

The Dream

The guttural yells of Trollocs, the smell of smoke, and the touch of hot ash on her skin were the last things Viva remembered as she jolted up into a sitting position. The cottage was dark and quiet, no smell of smoke... only a slight summer's night breeze through the open bedroom window. The air was cool against her hot skin. Blankets wrapped tightly around her like a snake trying to squeeze the life from its next meal. Bed sheets crumpled and sticky from her sweat.

Her head pounded and a wave of nausea passed over her. She retched over the side and onto the floor. The dreams were getting worse and worse each night. She felt inside herself and reached for the one thing that would clear away the haze, the one thing to bring any sort of comfort; Saidar. But it eluded her once again.

Years she had been channeling and never before had she had problems embracing the Source. Not until the dreams had started.

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Bright flash of light, no heat. Eyelids blinking rapidly trying to shield from the glare as the eyes dart back and forth, hazy blotches appear and vanish amidst the stunning white contrast. And then the sound starts, like it always does, *boom... thud... boom.*

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Viva cleaned the floor next to her bed to the sounds of false dawn through the window, the beginning musterings of the Robins and Starlings that lived outside it, the high pitched tune of the fruit bats getting in their last meal of the night. Her body ached and she fumbled the towel she was using, soiling her hands against spilled insides that crudely splattered across the wooden boards. She paused, drew a deep breath and held it. *One... two... three... exhale.* She reached again, deep down inside for the Source, and this time light blossomed to life like the rise of the morning sun.

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The sound's tempo raised with the quickening pulse, or was it the same? It crashed in the ears first shutting out anything and everything else. Even the harsh white light was forgotten in the moment. The sound moved inside somehow, pulsing into the neck and down both shoulders. *Boom... thud... boom.* Until fingers and toes throbbed to the beat, the pressure still building, *Boom... Thud... Boom!*

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Viva sat at the small wooden table near the window, a delicate porcelain cup held between both hands, as she rested her elbows on the wood. The view from the window was northward towards the Blight. The color contrast was stark from the greens and yellows of Kandor to the blackened and ruddy red ash of the spoiled land beyond. She looked down into the cup, the Flatwort tea had cooled while she gazed out the window. A quick weave of fire and water puffed a plume of steam up from the cup, the contents back to a proper heat; Seafolk porcelain warming her fingers once again. She looked back up and lost herself to memory.

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Darkness... silence... nothingness. Then there, in the stomach, the pit moved. Up and up it raised through the center. Slowly though, or was the center just very long? Darkness... silence... movement? Yes, the pit moves up, the rest moves down! Down, falling, faster. Downward! Down towards something small and circular.

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The sensation of falling without the accompanying sound of rushing air or feeling of wind against her skin was the most unnerving thing. The reason she always emptied her stomach after she woke. It always comes back to that, the absolute alien feeling of loss of control; the unnatural. *Why now? What changed?*

She set the cup down on the tabletop, inside mysteriously empty as she couldn't remember drinking it even though she knew that she did. Her gaze looked up and out at the Blight again in the distance. The single guiding principle of Kandor; Steady, Steadfast... hold the blight border. Even throughout the Guild this principle persists; Sustain, Sustainability... fund the war against the Blight. But the community, their borderland neighbors, there was nothing really. Nothing on a human level, no sense of greater hope. No sense of unity. Just the single drive to hold the blight back, never to make life better for each other. Never innovate and create, just hold. Hold the Blight. The Wheel turns, but nothing changes... not really, not along the blight border.

Do people change? Have I changed? She thought.

She opened the single drawer inset in the table and brought out a piece of paper. One corner slightly bent from repeated placement from the drawer to tabletop and back again, the side with a slight smudge pressed face down. She sat and stared at the blank page. Later, the call of a Magpie from beyond the window brought her back, how much time passed? She didn't know.

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The pinprick of light jumped up and grabbed a hold. It started as just a hazy dot somewhere below. Never really changing in size or giving the sense that it was getting closer. But when it did move, it struck like a bolt of lightning. The pit in the stomach stopped moving up and everything became one again; light, noise, tingling, stench, and taste... the iron taste of blood.

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Viva reached inside the table's drawer and pulled out a blotter, an inkwell, and her quill. She set them down precisely, evenly spaced and in the perfect natural placement for her wrists, fingers, and arms to reach them.

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It was a glade, enshrined with pine trees a stone's throw across. The moon was high in the night sky, or maybe it was twilight, glinting light off of footlong ground spikes of mist reaching back up towards the heavens. It all smelled wrong somehow and the farthest distances of sight were blurry to the eye. Fingertips to lips come away with the glissen of dark red, a bitten tongue or cheek from the jolt of becoming, the jolt of existence. Dew coalesced on the ground encircling everything, onto arms and neck giving a heavy feeling of foretelling; of anxiety. And then away, in the distance, the sound was there. Boom... thud... boom... thud... boom...

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She sat with glazed over eyes, a letter in each hand, looking out the same window she had watched from all day. The day was late and the night was soon to take whatever was left of it. She thought she could see the abstract light of torches being lit throughout Chachin, the only hold over against the Dark through the night. And as the darkness fell and the daylight retired she made her decision; folded both letters carefully, addressed them, and then sealed them for delivery. She would send them tomorrow with the first dispatch of the post. After she slept, perhaps without dreaming, perhaps without losing her personal connection to the power forever.

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The flagpole arrived, like it always did, blinking into existence on the far side of the glade. Kandor colors and Red Horse flying high above the smaller black flag with three silver chains of the Guild. No wind that could be felt, no sound of the rush, but the flags flapped like the mother of all storms was blowing. The only sound was the boom... thud... boom... coming closer.

The moonlight dimmed, throwing the glade into shadow. Viewpoint moved up to watch as darkness swirled in front of the moon, a perfect swirl of darkness, transforming the moon into the ancient symbol of the Aes Sedai; one half Flame of Tar Valon, the other the Dragon's Fang.

Boom... Thud... Boom!

Noise once again was all around. The sound of brush crunching, trees swaying, the wind howled like three full packs.

Boom... Thud... Boom!

The darkness left the moon and its full radiance shown down into the glade, illuminating, and fiery.

Boom... Thud... Boom!

The stench intensified, strong and overpowering. The smell of death and damp.

Boom... Thud... Boom!

Movement among the trees, vision spinning the entire perimeter of the glade, encircled and surrounded. Dark shapes filtered in and headed towards the center.

Boom... Thud... Boom!

The shapes fused and melted until they reached the flagpole at the northern tip, the banners of Kandor. The shapes were recognizable now, as any in the borderlands would recognize, the Dark One's own trollocs. They pulled and rent the flagpole from its mooring, the image of the flags falling down into the dark mass of writhing bodies brought a profound sense of sadness and loss.

They left the pole broken and splintered, the flags torn and bloodied. And at that moment a silence came over the glade for a heartbeat boom... thud... boom... and then they saw her.

Boom... Thud... Boom!

She stood in the center of the glade, her arms wrapped around herself. Tears poured down her face, wisps of wild hair stuck to her salty cheeks. The glow of moonlight started to fade around her. The darkness stirred and moved inward. She reached and it was gone, the Source, the One Power... Saidar. The moonlight receded even more, falling softly away, and with it any connection to the gift that was hers since childhood.

And then the warm hot glow of fire flared in the night sky and she dragged her eyes skyward, slowly resisting; trying not to see it. Not again. The moon was there, still the same half blackened swirl matched against its white sibling. But now the flames were behind it, fire on the mountain, the symbol of the Aes Sedai on a starlit field of flame red. She reached down inside, one last desperate attempt to grasp the source, and nothing. The trollocs surged, their grunts and yells calling for her death, for the iron taste of her blood.

ARRRAAUNTT!

The scream filled every ounce of being, every fiber of the soul, every thread of the Wheel. Fire fell down from the heavens around her. The screams of dying trollocs rose

to a fevered pitch. The stench of their burning corpses blunted the smell of wrongness in the glade. She cried even harder as she knew what came next. Visions of red scales glistening in the fire's light; sinewy muscles writhing underneath as it flew past. Over and over again it passed by raining down fire on the trolloc horde. The piercing green eyes of the Dragon staring deep into her soul as it toiled. The flap of the wings on the wind; boom... thud... boom...

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My Dearest Wisdom,

I leave south from Kandor in two week's time. I will travel west to Irinjavar where I will catch a boat south to Whitebridge where I hope to see you and your Woman's Circle. Enclosed is the best description I can give of my continued affliction. The dreams I had spoken to you about have become worse, my ability to channel more and more frequently unstable. Last we spoke I was going to inquire with the Aes Sedai and I have news of that dispatch: I am too old to join the Tower and don the white.

I did not tell of the dreams to them, or of my fortelling as one might call it. Any help from the Aes Sedai I believe would be detrimental to me if they heard of what I dream. Of who I dream.

I hope that you can help. I hope that there is a way I can take control back of my life, my fate. If not then I must face it head on and travel to Ghealdan and speak with the Prophet, and see if the Dragon is truly my only salvation as my dream foretells.

Yours in confidence,

Viva Mae

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Dragon Captain,

I request an audience with the Prophet in Jehannah. I expect to arrive next month as my travels take me south from Kandor. If I do not arrive by Bel Tine my fate has been decided and I ask that you excuse my absence. Enclosed is my description of events, recanted to the best of my ability. The dreams persist and I worry about what they mean. I worry for us all.

Signed under the Light,

Viva Mae, Magnate of the Kandori Merchants' Guild