

AS WE ONCE WERE

By Ran Kailie

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Prologue

Haze hung oppressively over the late afternoon leaving the air heavy and thick like a wet wool blanket. Light from the fading sun filtered through the tall majestic oaks into the small room on the west side of the large chalet throwing the room deeper into shadows as the day wore on. Silhouetted against the far wall sat a woman, her gaze focused beyond the room staring endlessly out of the open terrace doors. Behind her, standing in the doorway, a man watched her, quietly.

A week had passed, and she hadn't spoken in that entire time, Calek ran his hand through his hair a bit in frustration.

Everything was falling apart; the fight with the God Slayer had taken more than a small toll on the clan. Callista was listless and non-responsive since carrying their son from the field of battle, dead, cut down by a demon's sword. And Mylia...

The door frame splintered under his grip, worst of all Mylia had vanished without any warning the day after the battle, Stormcrow was looking for her with little luck. Calek didn't have the heart to tell Callista, to add the burden she already bore.

Callista turned to look at him at the noise of the door frame splintering, the small amount of light from the window playing off the tears on her cheeks. It didn't take a single word for Calek to cross the room to her dropping to her side gathering her up in his arms.

He knew there was more to this than simply Arick's death but he didn't want to pry, she would share if she felt she needed to. They sat there, quietly for a long time, her tears coming and going before she finally spoke her voice low, "She's gone."

Calek stiffened; he had assumed that even though Mylia had left, Callista could still feel her through their connection. But she apparently knew, "She disappeared the night after the fight, Stormcrow is looking for her."

"He won't find her," a dangerous edge began creeping into her voice. Calek recognized it, this was Callista when she meant business, her no nonsense personality, "I fear..." she paused for a

long moment considering her words, "No... I know she has betrayed me, she has betrayed all of us."

"Calli you don't know that, something could be wrong. For all we know she might have been kidnapped."

"No, if she had been kidnapped she wouldn't have shut down the connection herself."

The implication of her words struck him Mylia had forced her out, and in such a way that Callista obviously had no connection to her at all, unlike when she was trapped in Sheol. For Mylia to do something so severe could only mean she was hiding for some reason.

"Calli we still don't know, you know how Mylia can be..."

She cut him off, the coldness in her voice complete as she pulled away from him a bit, her eyes burning with fury, "No, not this time, I cannot... I will not accept her betrayal, I will find her Cal, and I will sever our link and kill her. She does not deserve that which I have given her."

He had never seen her this way, so full of indignant anger and rage, and it scared him, suddenly the woman before him was someone completely different. Inside the small room the haze thicked, the air becoming thicker and hotter and almost unbearable.

"Calli you're upset, and not thinking rationally, I know you're upset over Arick, I'm upset too, but this isn't the answer."

his tone pleading searching her eyes with his, trying to find that part of her she hid so well and only finding a wall.

"No," she stood suddenly, "Come with me... help me hunt her, help me kill her Cal."

"I can't do that! Mylia hasn't done anything wrong, Calli you're being irrational," his voice rose as he stood facing her, stepping forward to put and hand on her shoulder.

She stopped him cold, her grip on his hand almost too tight, "I'll only ask one more time Cal," pain creeped into her eyes and maybe even the hint of fresh tears, "Trust me, help me and be with me... I need you."

"Calli I'm not going to help you hunt and kill Mylia..."

The pain in her eyes disappeared instantly, replaced with only coldness, "So be it, please do not hinder me, or I will kill you."

Calek watched her in shock as she disappeared out the window into the coming darkness.

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Ransim stepped out of the time break, the smell of lavender curling past her as she looked around the large open room of the temple; she laid a boy down onto the floor. He appeared as if he could be no older then 6, his back marred by a large jagged gash.

She turned as an older man approached her looking to the boy with some panic noticing the pool of blood forming as the boy bled.

The older man looked to Ransim and nodded yelling for a healer, "You have done well Ransim Su'Noch, thank you for bringing him to us."

As the healer ran in and tore the boy's shirt from him, the sigil on the boys back came into view; it was an all seeing eye perched atop a set of scales.

"I'm aware of how important he is Elder, I shall return in a few days once he has healed to begin his training." She turned and disappeared into the time break.

Ten Years Later

The woman jerked up out of a troubled sleep and grabbed her sword, looking around wildly. All seemed to be quiet on this moonless night, but something had disturbed her. She slipped free of the linen sheets, her thin shift sticking to her body from the perspiration caused by the dream, onto the cool floor. Biting her lip, she went to stand before the open window, letting the icy rain and chill wind blow over her. Her burgundy hair blew around her face wildly as she stared out into the night. She raised a hand to move her hair out of her face and stared to the spot below her window. Someone was down there, she was sure of it. She stared down at into the darkness and picked up the shape of what looked to be a small child.

"What are ye doing down there?" she called. Over the years her accent had faded, it was now a soft burr, something that annoyed her but seemed to keep the men flocking to the sound of her voice.

A light flared with a strong gust of wind and a child looked up at her. She gasped softly, staring at the child, her eyes filling with panic. She knew that face..

"Go home, Aunt Mylia," the child called up to her. "You have been away too long they need you."

Mylia awoke from her dreams with a soft cry as she bolted upright in bed. She gripped the blankets in tight fists and blinked

around the room. "Arick? Little nephew?" She slipped from the bed, grabbing her sword and went to stare out into the rain. No one was there. She shivered, wrapping her arms around herself and holding her sword in front of her.

The dream had been so real, the latest in several she had had about her nephew, and other things from the past. Arick haunted her most of all, she hadn't meant to kill him. She shook her head, but she had, the God Slayer had manipulated her to do it, it wasn't her fault.

* * *

Mylia looked around, the Villa burning all around her. God Slayer had presented a direct attack on them without any warning. He had come for her, of that she was sure. However they were not prepared for this and his forces were overwhelming them.

The demons were overrunning the town which laid near the Villa, and they had been fighting all night and into the day, trying to stop the flow of demon warriors.

Near her she watched Callista dispatch another warrior with a scream of rage, she was like a whirlwind of destruction through their ranks. At her side stood Calek, her husband, making easily as big of a dent as Callista was.

Mylia fought her way through the demons to get to the front lines. There she saw the object of her terror and her hatred.

He called himself "the God slayer", but Mylia called him many other things. He was an ancient from the Outerworld, a powerful sorcerer and a fierce warrior. He was here to stop her, and to keep her from continuing to build her power base. The God Slayer did not want to share his power anymore then she wanted to share her own.

She had told the others that he had tortured her mind and her dreams for ages before he had shown himself to her in a full-scale attack on her and everything she held dear. That he originally wanted to kill her to add her powers to his, playing with her and trying to drive her insane until he did so. She told them that he also wanted Callista's powers as well, the entire clan was up in arms.

Deception was part of her bread and butter, but she did it for the greater good of the clan. But with their defenses split they couldn't easily come to each other's rescue.

Mylia frowned as she looked around at the battlefield surrounding her. This could not go on, it had already gone on long enough. He would be yet another warning to the Council of the Outerworld of her power. The God Slayer had to die.

Mylia fought her way closer to him, her rage building to the extent that she could feel herself manifesting the fiery form of the phoenix. It was a power she borrowed from Callista who seemed less willing to use it. The form overtook her as she tilted back her head and let loose with a shrill avian scream as she charged God-slayer.

The flames seared his face, causing him to lose his concentration on the time break he had been holding open. Instantly the portal snapped shut and the flow of extra demon warriors was cut off.

The others would deal with the last of them, and she went after the God Slayer again unleashing a hot bolt of fire at him, searing everything in his general area. He snarled in pain and fury at her, swinging a giant arm at her, trying to knock her down. Mylia shrieked again and sent white-hot bolts through his mind as slashed at his face with a dagger, tearing the flesh to shreds.

* * *

Mylia shook her head, jerking herself from the memories of that day. She stared out into the rainstorm. Arick, the son of Callista and Calek, he had died that day and it had been her fault.

She stepped out onto the balcony, not caring that her thin shift did nothing to keep her dry. She tilted up her face and let the rain mix with her tears. She hadn't meant to kill her nephew, but she had just the same, it was an unforgivable crime.

And for what? For a petty power struggle with the Outerworld, one that had gone sour quickly. When the smoke and fire had cleared, Arick had lain dead. She had left the next night after making sure most of the family was alright. She had seen Callista holding her dead son, and the guilt of her actions, of her lies

began to eat at her, so she fled.

* * *

Green eyes flared with anger, the long sword made a light whistle followed by a rush of air it cut through an empty space. Her lips curled into an angry snarl, hissing softly as she continued to slash at the man before her.

Wounds opened up in the man's body, cries of pain emitting momentarily from a choked voice. Something flickered in her eyes, deadly intent; her rage reaching its pinnacle as the man fell, backpedaling before hitting the ground hard.

She was on him swiftly the edge of the long sword at his throat, her eyes burning holes of hate into him. A thin red line appeared on his neck, red beaded sweat on his brow, his eyes panicked, pleading.

"Any last words?" she demanded, her voice icy and emotionless.

"Why are you doing this? I love you Calli, please..." he managed to get out through his breath short and harsh.

"Wrong words," she hissed as she shoved her sword through Calek's throat...

* * *

Mylia sat up with a scream. "No!"

She huddled in the bed as she tried to shove the images of the nightmare from her mind. First Arick coming back, and now dreams of Callista and Calek killing each other, what the hell was going on? She slipped from her bed and walked to the balcony doors once more, staring out into the rain.

Had it really been ten years since she had last seen her family, or spoken to any of them? Ten years since she had last been held by her dear Stormcrow? She leaned against the doorframe, ignoring the fact that she was getting soaked as she stared out into the murky night. It didn't seem that long ago at all. She missed them all so much.

Tears slipped down her cheeks.

What are ye going to do now, Mylia? She wondered silently. Where do ye go from here?

* * *

The winds blew harshly behind her, the edges of her cloak flowing out, the bottom pushed against her ankles as she looked upon the man standing before her bruised and battle worn, bleeding from many wounds. It was still three hours from sunrise; she had to admit, this had been a chase that even presented her with a challenge. Her red hair blew around her head wildly making its crimson tresses seem a fiery inferno upon her head. Her eyes bore

down on that creature with a cold venomous gaze.

"Make a choice..." her voice rang out swirling with the wind around her a cold edge to her words a slight hiss following each, "Die with honor by my blade here, give up running because you won't ever escape me, or continue to run, and I promise to not be nearly as quick when I kill you."

The fear grew for a moment in his eyes before it disappeared leaving them glowing a soft red. His blue tinted black hair danced around his head as he looked onto the woman. A pain grew in his chest, he hated this, he loved her still and missed her, and the peace.

"Calli why... I loved you... I still love you, his death wasn't your fault, and her leaving wasn't you fault... Please..."

The ice edged her voice with anger, "I know it wasn't my fault, and her leaving, her betrayal drove me to this Cal. I wanted you to join me, I loved you, but you refused me." Pain entered her voice shaking her exterior. "If you had loved me you would have gone with me. You would have helped me hunt her down; you would have understood why I need her dead instead of continually fighting me. You would have trusted me."

Tears slipped down her cheeks as she lunged forward pulling her sword from its sheath on her back the blade ringing. Leaping towards him she brought the sword down on the side of his arm, catching him off guard and cutting him deeply, a scream of pain

escaped Calek's lips and he backed off quickly. Running, he disappeared into the tree line.

Closing her eyes she watched him disappear, light trickles of rain started to fall around her quickly turning to a downpour soaking her. Turning away bitterly she walked slowly into the forest the rain drops ceasing their assault.

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Callista desperately sliced through another demon screaming out a feral battle cry filled with anger and blood lust. She quickly pulled a form from under where the demon had been sending the small girl away from the battle. To her right Calek took out another demon looking to her his eyes showing the strain the battle had already put on him, "Calli where is Arick?"

Her eyes flew desperately around the scene around her slicing through another demon, "I don't know Cal, "her voice filling with panic, "I thought you were watching him!"

But as quickly as those thoughts had entered her mind she felt her sister's rage, she felt her pull on her connection to the phoenix, drawing that power to her. The world swam for a moment around Callista, forcing her to stumble as Mylia pulled all of the power to herself. Mylia had told them of the God Slayers plot, his desire for Mylia's power, and now for her own.

The rage slowly built, and the world went red, the flames

built around Mylia's form and she took aim striking out brutally at the God Slayer in that instant. Callista stumbled forward, Calek barely managing to catch her. As she looked up though horror filled her she saw her son. The world slowed down as she tried to scream to him, but the words never made it in time. Behind him the demon warrior rose up and struck him with a brutal slash. His small form fell to the ground lying motionless.

She pushed desperately at Calek trying to go screaming at him to let go. And in an instant she knew why Calek held her back, the final lash from Mylia lit the field up incinerating everything in a 20 foot radius of Mylia.

She stopped falling limp in Calek's arms, to shocked to even cry.

* * *

Callista drew her sword in anger and spun imbedding her sword deeply into the side of an ancient oak. Leaning against the tree ignoring the roughness against her forehead. Moments passed before she screamed in rage slamming her fist into the tree leaving blood speckling the cracked bark.

With the crinkling of leaves behind her she grabbed her sword reacting with inhuman speed to rip it from the tree. Turning quickly her eyes moved towards the two forms lurking before her. Disbelief barely had a chance to register as she lunged forward slicing down upon the image of her sister, the illusion dissipating as her blade touched it. Her heart quickly jumped to her throat

pain and surprise settling into her as she took stock of the other figure, that of her son Arick.

The sword fell from her hand with a stomp thump as it landed in the wet grass. Callista rushed forward only to be met with air and the bitter coldness of the rain. Submitting she fell to her knees crying her hands gripping the earth as if it could somehow be forced to change the past.

From outside the grove quietly behind a tree Calek watched her pained. His love for her was still strong, even though she now sought his death, and the death of Mylia. But all he wanted to do was reach forward and take her into his arms.

* * *

Mylia tossed and turned in the bed as her dreams tormented her mind. Her hands ripped at the sheets and sweat poured down her face as she whipped her head back and forth wildly, her dreams giving her no peace. She whimpered, shaking in her sleep and tearing at the sheets, as she seemed to fight against some unseen monster.

A form stood silently over her watching, the gaze neutral and cold. Her torment was evident but the form seemed not to be concerned or to care.

With a soft mutter a pale hand rested against the side of her head eliciting another whimper from her. Leaning over the bed another hand rested against the opposite side of her head, and a slight vibration reverberated from the dark form to her.

Mylia turned around slowly, her eyes adjusting to the dimness caused by the hanging mists. "Where am I?" she asked softly, not really expecting anyone to answer her.

The mists parted and she stared into the face of someone she knew so very well. It was her nephew, dead these last ten years. "You are at the place of in-between," he said solemnly.

"Arick?" she whispered. "Why am I here? Am I dead?"

The child shook his head. "No, Aunt, you are still very much alive, if you could call what you have been doing living. I would call it more like walking around waiting for the executioner to hit you with his axe."

"As to why you're here, I brought you." He crossed the space between them, seeming to float over the ground.

Mylia looked at him in confusion. "Why?"

"You're needed, Mylia," he said somberly. "And I need your help."

Mylia stared at him, her eyes reflecting shock. "But how can I help you? Haven't I done enough to you?"

Arick shook his head. "None of that is important now. What matters is that you're needed, and you need to go."

"But who am I to help anybody?" she asked, her voice shaking. "I couldn't even help my own family..." she caught herself unable to say the rest a tightness beginning in her stomach, the sourness of guilt.

"That doesn't matter, Mylia." Arick said calmly. "You need to return."

"Return?" Mylia swallowed, really not liking the sound of this.

"Mother needs you Mylia. And Father needs you." Arick touched her hand. "And I need you."

"How do you need me?"

"I need to you reunite with mother, you need to be together again." he said softly.

"Why?"

Arick sighed softly, "Because if you do not horrible things are going to happen, and my existence will be completely forfeit." He looked up at her with his mother's green eyes. "Please, Mylia. Please say that you will return and seek out my mother."

Mylia swallowed, her eyes filling with tears. "I could nae e'er refuse ye anything," she said softly. "Yes, I'll go back..."

Mylia woke with a start, sitting bolt upright in bed. She blinked her eyes and found herself in her own room again. She wiped the tears from her cheeks and went to stand in front of the window again. It was still raining, and her hair blew wildly around, whipping against her face and neck.

She was going back.

She swallowed, wrapping her arms around herself. How would everyone react to her return?

She had slipped away in the middle of the night, not giving anyone a chance to stop her. The Crimson Guard knew she was leaving and hadn't been happy, but they had abided by her wishes and not said anything to anyone else. The Crimson Guard and the Brotherhood were the only ones that knew where she was in general. They didn't have the exact location, but they knew the vicinity. And she trusted both factions not to say anything. As always, their first loyalties were to her.

She had left Arion, sleeping in the bed they had been sharing, careful not to wake him as she slipped away. She had stood in the doorway of the bedroom, watching him sleeping so peacefully, and her eyes had filled with tears. How could she explain to him what she had done, that she needed to leave? She didn't want to take the chance that he would quit loving her when he found out what had happened in the fight, that she had killed an innocent child, or of her other crimes. So she had turned away and slipped into the darkness, not wanting to take the risk of him waking up and trying

to stop her.

Mylia wiped her cheeks now as she thought of Arion, her Stormcrow. She had always thought they were cursed to remain friends and nothing more, but the day he told her he loved her she had been so happy.

Now as she stared into the darkness and felt the stinging rain, she wondered what his reaction would be to seeing her again. Gods it would kill her if he refused to speak to her, but she supposed he would have every reason to hate her. After all, she did abandon him with no explanation.

She tried to think of anything besides the uncomfortable knot in her stomach, she also worried what would happen if the Outerworld Council found her, after the attack by the God Slayer she knew she would need to hide, they were going to stop at nothing to make her own up to her actions in Sheol.

She clenched her fist, it was all the fault of Da'Noch's daughter, Ransim. Somehow she had survived and taken all of the information to the council of the Outerworld, the God Slayer had just been the first in what would have been a long string of issues. She could keep the facade with the clan up for awhile, but not forever.

Mylia sighed as she pulled her shift off and slipped into a comfortable pair of leggings and a tunic. She wrapped her cape around her and started down the stairs.

Mylia stood in the shadows as she entered the room, watching her friend conducting her business. She had the power and the sharpness that she had always admired and wanted in herself.

"Your thoughts give you away, Abban," the Drow matron said, turning to her.

Mylia smiled wryly, stepping out of the shadows. "Aye, that they do, Labrynth. That they do."

Labrynth shrugged. "You had the dreams again." It was a statement, not a question.

"Aye," Mylia said softly. "Labrynth, I need a favor..."

The drow matron nodded. "Anything, Abban."

"I need ye to tae down the blocks we put up in my mind when we first got here."

Labrynth frowned. "Are you sure you that is a wise decision?"

Mylia sighed and then shrugged, she had not told Labrynth everything, but the drow matron was aware of parts of the truth and well aware of the seriousness of Mylia's request. "I don't know, but I need to take them down. I fear something horrible is happening, and I've hidden from the past for too long."

"I don't like this, abban..."

"I know and I don't really like it either, but it must be done. There are things going on, and I'm needed."

Labrynth frowned, but sighed and placed her hands on either side of Mylia's head. There was nothing but silence for a few tense moments and then Labrynth stepped back. "Done."

Mylia opened her eyes and let down her own mental blocks just enough to let her feel Callista. She had painstakingly put those blocks into place the night she had left, it had been the only thing that had kept Callista from being able to immediately locate her. Rage, calculated and unreasoning, and the thirst for vengeance colored her vision crimson sending Mylia to her knees. Her hands flew to her head holding it as she screamed, her body trembling.

Long moments passed as Mylia struggled to focus long enough to force the blocks back into place. Something else had been there, something far more powerful than Callista. Mylia thought frantically a moment, worried that perhaps she had become possessed.

Labrynth knelt down beside her, "Mylia? Abban?" the drow matron had also felt the presence, the overpowering sensation.

"Such rage...hatred..." Mylia looked at her. "I have to go back and stop Callista. Something is terribly wrong... that wasn't just..."

"I know Abban, I felt it to, there was something else, something older, and far more powerful."

Mylia looked to Labrynth questioningly, "What was it? Who was it? If you know Labrynth please tell me."

She shook her head a moment before standing her face solemn, "No, I am sorry Mylia but I do not, but it is not a force you should be so willing to face alone."

Mylia sighed. "I do not have a choice, I've run from the past for too long, I must face it, and my mistakes. I must return."

Labrynth simply nodded to her, she did not need to ask, she could sense that Mylia was determined, and when Mylia was so determined it was not often easy to sway her. She knew far more about what Mylia had done before she had come to her for aid.

"I have to stop Callista from murdering Calek," she whispered with tears in her eyes. "And, my nephew cae to me, saying he needs my sister and I to reunite or he's trapped forever in darkness."

Labrynth sighed, "How can I help?"

Mylia smiled grimly. "I need you to help me get to the exact place Calek is right now. If my dream was any indication, Callista is hunting him at this exact moment."

Labrynth nodded and closed her eyes, picking the location right out of Mylia's mind. "Be careful, abban, and come back safely..."

The darkness seemed to crawl out from all corners of the room, swirling around and over her form, Mylia forced her eyes closed as the darkness enveloped her. When she opened them, she was standing a few yards from where her sister and Calek were fighting.

With a sharp cry, she ran, throwing herself to roll in between the two. She shoved Calek out of the way as she stood up, and planted herself to face Callista.

"You will nae hurt him, Callista," she said calmly, her voice surprising strong, though she was trembling inside.

Mylia stood stoically as she watched her Callista's face register disbelief at her being there. She brought up her hand and her flaming sword suddenly appeared to parry the downward swing at where Calek had been only seconds before.

Callista blinked, hearing the deft clang of her sword against another falling back a step defensively, her eyes falling harshly on Mylia, hate burning and festering there.

"You, after all these years, you've finally had the guts to return." Her voice was cold and accusing, burning into Mylia's soul with her anger pent up over the years.

Mylia flinched from the hatred in her twin's voice, but she stood there, ready to fight if she needed to. "Calli, don't do this!" she begged. "It wasn't about guts or bravery---but about need."

Rushing forward with hate and murder in her mind, Callista raised her sword coming down to strike a deadly blow.

Mylia raised her sword to block and crumpled under the sheer power behind the blow. She fell to the side, Callista's sword narrowly missing her. The flash of silver filled her vision for a moment as Callista had turned slashing the sword at her.

Mylia closed her eyes expecting the blade to slice through her when she heard the sword connect with another. She opened her eyes to see Calek facing Callista his sword locked against hers.

"Calli she didn't betray us, if she had betrayed us why would she come now to help me?" his voice held some strain but he held his ground.

"And you're still foolish enough to believe that? She ran Calek, in the middle of the night, and blocked me, I find it suspect that she comes back now willingly, but I'm not about to question lady luck shining on me. I will not explain myself or my actions to you."

She pulled back spinning on her heel pulling a shorter blade from her side slashing at him again. He met the blade, and each of

her successive attacks, blocking and parrying, he was well trained as a swordsman even before they had met, and many years practicing with her had kept him alive the past 10.

"I would rather ask her why she left, not try to make assumptions."

Snarling in frustration she jumped back from him, her form straightening, she began to circle them, Mylia on the ground by Calek stunned at their conversation. She looked to Calek a bit frantically then back to Callista. She forced herself to stand her legs shaky, a million thoughts flying through her mind, exactly how much did Callista know.

"I don't need to hear it from her mouth Calek, I know enough as it is, but you didn't trust me then so why should you now?"

She charged, and Calek braced himself for the impact that never came. Not a sound was heard until Callista hit a tree some 20 feet away, only the black blur in the corner of his eyes told him that someone else has joined in for the fun.

The woman sitting atop Callista had a shock of unruly brunette hair that barely brushed against her shoulders. She pulled her arm back and slammed her fist into the side of Callista's head, eliciting a wince from Calek. Callista's head snapped to the side and she slumped against the tree.

The woman stood and turned to face them pushing a pair of

sunglasses onto her forehead, she was dressed simply in a black t-shirt and black cargo pants with a pair of utility boots. Her skin marble white, a sharp contrast to her dark clothing. Calek couldn't tell from there but he knew her eyes were gray, the color of storm clouds. She was Ashoka, a chill ran down his spine, if Ashoka was here, Damon would not be far.

The temperature seemed to drop a few degrees as a dark figure stepped out from the shadows placing a black-gloved hand on Mylia's shoulder. Calek barely caught sight of him as he turned hearing the gasp from Mylia.

Coldness crept down Mylia's spine, she turned slowly to face him, it was Damon, Callista's brother. She tried to pull away, panic slowly building inside her, but Damon was much stronger than her and his hand was like a mountain on her shoulder.

Calek moved to help Mylia, but Ashoka was suddenly there grabbing him and twisting him skillfully into an arm lock. A smirk crossed Ashoka's face but disappeared quickly leaving behind it no trace of emotion.

"Let him go," Mylia cried out, pain and fear in her voice, trying to get away from the hunter that caused such fright within her.

Fighting Ashoka's hold, Calek pulled away only to be gripped tightly, a hand on his mouth. "Don't make me break something love..." Ashoka's voice smooth as silk with only a slight accent.

"We're not here to hurt either of you."

Ashoka's words were not comforting to either Calek or Mylia. Damon looked down to Mylia his eyes devoid of emotion, Mylia was sure she could count on a single hand the amount of times she'd heard Damon speak.

"Callista has lost her ways, and I fear even more that she has lost her mind. I have been watching you Mylia Wolfsabre, I know your pain, and the child is right, you must amend the wrongs. But you cannot deal with Callista directly."

His voice almost seemed choked for a moment, Mylia could see, fleetingly the hurt in his eyes, the pain he must be feeling to see his sister this way. "I have to help her, whatever the costs, otherwise Arick will suffer in that damnable hell forever." Her voice harsher than she had planned.

Damon shook his head and stepped back from her, "You don't understand." He hesitated a moment, "But I did not come here to make explanations." His hand slipped from her shoulder, and the shadows fell in over his form, "But do as you will, I advise leaving before she awakens."

Mylia turned quickly towards Calek, but Ashoka was also long gone Calek seemed a bit dazed. The two stared at each other, so many things that they needed to say, but neither knew where to start. She saw the question in his eyes, the one she did not want to answer."

"Why? Why did you leave Blossom...?"

Mylia opened her mouth a moment, considering her response; she could tell him the truth, the truth about his son, and about her dealings with the Outerworld. She couldn't bring herself to admit to the greater of the two evils.

"Why did I leave, Warrior?" Mylia whispered, looking at him. "Gods if I could answer that with something light, but I know I cannot. I left because I could nae bear to see ye and Callista look on me with hatred."

"Hatred?" Calek whispered. "Why would I look at you with hatred?" Callista's words came to him, of Mylia's betrayal, but he pushed the thought away.

Mylia looked down, pain choking her as she whispered one of the damning phrases. "Because I was to blame for Arick's death..."

Calek looked at her, confusion swimming in his dark blue eyes. This was not the answer he had been expecting to receive after ten long years. Fear of bringing more harm on her family, yes, he had expected that answer. Or even depression over so many deaths. But blame? "You, Blossom," he whispered, coming to stand closer to her. "How do you figure?"

She found herself unable to look at him, so she focused on the trees behind him. "That day that the God Slayer was finally near enough for me to attack him. I was so angry, so very angry over the

deaths and the suffering he had caused, Warrior..." As she spoke, Mylia's mind flashed back to that day of blood so many years ago...

* * *

Her eyes went red as she stood in front of him. The Outerworld Council needed to understand she would not be trifled with for any reason. She drew up on her rage, the flames forming around her.

"Your crimes are great Mylia, you should have turned yourself over to the council," his voice was filled with hate, "You are forcing your family to suffer now for your crimes."

She screamed at him her voice filled with rage, "Ye do nae know of mae crimes, if anyone is going to get hurt here today it will be ye that is mae promise."

The God Slayer struck at her suddenly trying to knock her down, Mylia dodged the attack pulling the last of the power she could to her. Distantly across the battlefield she felt Callista, and drained as much of the energy as she could through their link. The inferno was white hot bursting out from her form incinerating everything around her. The God Slayer choked and fell to his knees burning the fire eating quickly through his flesh, the judgment of Phenixel.

He looked up at her as he died; her form had towered over him, the last thing he saw before the world faded. Mylia turned and she

saw the body on the ground a few feet from where she stood. The small form was mostly untouched by the purifying flames of justice, it was Arick, she had killed him when she had killed the God Slayer.

* * *

Mylia's voice was quiet as she stared up into the rain, the raindrops blending with her tears.

"I did nae know he was so close to me, Warrior. I hae no idea that he was so near to me. The last time I had seen him he had been behind ye and Callista. He died; all because I.." her voice broke, unable to admit why the God Slayer had truly been there. "That poor little body, suffocated in the fire."

Mylia swallowed, a sob catching in her throat. "As soon as I saw that you, Callista, and my sweet Arion were alright; and that ye hae found Arick, I left. I couldn't bear the guilt or the pain I hae caused ye two. I traveled for a bit, and then was attacked by a band of Drow. I didn't fight back; I didn't care any longer what happened to me. I am nae sure what would hae happened hae Labrynth nae found me."

She caught her breath a moment, remembering the attack a bit too vividly, "She and her brothers fought off the Drow and gathered my bleeding body to them and took me to T'ymrick. Once there, they nursed me back to health and Labrynth helped to repair the damage to my mind. She is the one who solidified the barrier I had put between me and Callista. "

Mylia handed him her flame sword and met his eyes. "I wronged ye, it be your right to take this sword and cut me down for the harm I have caused." Mylia knew it was a calculated risk, but she knew Calek, above all he was a man of honor, he would not cut her down.

Calek looked at her somberly for a moment and shook his head swinging her blade as hard as he could, throwing it across the field.

"Blossom, it was not your fault and I am not going to kill you. I don't know what you saw but you did not kill Arick. We saw him cut down before you killed the God Slayer. "

Mylia looked up at him, disbelief in her orchid eyes. "But I saw..."

"You assumed that you had killed him when you saw him near you. You didn't even ask anyone, you never even mentioned it. You fled, eaten up with guilt and despair, and Calli..." Calek swallowed giving her a pained look. "Arick's death was not your fault."

"For ten long years I hae blamed..."

"If only you had come to us first. But you left the battlefield went home with us, with Arion, and the next day you were gone!" Mylia flinched from the accusation in Calek's voice.

"You didn't even disappear on the battlefield..." Calek stopped, cutting off the blaming words.

Mylia backed away from him, tears still flowing to mix with the rain. Her voice was a tortured whisper. "Aye, mayhap if I hae allowed you all to think I had perished on the battlefield or hae been kidnapped and overcome by demons...perhaps then Callista would nae hae become this creature."

Calek stepped toward her. "That's not what I..."

Mylia laughed, a harsh, humorless sound. "No? Why nae, Warrior? Perhaps if that hae happened, my sister would still have her sanity. You could have struck out at the demons that you believed to have harmed me. Then Callista would still be her own self and you could all be happy. Better for you all that I should have just died..."

Calek grabbed her, shaking her a little roughly, his voice full of emotion. It was the first time Calek had seen Mylia's martyr complex and at the current moment it was the last thing he wanted to deal with. "Stop it! Stop it. That's not what I would have wanted at all. You think we would have been happier to lose you to death?" accusation became clear in his voice, "I drove Calli, my wife, away because I defended you to her!"

Mylia stared at him, torment flowing through her, her orchid eyes full of pain. She opened her mouth ready to tell him the whole truth, of her crimes that truly drove her from home and comfort.

She stopped cold as a new voice came from the woods lining the field.

"Stop it, chere," a new voice rang out in the field.

Mylia looked at Calek with accusation and then turned.

"Arion?"

"You don` write, you don` call...where`s de love?"

Mylia flinched at the coldness in his tone and looked to Calek. "How..."

"You didn`t think I wouldn`t send for him as soon as I saw you again?" Calek whispered. "He`s been just as lost and worried and confused as the rest of us..."

Mylia backed away from both of them, shaking her head. "This was nae..."

"What," Stormcrow whispered, his eyes harsh. "This wasn`t what you had bargained for? Like we got to make that choice when you vanished?"

Mylia swallowed a sob, looking at Stormcrow. "Ye would nae hae understood..."

"Chere, you didn`t even give us a chance to try." Stormcrow leaned against a tree. "That wasn`t fair, Mylia. You don`t just

vanish on the people you claim to love."

"I couldn't do it..."

"Do what," Stormcrow demanded icily. "Give us the courtesy of a goodbye or an explanation?"

Mylia swallowed her eyes full of anguish as every word from the man she loved hit her like a sharp knife in the heart. Her worse fears had come true. He didn't love her anymore. His eyes were chips of ice and his voice, oh Gods, she had never heard him speak to her in such a fashion. "Arion..."

"What?" he spat angrily. "Merde, Mylia, some of the decisions you make have got to be the stupidest ones in creation. You take the weight of the world on your shoulders and blame yourself for everything. You kick yourself for every little thing that life does, and it's bullshit."

"I did what I hae to do."

"So you had to run away, again," Stormcrow spat, his eyes chips of blue ice. "I don't accept that. That's pure stupidity. You could have come to me no matter what the problem was you were having. Bailing like you did just tells me that you really didn't care that much about me...and that you didn't trust me."

"That's not true!"

"Sure couldn't prove it by me, girl."

Mylia bowed her head for a moment, reflecting on her decisions. She had known coming back was going to be difficult, but this was something she had never expected. Sure, she had known Stormcrow would be pissed off at her, but this coldness and this complete lack of emotion wasn't something she had been prepared for.

Calek watched all of this silently, his face unreadable.

Mylia looked at them both, tears streaming down her cheeks, mixing with the rain. "I'm here to get Callista well again. After that, you will never have to see me again."

"Don't do me any favors, chere," Stormcrow whispered coldly.

Mylia backed away again, trembling as she looked at the two she loved. She took a step back and turned to run. As she prepared to bolt, light flashed around her and pain exploded in her head. With a soft whimper she crumpled in a heap as darkness overcame her.

Stormcrow and Calek moved to crouch down beside Mylia.

"What did you do that for?" Stormcrow demanded angrily, as he smoothed Mylia's sodden hair from her face and made sure she was all right.

"Me?" Calek asked, his voice incredulous. "I thought you did it."

Stormcrow looked at him. "Why would I strike out and hit her?"

"Why would I?"

As the men tried to figure out what had struck Mylia, a bright light filled the clearing, the light seeming to sear into their souls before the explosion, it rocked the clearing and threw both men back into the tree line. Blinking past the stars, Calek opened his eyes and Callista bearing down on Mylia's crumpled form.

They had forgotten, Damon's warning echoing in his mind, she'd woken up, and obviously pissed about the blow from Ashoka. He climbed to his feet, watching helplessly as Callista raised her sword to sever Mylia's head.

Out of nowhere, Mylia's flame sword appeared in her hands and she raised it, knocking her twin's sword off-balance as she rolled, struggling to get to her feet.

Mylia stared at her twin, sadness in her eyes. "You don't want to do this, Callista," she whispered.

Callista laughed. "Oh don't I?" She swung her sword again, connecting with Mylia's sword with a fearsome clang that echoed throughout the forest. "You're a coward and you ran, sister dear," Callista hissed. "I will be more than happy to be rid of that

wretched link to you."

Mylia shook her head, not attacking Callista, just parrying her blows. "It wasn't about being a coward, Calli."

"It doesn't matter why you did what you did," Callista spat. "What you did forced my hand in this matter." Callista swung her sword faster than light and sliced deeply into Mylia's arm.

Mylia bit back a cry of pain as she stepped back, switching her sword to her other hand and wielding it. "Stop this madness, Callista, please, before one of us gets hurt."

Callista's laughter filled the clearing, a dark and unsettling sound, "One of us is going to get hurt Mylia, and I promise you it is not going to be me."

* * *

Calek and Stormcrow looked at each other with similar thoughts showing in their eyes. Calek voiced it first.

"She's going to kill Lia..."

Stormcrow shook his head. "She may try, but Mylia has skills too. Mylia won't let herself be killed. Too damn stubborn for that."

"And if you're wrong?"

Stormcrow looked away, not answering his friend, watching the swords clash again, sparks sizzling as the rain hit them.

"Arion," Calek whispered. "I know she hurt you, and you hate her for that, but do you really want her to die?"

"Of course I don't want her dead!"

"Then help me figure out a way to stop this before she really does end up dead. She is no match for Callista in a sword fight, she knows it and I think right now she'll let Callista kill her."

"Mylia isn't that much of a martyr."

Calek shook his head. "Arion, don't you get it? Lia doesn't think she has anything left to live for. She has nothing to lose but her life. And Calli..." Calek's voice broke off for a long moment, "Calli feels betrayed by Mylia, and she wants her dead."

Both men watched as Mylia brought up her sword again, parrying another deadly blow from Callista.

* * *

"Calli, please," Mylia pleaded.

"Please? Are you looking for another trip to hell, because if so I'll be more than happy to ferry you there and pay your way."

The rage clear in Callista's voice, "I don't suffer those who betray me to live."

Mylia shook her head, once again parrying a deathly blow from her twin. "Calli, it doesn't have to be like this."

Their swords clanged together again, sending jolts of pain down Mylia's arms. She fought to focus on her sister, trying to pull on the link they had. Gods, she had known from the dreams that Callista had been bad, but she hadn't realized her sister so truly wanted her blood. She needed to know how much Callista knew, or suspected, why she was so bent on her destruction.

Callista's sword cut deeply into Mylia's shoulder, bringing a cry of pain to her lips at the pain so close to her neck. She was doing her best to parry her sister blow for blow, but Callista was older and had much more practice at swordplay.

Callista smiled darkly at the bloody wound she had inflicted and then looked into Mylia's eyes. "You can't keep this up much longer sister dearest," she hissed.

Mylia swayed, knowing that she was right. She couldn't fight Callista much longer. She just didn't have the strength, or the heart to continue doing so. She went to parry a blow from Callista, but as their blades sang out a dagger appeared in Callista's hand, yanked from her belt and plunged into Mylia's chest.

"No!" Calek screamed as he saw the surprise on Mylia's face, as she stumbled and fell backwards, staring down at the knife

protruding from her chest. She yanked it out, biting her lip, the dagger fell from her fingers to the ground. Calek watched her sway slightly, fighting to get her equilibrium. "Arion, Calli's going to kill her!"

Stormcrow didn't answer. Calek turned to look at him and realized Stormcrow was no longer beside him. He heard the clanging of swords again and looked to the battle. There was Stormcrow, parrying Callista's blows against Mylia. Mylia herself was leaning weakly on Stormcrow, with one of his arms around her to keep her on her feet. Her eyes were closed and blood was running from several different wounds on her body.

"Now, chere," Stormcrow said calmly, staring into Callista's eyes. "I'm none too happy with your sister, either, but I am not about to stand by and let you kill her. She may not have the strength to fight you to a standstill, but I do. You wanna dance, we dance. Otherwise, you back off of her."

Charging from the side Calek leaped at Callista, hoping to tackle her, she moved swiftly side stepping his charge, her hand flying to her right hip and the second sword hanging there. The sword flashed parrying Calek's.

Calek yelled to Stormcrow, "I told you!"

His voice strained as he fought valiantly against Callista while supporting Mylia, "Now really isn't the time mon ami, but yes you were right."

Callista spun slicing at them both landing a grazing blow to Stormcrow who yelped in pain, her voice a snarl, "I advise focusing a bit more on the fight at hand."

Grimacing Stormcrow let Mylia go, and charged Callista, raising his sword and slashing at her, Calek came from the side landing a blow to her arm a deep gash opening. Infuriated she screamed her rage starting to drive her.

Her hand came from no where back handing Stormcrow, his head snapping sharply to the side as he fell. At that same moment she changed her stance her foot landing squarely in Calek's gut. He landed several feet away struggling to catch his breath winded from the blow.

Stormcrow wiped the blow from his mouth and stood again spitting angrily he came at her again the fight raging on between the three.

* * *

Silently Daemon and Ashoka watched the fight from the edge of the forest surrounding the field. Thin lines formed on Daemon's brow. Ashoka watched him carefully, her gray eyes unquestioning. She knew there was more about the situation than was being said, she also knew not to pry into his past. Damon was very secretive about everything, he never willingly shared anything, even with her. After almost 300 years working with him, she still knew the same about his past that she knew when they first met, absolutely

nothing.

Damon knew that he would have to deal with Callista, everything in life was a cycle, and it seemed as if the past was repeating itself. This time he knew he would have to kill her, before she gave in to that horrible rage, before she gave in to...

He stopped, he didn't want to think about the last time, he should have killed her then, but he couldn't bring himself to.

* * *

The air had been filled with the stench of burning and death; all around him were the cries of the wounded and mourning. Never had he seen so much death, unadulterated and carnal.

A shriek pierced the din, coming from the direction of the town square. He picked up his pace, the leather boots falling loudly on the cobble stone path, his hand reaching to draw his sword. As the town square opened before him he saw a woman on the ground, eyes wide in fear, her hands and face already bloody. Standing over her was Callista, at least it appeared to be Callista, her green eyes gone red and fire burning from her eyes. Damon knew she no longer controlled her own actions, she was lost to the drive for justice.

She looked every bit like a vengeful goddess of fire and her hair a fiery halo on her head. Many wounds covered her body, some bleeding, others crusted in blood and dirt, and her outfit hung in

shreds on her body. She didn't seem to notice or care her gaze fixated on the woman below her.

Callista's lips curled into a hateful snarl as she raised the axe in her hand to strike, flames traveling from her hands to the blade setting it alight. The moments passed slowly as Damon rushed forward slamming the hilt of his blade into her temple. Disbelief filled her eyes as the world blackened around her. His eyes for only the second time in his life filled with tears, "I'm sorry, " his voice soft and grief stricken, in that moment, his rage had vanished.

Damon caught her as she crumpled to the ground, the axe falling from her hand to the ground. He lifted her carefully and fled the destruction she had wrought.

* * *

A feeling stirred within him that he had not felt in a long time, but he quickly quelled it pulling the edges of his cloak around himself.

Next to him Ashoka sensed the pain, resting a pale hand on his shoulder, she could barely feel his body beneath his suit of thick armor quality leather. Her voice was soothing, only bearing a slight accent from days gone by, "Damon, you don't have to do this..."

"No, Ash I wish you were right, "his voice trailed off slowly

to almost a silenty whisper in the winds, "There are things at work here that I cannot, and will not tell you, but please trust me when I say that this is my burden to bear."

Ashoka could feel the electricity in the air, when she looked back to Daemon his eyes glowed soft blue, a soft rain began, the forest filled only with the sound of the water hitting the leaves above them. A sound drove her to look towards the clearing, Calek slammed into a tree not far from where they stood. Callista stood over Stormcrow one of her swords rose to impale him.

Ashoka felt a rush of air and looked to Damon, but in the place of the dark figure was only the empty forest.

Calek sat for a second at the base of the tree dazed, he looked up to see Callista preparing to run her sword through Stormcrow below her. Calek barely saw the blur of movement that passed him meeting with Callista, shocked filled her face the moment before she fell back across the space.

She hit the tree with a deafening crack and a grunt of pain snapping the old oak with the force. Where Callista had previously stood, now stood Daemon, his face emotionless, his body still as a statue only his long jacket fluttering in the breeze.

Winded Callista slid to the ground with a bit of a wince, for a moment the pain grounded her but a burst of anger ran through her. Standing slowly and cracking a few joints to right them from the impact with the tree the air around her crackled. The thermal heat picked up around her sending her hair dancing like unruly

flames.

A new presence came over her, sliding in place easily a smirk playing across her lips. "So, " she voice almost hissed out the word, the tip of her tongue touching her upper lip as if to taste it, "We stand here again, we've been here before, we've known the pain of your betray Damon. Or is it Drake's I should be addressing?"

"No one here needs to bear the brunt of your mad vying for vengeance Callista, no matter how much Phenixel urges you," Damon's voice carried through the space even though he never raised his voice, "You've created enough chaos."

Callista laughed, her voice mocking, "She does not deserve that which she was given, the blessing of the Goddess, of Phenixel. I want the treacherous witch dead as much as Phenixel, she has spoken her judgment and I am to be her executor. For her betrayal, only death is a proper sentence. I do not need to explain this to you."

Grabbing her long swords from the grass near her where they had fallen she turns back to him her eyes burning with ethereal flames. "But if it's a fight you want it's a fight you will get."

Rushing forward she lunges at Daemon, her swords silver blurs against the night sky, before she can reach him he steps deftly to the side grabbing her wrist and twisting it. From her other side he pulls her against him the blade of her own sword against her throat.

Callista's face contorted in frustration, the flames weren't immediately noticeable as they sprouted around them. Quickly they enveloped both of their forms, the pressure rises for a moment and seems to pop as the two disappear in a flash of flames and white.

* * *

Mylia awoke, the rain falling, the water cool against her skin. She opened her eyes and sat up seeing Stormcrow a few feet from her sitting up and shaking his head.

"Tell me someone got the name of that train." Stormcrow's voice was strained, but his attempt at humor meant it wasn't serious.

Calek stood slowly and looked around, he was looking for a single person he knew was still there, somewhere watching them.

"Ashoka, show yourself, I know you're out there!" his voice ringing out in the clearing and disappearing into the murk of the surrounding forest. Standing slowly on unsure feet the moist ground sloshing at his boots, he looks a bit more, anger replacing the shock quickly. Turning to Stormcrow and Mylia, "Where did they go? Why?", anger filling his voice.

Mylia looked to Stormcrow forlornly, and he stood walking to her and helping her up, letting her lean against him for support. Mylia looked to Calek confused momentarily, "Who? What happened?"

"Damon and Callista, I saw him attack her and they both vanished."

Ashoka's voice came softly from the tree line, she appeared leaning against one of the old oaks, "He's going to kill her."

Calek spun looking at her with venom, "Where did they go? And why is he going to kill her? She is his sister, why would he want to kill his own sister?"

Ashoka shrugged in a gallic fashion, "I don't know, you know as much as I do, but Damon seems quite set on dealing with her himself. Now it you'll excuse me."

Taking a step back Ashoka faded from view before Calek could even utter a word at her to stay, he cursed under his breath and turned back to Mylia and Stormcrow.

It was Mylia that spoke. "We have to find her and help her."

"You're too weak," Stormcrow said as he glanced to see Calek's reaction. Calek was walking the perimeter of the field oblivious to their conversation for the moment. "You can't."

Mylia shook her head stubbornly. "I have to," her violet eyes wildly looking to. "That's the answer, isn't it? If I can't save her, we will both die when Damon kills Callista. And it's going to leave Arick trapped."

"Arick?" Calek finally spoke up looking to her, his eyes

questioning as he walked towards her. "What about Arick?"

"Arick came to me, in dreams he told me that I had to reunite with Callista to save him." Her voice choked at the look on Calek's face, his questioning turning to raw pain.

"Why didn't I know?" he asked no one specific.

"I don't know Warrior, but I do know that I have to go after Callista."

Stormcrow chimed in, "You can't go, you're too weak. Calli almost killed you this time. What do you think she'll do to you in your weakened state?"

Mylia looked up to Stormcrow's eyes, but they were hooded and she couldn't read them. She swallowed and tilted her head her voice was hoarse and resigned as she replied to him. "If I don't go, I'll die anyway. Either way, there is death waiting for me."

Calek looked away from Mylia shaking his head, for 10 years he'd chased Callista, trying to convince her to stop. He spent each day missing her and their son, and now Mylia, who had disappeared over 10 years ago, comes back and claims that his child is possibly trapped in some horrible place until she saves Callista. Calek's voice was void of emotion, "I say we go after them, perhaps we can reason with Damon and he'll help us convince Callista to stop and listen."

Mylia winced at the iciness of Calek's tone and it almost broke her resolve, there was accusation in his voice that his son had come to her and not him. She closed her eyes, hardening herself and trying to ignore the pain from her many wounds.

"I will help you and then you won't have to see me again Calek." Her voice broke as she spoke, "I have nothing else to lose as it is." Mylia looked at Stormcrow again and sighed, "Please put me down."

Stormcrow tightened his lips and looked down at her with a fiery gaze. "And if I don't? Christ, Mylia, for once why do you not let somebody help you and take care of yourself?"

Mylia looked at him for a moment with tears filling her eyes. "I did that once...look what it got me. I killed my sister's child..."

"You didn't do it..." Calek protested.

Mylia ignored him. "...Caused heartbreak and pain to my sister and Calek, ran away in the dead of night without even telling the man I loved goodbye or why I needed to go. I lost everything I held dear Arion, now I no longer have anything to lose."

Stormcrow swung her down from his arms and held her close, smiling down at her in his cocky way that she loved so much. "You never lost me in the first place. I was always with you and I always will be. I love you."

Mylia felt her eyes mist with tears as she looked up into his beautiful blue eyes. She touched his cheek lightly. "I'm sorry Arion, I'm sorry I hurt you."

Stormcrow shook his head. "There's no time for that now, baby. Whatever you decide to do we're going to do it together." He kissed her forehead. "We go and help your sister, help you. Then you and I sit down, and we have ourselves a long talk."

Calek nodded, "I'm going to, I've been chasing Callista for the past 10 years while you were hiding." Calek didn't bother to keep the accusation out of his voice, not even looking at Mylia.

Stormcrow looked to Calek, "That isn't going to help anyone right now, mistakes were made, we will deal with them afterwards."

"Fine by me."

Stormcrow looked at Calek for a moment, but it was Mylia that spoke before he could.

"I'd rather die on my feet than live on my knees, Wyldcard told me that once."

"And what a great example of manhood he was," Calek's voice remained icy. "He left you while you were being tortured and married someone else."

Mylia flinched from the memory and closed her eyes for a

moment. She shuddered slightly and then opened her clear orchid eyes again. Looking to Stormcrow for a long moment thinking, Calek had every right to be angry with her, especially the things he didn't even know about. The past 10 years had been horrible for him, and it was all her fault.

Mylia bit her lip and began to speak, but her words were cut off, caught in her throat as the pressure rose around them. She felt the tightness invading her through her nostrils and her mouth. Panic filled her eyes as she looked to Calek and then Stormcrow. But they didn't have a chance to react.

The world spun, colors merging into nothingness, vertigo of destruction sucking color from everything around it. Everything around them fell apart before their eyes as the pressure finally reached its highest level and popped audibly.

The nothingness quickly becoming color and solid shape again, leaving them standing in the center of a vast round stone room. Twelve columns carefully carved and inscribed in strange runic symbols rose to the ceiling of the room. Standing before all but one column were eleven figures, dressed in robes of charcoal gray, lined with the same strange runic symbols. All eyes fell onto the three of them, waiting, patiently it seemed.

The jarring return to reality send Mylia to her knees the world spinning around her, Calek and Stormcrow both stood stoically if not a bit pale.

Mylia slowly returned to her feet as the vertigo passed and a single figure stepped forward, pushing back the hood of their robe.

Middle aged and slightly balding he sported a patchworld of gray and brown hairs on his head. His face was soft and lined with years, but his eyes showed a much older wisdom than even his years alluded to.

As he approached Mylia he ignored Calek and Stormcrow, and before he could be grabbed by either he lowered his head, "It is a pleasure to finally have you with us Mylia," his gazed raising to meet hers, "I am Tainet, elder of House Gard'Drakescel, of a land known as Ailianus."

Cautiously Mylia watched the man for a moment taking in the room and his appearance, "Have ye brought me here because of Callista?"

Nodding slowly, "We have decided that it is time for you to know the truths held captive by the past and the reality surrounding both of those you know as Callista and Daemon."

Calek moved up behind Mylia his voice becoming defensive, "What do you mean the truth? How do we know you're not lying?"

Looking to Calek the man nodded, "I wouldn't have expected less from you, Calek Hunter Nite, for all her faults, Callista was right to have trusted you. But please let me explain, it will make more sense if I do."

"In the days before man or beast roamed this place, the earth was barren, empty, and devoid of any life. It was during this time

that the planet was visited by a great serpent, and a great bird of fire. These creatures would sow life as we know it on this planet. The great serpent gave us the elements, like water, and the solidarity of the earth, the great bird of fire gave us fire, and warmth, and the wind with which to stoke the fire. Together they breathed life into this planet and created the creatures as we know them. The great serpent and the great fire bird created man as guardians over this planet. "

"The bird of fire is our goddess, Phenixel, the creator of life; the guardian of the cycle of life, the serpent is her consort, the god Drakecel. They created two families to represent them, and who they would select their avatars, bearers of their will and their earthly vessels. These families are known as Gard'Phenixel and Gard'Drakecel. "

Calek's scowl fell, he recognized the names that both Callista and Damon had used moments ago. Thin lines formed on his forehead as he listened, for the time being he paid no attention the Mylia or Stormcrow.

"These families were the head households of this realm; the bearers were trained their entire life to protect all creation and to be the earthly vessels of the divine will. At the festival for the divine, the bearers of Phenixel and Drakecel were melded with the gods and joined physically as one. They are each a integral part of the other's soul, I believe the term used now is marriage." Tainet stopped looking to Mylia then to Calek.

Shock already began to set in Calek's eyes as he remembered the conversation between Damon and Callista. But he still couldn't quite bring himself to believe it.

"The two you call Callista and Daemon were the last two bearers born, over 12,000 years ago." his voice dropped off shocked realization crossing Mylia and Calek's faces.

"That cannot be, they're twins." Defiance filled Calek's voice. The words out of Tainet's mouth, Calek's anger returned unwilling to believe him.

"I am sorry, but they are not twins, they are not related except by marriage."

Stormcrow grabbed Calek, restraining him as he lunged forward the defiance breaking and his anger swelling, "That cannot be, you're lying! If they are bound together then why are they trying to kill each other?"

"Perhaps, Calek if you let me finish the story you will understand." Tainet's voice never changed.

"Mon ami calm yourself and let the man speak," Stormcrow whispered harshly to Calek, "There is no point in getting angry yet."

Calek loosened, and Stormcrow let go, "Go on." his voice sullen and angry.

"If you do not believe my words perhaps you will believe your eyes, and the pictures of the past," Tainet's voice rose slightly as a great vibration seemed to fill the cavernous stone room. Raising from the center of the floor between them an orb of the

purest crystal, the vibrations seemed to begin with it and spread throughout the room. "This orb is a keeper of history, it was here before us, left by the creators."

Without touch or word it came to life, the pure crystal filled with pictures and images...

* * *

It had been a clear day, beautifully peaceful; the sort of day you wish you could capture and keep for yourself for eternity. Around her the tall grass danced with the soft breeze, she ran, carefree and barefoot through the field, her laughter was pure and true.

The girl, with long brilliant red gold hair looked to be about 16, her skin sun touched, her eyes emerald and full of life. The boy who chased after her laughing was about the same age, his appearance almost shockingly different, his hair long and of such a dark brown it almost appeared black, his skin pale almost shimmering, and his eyes black and as deep as the abyss.

He caught her shortly, falling tumbling into the grass, laughter rising into the sky...

The image faded and changed...

It was Callista as they knew her, she held a broad sword, across from her was Daemon, also older holding a broad sword, they

sparred, watched closely by a group of onlookers. They meet each other's blade skillfully deflecting the blow in some sort of deadly dance.

She gets the upper hand, taking him to the ground, sword to his throat, the onlookers break into applause as she offers a hand to him pulling him up from the ground. They embrace laughing again; he spins her around before setting her back to the ground.

The orb's image changes again...

The waves crash against the beach, endlessly beating it in their never winning battle; in the surf a child plays, picking up sea-shells examining them thoroughly before placing them back. He doesn't look older than 3 perhaps, his hair curly and black, he finds the right shell and runs up the beach to where two figures sit, one with hair of reddish gold, reflecting every beam of sun, the other with hair of the darkest brown.

"Mommy look what I found!" jubilation in the young child's voice, reflected in his eyes as he holds out a seashell to the women, she smiles and takes it from him.

"That's beautiful Riven, thank you, " she holds the shell up to the sun as the child runs back to the surf, her gaze turning to the person next to her smiling, "I could not ask for more, Phenixel has blessed us."

A smile crosses his face, "Yes, I don't think I could ask the

goddess or her consort for anything else" He leans forward and they kiss before embracing...

Again the orb's image changes, only it returns the scene darker...

The sky had gone red and black, as if the earth itself was bleeding and had no other way to show its pain. Callista stood a long sword in hand, dressed in a long red and gold tunic, blood splashed across her face and clothing, the sword coated in gore.

Not far behind her Daemon pulled his sword from the chest of a inky black figure, he also coated in blood his sword in gore. "We must drive them from the city, "his voice filled with frustration.

"There are too many!" hopelessness filling her voice, she had lost track of time, of the hours, the days they had been fighting, almost endlessly. But they kept coming, more and more, and now hopelessness was taking hold, hopelessness and despair, she missed the peace, her child, tears held back to long finally came.

He walked over and held her frustration creasing his brow something needed to be done. It was then that he felt the power rising around them, something was happening, and before he could do anything the world had shifted, the columns of their home vanished around them, replaced by a forest.

Pulling her closer he looked around, frantically, the voice spoke, "The island has been hidden, it was out only choice, may the

Goddess and her consort guide you in your fight."

In that moment, they both knew their lives as they knew them were gone, there was no way to win, and frustration, hopelessness and pain finally took him too, he screamed into the night piercing the silence of the forest surrounding them before taking them both to the ground as he went to his knees weeping clutching her as she cried.

* * *

Light faded from the orb slowly as the image disintegrated leaving it clear again, as if it was nothing more than a ball of crystal. It faded slowly back into the crevice it came from. The vibration in the room slowly subsiding, the look on Tainet's face had changed, lines formed at the corner of his eyes now, his brow creased, his eyes full of sorrow.

"Over the years they have changed and adapted to the situation around them, but the evil has adapted as well. The one you call Damon has pushed it out, blocked himself from the world emotionally, after a few hundred years he could no longer feel, and he slowly pushed her away, "his voice falling low, and pained now, "The one you call Callista never quite accepted it, accepted being taken from her life and shoved into this fate, Phenixel feeds her rage and lust for vengeance to perhaps a frenzied point.

When Damon, and Drakecel pulled away, Phenixel reacted with bloody fury, passing judgment on all she could find. Drakecel

guided Damon to take her out as he had done for the other bearers who had since the war gone insane. Damon however did not kill her, he could not bring himself to, he still, in some way loved her. She compensated after, adapting new personas as she needed to, trying to find a semblance of normality."

Turning his eyes to Mylia, "In you perhaps I think she saw herself, and wanted to help you avoid living her fate, to avoid suffering for eternity. She allowed herself to become close, to become involved, much to Damon's dislike. But with you and your family she was able to rebuild what she had lost."

Tainet closed his eyes, "I fear however that this time, Daemon will kill her, and it could have serious effects on the balance on this planet, they are the last. The minor bearers are a trivial matter next to the avatars of the Goddess and her consort. The world is in mourning, the Goddess and her Consort cannot be at war. They are a balance, and breaking that balance will bring this world to chaos."

He took a deep breath and opened his eyes again looking to Mylia, "However, you now are also a phoenix bearer, and I believe that may be why Phenixel desires your death, she does not have direct control over you, and she does not like your attachment to her consort, Drakecel and Damon. She has used your betrayal to fuel Callista's rage."

"I can only hope that some part of him still cares enough to not kill her, but you must do something, you must try to reach

them." his eyes imploring now, "We will heal you, arm you as you need, but there is little we can do to prepare you for the mental warfare involved."

Mylia couldn't believe what was happening.

She had come back to help Callista, and to save Arick from whatever fate awaited him, only to face a even bigger challenge. Damon was not a foe she relished the idea of facing, Callista was already a challenge, Damon was by far more dangerous then her.

And to think that while she thought she was hiding things from Callista, she had been hiding even bigger things from her. She began to wonder, Callista must know about her crimes against the Outerworld, and for some reason she had played along. A sour feeling began to form in the pit of Mylia's stomach.

She stepped away from the men, needing to take a deep breath and try to find some sort of inner strength to make the decision she was being asked to make. If Callista knew, then she would need to own up to her crimes if they saved her, but they could also just as easily let Damon kill her. At that time she could easily take her place as the avatar of Phenixel.

Callista, she thought, lines forming on her brow, she had been perhaps her strongest and most devoted ally. Never questioning and always there to help her when she needed it, she was perhaps her staunchest supporter. Yet now she had turned against her so completely, and Mylia knew she was her greatest threat.

She stared at the walls of the temple as she continued to walk, trying to decide what the best way to proceed would be. She quietly remembered the fateful day that Callista had become so completely entrenched in her life

* * *

She had faced the Nothing in a battle to the death. It hadn't even occurred to her that he might defeat her. She had been so angry over all of the pain he had caused and how he had manipulated her into performing like a trained pet.

She had landed the killing blow, but in the last instant, he had struck her with his magics deep within her chest. She had collapsed, feeling her insides being cooked as she slowly started to die.

"NO!"

The angry cry that had filled the room had come from, Callista. She heard running feet and then felt her head lifted into someone's lap.

"Mylia..."

"Calli...I killed him." She had swallowed and tried to focus on Callista's green eyes. "He'll never hurt anyone I care about again."

"Damn it, Lia," Callista had scolded her. "You should have waited."

"I hae no choice," Mylia had said softly. "He threatened Talis...he told Talis I was unfaithful."

"Talis would never believe something like that about you, Lia."

Mylia had closed her eyes. "Take care of them, please Callista. Take care of my family."

"You're not going to die, Mylia. I won't let you."

Callista had wrapped her arms around her and started chanting something softly. A tingling spread through Mylia's body and when she opened her eyes, there seemed to be the tinge of fire surrounding both women.

* * *

Callista had explained to Mylia later that she hadn't been able to just let her die and had given Mylia half of her life force. This had imbued Mylia with the Phoenix and had also caused her them to be bonded and connected.

She stared at the many different images on the wall of the temple and she knew that her decision had already been made for her. She sighed and turned back to her men and to Tainet. She cared

for the woman who had once saved her life, but she knew that Callista was a liability now. If she knew the truth she would never quit before making Mylia pay.

"Sage," she called Tainet respectfully. "Your people, you plotted this out this last month, didn't you? You knew that I would come back, that the nightmares and the appearance of Arick in my dreams would make me come back."

Tainet nodded sadly. "You were our last hope, Mylia, and had you not come back on your own, we would have retrieved you. We had to create an illusion that would be able to convince you to come out hiding."

This set Calek off again. "Are you saying that Arick visiting her was nothing but an illusion?"

Mylia watched this exchange in silence.

"Yes, I am sorry Calek, it was the only emotional hook we had that we knew would work."

The look Calek gave the old man was far from friendly, he looked ready to say something for a moment and looked from Tainet to Mylia. Turning away from them taking a deep breath, "I lost my son, and then my wife, and right now this is a bit more than I want to deal with. I'm not even sure how I feel about Mylia's return. I don't like people screwing with my emotions though and for a while I hoped that maybe I would get my son back."

"You never really let go of a child that dies, but it fades into the background, a constant pain in your heart. It was not a wound I wanted to have ripped back open." Calek's voice was edged with anger, his fist clenched tightly.

"I'm sorry Warrior, I did nae..."

"Don't, please. I'm tired of all the apologies Mylia. Lets just get Callista back, and see where it goes from there." He walked away sitting down against one of the walls and closed his eyes as he meditated.

Mylia moved to Stormcrow shaking her head a moment before looking to Tainet, "You've known where I was the whole time?"

Tainet nodded. "It's not usually our place to interfere, but you're needed. Had you not shown up this night, we would have taken you from where you were staying."

"You would have caused a war with Drow to take me?"

"What war? We would have taken you and disappeared. There would have been no sign of our presence at all."

Mylia sighed. "How long do I have to decide? I want to talk to the guys before I make a final decision."

"Time grows ever short. We must act before Damon kills her."

"She's not going anywhere without us," Stormcrow said softly.

"We would never ask her to, Arion. You are Mylia's strength and she will need you for part of this. However, there are some things that she can only do alone. You must respect that."

Mylia looked at Tainet, waiting.

"An hour, then, daughter," he finally said. He pointed to a curtain. "You can talk there."

Mylia nodded and moved behind the curtain. Stormcrow followed her. With a sigh, she moved to stare out the window. There was only darkness beyond and she realized she had no idea where she was.

"These people are very determined," she finally said softly.

"Did you really have no idea about this cheri?" Stormcrow said, "I thought you both shared everything."

Mylia nodded, "I thought we did as well, but Callista is older than me, stronger, and wiser, it was also a bond she created. She must have deliberately hid this from me."

Stormcrow walked to her and wrapped his arms around her. He breathed in her scent. No matter how much he wanted to protect Mylia, he knew she had to do this, maybe he didn't know all the reasons but it wasn't like him to question or control her.

Calek appeared through the curtain looking first to Stormcrow then to Mylia, he looked calmer, more focused. "We need a plan. We know that Callista is obviously stronger than us, and Damon doubly so."

Mylia nodded, "She may be, but I have the same power as her now, I can use it against her. I didn't before but now I know there is no other choice."

"You might kill her Mylia, you don't have nearly as much control over that power." He left the rest unspoken, she had devastated whole areas before with the power in her rages. "We will have to come up with another way to..."

"There isn't another way Warrior," Mylia cut him off standing away from Stormcrow, "Callista almost killed us all before. She is my family I would never kill her, or anyone I care about."

"Like you didn't kill Black Velvet in a rage?" he never raised his voice, remaining calm in the face of her rising rage, "I don't want to take the risk Mylia, and I don't want to lose anyone else."

Mylia glared at Calek, rage starting to show in her orchid eyes. "Ye do nae know me as much as ye claim, Calek. I forget nothing and ye might want to remember that," she hissed leaving the betrayal she felt at him marrying Callista in her voice, and her anger at his accusations. "We will do whatever is necessary to help her, even if it means hurting her to do so, we aren't left with much choice." her voice lowered dangerously, "And even if I have to

do this alone."

"Chere," Stormcrow said as he let his chin rest on the top of her head. "You're not going to be alone in this. I already told you that I wasn't letting you go anywhere without me. We will do what needs to be done together as a team."

Stormcrow looked to Calek questioningly with his last statement, "Isn't that right mon ami?"

Calek nodded without speaking for a moment deciding that arguing with her at this point was useless his tone cold, "Whatever has to be done."

* * *

Damon glared up at her, his gaze set and determined, his hand around her throat holding her away from him like some wretched thing. Callista clawed at his arm trying to break free of the grip, her breathing coming in short deliberate wheezes.

"This isn't right, this isn't what you want," a voice whispered in her mind, trying to scream over the indignant demands of Phenixel.

Her vision started to narrow, the edges blackening, in that moment she could smell the ocean, hear it crashing on the surf, the mist lightly touching her face. It was then that she could see him, her child, and his hair black and curly, the name Riven crossing in

her mind. He turned towards her running to her, his eyes full of the joy only a young child can know, his voice was muted, only the ocean crashing filled her mind, but she could make out the word mommy on his lips.

Tears welled in her eyes, her voice choked through the strangle hold of Damon, "Riven," tears escaped her eyes running down her cheeks.

His grip wavering only slightly as pain lanced through him almost buckling his knees, Drakecel's will alone keeping his grip and knees steady. "Why does it have to be this way," he thought angrily towards Drakecel, but his patron did not answer. Biting back tears, he quickly smothered the emotion, and the urge to hold her, and comfort each other as they once did, but neither of them was the same person, they had both changed.

Her vision darkened, the ocean turned red, the sky shifting to an angry black and orange. Without even a chance to scream, to warn him, the monster exited the red ocean and cut the child down, leaving her words caught in her throat. The monster was then on top of her, his hand around her throat choking her. As the vision faded but the monster remained, Damon was now that monster. Her anger swelled finding energy in her new found anger. The temperature started to rise, the air popped and cracked with the heat.

The sudden anger throwing him off guard, Damon's grip on her throat loosened. It was the heat wave that hit him first, but the scorching of the fire as the flames emanated from her, pushing him

away, overwhelming him, almost immediately followed it. The flames rippled off her form in waves, scorching the ground around her beyond any semblance of life, torching everything in its path.

The flames pushed Damon away from her, burning on him a suffocating blanket of fire. His eyes began to change, the whites filling in solid black, a blue outline covering his form pushing the flames away from him. In the visible areas of his body his skin took on a luminescent-scaled appearance.

A wind began to kick up, the temperature sharply dropping, the flames choking in the icy wind. The wind howled deafeningly a sudden rush of wind hit Callista like a brick wall slamming her into the air and backwards, blackness filling her vision. Fighting to keep conscious, she noticed the wind begin to die down, the howling abating. A rush of air blew over her, her eyes clearing to see the blade rushing towards her head.

* * *

A soft knock on the doorway broke his meditation, he rarely had times for quiet thought, but he wasn't angry at the interruption, he had been waiting for it. Standing slowly he crossed the small room answering the door.

A woman leaned in the doorway; she was dressed in all black the material lined in silver and red runes. She was beautiful in a predatory way, her eyes two toned, a yellow star burst around her pupil fading to a blue the color of sapphires. With careful steps

she walked into the door, her feet falling silently on the floor, her long black hair swinging with each step.

"Aunt Ransim, " Ariden smiled his voice filled with equal parts happiness and excitement, "You're back?"

Ransim had been gone for over two years, visiting the Outerworld, the land of demons, of those creatures not strong enough to be deities, but powerful enough to surpass mankind. They were the children of Anerizel, neutral in almost all things; most worlds looked to them as powerful mediators, and unbiased trainers in the magical arts.

Ransim was a powerful succubus, and had been Ariden's trainer in the magical arts. Though Ariden couldn't remember the first 6 years of his life he knew it had been Ransim who had saved him from certain death.

Ransim smiled resting a hand on his head ruffling his hair some. She had a voice that was never unpleasant to hear, he knew that was her succubus nature, her tone playful, "Yes that I am, quite obviously given I'm here, Tainet sent for me two days ago, it seems that it is finally time."

"Already?" Ariden knew what she was talking about, from as early as he could remember he was trained specially by Ransim and a few others. He had been born bearing a special mark on his back, he was the first bearer born in over 12 millennia. Etched into his skin was a symbol an all seeing eye perched atop a set of scales,

it was the symbol of Anerizel, the god of the void, the epitome of order and balance.

Prophecies spoke of the unbalance that would come to the goddess Phenixel and her consort Drakecel, everything in life was a cycle, and he was to be the catalyst to return life to order. He knew of the trouble with the incarnation of the goddess Phenixel, the warrior bearer Callista, he was aware she had foolishly shared her connection to the goddess with another woman who had proved unworthy, a woman named Mylia Wolfsabre.

Looking to Ransim, worry etching lines around his green eyes, he knew what the unworthy woman had done, she had in the past killed Ransim's father, Da'Noch, when he refused to aid her in the destruction of council of the Outerworld to seize control of their power. Da'Noch had been obsessed with the woman, and brought her to his own realm, Sheol against Ransim's wishes. But in the end he did not cave to her request and banished her from Sheol.

Mylia and her family however retaliated, only a last minute decision by Da'Noch had saved Ransim from his fate, he sent her from his realm as Mylia harnessed the power of the goddess Phenixel through Callista to annihilate it. Since then Ransim had learned of the lies spoken by Mylia to her clan of her time in Sheol, claims of abuse, and kidnap.

"Aunt Ransim, are you alright?"

Ransim smiled to him, but it didn't reach her eyes and the

sadness there, "Yes, I'm fine Ari, you've done a wonderful job training under me and the others, I have faith in you." The tears forming in her eyes were quickly wiped away, "It has been 11 years since then, I miss my father greatly, but... no matter you need to go. Remember Ari the woman doesn't know and can't know or she won't co-operate. If we are to return the bearers of Phenixel and Drakecel back to their former glory we must let Callista remove her mark from the woman before she is killed."

Ariden nodded, he had an important role in making sure that Mylia did as they needed, and met her fate at the sword of the holy bearers. It would also be his job to neutralize Damon, the bearer of Drakecel for the time being.

Ransim helped him into his travel outfit, similar to her own, black, but loose unlike her skin tight outfit, it was etched in silver and red runic symbols. They were the symbols of Anerizel, the proof of his word. He could hear the whispering voice of his patron in his mind, he had always heard the voice, as long as he could remember, but since his melding with the divine four years ago the voice had become stronger. He was truly one with his patron now, the true voice of his word.

Smiling again sadly Ransim laid a hand on his cheek, her skin warmer than a humans, but soft to the touch, "I cannot go with you, but I am always with you Ari, I will be there when I am needed." She leaned forward and kissed his cheek, the human like emotion disappearing quickly from her features, replaced by the enticing grin for which she was renowned. She would bring a man to his knees

begging without a single touch or word in his direction. Ariden however knew it was only a front, her way of walling the world away.

"I will make you proud Aunt Ransim, I swear on the word of Anerizel." He placed his left fist over his right breast and partially bowed to her. With that he left, a small pack slung across his back, his sword slung to his hip with a set of daggers.

Ransim watched him leave leaning back against the door frame speaking to no one but herself as he faded into the distance, "Be safe, warrior of order, it was the least I could do for Callista and for the world when I saved you from certain death after the God Slayer's futile attempt to destroy the harlot Wolfsabre. Child of the avatar of Phenixel, and the samurai, your name is permanently etched into the future of this world. Someday you will know the whole truth about your beginning, your mother and father."

The figure that appeared behind Ransim placed a hand on her shoulder, "True enough doll, that one right there has a lot to carry on his shoulders. You did the best any of us could to prepare him, I only hope he succeeds, I still fear the Mother's involvement in this all. But I can't wait to see the look on that idiot Calek's face when he finds out what Mylia really did."

Tilting her head a bit and leaning back into the form behind her, reaching up to trail a hand down his cheek, she heard him catch his breath, "You know better than I that mentioning the Mother is never a good idea and you know Calek will take it badly.

Him and Callista continue to fight over that, and its torn him up for 10 years now." her breath came across the flesh of his cheek followed by her tongue tasting him his breath quickening unable or unwilling to pull away from her, his hands sliding down her form encased in the black etched leather.

"But that's not why you're here is it Rand?" her voice was a soft purr against his moist flesh sending goose flesh up his spine.

"Two years, you're damn straight its not!" he grinned to her flashing the tips of a set of fangs on purpose, eliciting a predatory sound somewhere between a purr and a growl from her. She turned quickly slamming him against the wall kissing him with such ferocity a casual observer might think she was trying to devour him.

His fangs pierced her lower lip sending two tiny rivulets of blood down her chin, Rand was the first person to ever have as strong of an effect on her as she normally had on men. Truth be told she loved it, every second of it. She pulled away from the kiss, and he licked the blood from her chin in slow deliberate strokes.

"As much as I'd like to catch up, can we save the politics until after the coma inducing sex?" her tone clearly letting him know that any answer besides yes would probably be ignored.

Rand's grin spread as he yanked her into the room slamming the door behind her. "I doubt the boy is going to care if we borrow his

bed."

* * *

Ariden stood before the great temple looking up to its massive form, the gold symbols on its exterior shimmering in the mid day sunlight. The apprehension set like a rock in his stomach, he had heard the stories of the woman known as Mylia Wolfsabre, and he did not hate her with the same passion as Ransim. But she had hurt Ransim deeply, and he cared about his teacher, and adopted Aunt more than anyone else, and it made him hate a woman he didn't even know.

He steeled himself, and pushed his feelings down into a hidden place as Ransim had taught him. Much as he did when he trained and much as he knew he would need to do when his task turned to violence.

Taking a deep breath he entered the temple, passing through several rooms, the walls painted with murals. The murals depicted the creation of the world by the Goddess Phenixel and her Consort after the War of Eons with Anerizel and his children. It depicted the birth of each of their nine children, the Exalted guardians of the sky. It also told the story of the first Great War, the war fought by holy incarnations of the past, the eleven who saved the world from destruction.

He stepped through a large archway into the main room of the domed temple, the sun shining in from above making the gold

detailing on the white marble floor sparkle. This was the main convening room for the council of elders, the elders of the eleven great houses of Ailianus. He did not officially belong to any of the great houses, he had been born outside of Ailianus and its realm as the prophecy had stated, but he had been here before for many council gatherings.

As he entered the room he could hear arguing across the room, a women's voice, and two separate men by the sound. Tainet approached him; the older man had become much like Aridens grandfather. He clasped a hand to his shoulder in a friendly welcome and smile to him.

"Ariden, thank you for coming, please follow me, there is much to do and at this juncture and time runs short." he tightened his grip on his shoulder, nodding again, Ariden could see the small amount of strain in Tainet's eyes, he didn't like her presence here anymore then anyone else.

Ariden watched as Tainet turned away and started across the room towards the voices, Ariden followed, thoughts running almost frantically through his mind.

When they reached the halfway point in the room a woman walked from behind the curtain of the meditation room. Her hair the color of expensive red wine, she looked tired and sported a few bruises and cuts, but from her stance and gaze he could tell she was a lot more powerful then her demure appearance led one to believe. Ariden resisted the urge to take a deep breath, instead keeping his face

neutral, if his time around Ransim had taught him anything it was to resist the allure of a beautiful woman.

Behind her came the two men he had heard, one stood about his height, his hair long and dark blue-black, he sported a disapproving frown. He recognized him, Calek Nite, he was the spitting image of Randall Nite, Ransim's other half. Only their hair color differed, Rand kept his dyed blood red, Ariden had always assumed it was for dramatic affect.

The other man stood a bit taller his figure more lean, his hair long and pulled back, a reddish brown color, he wore a leather jacket and had a cavalier air about him. Ariden thought long for a moment the name finally springing to mind, Stormcrow, Arion Stormcrow to be precise. He was Mylia's other half, and would probably prove to be the larger hindrance to their plan in the long run.

Tainet took another step forward and to the side, "Daughter, this is Ariden. He is a member of a special sect, the Vovicus, trained specifically to deal with the holy warriors. I am assigning him to work with you. He knows the land and its history better than most,

Mylia looked Ariden over, her gaze seeming to see right through him, but he didn't wilt from it, his voice clipped and business like, "I do as my council orders."

"He is just a boy barely into the beginnings of manhood." she

looked him over; he was young and tall for his age. His blue-black hair was pulled back into a short ponytail, a single white streak down the middle. His skin was fair, and his striking green eyes told his young age truthfully, but his eyes also held something else, immeasurable wisdom and age. This boy had lived much in his short time. "But I am not about to begin to turn down aid, as we will sorely need it."

Mylia nodded to him as the two men scrutinized him, Stormcrow looked away long before Calek, the intense gaze slowly beginning to make him uncomfortable.

"Where are you from?" Calek began to walk towards him, his voice inquisitive and edged. "You remind me of someone..."

Before Ariden could answer Tainet stopped Calek, "The Vovicus are taken from their parents at birth, and indoctrinated into their order." the old man's voice left no opening for question, "Ariden was born of House Gard'Phenixel, the same house as Callista was born to over 12 millenia ago."

Ariden simply stared at Calek with the same neutral gaze, letting Tainet handle the question for him. Calek paused a moment and finally relented nodding, "My apologies for prying, now I believe we will need some equipment then we shall be off."

* * *

Preparations had gone quickly, fresh weapons, and clothing for

them and herbal cocktails for Mylia to help her heal her wounds faster. The council had informed them that it was imperative that they be placed immediately in the same place as Callista and Damon. The fight had gone sour and Damon apparently had the upper hand.

Standing in the center of the large room, the elders fanned out around them, taking their positions along the columns, Ariden drew his sword uttering a prayer under his breath to Anerizel, "I shall handle the avatar of Drakecel."

"There is no way you can take on Damon yourself." Mylia's voice held the disbelief she felt at the youth's ability to take on the intimidating hunter in black. "We shall back you."

The air around them began to grow warmer, thicker as it pressed against their clothing, "Trust me, you will be quite busy with the avatar of Phenixel I believe. Please let me handle Drakecel's avatar." His voice was confident, far beyond his years.

Mylia paused a moment and nodded an ascent as she pulled her flame sword to ready. Near Ariden Calek's katana was already at ready, Ariden could feel Calek's eyes boring holes into his back. Near Mylia to her rear Stormcrow pulled his own blade holding it in a more relaxed manner than the rest of the group.

"Well looks like the fun is just about to get started..." Stormcrow was cut off as the pressure around them finally popped, the world shifted and brightened, the open field around them appeared within an instant.

Ariden smelled the wild flowers first, then he heard the sounds of swords meeting in battle, and a frighteningly inhuman noise of exertion. 300 yards from there present position he saw Damon lunging for Callista, knocked to the ground, she wasn't ready and he knew the blade was going to go straight through her throat. Avatar of Phenixel or not, it would a mortal wound.

Time slowed around Ariden as he focused on what was going on, it was a natural ability he had, to slow time around him, to speed himself up well ahead of the natural flow of time. He reached the avatars with just enough time to force himself against the side of Damon's blade.

As his body impacted with the blade he let go of his focus, time quickly reorienting around him, the blade knocked from its path sending him tumbling with Damon for several yards his own sword knocked from his hand.

Damon was on him before he could finish jumping to his feet, the older man wrapped his hands around his throat lifting him weightlessly into the air. Damon's eyes were black, burning an unearthly shade of blue. Ariden knew it wasn't Damon anymore in control; Drakecel had taken over his body forcing him to do his will.

Everything crept to a halt around Ariden again, he raised his feet and pressed them firmly against Damon's chest and began to push. Letting go of his control again time immediately sped back up

around him, Damon's hand ripped from his throat, his body sailing across the clear coming to a skidding halt in the grass.

Jumping back with an eloquent back flip, Ariden grabbed his fallen sword and stood to face Drakecel, his face an emotionless mask.

"So, it seems that the prophecy was true," Damon's voice rang out through the clear, filling it, "Anerizel, it has been far too long." His voice full of menace cold, and calculating the Goddess's consort was known for.

Ariden felt Anerizel slide easily into his form speaking through him, the voice however was not his, completely alien in tone, "Drakecel, this time you are mistaken in your target for elimination. Phenixel is not your enemy."

Damon lunged at Ariden bringing his sword to bear as he leaped into the air with grace. Ariden's sword came up meeting his sword with inhuman speed, the blades screaming at them as metal ground against metal.

"Ah, but isn't she? She's not stable Anerizel, even you know that as well as I, she needs to be dealt with."

"No Drakecel, not this time, she is your other half, you are both broken while you fight, while you avoid each other. Go to her, help her..."

With a fierce cry Damon pulled his sword back and ducked

slicing at Ariden's feet, but not even he could keep up with the youth who seemed to control time itself. Damon didn't see the kick coming as Ariden's foot again landing in the middle of his chest, sending him backwards over a hundred yards.

Standing slowly Damon chanced a look around seeking Callista, but before he could find her Ariden was on him again. It was luck that helped him, deflecting blow with his foot, sending the youth over his head as he again fell to the ground.

"It seems you have found yourself a worthy vessel Anerizel," a reptilian hiss snuck its way into Damon's voice, "But he is still young and not nearly as well trained as Damon, do you seriously hope to defeat me like this?"

"I'm not here to defeat you Drakecel, I'm here to stop you from doing something foolish, and to help return balance that has fallen so far out of control because of you and Phenixel.

"You are a fool Anerizel, you could not defeat us before, and you won't do it now."

* * *

Mylia watched Ariden disappear faster then even her eye could follow in disbelief, Calek and Stormcrow shared her look, but they wouldn't have much time to ponder the possibilities. The battle cry sent chills down Mylia's spine, and before she could even react Callista was in the air above her, sword raised for a killing blow.

It was Stormcrow that blocked the downward slash of Callista's deadly blade. He grunted with effort as he felt the full brunt of her strength come to bear on him.

Calek moved to restrain Callista when a hand slid onto his shoulder; he felt his body relax at the touch, a voice whispering into his ear, "Perhaps you should take a moment to think before deciding your course of action."

It was a woman, he could tell from the feel of her hand, she smelled vaguely of lotus blossoms, the voice held no menace, and he found himself wanting to instantly trust it. Calek knew better, yanking himself from her touch and turning to face her.

She was familiar, not that any man could easily forget her face, he had first seen her around the time after Mylia's return from Sheol, she had been in Callista's company on a few occasions. The name came to him slowly, "Ransim?" his voice held suspicion, "What do you want?"

"Only for truth to be known," her voice slowly became edged, "And for those guilty to pay for their crimes."

"Crimes?" he thought first of Callista, of her irrationality these past 10 years, "Calli hasn't been herself we're trying to help her..."

Ransim raised her hand stopping him in mid sentence, "It is

not Callista who has committed atrocities Calek Nite, at least not recent atrocities."

She closed her eyes, and the grin faded, she looked worn, more human with her mask gone, "It is Mylia Wolfsabre Roase ap Skyfire ap Nite ap Scorn, who has committed atrocities for which she must face punishment."

Calek froze in place watching her for long moments the only thing he could think of came out of his mouth, "She didn't kill Arick... me and Calli we saw it happen..."

"I know Calek, I could not accuse her of your sons death given he is still alive."

Calek shook his head not wanting to hear the rest, "I don't know what you want but this isn't going to work. Arick is dead, Mylia has committed no crimes." He voice betrayed him, he wasn't as sure as he wanted to be.

Motioning across the clear towards where Ariden and Damon fought, "Do you not believe me Calek Nite? Ask him yourself, ask him who saved him from certain death, who cared for him while his parents fell into disarray. Ask him about the crimes of your precious blossom." She was shaking, a major slip for a succubus, but she couldn't withhold her rage, "Your precious blossom who killed an innocent and scores more when she destroyed Sheol."

"They kidnapped her, tortured her, all to take over the Lord

Mem'lelis and his power base, he was one of her closest allies..."

"She lied to you, all of you, she came to meet with Da'Noch, my father by invitation, and she was treated with the utmost respect upon her arrival. My father invited her there against my wishes. Her trip was fine, uneventful for many days until she began to make requests of my father. She tried to convince him we could take over the entire Outerworld council, that their power could be his for the taking."

She took a moment to compose herself, "When she persisted with such blasphemous talk my father banished her from Sheol, telling her to never return. Such talk in the Outerworld is a serious taboo, we live in constant neutrality, we are not warlike."

Calek took a step back, he didn't want to believe her, but she wasn't even trying to persuade him, and she could, easily, she was a succubus. But why would Mylia do that, how could she have lied to them so easily. But now he wondered why she hadn't been so quick to detail her trials in Sheol, why she refused to let Callista help her heal the mental scars. Why she had insisted on immediate retaliation, and instead of just taking out Da'Noch she had annihilated the entire realm and everyone in it.

His gaze then fell across the field to Ariden, he'd known the first moment he saw the boy, and he could sense it no matter what Tainet had said to dissuade him. Calek looked back to Ransim, his eyes filled with conflict and pain. "I've spent 10 years defending her from Callista, and all the while Callista was right?" the

question more of a statement.

Ransim's eyes held pain, she knew Rand was enjoying this, seeing his brother in agony over his mistake, but she couldn't wish that pain on anyone, the pain of knowing you're life was ruined over a careful lie. "Go help your son Calek..."

Any hesitation left in him dissipated quickly and he set off across the field towards where Ariden and Damon fought.

* * *

Stormcrow and Mylia took turns struggling to keep up with Callista, her eyes burning furiously with visible flames pouring from them. For every successful parry or block, Callista seemed to land another, slowly breaking away at their defenses, but together they might have a chance.

"Well, well, I always wondered how Cajun food tasted; I guess perhaps now I'll get a chance to find out." Rand's voice came across the clearing, several feet from them.

Stormcrow chanced a look at the newcomer, he had to chance a second, swearing at first that it was Calek, however on the second glance he took in the red hair and a glimpse of the figures face as he slipped a pair of mirrored glasses over his eyes.

"An who the hell are you?" Stormcrow yelled at him.

"Me? No one really special," Rand laughed, "I'm just the guy who's going to kick your ass."

"Keep thinkin' that, maybe it will happen, but I highly doubt it mon'ami."

Mylia winced as Callista landed a blow to her while Stormcrow was distracted. "Arion!"

"I know, I..."

He hadn't even seen the other man move near him before he felt himself pulled away from Mylia and propelled into the air sailing 30 feet before hitting the ground, hard.

"And mom said I'd never be good at shot put..." Rand was on him in that instant his fist slamming into Stormcrow's face with a satisfying crunch followed by a wet sloshing noise. A groan emanated from somewhere in Stormcrow's chest momentarily stunned.

Rand stood hauling the man up with him holding him up by his jacket. "And to think, Ran said this would be a chall..."

His face scrunched into a mask of pain as Stormcrow's foot connected with his stomach. Rand lost his grip, dropping the other man who fell into a roll before standing. Stormcrow's face was a mess, blood pouring from his broken nose; he glanced around trying to spot his sword without much luck.

Ducking moments later Stormcrow barely avoided the right hook from Rand as he came up. It was the left hook however that did nail him, solidly in the side of his head, stars filled his vision again for a moment. Pushing forward he head butted Rand in the gut, the other man made a loud oof.

Stormcrow knew he couldn't win a fistcuffs fight against the other man, he was too strong, and obviously more practiced than he was. His sword however was no where to be seen as he looked around frantically.

The scream across the clearing made him turn abruptly, just in time to see Callista drive her sword home through Mylia's chest. Mylia crumpled to her knees before the other woman.

Stormcrow ran for Mylia, he might just make it, but as he went to leap for her, his forward momentum ended and he slammed face first onto the ground. Rand was on him within seconds, pinning him and pulling his head back by his hair.

"No please, I think you want to see the show, as your little harlot queen pays for her crimes."

Stormcrow tried to closes his eyes and couldn't, only thankful that the blood blurred his vision, and hid the tears there as he watched Callista haul Mylia up by her hair. How had this happened, they had it planned so carefully, how could the council not know about this man?

It dawned on him then, it had been a set up, Mylia was never meant to walk away from this battlefield. Callista reached towards Mylia's leg, where she bore the stylized phoenix brand Callista had placed there herself. Forcing her free hand into the brand, flames burst from her hand and traveled up her body.

Stormcrow screamed Mylia's name, his voice lost in the gale that whipped up around them, swirling the flame into the air. The color drained from Mylia's limp form as Callista dropped her stumbling back several steps before collapsing to her knees.

The world blackened as Rand abruptly slammed his palm into the back of Stormcrow's head, "Night Cajun, no promises about not sneaking an after show snack."

* * *

Calek reached Ariden and Damon within moments, flinging himself into the battle, catching Damon off guard and leaving a nice sized gash in his arm. Damon whirled around, his eyes still blazing that inhuman shade of blue.

"You! Don't interfere..." It also didn't sound like Damon, in fact Calek was sure he'd heard less than 10 words from Damon during the entire time he'd known him, well over 20 years now.

"Sorry I can't do that," Calek met Damon blow for blow carefully guiding him from Ariden, giving the boy a chance to catch his breath. "Besides if what I was just told is right, Callista

isn't the one you want."

The inhuman eyes regarded him, "What do you mean?"

"I mean that if you want to find the source of your problems, look elsewhere, instead of being an idiot like me and blaming Callista immediately because she's a great target of opportunity with that temper of hers. It's Mylia, not Calli..." Calek shook his head, he'd been stupid, all these years and he'd never seen it, Mylia's subtle manipulations, even when she wasn't even around. They had all been so convinced of her damsel in distress act, no one even questioned her. But in thinking back, every instance of a fight turning deadly because the control had been lost, and the power of the phoenix had been used, it was Mylia in control, it was Mylia who was so ready to solve any problem with the phoenix's flame.

Sure Callista had lost her temper, but never to a deadly point, she easily could have just killed him 10 years ago when he choose to defend Mylia over listening to her. But she didn't instead she left and told him to leave her alone; he'd been the one foolish enough to not listen.

"Callista isn't the enemy Damon, you loved her, you probably still do, you know her better then any of us, and she's not so quick to kill. She's not as irrational as we all want to believe."

Damon's gaze faltered for a moment, "No! Phenixel is the cause, and she must be stopped at any cost."

"Listen to yourself? Who are you trying to convince? Use your head Damon! It must be worth something if you've managed to live this long." Calek raised his voice in frustration. Parrying each of Damon's blow as they spoke. He tried not to follow Ariden with his eyes as he stalked up behind Damon.

"I..." Damon faltered again, the blue flames fading from his eyes and the black receding to his pupils. "How could I..."

Ariden lunged at him then, tackling the larger man to the ground, but he didn't resist, he simply crumbled under the boys weight.

Calek turned abruptly at the scream that reached across the field. It was Mylia, and he saw her fall to her knees as Callista pulled the sword from her chest, then lifted her into the air by her hair.

As Callista pressed her hand to the spot Calek knew all too well held the brand she had given to Mylia to seal their connection, their eyes met for a brief moment. He saw there the woman behind the mask for a brief moment before the flames trailed up her arm, and swirled into the air around them.

As Mylia crumpled to the ground he saw Callista stumble back a few steps before dropping to her knees. He stood to go to her, stopping a moment to look back at Ariden, still pinning Damon to the ground unceremoniously, "You can let him up, it's over..."

He then turned making his way towards Callista.

* * *

Mylia's eyes desperately followed Stormcrow as Rand launched him through the air, she lunged towards him only to find herself yanked backwards by her hair. Landing on the ground painfully her eyes flew to Callista, in that moment she'd forgotten about her.

There was barely a moment to react, rolling to the right as Callista's sword entrenched itself deeply into the ground where she had been moments before. She turned to look at Mylia her eyes burning through her, her voice came, it was not the voice of Callista anymore.

"I see and know all little Roase, I know of your betrayal, and of your crimes. That moment you opened yourself up to me when you killed the God Slayer I saw it all." Phenixel hissed through Callista. "Long have I allowed my avatar to determine your fate, but no longer, you have committed your last betrayal Mylia Wolfsabre Roase. She resisted me for several days, long enough for you to escape, but this time you won't escape."

Mylia could feel the heat before the flames were upon her, swirling around her form suffocating her as they leeches the oxygen from the air. With a scream she forced the flames back, using her own connection to the Phoenix, the fire dissipating around her as she jumped up sword in hand lunging at Callista with a fierce

battle cry. "Ye do nae know me!"

The second sword appeared in Callista's hand at that moment, pulled from its resting place on her right hip, parrying Mylia's blow and ducking swiftly below the second swip. "It's futile Mylia, accept your fate, and the judgment of the Goddess." It was Callista's voice again, edged in anger. "I had hoped you would see the errors of your ways after Arick died, I hoped you would turn yourself in to the Outerworld. But when you left, and blocked me I knew you would never feel remorse for your actions."

Callista's blade connected with Mylia's leg, leaving a deep gash sending her stumbling to her knees. Mylia looked to Callista her eyes enraged, she raised her hand sending a torrent of flame at Callista. "You know nothing of my actions, you are nae my judge and jury Callista. Ye do nae control me!"

Callista frown a bit solemnly, "You have continued to live at my bidding Mylia," the anger returned quickly to her eyes, "And now you are dead to me!"

The sword was up with a flash, Mylia screamed and moved to avoid it but it was too late. She looked down at the sword, plunged through her chest, her eyes looking up to Callista pain and fury there. Her voice was soft, barely a whisper, "I did nae know it would turn out this way, I did nae..."

Callista pulled the sword from her chest, cutting her off, she reached down grabbing a handful of Mylia hair and hauled her to the

air. "The judgment of the Goddess, has been made, you forfeit your right to bear her holy flame."

Mylia's eyes widened in panic, "No, Callista don't!"

Callista's hand fell onto the sigil burned into Mylia's inner thigh, her eyes met for a brief moment with Calek across the field bringing tightness to her chest. She quickly looked away settling her burning gaze back on Mylia as she began to tear apart the bond.

The pain was immediate, fire burning through Mylia's veins. She screamed as she had never screamed before, Callista's hand sinking into the sigil, wrapping her fingers around the mystical bond there and ripping it away. Mylia's screams stopped in an instant the world going black around her, the last scream caught in her throat.

Callista dropped her stumbling back several steps, whiteness filling her vision. Gasping she fell to her knees, "Goddess?"

Consciousness slipped from her, and Callista slumped to the ground a few feet from Mylia.

* * *

The world seemed to bend away to give Ransim a path, she stepped through the time rip a few feet from Mylia's inert form. Her eyes fell onto the woman, hate burning there, and the anger got the better of her as she began brutally kicking her over and over

screaming in frustration.

It was Rand who grabbed her wrists gently pulling her away from Mylia, "Calm down doll, you don't want to kill her, you know what the ruling was, life imprisonment in the Outerworld... if you kill her they'll do a whole lot worse to you..."

She let out a frustrated and angry sound stopping as she watched Calek drop to Callista's side, he hadn't even noticed Rand yet it seemed, his attention entirely focused on Callista.

He pulled her to him, cradling her against him he finally looked up to Ransim, avoiding looking at his brother.

"Really fucked up this time bro, always knew you had shit for brains, but this really takes the cake..." the voice was Rand's, his tone mocking.

Calek's voice was dangerously low, "Shut up Rand..."

"I'm just saying how the hell could you believe that bitch anyway? Seriously, especially after that whole claiming to be forced into gang rape? Like that was even remotely believable and you fell for it. You're a gullible moron."

Rand pulled Ransim towards him and she didn't protest, "And what did you do once you found a good one worth keeping? You didn't trust her enough to hear her out, just like everyone else."

Calek looked up suddenly his eyes glowing an angry red, "Shut up Rand I mean it or I swear I'm going to shut you up permanently."

Rand grinned at him, "I'd love to see you try bro."

Rand looked away from Calek as Ariden approached the group, he was, worn, covered in bruises and a handful of cuts, but no worse for wear. Calek opened his mouth to say something, but Ariden spoke first his voice very serious, "It's done, the balance as returned. The avatar of Phenixel is whole, and the avatar of Drakecel is no longer seeking her death."

His voice broke and a big smile formed over his face brightening his features as he threw himself at Ransim and Rand hugging them both. Ransim smiled accepting the hug with a laugh. Rand patted him on the head, "Like there was any doubt with me on the job?"

Ariden punched Rand lightly in the shoulder laughing, "Ransim's right, you are an ego maniac."

Rand feigned a pained and angry look, "Hey boy, remember who you're talking to here, I am the ultimate ego maniac, you best remember that!"

"Oh yeah? Who was it that beat you into a pulp a few weeks ago? Thats right me, " Arick laughed mocking Rand.

Ransim laughed more, the two continuing their playful fight, as Calek took in the strange scene. Arick, no Ariden, he remembered

nothing, nothing of him, or Callista, he looked to Ransim questioningly and she shook her head and mouthed to him, "Not now."

Calek nodded numbly and looked down to Callista's still form, she was breathing regularly, he stared at her for a long moment; it had been so long since he'd seen her at such peace. He jumped slightly as Damon walked up behind him, leaning over to pick up the still form of Mylia, his voice low, "Don't think it will be so easy with her to pick up where you left off 10 years ago Calek. You've betrayed her trust; you made the same mistake that I have now made twice."

"Twice?" Calek looked to Damon but he was already moving away from them.

"I will ensure she is delivered to the Outerworld council to face her punishment." And with that last statement he disappeared taking Mylia with him.

Ransim stepped away from Rand reluctantly as he continued to banter back and forth with Ariden, slinging worse and more creative insults at each other. She leaned over to the still form of Arion Stormcrow lifting him carefully off the ground.

"We should return and tend to wounds, I'm sure the elders will want to know of Callista's condition." Reaching out she sliced at the air, a black hole forming before her as she looks to the others, "Come."

Ariden and Rand went first, Calek walked up to Ransim still cradling Callista against his chest. He looked to her his eyes questioning, "Will you ever tell him?"

"Don't worry Calek, he shall know soon enough." She looked away from him and stepped into the hole, Calek silently following her.

* * *

Mylia awoke with a start, a dull pain in her stomach and chest keeping her from bolting up. Her body felt raw, and ached with a pain like none she had ever known. And she was cold, so very very cold for the first time that she could remember. She tried to focus through the fog, looking around to the bare room, the walls plain and void of any sort of markings, not even a window. The door was ominous, fitted with a single tiny window and a slot along the floor. No sound drifted into the room from the other side.

Slowly she sat up, her body protesting, she looked down, her clothing was not her own, a simple white shift, as plain as the walls of her room. The memory came back slowly, the fight with Callista, Arion he had fallen to another man who looked strikingly similar to Calek. And Callista...

It came rushing back then, ripping the shift up looking for the brand that had been placed on her thigh by Callista and instead found her skin smooth, flawless as if it had always been that way. Callista had completely torn her connection to the phoenix, and her

Goddess when she had passed judgment on her.

A shiver ran through Mylia and she rubbed her arms, this must be the Outerworld, and she was here to face those she had wronged. Her eyes flew around the room again searching for an exit, anything useful and found nothing. Concentrating a moment she tried to reach Arion, or Labrynth, someone who could come to her rescue, anyone, and she found nothing but a void, an emptiness around her.

Panic slowly began to rise, she was truly cut off, left to her own devices much as she had claimed she had been during her time in Sheol. She rose clumsily to her feet, her legs not quite ready to walk and stumbled to the door, banging on it, her voice rising in panic, "Help me! Cae anyone hear me!"

Only silence met her yells, her voice cracking as she turned and slide down the door sitting on the floor crying. The lies, and the deception had finally caught up to her and now she was alone, totally alone.

She lost track of how long she sat there crying and shivering surrounded by the silence and coldness of the room. She looked up to find a woman standing before her, when had she come, how had she not noticed her entrance. She was of moderate statue and looked like a Greek statue brought to life. Her skin pale and white as marble, and just as still and lifeless. Her hair was long and black falling to the floor around her disappearing into the shadows. But her eyes, they were perhaps the most unnerving part of the woman that stood before her.

They were completely blue, no pupil or iris, her eyes looked and felt like the snow, and ice, you could almost see the snowflakes dancing in her eyes. She watched Mylia like a predator would view a creature not fit to be its meal, with disinterest and some disdain, but no hostility.

Mylia raised her gaze to hers but could not keep it, her eyes falling to her shoulders, "Who are ye, where am I?" many questions came to mind but those were the only two she managed to get out before the woman raised a hand, her words suddenly swallowed back silencing her.

"I know who you are Mylia, and perhaps you know me, if not in name, but in thought, in mind and body." Her voice was everywhere in the room, speaking at and through her touching to very core of Mylia's being with ice causing her to shiver violently. "As for where you are, it is of little concern for the moment, I have come at your call for aid."

Recognition slowly came to Mylia, "Ye cae to help me?" suspicion slowly began to replace the momentary relief, "Why would ye help me? I do nae know ye."

"We have a joint interest Mylia, and I believe that you can aid me in reaching an outcome I so sorely desire."

Mylia shivered again though not nearly as violently, "And what do ye offer me in return for aid." Mylia was no stranger to these

sort of deals, powerful beings were always willing to offer something in exchange for their aid. This would not be the first time she brokered such a deal.

"I offer you power, and your freedom from here, " she made a motion at the room surrounding them, "All I ask for in return is your aid, and your utmost loyalty, and you shall have your every desire."

Mylia's orchid eyes raised again, forcing herself to meet the icy and inhuman gaze of the being before her, she was tired of serving others of being their tool, she did not want to share that power. But there was little choice considering the situation, her chest ached for a moment the memory of Callista's sword sliding through her chest still fresh in her mind. It stirred her lust for vengeance a hateful gaze coming to her eyes, "And who would ye hae me pledge mae allegiance to?"

"I am known as Mater Matris, but most call me the Mother." she offered a hand to Mylia.

The Mother, a name that most did not dare to speak for fear of conjuring her with only that utterance. No one alive knew or or was willing to speak of where she came from, she simply existed, a being said to rival the god's themselves. Ancient, and powerful, the Mother was not a force that any, not even the Council of the Outerworld would trifle with.

"I give ye mae heart, mae soul, and mae body, " Mylia reached

forward to take her hand, it was like ice, colder than anything she had ever experienced. The pale stone like hand wrapped around hers instantly like a snake coiling around its prey.

"And so you shall be mine, Mylia Wolfsabre Roase."

* * *

Silence and the scent of lavender filled the room, the afternoon sun laid bands of light across the bed in the middle where Callista laid. Unconscious with no change from three days prior. The elders spoke of the Goddess abandoning her avatar, angered by her choice in Mylia, and her inability to deal with her this long. But the truth was that no one really knew what was going on, except perhaps Damon, who refused to speak on the subject.

Calek stood across the room silently watching her, he had spent the past several days here in a silent vigil waiting for something, for anything. He leaned against the wall a hand rested on the hilt of his blade, he didn't even turn to look when Ransim approached, he knew who it was. The smell of lotus blossoms preceded her, and her presence was such you could almost taste it in the air.

"Standing here and waiting won't do anyone any good, not for you, and not for her," her voice was soft and sympathetic, "Mylia's trial will commence in a week."

He had not yet decided if he would attend her trial by the

Council of the Outerworld, anger formed a knot in chest the sour taste of betrayal in his mouth. He could hear his brother's words mocking him, his fist clenched reflexively.

Ransim's hand fell onto his shoulder, the tension eased instantly, but not even the succubus could take the hate from his heart or the sour taste from his mouth.

"I have not decided if I'm going, thank you however for letting me know." He avoided the question he'd wanted to ask since the fight, since Ransim told him about Ariden. It forced him to keep his conversations with her clipped she had told him it would be discussed later and he trusted that.

She turned her hand drifting from his shoulder walking away several steps before stopping, "He almost died that day Calek, he was so young and so very hurt, but I knew what he was, Callista confided it to me, she hid the fact he was a bearer from everyone. She didn't want anyone to know he bore Anerizel's mark, she didn't want her son to live a repeat of her life, or for him to have to be his mother's executioner."

She turned back around her eyes glistening with unshed tears, "I knew the God Slayer would attack recklessly, so I came, and barely rescued him. But I did not want you to know, I did not want Mylia to know, if she knew she may try to warp the child, or worse. And Callista was losing her control to Phenixel over Mylia, she wanted to give Mylia a chance to repent for her sins, to turn herself in."

Ransim stopped looking at Calek, "I am sorry, I had his best interests at heart when I brought him here. I never wanted..."

"I know, " the strain in Calek's voice was evident, "Not everything but I know you had his best interests at heart, neither I nor Callista could have raised him over these long 10 years."

The tears on Calek's cheeks were barely visible in the shadow he stood in, "I should have trusted her, I should have been willing to listen, but I made the same assumption with her that everyone else did. You did right to take him, give him the life he has now, we could have only offered him pain, and turmoil."

"Come Calek, I believe that its time for Ariden to know the truth, about his mother, and his father. There is no reason that he should not know now, the battlefield has made him a man whether he was ready or not." Ransim turned away from him, "And the God and Goddess knows Rand isn't the greatest father figure at times."

Calek could sense the humor in her tone, her attempt to lighten the dark mood, but he couldn't help the frown forming on his face and his contempt for his younger twin. Rand only did things that benefited himself, and he knew he had only helped Ransim for the chance to rub it in his face later. Calek also wasn't foolish enough to think that the succubus wasn't playing games of her own and manipulating Rand in her own manner, you could say they were made for each other.

But where Ransim had a heart of gold, Rand's was most decidedly fool's gold. Calek followed after her hesitating a moment to look back at Callista his voice soft, "I'll be back, I promise."

* * *

Ariden ducked, Rand's foot barely missing him, he reacted quickly grabbing his leg and twisting using his momentum against him sending Rand towards the ground. With a grunt of exertion Rand pushing down at the ground with his hands propelling himself back against Ariden's chest sending the boy flying.

Jumping to his feet Rand feigned away as Ariden's fist seemed to appear in front of him in a right hook. The boy was good, he'd never seen someone control time in a natural manner without the aid of any devices. But his use of it came with a price, it wore him out quickly, and Rand was beginning to see the effects on him.

Rand easily blocked Ariden's second blow and swung at him, he didn't have time to see the fake out Ariden had set up as he quickly shifted footing slamming his foot into Rand's stomach knocking the wind from him and sending him stumbling back. It gave him the moment he needed jumping into the air with a sweeping kick to Rand's head sending him sailing to the side of the courtyard used for practice.

Rand hit the ground hard with a groan, he was learning, being able to mislead him on exactly how tired he was was good, it meant in a fight it might work. He got to his feet slowly wincing

slightly, couple broken ribs, nothing to be very concerned it.

"You tricked me?" Rand looked to Ariden questioning.

Ariden grinned a bit, a very satisfied and male expression, "You always rely on me getting tired, that I'll overuse it, I just exploited your weakness."

Rand laughed and beamed at him proudly, "Good, keep it up and some day maybe you can really beat me and I'll stop letting you win."

"You lost again fair and square," Ariden's tone became mocking, "unless you want another beating to prove it?"

Rand chuckled almost ready to take him up on the challenge before the scent of lotus blossoms filled him. He stood the rest of the way taking a deep breath, her arms wrapped around him as she pressed her body along the line of his back. He felt the tension from the fight leave his body as a tension of a new sort came to life.

Her breath played along his skin for a moment before she pressed lightly on one of the broken ribs making him gasp, "Sorry love, " her voice playful, "I believe once again he's got you beat."

"You think so?" Rand's voice was low a grin spreading on his lips, "Well quick, I think I need to have my bruise ego stroked."

Calek's voice filled the courtyard before the conversation could continue as he stepped into the sunlight, "Save the show for someone who cares."

Ariden looked to the man who walked in and shook his head still laughing some, "Actually, they're always like that, worse to be honest."

He crossed the courtyard to where everyone stood kissing Ransim lightly on the cheek, "I need to go clean up then Tainet said he needs to speak with me and Damon."

Ransim shook her head, "It can wait a moment, I need to speak to you Ariden, " her gaze fell to Calek, "And to Calek."

Rand tensed again under her touch, they'd had an argument already regarding the very conversation she was about to have. He disagreed with her, he didn't feel it necessary for the boy to know the truth, he'd lived this long without knowing either of his biological parents there was no need to create turmoil for him. And to be honest, he enjoy his brother's misery over it, knowing he'd been a father where he couldn't be.

Pulling away from Ransim he turned to leave leveling an unfriendly gaze on Calek, "I believe then that I will be going to shower."

With an abrupt motion he pulled Ransim to him sweeping her

into a kiss, his anger fueling the passion. His voice was almost a low growl as he pulled away from her, "And I -will- see you later."

He let her go and turned again pushing past Calek roughly his voice harsh a mocking smirk on his face now, "Don't screw it up again bro. I don't like fixing your mistakes."

Calek clenched a fist resisting the urge to grab him and pummel his face in till that smirk went away. He didn't give Rand the satisfaction of voicing what he was feeling just then. His attention went back to Ransim as Rand disappeared into the building.

Ariden took a seat indian style on the ground looking at Calek for a moment and his obvious anger, leaving his comments unspoken his gaze turns to Ransim. The playfulness melted from him, his demeanor becoming serious as he sat up straight.

Ransim looked to him, her mask sliding away, that constant sorrow replacing the playfulness of her mask. But she smiled to him, that sorrow fading from her eyes, and it was probably the first time Ariden had seen his aunt without that haunted look. He couldn't help himself as he returned her smile.

"Its time that some things were clarified for you Ariden, there are many things that you weren't told about your life before arriving here." her voice was soft, "You're a man now, no longer a child, and I believe its time you know."

"Aunt..." his voice tailed for a second as he looked from Ransim to Calek and back, "I know, and I knew that there must be a good reason I wasn't told. So I did not ask."

Calek couldn't help the small smile seeing that small bit of himself in his son, even with only 6 years he'd managed even that small impact.

Ransim smiled again softly kneeling in front of Ariden touching his cheek, he'd grown so much since that day 10 years ago when she lifted his broken body from the field of battle. "You were so young, it was a horrible battle that both your mother and father were involved in. I can only assume that you had wandered away at an inopportune time, I found you just after you had been struck down."

Ariden frowned, he'd heard the story and seen the large scar on his back where he had been cut down. He had vague memories of it, nightmares of the demonic form towering over him before he felt the searing pain in his back. Somewhere a woman screamed a name, Arick, and everything went black. It was the only memory he had that remained of the time before he was brought here.

Ransim's eyes had closed when she stopped talking, "You are a member of the Roase clan Ariden. "

His eyes widened in shock, "That means..." "

She nodded, "Mylia Wolfsabre Roase is your Aunt."

Relief rushed over him, for a moment he had feared that he was truly the child of Mylia. His voice was soft a moment, "If Mylia was my Aunt then who were my parents?"

It was Calek that spoke, not Ransim his gaze set on the ground, "Callista," Calek's gaze rose to meet his, "your mother was Callista."

Ariden looked to Ransim as she nodded in agreement with Calek's statement and he looked back to Calek the realization settling in. "But, if I'd had to kill the bearer of Phenixel to restore the balance it would have meant..."

Ransim looked to him sadly, "Yes it would have meant killing your mother. When you were born Callista found the mark on you and hid it, she told no one because she knew of the prophecy. She hoped she could give you the life she never had and save you an existence like her own. But when Mylia destroyed Sheol, and seemed to be unrepentant of her sins Callista entrusted me with her secret."

Ariden suddenly looked a lot less like the polished warrior he had become and more like the scared child she had helped raise. Tears were forming in his eyes, and even so he resisted the urge to cry rubbing his eyes furiously.

Ransim touched his cheek again before standing and crossing the few steps to Calek who watched his son for a moment before looking to the ground. He was tense under Ransim's hand as she laid

it on his shoulder, "Calek is your father."

Calek had expected surprise, shock, maybe even disbelief, but the raw anger that appeared on his sons face was completely unexpected. Ariden's green eyes blazed in anger, so much like his mother Calek thought that sour feeling returning to the pit of his stomach.

The boy stood slowly his fists clenched, his body trembling with the anger, he'd never felt so much rage before, but how could he not considering the last 10 years. He knew more about his parent's relationship than any child really should, he knew that Calek had defended Mylia to Callista, and that he hadn't trusted her. He also knew that Calek had been married to Mylia before, and that his loyalties had been tied strongly to her. He couldn't help but feel betrayed, for his mother's sake, for the mother he'd never known.

"You betrayed my mother for a pretty face, and fanciful lies."

Calek flinched at the tone in his voice, the wound in his heart caused 10 years ago when Callista had left to hunt Mylia ripped back open. He knew that many people questioned his motivation for being with Callista, speculating that it was simply a way for him to get close again to Mylia. Whether it was true or not it had persisted, and Mylia had seemed conflicted over his return at Callista's side.

The passion he'd felt for Mylia had died the day she let him

die for crimes that were not his own, committed while possessed by a malevolent spirit. Honor kept him from voicing his opinion on her hypocrisy, he had been sentenced to death for a crime that she herself readily committed against him. His return had only been by chance, and he hadn't planned to stay, luck and chance it seemed had put him in the same place as Callista one night, at a pub. Their conversation went long into that night, she told him what had happened since he'd left.

He learned of the ongoing war with a neighboring clan, and of the current events of his once family, the Roases. He would leave, only to find himself returning many times over the next few months to visit, learning more about the family, but even more about Callista. She wasn't the quiet sort, but she had always been private, the type of woman most men would consider off limits. She was beautiful, intelligent, great with a sword and in a fight, and the temper and mouth of a drunken sailor on leave.

They knew each other before, but only in passing, during family affairs Callista tried to not involve herself unless necessary. When she did it was with the same passion she presented when throwing the first punch in a fight at the pub. Calek learned there was a lot more to the passionate woman who seemed to most to only be Mylia's killer bodyguard on a leash.

It started out as most relationships that begin in a pub do, one night after a lot to drunk, and a particularly rousing fight. Ousted by the pleasant tempered, but iron fisted owner Godunya they had gone to her place. It didn't take long for the night of alcohol

and drunken fights to turn into a flurry of clothing and flesh. Calek remembered that night well even through the haze of alcohol, mostly for the pain he'd felt days afterwards, muscles screamed from places he hadn't known existed.

Callista did very little half way, she had a fire to her that seemed to relight his own, and he found himself falling in love with her.

When Mylia disappeared to Sheol, unknown to her family, Callista seemed to be the calm in the middle of the storm, unworried and unaffected. He knew now that it was probably because she was well aware of Mylia's whereabouts and that she perfectly safe. But it was during that turmoil that he'd asked her to marry him, he hadn't expected the yes response, Callista seemed to avoid most relationships. In the prior 8 years he'd know her she had only had two other relationships, the first with a man named Derek who had mysteriously disappeared.

Callista's second relationship was complicated and even now Calek didn't know the whole story, he only knew that Alyosha was a powerful king. It had ended badly, more then once and it wasn't a topic he ever dared broach with her.

Many characters found within this story are not wholly my creation. I have remained as faithful as possible to them, but this is my own personal interpretation of them. I will list character ownership for those I know. If your character appears or is listed below without a reference please send me an email to the address at the top of this manuscript for credit. This story is not meant for public distribution or publication.

Notations:

- **Ran Kailie** - Callista, Ransim Su'Noch, Da'Noch, Damon, Ashoka, Arick/Ariden, Tainet, Ailianus, Phenixel, Drakecel, Anerizel, Mater Matris (the Mother), Warrior Bearers
- **Russ Brewer** - Calek Hunter Nite, Randall Xavier Nite
- **Deborah Erikson** - Mylia Wolfsabre Roase ap Skyfire ap Nite ap Scorn
- ? - Arion Stormcrow
- ? - Labrynth
- ? - Lord Mem'lelis (*Originally Mem'noch*)
- **Todd Hess** - Alyosha (*Originally the Dragon King - I would love to include Aly the Dragon king, but I know for a fact I could never do him justice without Todd's help*)