

"Endymion!"

Snoring, quiet and subtle, served as the response.

"Endymion! Wake up!"

He never moved with any form of haste, at least not unless he barreled after prey, but upon the tinny thump of Calliope's knuckles, Endymion cracked open a milky white eye and a fine pink mist leaked from it. Awake at least, but tired as hell, he yawned wide, flashing a row of pearly teeth and peered over the top of Calliope's camper to see the petite little pink crook with a piece of paper in her hand.

"Mornin'," Endymion said with another big yawn. He ran his fingers through a purple mess of fluff on the top of his head and rolled his rotund self off the top of the camper. "What's that you got there?"

Calliope brandished the paper in his face and he sniffed it, eyes going cross as he tried to read the messy handwriting. She seemed excited, and also a little smug.

"A letter?" Endymion asked, finally taking the page.

"I told you she was real," Calliope said. "It's from Calypso. She wrote it herself, I can tell."

Endymion looked over the paper again. His level of literacy left a lot to be desired, but he saw strange smudges in the paper that smelled odd when he sniffed it again. While he couldn't place his finger on it, the smudges smelled distinctly of a different place. Nothing like Calliope's camper at all.

"I remember you saying that teacher you went to could see her too."

"Yeah, and you didn't believe me," Calliope replied. "But she's real. And she's here. Well, she might not be here right this second, but she was here. And she gave us some valuable info."

Endymion handed the letter back to Calliope, still sniffing the air. "Do you think I can't see her because I don't have my lantern?"

Calliope shrugged. "I couldn't tell you, bubbs. Maybe? Regardless, we need to get back to that place we checked out yesterday."

Endymion flared his nostrils. "If you say so."

He clambered into the back of the camper, pulling in the dusky sky that served as his tail, as vast and wide as the real thing. He coiled it

around himself a few times and once he was settled, Calliope shut the back of the camper and climbed into the driver's seat.

"There's a safe room," she explained. "We might be able to find food in there. Maybe some batteries too."

"Maybe they have the canned tuina," Endymion said, licking his chops. "I could use a can or two of tuna. It's been too dangerous to go catch my own food."

"I said I'd go with you," Calliope replied, starting the engine. Her camper came to life, wobbling and vibrating in its age, but still as reliable as the day it rolled off some cccat's lot decades ago. "I know I look like one of them city folk, but I don't mind getting my hands dirty."

"Oh no," Endymion said, shaking his head so hard that his little round ears flapped. "You already doin' so much for me, I don't wanna make you do more."

Calliope rolled her eyes as she pulled onto a miserable looking road. The poor thing had already seen better days, but the fracture made it seem even more pathetic and bumpy than usual. If it weren't for the brand new wheels, she doubted her camper would have been able to handle it.

"Honestly, bubbs, I think you put too much stock in that thing," Calliope said. "You don't even need it."

"I do," Endymion replied, voice curt.

"I mean, you managed to use your magic without it once."

"Yeah, once. And I think it was because we woulda died if I didn't." Endymion paused for a long time, thinking. "And I tried to do it again, honest. But nothin. Not even a little bit of magic came out."

"Well, it's in Stonewing for sure. I know that."

"And that's where we're going, right?"

Calliope kept her eyes on the road. Finding the lantern's approximate location had been difficult enough when the world was in one piece, but now that everything was broken down, she wasn't so sure she could make good on her promise.

She was on her way to Endymion when the fissures started appearing closer to the cities. He lived out in the middle of nowhere, thankfully in a place where nothing went wrong, but almost as soon as she got to him, all hell broke loose.

And now she had to get back to Stonewing, and she couldn't be sure what was waiting for them. Maybe the whole place had been overrun with ichor beasts. Maybe it had fallen out of the sky. Or, more correctly given how Eeridi broke apart, maybe it had become one with the ground.

"That's the idea," Calliope finally said. "But I don't know what to expect when we get there. You should prepare for the worst."

Endymion frowned. "No, I know it's still in one piece. I can feel it."

"For your sake, I hope so."

They rode in silence for a while. The town they had picked through yesterday was a few hours away, and Calliope hoped that Calypso was right, otherwise they'd be wasting a lot of time and battery power. The camper for sure would be sturdy enough to climb over all the busted road debris, but the engine battery had always been the least reliable part of the vehicle, and Calliope had kept her fear of it dying to herself, lest she jinx it.

The town stood just as dusty and dead as when they left it. A decrepit place, ransacked at least three times over by roving bands of refugees and survivors. Puddles of ichor spilled out everywhere, and the deepest fissures lanced all the way through the soil, opening up to empty air and unsettling oceans of unknown gunk.

It smelled awful.

Endymion hated this place, and clamped his hands over his nose. The prospect of food had been enticing, but now that he could smell the ichor again, his stomach churned and he wished to leave.

"I think it was this one," Calliope said, parking the camper in front of a collapsed building.

Maybe at one point it had been a house or a store, but now it was a grave, robbing of everything valuable, or so she thought. The front door had been ripped apart by panic or monsters, but everything else had been crushed, torn, spoiled, or melted. An unrecognizable mess in a broken down box with nothing to show for it.

"Come on."

Endymion climbed out, his soft fur standing on end. "That place gives me the creeps. Even more than yesterday."

Calliope stared into the darkness. "I don't sense anything. I don't see anything either. She said it was under the rubble."

Endymion followed after Calliope, lumbering on all fours so he could fit a little easier through the opening. Calliope slipped in and tapped her delicate hooves on the floor. She muttered to herself as she poked around and Endymion sat on his haunches, hands clasped.

He'd be better suited for helping lift rubble over trying to sniff anything out. It all smelled like death anyway.

"Surely there must be something to indicate where it is," Calliope said as she stomped around. When she heard a particularly solid sounding thud, she stomped in the same place. "It must be here. Endymion! Help me move this."

Without a word, Endymion waddled over and pushed heaps of broken ceiling out of the way, grunting with the effort to haul the huge beams out of the way enough for Calliope to get a better look. Under the collapsed ceiling, the floor bowed in a boxy shape, and Calliope ran back to the camper to get a crowbar.

She hooked the crowbar under the floorboards and wrenched with all his strength until one of them came up. After that, Endymion pried more and more of the floor up, growling and huffing a cloud of dust and moldy splintered wood blew up into the air.

There, under it all, was a metal trap door.

"By Skire's mercy," Calliope breathed. "Calypso was right. Oh, thank you, Calypso."

"Yes," Endymion said, crushing the lock with his powerful jaws. "Thank you, Calypso. Sorry I wasn't believing in you before."

"She says don't worry about it," Calliope replied, patting Endymion on the shoulder.

In truth, she couldn't feel Calypso in this area. She suspected it was because of the ichor interfering with the land in some way but she imagined that Calypso would have been the kind of person to forgive Endymion.

"I'll go down and see what's in there."

Endymion nodded. "Good idea. I don't figure I can fit in this little hole."

He lifted the trapdoor for her, though, and she climbed down the ladder. Even for as small as she was, Calliope could tell this was a place that humans had owned. The ladder, a bit too small for her frame, tangled her hooves, and she coughed as the stagnant air squeezed around her.

As Calypso had described, the space beneath the building turned out to be a panic room. Not a large one, but packed with shelves of food and water. From what little light filtered in from above, she counted a handful of shelves with cans and bottles lined up in neat rows.

"Hey, bubbs," Calliope called. "Can you go grab me a flashlight?"

She heard Endymion's heavy steps leave and return, flashlight delivered. She flicked it on and picked through the panic room. The cans were all still within their expiration dates, not that it would have mattered for a pair of crooks, who wouldn't fall ill if the cans were unsafe for human consumption, and there was enough water for at least three people to last a few weeks. And beyond that, there were a few bottles of soda.

In the farthest corner, a stack of boxes labeled "Necessities" stood next to a cabinet with a few firearms and boxes of ammunition. She rifled through the boxes to find batteries, tarps, blankets, a set of walkie talkies, a few sleeping bags, and a battery operated radio.

"You okay down there?" Endymion called.

"Just taking stock!" Calliope called back.

"Do they got tuna?" He sounded hopeful.

Calliope returned to the shelves of food. There were dozens and dozens of soups, meats, vegetables, sauces, and a few different fruits, but no tuna. How disappointing. She emptied one of the boxes with tarps and blankets and filled it with cans. She pried one of the fruit cans open and downed it in one gulp before hoisting the filled box over her head and pushing it up the opening.

"I'm sending up a box of food!" she called.

Endymion took the box and put it in the camper. While Calliope filled a second box, he picked through his options and emptied a few cans of beans, soup, and corn. Over the course of a few hours, they took what they could carry safely and sat around the camper to eat their fill.

The pile of opened cans grew into a sizeable mound and they shared a couple warm sodas while the sun hovered directly above them.

"I suppose we'll be heading off soon," Calliope said, content. Her belly hadn't been totally full for a while, and she patted it absently, savoring the feeling.

"What happens when we get to Stonewing?" Endymion asked.

"Well, I guess it depends on what it looks like," Calliope admitted. "If it's a wasteland, we'll have to be careful. I honestly don't know if it's still there. I don't know anything, the radio's dead and we haven't seen any gravent flocks."

"I hope it's okay," Endymion replied, distracted. "I think she's had enough."

"She?"

"Skire."

"Enough of what?"

Endymion shrugged, no longer interested in finishing his soda. "Whatever she was looking for."

Calliope didn't like that answer. She finished her soda, downed Endymion's and laid out the empty bottles in a lazy trail back to the trapdoor.

"What you doin that for?" Endymion asked as he coiled his tail in preparation.

"Maybe a hint for the next group that travels through here," she said. "They might be able to use what's left."

"Mighty kind of you."

He loaded himself into the camper.