisha nodded and straightened her back. "Okay. If I don't have to worry about the people and you have that side of things handled I'll get working on my side." She was quite for a moment.

"What have you thought of?" T asked taking a step back when Kymisha started pacing again, not in worry but in concentration.

"Getting Viltis out is the first step." Kymisha turned to face him with pure joy on her face. "He's the key to us getting out of here even if he doesn't know what he is."

"Kymisha. What is he that makes him so important?" T crossed his arms over his chest. "I haven't asked since that night I met him and it's been over a hundred years. I think I deserve to know at this point." Kymisha laughed.

"So your sources don't run that deep then?" When he shook his head she laughed again. "He's a Dragon Tyranus." When she saw the shock on his face she laughed again.

#13

Kymisha worked her way through the tunnel slowly. She gathered her thoughts as she noticed the improvements T had made to it. She hoped that they would work, but first she had to make sure it was worth the effort.

Since his comment after meeting T she continued to impress on him, in quiet ways, that he was included in her plan to reach the surface. However, he still seemed to not fully understand that. Tonight that would change.

She contemplated how she would tell him and find out if it was what he wanted too. She knew that he wanted to see more of what was around him, but did he really want to come to the surface with her and everyone else she and T could convince?

She didn't realize how distracted by her own thoughts she was until she heard Viltis say her name from around the bookshelf.

"Kymisha?" His voice was whisper quiet, she almost hadn't heard it.

"Viltis..." she answered just as quietly. She heard a small sigh as she rounded the shelf. He was laying on his back on his cot above his bedding. "What's wrong?" She walked over to the cot and knelt down next to his head.

Viltis sat there quietly with his eyes closed and covered his eyes. She couldn't see clearly in the darkness of the library this late. All the main liquid lights were removed at night to avoid people being too low in the library. She reached into her bag to activate her own liquid light. She felt a hand touch hers to stop her.

“Please don’t. Not right this moment at least.” His voice cracked slightly as he spoke to her softly. They sat in silence for a short time with his hand resting on hers. She realized something was very wrong. She heard the hic-up in his breathing, the deep breaths to try to hide it, the sniffles and that he continued to use one hand to cover his face and the other to hold hers.

“Viltis, talk to me please. I want to help.” She squeezed his hand lightly while reaching up with the other to touch the top of his head. Viltis took in a deep breath and lowered the hand covering his face.

“I’ll never leave here. I will die here. I don’t know why they’re doing this and all I want is to see the surface with you.” His voice held the remnants of tears.

She allowed the silence to fill the space as her heart swelled. Not because he felt this dispar but because she wouldn’t have to convince him of anything. He wanted this!

“Viltis, I came here tonight to ask you a very important question. I was so scared you’d tell me no, that you wouldn’t want to. But you just answered it for me.” She smiled even though he couldn’t see it. “Viltis, when we enact it, how would you like to leave the library?”

#14

“Commander Bartlet please listen to reason. We are all dying down here. We need to go to the surface.” Kymisha sat at a diner table with a man she hated, acting as if they were the best of friends.

“Kymisha, dear, there is no way I am going to support this. You’ve been a great asset to the Collegium for over four-hundred and fifty years. Do not throw that away by pushing for something that will never become reality.” He sipped his wine and smiled at her.

“Very well commander.” She made the agreed upon signal and T appeared behind Bartlet. His sword at the man’s throat. “You see commander, I tried to get you to be on our side for this. But I can’t keep fighting against all of you. So I’ll take out the loudest voice against me.” She nodded to T.

He slit the commander’s throat and let the body drop against the table. Kymisha stood up and left her table setting. “Thanks T. Now we need to move. They’re only going to be at that dinner party for a few hours and it’s the perfect time to get Viltis to his new home.” Both left out a side door leaving the body of Commander Bartlet with his face in his soup.

They made their way down the streets to where the tunnel was hidden. They had worked together to make it something Viltis would have an easy time Making his way through. They needed this to go as smoothly as possible.

All of the highest ranking Collegium officers were having an annual party. All staff was invited to go as long as they weren't on a mission. Kymisha had taken a long mission, however with T's help she was able to get through it in a quarter of the time.

He and some colleagues, as he called them, had gone ahead right after she had given them the details. T had brought out what was needed and they spent the rest of the time working out the plan with Viltis on how to get him out.

Now it was time to execute the plan. Bartlett had only been the first part, he had always pushed against going to the surface. Kymisha thought that it was because he'd lose his control over the citizens.

They made it through the tunnel and wound through the bookshelves as quickly as they could. Any librarian that happened to cross paths with them were gassed by Kymisha as T called out what race they were so she would know what to throw. They then promptly knocked them out and poured an amnesia down their throats. No one needed to die, they just needed to forget seeing Kymisha and T.

They got to Viltis and rushed over to unlock the shackles around his ankles and wrists. T took the ankles while Kymisha took the wrists. They both got the locks undone and Kymisha smiled at Viltis.

"You ready? We need to move fast." She watched as he nodded at her. T grabbed the bag they all had agreed Viltis could bring with him. He grunted as he swung it on his shoulder.

"Really?" T opened the bag and lifted a large tome partially out. Viltis stopped him and shook his head.

"It's really important. Trust me okay? I wouldn't pack it if we didn't need it." Viltis smiled and looked back at Kymisha. "Let's go!"

Kymisha shrugged at T and they all began moving quickly through the bookshelves. As they wound through they weren't able to spot the librarian that rounded the bookshelf, coming face to face with them.

"Magic Prison!" Viltis' voice sounded from behind them. The librarian froze, Kymisha and T both turned to Viltis. "Uh...I don't know what that was." Viltis looked at his hands.

"It's alright Viltis." Kymisha took his hand. "We need to keep going. We can talk about what happened later, right now we move." She pulled out a sleep gas, thankfully this librarian was human. "Viltis I need you to come here."

Viltis moved over to her and watched her. "Okay Viltis I need you to put your hand on her shoulder and say prison down while you think about letting go." Kymisha readied herself as Viltis did what she had asked of him. He let the prison spell go and she waited a breath to make sure he'd done it. She threw the globe at the woman and she fell right asleep. Viltis caught her and lowered her to the ground.

"Now what? You're not going to hurt her are you?" Viltis asked as he knelt next to the librarian. T walked up and touched his shoulder.

"No friend. We just make them forget they ever saw us. We need to do this so no one knows who helped you." He knelt next to the woman and poured the amnesia down her throat. "She will be fine when she wakes up. Now we need to keep moving."

They began again and made it to the tunnel. Kymisha stopped just outside and began to activate the trap they had set up. They needed to cave the tunnel in so that no one would be able to follow. Because they would attempt to track them. But if she were able to take some time to confuse the tracks that would go a long way in helping.

She nodded to T and Viltis when she was ready. She held the cord in her hand as they all sprinted down the tunnel. Half way down the cord went taught and she shouted at them letting them know as the trap at the end went off. It was a chain reaction so the would be out by the time the last one went off.

"Don't stop! Just keep moving." Kymisha shouted at them as the next trap triggered, then the next. They were going a little slower than she had thought they would. She kept moving behind her two friends. She hoped that the timing wasn't off. She was good with traps, but nowhere near a master.

"We're almost there!" T shouted back to her. Then she heard it. The traps were triggering faster. \*\*\*\*!

"Move faster! The timing is off. Hurry!" She noticed the traps were getting closer. She saw the opening as Viltis and T made it out and continued to a safe distance. She gave it the last of her speed and moved faster. She reached the opening, grabbed the edge and pulled herself around the corner. She kept running as fast as she could as the force of the blast pushed her forward.

A hard grabbed her and pulled her into an alley. Her body slammed into another. She pushed back and saw T smiling at her. "That was a little close wouldn't you say?" He said as he laughed at her. She looked past him to see Viltis. He was looking above them.

"Viltis?" She gave T a quick smile and walked over to him. "Are you okay?" She touched his shoulder. He looked at her and smiled.

“It’s so open out here.” He looked back up. Kymisha looked up as well. She suddenly understood why he may feel like this was open. He’d spent his life inside the library, she’d known that he’d been there yes, but this was bigger than anything he’d ever seen. Kymisha smiled and wrapped her arm around him.

“Just wait. This is big now, but I imagine the surface will be even bigger.” She gave him a squeeze and then took his hand. “Let’s get you home.”

#15

“You will be helping to locate some missing Collegium property during this mission. The second part will be to get the water filter up and running again.” Kymisha leaned against the wall as the mission was explained. She had to go with a team this time, which was unusual. Normally they allowed her to form her own team or to execute the mission how she saw fit.

This time however she had been paired with a Librahm and a Warden. They had introduced themselves at some point. The Warden was Thomas and the Librahm was Salvin. All she really knew was that they were all about the same rank. She hoped that maybe they could be turned to her side, maybe gain more allies for the surface.

They made it to the entrance to the lower levels. Since this was all sanctioned they wouldn’t have to take the routes she and T normally would. Not that she really minded, this was supposed to be safer. Nothing was between the floors here, so this should be easy.

They wound their way down the stairs as they moved to the level they were supposed to get to. Kymisha was content with walking in silence but it seemed like Thomas had other ideas.

“So what is this object we’re supposed to be getting? You have to know, since you’re the one that is going to get it while we guard you.” He was looking at Salvin.

“That is classified. I’m not supposed to talk about it.” They didn’t give up any information. They obviously were higher rank than she was.

“That’s a load of crap. You can’t seriously expect us to do all of this and not know.” He turned to Kymisha. “Common you’re with me on this right?” He motioned to Salvin. “They won’t tell me anything.”

“I’m pretty used to the whole not knowing crap. It’s how the Collegium works. Been that way for the last four-hundred years that I’ve been with them.” Kymisha shrugged. “It’s annoying yeah, but there’s nothing to be done about it.” She kept moving.

As they moved Kymisha was able to make small talk with both of them. She found out a lot about both of them. They didn’t know the political game well enough. Thomas was enthusiastic,

excitable, and reckless. Salvin was harder, but not impossible. They were more reserved, but eventually opened up after Kymisha talked a little about herself.

She noted that neither would be good in the first year or two of living on the surface. She thought they both may be helpful either down in the Cairn, or if they both came up once things were established. She'd have to talk with them both alone at some point.

Finally they all made it to the level they needed to be at. They entered the level and it was silent. Kymisha was used to this by now, having gone into levels that were no longer lived in many times.

They worked their way through the empty streets towards the central Collegium building. Salvin worked their way to the central office space and opened a secret panel in the wall. Kymisha stood waiting and listening for anything unusual.

“We can leave now. I have what I need. We should get to the water pump and see what is causing it to malfunction.” They all moved out of the building and towards the water pump.

When they got there Salvin began looking at the pump and working on it. Suddenly a Dryad came walking up to them. She was all wrong though, black ooze was dripping from her body. Kymisha looked at the water pump and realized that there was more of the black ooze in the water.

The dryad walked up to the water and reached into it. The ooze all rushed towards her creating a sort of shell around her. Her size grew and it was then Kymisha knew if they didn't act fast they would all die.

Kymisha pulled out her bow and looked around at the others. “We need to start moving!” Both Salvin and Thomas looked over. Thomas came up to her side with his swords out.

“I've almost got it! Keep it busy for a few moments and we can use the pump to get out of here!” Salvin shouted.

Both Kymisha and Thomas sighed. “Well let's keep it busy...” Thomas said right before rushing forward and attacking the sick Dryad.

Kymisha used her bow to shoot at the creature. Arrow after arrow she shot at it while Thomas attacked. He began to take on damage after his armor was beaten up.

“We need to get moving now!” Kymisha yelled back at Salvin. Suddenly she heard the pump kick on.

“Let's go! We need to get into the pipe that pushes the water up! Wait for the pause and jump in!” They cast a healing spell at Thomas when the pumping sounds paused, they jumped into the pipe and were jettisoned up and out.

Knowing that there wasn't any other option she used her deadliest attack. She realized where the heart of the creature was. The pipe began to quiet and she knew she had only moments. Thomos watched in awe as she jumped backwards into the pipe while taking her shot. The last thing she saw before the rush of water pushed her up was the creature falling dead at Thomos feet.