

<== Gabrielle

A rhaloren came back into the world in a burst of darkness, panting with exertion. She'd come a long way from Zigur with but a single spell.

The elf's name was Kilia. She was blonde - not a common colouring for their kind - and wore robes of deep emerald. Minutes before, she had been in the city of antimagic.

She should never have been there. Her mother had always told her to seek out new things, to try new forms of magic and to experience all she could - after all, that was why Kilia had thirteen candidates for the position of 'father' - but following the advice into this attack had not been smart.

She had been told that Myssil stood for those that persecuted them. It didn't seem to be true. And...

She couldn't be sure, but she didn't think anyone but her and Narius had left.

That left ten rhaloren, and the Arcanist. She may not have stained her hands personally, but the Protector was still dead.

She began to look around. No sign of the river, so she couldn't be northwest or southeast of the city. She couldn't see the spellblaze, and she hadn't landed in the lake... how far away had she even travelled?

She turned around, and saw smoke in the horizon. Clearly not far enough.

She turned again, beginning to walk towards what she hoped was the pass, and not towards the lands of the thaloren.

"Okay..." she murmured, to herself. "She said... clarity... ugggh. I'll do that last."

Kilia had always found that speaking aloud helped her to concentrate on her casting.

"So... if I want to invoke the light... hope. Hope and empathy..."

The elf had received a dozen minor scrapes in the attack on Zigur, mostly from a brown-haired psion, but they were sealed by a radiant light as she concentrated on the hope that Myssil had survived against all odds.

"Darkness... darkness is anger, but not fury. Not righteous fury, not a berserker rage. That's fire. Darkness is cold and shadows. Darkness is *revenge*."

She took a deep breath, and remembered all she had been told of the Ziguranth, of Myssil's evil - and that it was untrue. Of the lies she had been fed, and of what she almost helped them to do.

She spun, and pointed a finger at an unfortunate rock. A streak of moonlight connected the two, and the rock exploded. She gave a slight smile before moving on.

"Frost is aloof." she said aloud. There were trees getting near, on her left. "Distant. Beyond everything."

She took a deep breath, and released it. Another deep breath.

She had left. This event did not stain her hands. She had seen what was coming, and she had left. She was above her fellows. She was...

Ice.

She gestured, not dramatically, but simply. A tree was encased in frost, every branch perfectly outlined. She allowed herself the tiniest smile as she walked past the tree.

Lightning turned out to be excitement, for which she dreamt of going home. Maybe visiting Angolwen. Another tree did not survive the experience.

Fire, of course, was rage, which she managed to reach with the same memory as darkness - before panicking, making it very hard to bring forth the cold that put out what might soon have become a wildfire.

Nature was calm, which didn't come easily to her, for some inexplicable reason. She decided to do that one later, and moved forward to something which came more naturally. Curiosity bought forth time magic, as she thought about what she might learn next. She didn't use the power she drew then, of course - not enough people knew it existed for her to throw it around in the forest.

Stone was solid. Stone was stubbornness, not born of superiority, like cold, but just knowing that you would not stop for anything or anyone.

For this, she took a deep breath and faced her fears.

"If they come for me I will not run." she said clearly, punctuating the last word by thrusting her hand out. Another tree was destroyed, a dozen stones shattering its trunk.

She felt better for facing it, and continued on with a lighter heart.

"Acid stems from hatred, melting away that you despise." she said. Well, maybe she didn't want to kill them on sight, but she despised the ziguranth and their futile fight against progress. It was idiocy. Complete stupidity! What gave them the *right*?

A tree bent over from halfway up as the trunk melted away.

...which bought her back around to nature. After a few moments trying to feel safe, she decided she didn't feel *that* much better, and moved back on. She toyed with an attempt at manipulating the mind for a moment, but it had never worked before. It was probably impossible. Besides, there was no-one around to use it on.

...that left her arcane magic. Aether. Pure magic.

The arcanist had told her that the art should really be known as Katharomancy, taken from an ancient word meaning 'pure'. It was no fraction of the psyche that bought it about, no single emotion. It was force of will allowed to change the world through the power of mana.

She stopped trying to feel her way through, and decided instantly that *that* tree? That one in particular? She wanted it *gone*.

Her hand shot out, and mana went with it. The tree tore itself apart, the thrust of power utterly disintegrating it.

She giggled.

That only left blight. Blight stemmed from malice, she was informed. She'd never noticed that, but she was Rhaloren. Blight obeyed their wishes like the wilds did their thaloren kin.

All she had to do to manipulate corruption was to reach out.

The tree bled. Lacking the sanguine fluid the spell typically stole, it gave up sap instead. It was like reaching out for meat, but biting down on long-dried leather.

And a low, impressed whistle sounded.

"You're pretty goood. Is there anything you can't do? I mean I didn't see any psionics, and no natural stuff but you got everything else. Say. You're a rhaloren, right?"

She whirled about, a dozen fears flashing through her head.

What she actually saw was worse than any of them.

Calliope smiled, tilting her head. She waved cheerfully. "See... I don't think we like rhaloren at the moment. Not that we ever did, but..."

She felt magic popping around her. Things blinking in and out, surrounding her slowly.

Calliope's smile fell, and eyes that no youth should have bore into Kilia's.

"You killed our Protector."

"No!" the terrified elf said, rapidly. "I left, she told you to leave us alone if we left, she-"

"She died and we were told to come back."

Kilia wished she was still smiling that terrifying smile.

"But I found you first."

A single mindstar floated from the child's robes, landing in an upturned palm. The arc of a blade came out, glowing softly blue.

Kilia knew there was no way out of this. She'd had teachers who'd run afoul of Zigur's hound, some of them better warriors than she could ever hope to be, and not one had survived the experience

She took a deep breath, as she felt three shadows blinking closer, approaching disturbingly fast.

All that was left was to go out fighting.

It was almost a pleasant realisation. There was no point worrying about it, just doing the best she could.

She shut her eyes, and with fear rendered pointless, everything seemed clear. The grass stiffened. The trees groaned. Boughs wrapped around the shadows, grass launched itself like green needles for the trapped spirits. Punctured in a thousand places they froze, struggling to reconstruct themselves.

Kilia opened her eyes, and looked into the face that was suddenly an inch from hers. It was smiling again.

"So, nature too. You *are* good." she murmured.

Kilia looked down at the blue blade embedded in her chest, and said, faintly, "...oh."

Calliope angled the blade down, and watched the elf slide down, collapsing in a growing puddle of blood. She watched, a faint smile on her face, as light left her eyes. As they went dark. With death, first, then darker. Then, as shadows erupted from her face with a silent scream, a young elf's terrified face looked up at the smiling girl, before being obscured behind the cloud of shadows.

Calliope turned for Zigur, and began to skip her way home. All four shadows followed.

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