

<== Katie

"I miss my home." the woman said into her tankard. The bartender rolled her eyes.

"You have said. Tom tells me you've spun a grand tale of lands far across the seas for him... twice this week already."

"Yes, well, it's true. What happened to him anyway? He was learning the story by heart." she replied, brushing her hair behind her as she straightened up. Moping over her beer was good, but not as good as telling her story to someone new.

Bartenders were good choices for this, she always found. They were obliged to listen to you, and would always get you a drink when you needed one.

"He's taking a few days off." the woman said, sitting down behind the bar and looking at the prospective storyteller.

She was strong, obviously a warrior. Her accent marked her as foreign, showing the truth of her story, but it wasn't the most obvious thing. Her skin was darker, a soft hazel that was closer to the bartender's hair than her pale skin. Her hair was several shades darker, held loosely in a band.

"Well. My name is Leah, and I came here from the Gates of Morning in Taj'Eyal." she begun, slipping into the practiced tone of a story that had been told many times. "There, our kind are besieged by the orc prides, who have never forgiven us for defeating them in the age of pyre. So, we seek a way to return home to Maj'Eyal for aid, where the rest of our kind have lived for many years. That is why our leader in magical research, Zemekkys -"

"Zemekkys? Did you say Zemekkys?" the bartender interrupted, eyes wide.

"Um. Yes. Yes, is that a common name? I'm fairly sure he hasn't been to Maj'Eyal in your lifetime..." Leah said to her, slightly annoyed by the interruption.

"Ah. I think I must have heard it somewhere. Sorry, please keep going."

"...that's why Zemekkys has been trying to enhance teleportation spells to send us here. I'd made my name saving some fool of a man from giant spiders, so he chose me to guard Serena. She's already famous, although... I dread to think what's happened to her in Maj'Eyal." she grimaced. "Obviously, the spell did not go well. I awoke in... a ruin. Northwest of a town I later learnt was called Derth. Even at home, we hear tales of the necromancer who once lived there. I speak of Kor'pul, and the undead that gather there. I was thrust into their midst with neither explanation nor companion, alone in a lost world..."

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A dark-skinned woman appeared in a flash of blinding light, in a crooked building that no-one nearby was foolish enough to enter. Stripped bare by the raw magic that bought her here, she scowled, but that was in no way her most pressing issue.

To begin with, she'd lost track of the Second Sunrise, whom she was meant to be guarding. And, on a smaller scale, but far more pressing, she was surrounded by the undead.

Leah stood upright, her eyes shining with a vicious light, before waves of radiance began to emerge from her, smoke rising from the nearest undead. For she was a paladin of the sun, defender of the Gates of Morning, and she was more than her armor.

The lack of weapon was a little more pressing.

From the glowing corona of sunlight, she fashioned a cloak, and with its aid a trio of sunbeams flew forth, the flashing light drawing hisses from the blinded horde. Without a moment's pause, Leah surged forth, taking up a blade from the fallen skeletons. Armed once more, she smiled, for she was the sun's hand, and none could stand against her now.

The shadows seemed to fade as the longsword shone, and she scanned the room. In an instant, the floor lit up. Before the creatures could react, she was at the other end of the golden path, driving the glowing longsword into the chest of a walker, exchanging it for the greatblade it had borne, and smiling.

With a greatsword in her hands, any fear she had left was gone. The restless dead were driven before her, shattered, broken, and burnt. Spending a few minutes to gather together enough scraps of armour to defend herself, she forged onwards. If nothing else, she would purify this place.

The unquiet put up no resistance, their kind being weak to the light of the righteous, and Leah rapidly made her way to the centre of the ruin. There she found a shade, and for the first time since she had travelled, she was challenged.

A wave of water struck forth, and the magically charged liquid threw her back, quenching the flames of her blade and forcing her to stop advancing, just to hold on. But the shade was not done, and a wave of frost held her still, bound in a block of ice. Struggling with all her might, she broke free, just in time to parry the spirit's blade, which was all too solid. As the second strike came around, she began to smile, sure she could block the shade's slow movements, only for it to let loose a blast of mana, throwing her back several feet. But then she dug the blade into the ground, and a path of light was formed. On that path she was as light itself, and the blade drove into the spectre's chest, baleful light and renewed flame. It still glared, malevolence bright in its eyes, so she pulled the blade out through its side, spinning in a perfect circle and decapitating the creature.

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So, unbowed, I left the ruins, and travelled south to Derth. With the gold I'd found there, I managed to acquire some clothing, and directions. From there it was but a few days travel to

Last Hope, where I gave my story to the king. Fortunately, with the looks and talents I possess, the king believed me. Alas, there is no word of Serena, and with the prejudice against magic, there seems to be no way home. For my information I was given a small sum of gold, but soon I shall need to find a way to survive here.”

The bartender, who had listened to the tale with rapt attention, gave a slow nod.

“You’ve certainly been very unlucky. It sounds like you’re a skilled warrior, though. Have you considered adventuring as a career? Or, if you don’t like being alone... I suspect there are a dozen adventurers in the bar who heard your story.”

She seemed to be right, as the bar had gone quiet. First to raise a glass was a halfling, knives on her belt. She sat next to, of all things, a yeek, and she wore an everpresent smile to contrast with the yeek’s worried sympathy.

“We got a bone to pick with this vampire over in Dreadfell. How’d you like to help us deal with him?”

“...there are worse things to do.”

==> [Serena](#)