

The Last Flight: From Sable to Gray

14th of Erastus, 4712 AR

Kaliyah's connection with Falcor transcended the conventional relationship between a marine and her mount. Their bond, cemented through countless flights across the skies of Korvosa, was as enduring as the eternal flow of the Jeggare River. Soaring with Sable Company, Kaliyah found her ultimate freedom amidst the clouds. Her comrades' jests about the dangers of aerial combat only made her clutch Falcor's feathers more tightly; for her, the risk heightened the exhilaration. As she once confided to Magda, flying wasn't just an act for her—it was a destiny. Even Krovax affectionately dubbed her "Little Bird."

Underneath them, the city lights flickered like a bed of stars, reflecting in Falcor's keen eyes. Mounted on her loyal hippogriff, Kaliyah couldn't help but be captivated by Korvosa's sprawling expanse. The sudden orders to rendezvous at the docks had broken the continuity of her evening, pulling her away from her team. It was vexing, yet it offered a temporary escape from the growing tensions that had been gripping them lately.

Unbeknownst to her, this serene moment was about to end, marking her last skyward dance with Falcor. A storm of arrows rained from the heavens, and before she could even process what was happening, one found its mark in Falcor. They spiraled downwards, a falling star extinguished too soon, crashing into the shadowy labyrinth of Korvosa's alleys.

"Seize her!" commanded the lead Maiden. Before Kaliyah could draw her sword, she was overpowered, her arms shackled behind her back. Her eyes met Falcor's just as a Maiden drove her sword into the hippogriff's side and ended his suffering. Falcor's screech tore through her soul.

"Under the order of Her Grace, Queen Ileosa Arabasti, you are hereby conscripted into the service of the Gray Maidens," Sabina Merrin declared, her voice as emotionless as the steel-gray armor she wore.

With little more than a flick of her wrist, Sabine had Kaliyah gagged and dragged off to the docks where she was taken aboard a ship. She was not alone though; several other young women were on the ship, sailing into unknown waters. Their identities were forcibly ripped from them as they were made to cast their possessions into the sea. Her armor, her badges, and even her Sable Company signet ring were thrown overboard as a

chilling voice told her, **"Your old life is over."** On a ship sailing into anonymous waters, her identity was cast away piece by piece into the sea. **"You are now Initiate Thirty-Seven,"** a stern voice said as they returned to Korvosa. **"There is no resistance, only obedience. Throw yourselves to the sea or choose to serve the Queen, the choice is yours."**

Fractured and Reforged

12th of Erastus, 4712 AR

Submerged in corrosive chemicals, their skin scrubbed to a raw shade, the initiates underwent a ritual cleansing designed to erase their former selves. The process continued as they were shorn of hair, relieved of piercings, their tattoos obscured in dark ink. Clad in monastic gray robes, they were rendered anonymous, reduced to mere numbers they were compelled to repeat as a mantra. Kaliyah became Initiate Thirty-Seven, her new identity burned into her flesh, the numbers branded onto the nape of her neck.

The initial days blurred into an unending cycle of degrading rituals. Her previous life in the Sable Company had taught her discipline and sacrifice, but the Gray Maidens required nothing less than total abnegation. The brand on her neck was a symbol not merely of physical pain but a testament to her internal annihilation. **"What is your name?"** they would interrogate.

Her first reply was **"Kaliyah,"** a response that drew hours of torment at the hands of Lady Andaisin. Yet, as the lash fell and arcane spells sullied the air, she eventually relinquished her name, whispering, **"Initiate Thirty-Seven."**

As the days wore on, Kaliyah's thoughts became muddled, and the walls of her psyche started to crumble. Despite clinging to the futile hope that her comrades would come charging through the gates to rescue her, none arrived. Under Lady Andaisin's calculated torment, Kaliyah shattered. Her torturer seemed almost artistically engaged in her suffering, meticulously tuning each agony to stretch the fabric of her sanity to its limit. And somewhere amid the relentless haze, Kaliyah was locked away, leaving only Initiate Thirty-Seven.

Initiate Sixty-Six, her designated companion, provided the tiniest sliver of connection to what remained of herself. They shared meals in silence and endured grueling training

regiments side by side. Yet, in the fleeting moments when their eyes met, Sixty-Six's gaze seemed to convey a wordless plea: *Endure*.

The Crucible of Sisterhood

24th of Lamashan, 4712 AR

In the throne room, Sabina introduced her to Queen Ileosa. **"In the finest armor, they have been clad, and with the finest swords, they have been armed,"** Sabina announced, her eyes meeting Sister Thirty-Seven's. **"Under my tutelage, they have grown from impressionable young women into bastions of discipline and skill worthy of defending the Arabasti line."**

In a dimly lit hall, the air filled with a sense of both tension and grandeur, Queen Ileosa takes her seat upon an elevated throne. Her eyes survey the room, settling on the two initiates standing in the center of the arena, Initiate Thirty-Seven and Initiate Forty-Eight. The metallic sheen of their armor glimmers in the torchlight, each woman gripping a weapon, their faces taut with focus and determination.

"Ladies of Valor," Queen Ileosa begins, her voice ringing clear and assertive. **"Today you stand on the precipice. This duel is not just a test of your skill but of your devotion, your spirit, and your unyielding commitment to a cause greater than yourselves. May your blades find the unworthy and your souls find the discipline required to serve me. Show me the steel of your resolve, and you shall be rewarded with purpose beyond measure."**

The duel commences, a dance of steel and willpower. Strikes are exchanged, dodges and parries executed until initiate Forty-Eight falters, and the other—Sister Thirty-Seven—stands victorious. Her breaths come in quick succession, a mixture of exhaustion and exhilaration coursing through her veins.

Sabina Merrin steps forth, her imposing presence emanating authority. **"Repeat after me,"** she commands. **"By the steel of my blade, the blood in my veins, and the very essence of my soul, I hereby swear loyalty to Her Majesty, the Queen Ileosa Arabasti, rightful ruler of Korvosa. I vow to serve as a shield against her enemies, a sword in her battles, and a keeper of her laws. I renounce all former ties and allegiances, pledging myself fully to the throne and the realm it governs. I submit to the authority of the Gray**

Maidens and the orders of our commander. My life is forfeit for the sanctity and security of the queen and her domain. In her service, I shall find purpose. In her glory, I shall find validation. In her orders, I shall find law. I accept the binding nature of this oath, under pain of disgrace, exile, or death. May this oath be sealed in steel, witnessed by the arcane, and irrevocable till the shattering of worlds.

The oath continues, punctuated by the stark finality of each commitment, each renunciation, each vow. **"So say I, Sister Thirty-Seven, now and forever a Gray Maiden."**

As the final word reverberates through the chamber, Queen Ileosa descends from her throne. The hall's atmosphere thickens with anticipation. Drawing a small, ornate dagger from her side, the queen approaches the new Gray Maiden. With precision, she slices the air, drawing a single drop of blood from Sister Thirty-Seven's palm.

"As your Queen, I accept your fealty, your loyalty, and your essence," Queen Ileosa declares, locking eyes with the initiate as she speaks. **"The bond between us is now irrevocable, sealed not just in words but in blood. You, Sister Thirty-Seven, are no longer a mere subject; you are now a vanguard of my vision for Korvosa. Never forget the weight of your oath, nor the privilege of your new station."**

Pausing for a breath, she adds, **"Rise, Gray Maiden, and take your place among those who will shape the destiny of this realm."**

Out of the Ashes

3rd of Erastus, 4713 AR

In the subsequent months, Sister Thirty-Seven loyally executed her queen's orders. Her missions ran the gamut from quashing protests and implementing forced relocations to administering torture, kidnappings, and executions—all committed unquestioningly in the name of Queen Ileosa.

Sister Sixty-Six was her constant companion on these operations, the two forming an indomitable duo as they executed their tasks across Korvosa. Their fidelity seemed unshakeable until a fateful delivery to the Temple of Urgathoa upended the foundations of Sister Thirty-Seven's very being.

During a courier mission to Lady Andaisin, the so-called mistress of pain lost her composure and assaulted both Thirty-Seven and Sixty-Six. Caught unprepared, they

were felled by her powerful spells. As Sixty-Six wheezed her last breath and slumped to the floor, a magical barrier immobilized Thirty-Seven. Shifting her malevolence toward Thirty-Seven alone, Lady Andaisin unwittingly broke down the mental defenses within her victim.

A torrent of memories and faces surged forth, drowning Sister Thirty-Seven in a sea of remorse and recognition. Voices of those she had wronged as a Gray Maiden resounded in her mind. Names like Aliayah, Magdalena, Beta, Simionis, Raja, and P'yong screamed in her conscience, each demanding acknowledgment for the life she had snuffed out. One voice, however, rose above the cacophony: Kaliyah Taterescu. Kaliyah's repressed persona rekindled like a phoenix, seizing control and expelling Thirty-Seven from her own consciousness.

Shaking off the spell that bound her, and disoriented by her newfound sense of self, she charged at Andaisin, knocking the priestess off her feet. Consumed by terror and bewilderment, she fled. She ran and ran, leaving behind an identity she could barely remember but would never fully escape.

Steel and Shadow

6th of Erastus, 4713 AR

As time unfolded, Kaliyah straddled conflicting worlds within herself. Her mental landscape was a cacophony of voices and facades, each a method of coping. Yet Sister Thirty-Seven, known as "The Maiden" to Kaliyah, was an anomaly, emerging only in moments of dire jeopardy.

Within Kaliyah's psyche, The Maiden functioned like a secure vault, resisting any form of integration. However, the vault had its weak points, which Kaliyah could only access in circumstances of imminent danger. In those critical instants, the vault's doors would fling open, unleashing The Maiden's unrestrained wrath upon any threat. Once the danger abated, the vault closed, leaving Kaliyah to confront the ensuing emotional turmoil.

Fueled by a newfound understanding, Kaliyah channeled her splintered identity toward a redemptive cause. Wearing her Gray Maiden armor, she became a vigilant knight of the shadows.

In the days that followed, Kaliyah became a sleuth of information, discerning fact from fiction in her quest to dismantle Queen Ileosa's malevolent plans. By night, she transformed into a subversive agent, derailing the Queen's schemes one step at a time—from unmasking criminals lurking in the intricate byways of the city to smuggling sustenance to the disenfranchised.

While Kaliyah's faith in the Queen wavered, The Maiden's loyalty remained steadfast. At this impasse, they discovered a common cause—saving their sisterhood, women who had also been subjected to unfathomable suffering. In her quest for actionable intelligence, Kaliyah felt the growing intensity of The Maiden's aura with every encounter of a Gray Maiden helmet, fueling a heightened sense of urgency.

Equipped with knowledge and skills, Kaliyah donned her Gray Maiden armor as a complex emblem of her dual nature. She operated under the cover of darkness, collating intelligence, sabotaging Queen Ileosa's agenda, and incrementally fostering a subterranean resistance. If The Maiden served as a reluctant force within her, Kaliyah would bend that force into an instrument of justice.

"Your deeds can never fully expiate the sins committed in Her Grace's name," The Maiden would murmur during her moments of liberation.

Kaliyah concurred. Yet she would strive for atonement. Each evening as she navigated the labyrinthine streets, she would murmur her guiding mantra, almost like a devout invocation to drown out the discord in her mind: **"It's never too late to do the right thing."**

Treading the precarious boundary between hero and antagonist, and between her fragmented selves, Kaliyah persevered. Whether as a lost marine or a rebellious Maiden, she remained unbroken as she waged her personal war within Korvosa's convoluted pathways.

The reckoning loomed on the horizon. A confrontation with Queen Ileosa was inevitable, as was her internal struggle with The Maiden. But as Kaliyah braced herself for the impending battles, she found comfort in one thought: no matter how splintered her identity, her purpose remained unshakable. That unwavering commitment would be her ultimate weapon against the Queen and for the liberation of her sisters.

Kaliyah was more than a Sable Marine or a Gray Maiden; she was a soul reforged in the furnace of hardship and reborn in the pursuit of justice. Her mission was just beginning, and her hope was that time had not yet run out.

