

Em wished Adi had stayed asleep. But it was impossible; she couldn't shake Adi's insistence to see her off. Em, a bit stockier in the arms and shoulders from two and a half weeks of hard exercise, squeezed Adi's hand. Em's face pulled into some sad mixture of a smile and frown.

"I'll be okay, Adi," she said. The dark quickly swallowed her voice.

"I know that. I know," Adi whispered.. She was frowning, staring at the ground. When she looked back up, Em saw dark circles ringed her sunken eyes. She looked older than ever.

"Just promise me. Promise me you'll stay on the path. It- it..."

"I know," Em said. She put a gloved arm on Adi's shoulder, patted it. Em smiled at her.

"I'll be fine. See?" and Em whirled the burnrod around in a circle around her head.

"Oh stop that, you're going to break that thing." She was smiling now. They were both smiling. It had been a few days since they smiled together.

Then their smiles faded. Adi's lips drew into a tight line. She cupped a shaky hand to her ear. Em looked out into the darkness. She could barely see where the big plot began, not twenty feet away. She saw some of the trees, only the tips visible against an empty velvet sky.

In the suffocating quiet of the night, some creature had called out in the wilderness. It was a sustained, throaty cry, like if a broken trumpet could scream for help. It sent shivers down Em's spine. They listened as it echoed off the trees.

But nothing. Only silence followed.

Adi turned back to Em.

"See? Please, dear, stay on the roads."

"Yeah. Don't have to tell me twice."

"Okay." Adi nodded gravely. "Get going."

Adi clapped her on the back.

Em skittered over the hard dirt towards the lean-to, clutching her down coat all the while. The weather had turned over the last dozen days. Adi had given it to her the night before—it was worn by the sun and by time and hung over her shoulders like a rug, but it was better than nothing.

Em pulled the canvas sheet off the cart and kicked up a flurry of dust in the process. She rolled her eyes when she saw it. It was pale green, just like Adi's front door- a color she was becoming increasingly bored of. She hung the burnrod and its gauntlet from a hook on the side of

the cart, purpose made, and began loading the cargo. Four carboys, four jars, and sixteen small vials. She stuck blankets in between the larger jars to fix them in place.

Hauling herself over the high edge of the box seat, Em snapped her fingers to light the lantern above. She unslung her satchel and carefully set it next to her. All the provisions she'd need for the entire trip were contained in that tiny little bag. Inside was an entire basket, organized with partitions that separated jars of fruits and vegetables and tea.