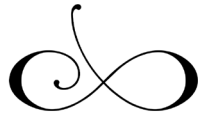


THE SHAM WIZARD  
OF GOLDEN DAWN



A NOVELETTE BY  
M. J. KUHN

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The Amulet of Orginthal broke sometime between nightfall on the forty-seventh day of our journey and daybreak on the forty-eighth. How did it break, you ask? Never you mind how it broke. Stop being so insufferably nosy.

All right, fine. I broke it myself. Or, more accurately, my drunken alter-ego did. All I truly knew was that I went to bed sometime late last night as Divinian Magus: Survivor of the Wending Wood and capable (if underappreciated) wizard of the adventuring crew known as Golden Dawn. I woke up the next morning with a screeching headache, a sour belly, and the cracked halves of the Amulet of Orginthal tucked into my back pocket, seemingly crushed by my ample left buttock.

The thing is, though my recollections of that night as a whole were foggy, I *remembered* putting the amulet in my pocket. It usually hung around my neck, but after my fifth cup of wine, Selina cocked her head to one side in her unsettlingly catlike way and asked me if I ever worried I'd strangle myself with the chain in my sleep. I'd never thought of such a thing before, but as our beloved druidess, Selina Skinsplitter,

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drifted peacefully off to sleep, I couldn't stop thinking about it and feeling short of breath. And so, while the rest of the crew snored quietly around the fire, I slipped the Amulet from around my neck and into my pocket.

For safekeeping, ironically.

Anyone who might try to tell me that there's no use crying over a broken amulet doesn't know jack about magic. No normal man can wield the Amulet of Orginthal (well, now no one can wield the damn thing at all, but I mean *before*), but without the Amulet, I was just a normal man. A normal man full to the brim of magical power, to be fair. But without a conduit to direct the power welling up inside me like a croak in a bullfrog's throat... I was no wizard. I was just another jackass roaming the wilds of Algenon.

If I had any delusions about the fact that I needed the Amulet to wield my magic, they would have been dashed just a few seconds later when Golden Dawn's leader, the impossibly heroic (and rather egotistical) Brendan the Bold, woke from his own wine-induced slumber.

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He awoke, as always, like he'd been startled out of his sleep by a crash of thunder, bolting upright and yanking his sword from the sheath he never removed. I'd often wondered if he even removed it when he was entirely naked or if he even fucked with the damn thing there, bouncing at his hip. But the idea of imagining anything related to Brendan the Bold's sex life was repulsive enough that I didn't tend to dwell on the question.

Once he was on his feet, Brendan pulled his sword the rest of the way from its sheath, slashing it through the air a few times as he shook the sleep from his bones. I winced as he reached the tenth step away from our campsite, knowing what would come next.

"Div, what in the ninth ring of Hell?" Brendan said.

"Hmm?" I said, pretending to still be half asleep. I tucked the broken amulet back into my pocket, hiding it from view.

"How much wine did you drink last night?"

"About four cups more than a shrimp like him should

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have,” chortled Caelan the Secondary.

Not a flattering adventurer’s name, but the man wasn’t deserving of anything grander. I had always thought he should have been called Caelan the Nepotism Recruit. He was Brendan’s younger, less talented, and more irritating brother. He was mediocre with a sword, middling with a bow, and of average stamina on the road. Generally speaking, he was the first one to flee from a skirmish and the last one to offer to help clean up the campsite each morning.

Of course, he also wasn’t going around crushing priceless ancient metal amulets with his stupid, drunken arse. So, perhaps I should go a bit easier on the man.

“That shrimp handles his wine a nice sight better than you do,” Selina snorted at Caelan. She was sitting cross-legged on her tightly furled bedroll, watching the tips of her fingers shift lazily back and forth between human nails and the claws of the panther form that earned her the ‘Skinsplitter’ part of her adventuring name.

“I wouldn’t be so sure of that,” Brendan said sourly.

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“Considering he was drunk enough to forget to set our perimeter charm last night.”

Selina snorted again, morphing her claws back into human fingers one last time with a *schick*. “What are you talking about? No, he didn’t. I was standing right next to—” she started.

I cut her off hurriedly. “I must have been tipsy enough not to concentrate on the perimeter long enough for the charm to set,” I said, inventing wildly. None of that was how magic worked. But non-wizards (especially meatheads like Brendan the Bold) could hardly tell spellwork from their scrotum, so he wouldn’t know the difference.

Selina raised an eyebrow at me over Brendan’s shoulder, her nose twitching in its distinctive catlike way, even in her fully human form. I gave her a warning look that said, “*I’ll tell you later.*”

No, of course, I didn’t *actually* intend to tell her later—what do you think I am? Stupid? Selina may be less of a prick than Caelan and less of a prat than Brendan (and less

vaguely terrifying than Quentin, sitting silently on a fallen branch some five feet away from us all, watching us with his unsettling gaze), but she was still a member of Golden Dawn. No one made it to the ranks of one of the highest-paid adventuring crews in Algenon because they were trusting... or because they were particularly trustworthy.

Besides, I knew the conversations Brendan was having behind closed doors. Or rather, closed tent flaps, these days. He was saying I was getting too old and weak to be of any use to Golden Dawn. Saying it was high time the crew replaced me with another wizard, like Liminal the Magnificent, that priggish little upstart currently running with Fated Saviors.

Who in the name of the fates named themself "*The Magnificent*"? If Liminal ever did join Brendan the Bold and Golden Dawn, I feared the entire wildlands of Algenon would spontaneously combust from the force of their colliding egos.

Brendan gave me a disgusted look, then shook his head and moved on. "Pack up the rest of your shit. We move

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for the Night Terror’s hoard before mid-morning.”

Ignoring the rebuke, I turned my attention back to my bedroll, packing it up and tucking it into my traveling sack before slinging it over my shoulder. Next, I went to help Caelan pack up his nonsense. The man was the lowest-tier member of our crew (or, he should have been, at least), and still, he insisted on traveling like a damned king. Instead of sleeping under the stars—and enduring whatever bugs or wildlife might happen upon the camp in the night—he tucked himself into a tall, canvas tent.

A tall, canvas tent that I realized would now be the first major hurdle of my new, magicless state.

I worked in silence at Quentin Quickstrike’s side, untying the canvas sheath from the rods supporting it and bringing the structure down to the ground where it could be rolled into a bundle. A very heavy bundle. A heavy bundle I usually used a featherweight charm to lighten.

Shit.

Caelan the Secondary was a Grade A whiner. He com-



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plained even when the bundle had been magically lightened. If he had to carry the full weight, there was no way in any of the dooms that Brendan wouldn't hear about it.

As I rolled the bundle, I considered my options. I could claim to need the day to save up my magic for whatever awaited us in the Night Terror's hoard. Or, I could recommend we leave our supplies here to collect on our way back through once we had our spoils.

But the longer I thought on it, the more I realized there was only one option that would not raise any more questions. One option that would keep me from revealing the broken amulet *and* keep Caelan from whining like a babe pulled too soon off his mother's tit.

I needed to carry the bundle myself.

Caelan approached the bundle just a few minutes before mid-morning. He gave a thunderous sigh and stooped, preparing to shoulder the thing. When he did, I held out a hand to stop him.

"Why don't we trade burdens today, Caelan?" I asked.

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He looked at my small pack (lighter than his bundle, even with the featherweight charm in place) suspiciously.

“Why?”

“Because I don’t know what we’ll encounter in that hoard,” I patted him on the shoulder solemnly. “But if we encounter danger, we’ll need your sword arm at full strength, don’t you agree?”

Selina raised her brow, thinking no doubt the same thing I knew: If we encountered trouble when we reached the hoard, having a wizard of my caliber at full strength would be far more useful than having a swordsman of Caelan’s caliber at his. After all, it was not Caelan the Secondary who had saved us twice singlehandedly in the Wending Wood. When the giant fire ants of the Wood had descended upon us, was it Caelan’s devastating oberhaw strikes that had saved us? No, it was the magnifying charm I’d cast on the air above the ants’ heads, frying them where they stood.

And, when the gremlins had surged from the underbrush, had Caelan the Secondary kept them at bay by parrying

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wildly, giving the rest of the party time to escape? Of course, not. I had cast a dozen holograms across the clearing to distract the little bastards.

But all of that was irrelevant without the amulet. Truthfully, Caelan really *was* more helpful to the party than I was at this point. Fates. Why had Selina had to get into my head about strangling myself with my necklace in my sleep? Now, I was formally the most useless member of the party.

But not for long.

I chewed my lip, suppressing a grunt as I shouldered Caelan's princely trappings. After all, it wasn't like I'd lost my magic. I'd only lost the thing that lets me *use* my magic. A subtle but important distinction. It's like if Brendan lost his sword, or if Quentin snapped his last bowstring. They'd still be warriors, just... a bit hamstrung.

And what had Brendan the Bold done when his last sword, Devil's Bane, had snapped in half during single combat with a twelve-foot-tall troll? Well, eventually, he'd reforged Devil's Bane into his current weapon, Lightning

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Strike. But in the heat of his battle with his smelly foe, he'd just grabbed the first damn sword he found and made it work for the moment.

That's exactly what I'll have to do to get through this mission. The only downside, of course, is that ancient, magic-conducting amulets are a bit harder to come by than pointy sticks. Fortunately for me, we're headed to one of the places in Algenon most likely to have one outside of a wizard's estate sale or an antiquities shop: A dragon's hoard.

"Since when did you become Caelan's pack horse?"

I jumped out of my daydreams of stumbling across mounds of amulets even more powerful than the Amulet of Orginthal at the mouth of Night Terror's hoard as Selina Skinsplitter's voice purred in my ear. The motion jostled the pack, sending me wobbling off-balance for a step or two until I could regain control of the absurdly heavy roll of tent poles and canvas slung over my shoulders.

"I just figured it couldn't hurt to get a little goodwill with the bossman," I said, inventing wildly, but realizing as I

spoke that it was honestly not a half-bad plan. “So he doesn’t try to replace me with that cape-wearing prick out of Drizzleford.”

Selina snorted. The sound came out halfway between a hiss and a growl. Not for the first time, I wondered how much of Selina was cat and how much was human at the present moment. She seemed to shift pieces and parts back and forth at random throughout the day, rarely resting fully in one form or the other.

“So, what happened with the perimeter charm last night?” she asked nonchalantly, loping with easy grace beside me as I struggled like a bitch with my too-heavy burden.

Literally *and* metaphorically speaking.

If I’d had the strength in my upper body left for a shrug, I would have given one then. Instead, I just shook my head. “I’m not sure. Must’ve drunk too much wine.”

“I’ve seen you drink more than twice that amount of wine and still be able to charm aside a pack of wolf-shifters like they were puppies,” she said.

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“Maybe when I was a younger man,” I chortled, still struggling to keep the strain from my voice. The hoard couldn’t be far now. We’d camped just beyond the sightline of the cave’s entryway. The Night Terror had left her hoard nearly a year ago and hadn’t been seen since, but still. There was no point in risking being snuck up on in the darkness by an eight-thousand-pound winged beast.

“I didn’t know you when you were a *younger man*,” Selina reminded me.

As though I needed reminding.

The rest of Golden Dawn was about half my age. Except perhaps Quentin—no one really knew how old that bastard was. Still, I knew he couldn’t be older than forty and still crouch low for a stealthy bowshot without his knees creaking.

As a druidess, it was hard to pinpoint Selina’s age, but if I had to guess, I’d peg her around thirty. It’s mostly her *over-this-shit* attitude that gives it away. And then, of course, were Brendan and Caelan, the Golden Brothers of Golden Dawn. Both filled with the confidence and stupidity that only

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a man's twenties could deliver.

Me? I was somewhere between forty-five and sixty. Truth be told, I'd lost count years ago but had always been too embarrassed to admit it. Any time someone asked me my age, I'd just take my best guess. Then, if they looked surprised, I'd say I was kidding and take another guess. Regardless of how old I was, I certainly wasn't a young man.

It was one of the many reasons Golden Dawn wanted to be rid of me.

And, honestly, one of the reasons I should have probably left this crew years ago. After the last Golden Dawn leader, Michel Highhammer, had died in a goblin skirmish on the road back from Verdwater Canyon. As soon as the Lord of Drearyton named Brendan the Bold as the new party leader, I know my days with Golden Dawn were numbered.

They'd be worse than numbered if anyone in the crew found out I'd temporarily lost my magic *by sitting on it*. As friendly as Selina and I could be at times, she was still New Golden Dawn, and I was still a relic from a half-forgotten

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age. She wasn't on my side. Or at least, her alliance wasn't a certainty.

I forced another chuckle, then said, "True, but when you get to be my age, things like your tolerance for wine can go to shit like that," I shifted the weight of Caelan's tent to one shoulder to free up my left-hand fingers to snap. I regretted it immediately, clutching back onto the bundle.

"Sounds miserable," she said. "I hope I never get old."

I was about to ask her if she understood the alternative to getting old was dying young when Brendan's ringing voice sounded out on the road ahead.

"Nearly there, Golden Dawn!" he said. He did look like one of the heroes of old, standing on the crest of the next hill, framed in sunlight that made his blonde hair glow and reflected off his sword blade, making it look like the weapon was made of liquid gold.

I crested the hill beside him, staying far enough away from the man that he couldn't hear my panting. And there it



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was: The Night Terror's hoard. From here, it looked like little more than a fissure in the cliffside. Little more than a quarter-mile of flat earth separated us from the former lair of one of the most feared beasts in northern Algenon. The beast was the reason why the lands were unpopulated all the way from the Wending Wood to the Ellori River.

Caelan came to a stop on the hill a few paces away, resting one hand on the sword in his belt in a poor imitation of his brother's naturally majestic stance. "How do we know the beast is really gone?"

He tried to make it sound like a throwaway question, but I could sense the fear rolling off the man like waves of stench rolled off a pile of shit. Not that I blamed him: I'd heard the stories of the Night Terror since I was a boy growing up in Brentwood, just a few miles south of the Wending Wood. Some said she was a dragon, others a wyvern. My father always said she was a wyrm. Wings or no, one thing is certain: The Night Terror is deadlier than deadly. Thirty feet tall with fangs as long as a man's forearm and the ability to

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move more silently than the quietest footpad.

Even with my amulet intact, I wouldn't be eager to come up against the Night Terror. Without a smidge of magic to my name? I'd be dead before I even knew what was happening to me, more likely than not.

In response, Quentin stepped lightly down the hill, kneeling at its base. He came back up holding a flash of green in his gloved fingers. A clover that he had plucked from the earth. Relief coursed through me, but I was careful not to let it show. Instead, I nodded at Quentin approvingly, adjusting the burden of Caelan's tent across my shoulders.

"Quickstrike's right—if the Night Terror were still here, there would be no signs of life across this entire plain." I took it in then, all the splotches of vivid green, dollops of white and purple flowers—even the rustle of small animals here and there. This wasn't the scorched earth of a dragon's front stoop: This was land that was healing.

I had no idea why the Night Terror had decided to up and leave her home of nearly a hundred years, but it wasn't

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Golden Dawn's job to understand the finer points of a dragon's psyche. It was our job to enter the hoard and recover the Gems of Drear: Ancient heirlooms of the Lord of Drearyton.

The gems were said to be the most beautiful stones in all of Algenon: Rainbow-bright and cut with perfect facets that could throw even the tiniest flicker of candlelight like the light of the sun itself. Of course, the gems were more than just beautiful. They were worth a damned fortune. Worth more than all the gold in Drearyton, Willowway, and Marshfire combined. They were also said to bring their carrier an inordinate amount of luck.

Maybe if I was able to find them first, I could use some of that luck to locate a replacement amulet from the hoard before Brendan snagged them away from me.



By the time we reached the mouth of the hoard, my shoulders weren't so much "aching" as they were "screaming." It took every ounce of self-control I had not to thrust the stupid tent to the ground the second our party stopped.

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Instead, I forced myself to lower it slowly to the earth. A part of me secretly hoped that the Night Terror *was* inside if only so I could watch her burn that fucking tent to cinders.

“Alright, Quentin, guard the entryway.”

The ever-silent Quentin gave a quick nod, pulling his bow from his back and nocking an arrow loosely, staring out over the stretch of rolling hills we’d just crossed, ready to pick off anyone who dared approach the hoard while we were inside with his infamously quick and infamously accurate arrow-work.

With Quentin watching our backs, the rest of Golden Dawn stepped over the hoard’s threshold. The entryway to the Night Terror’s lair looked just like any other cave. There were no riches piled high or sparkling pools of rubies and diamonds covering the ground. Aside from the gigantic scratch marks made by unfathomably large claws, there was no sign that they were even in the right place.

But that was normal: No dragon would leave its riches right in the open where anyone might grab them. Dragons

weren't able to speak the common tongue, but that didn't mean they weren't intelligent. My mentor, Gavalon the Wise, had been something of an expert on the subject of dragon intelligence. He had written tomes thicker than the average oak trunk detailing all the proof of their brilliance. Their complex and fascinating organizational systems had warranted several chapters in these tomes.

Instead of piling coins up and rolling in them like a dog rolled in sun-warmed grass as they did in the children's stories, dragons constructed mazelike designs with hidden doors, false decoy treasure, and deadly traps.

"Selina, what can you smell?" Brendan asked.

Selina Skinsplitter cocked her head to one side. As I watched, her nose flattened and spread, transforming into a broad feline nose. The nostril slits quivered as she took a deep breath in. Then, she wrinkled her brow.

"Smells like a big fucking lizard."

"*Fresh* big fucking lizard?" Caelan asked. I didn't miss the slight quaver in his voice. He flexed his fingers on

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the hilt of his sword as though that four-foot bit of metal was going to be enough to save him if the Night Terror really was here.

Selina shook her head, though. “There’s not a damn thing in here that smells fresh.” She waved a finger back and forth, pointing at Caelan, Brendan, and me. “That includes the three of you, by the way.”

Caelan looked offended, but Brendan and I shared a shrug that almost verged on being amiable. I’d been traveling with Golden Dawn since I was barely out of my teens—I was well-acquainted with just how vile an adventuring crew began to smell after a few weeks without a proper bathing chamber.

“Alright, then, let’s get the lady’s sensitive nose away from these rank smells as quickly as possible,” Brendan said, quirking me a smile that said, *women*.

Just when I was starting to feel a bit more secure about my standing with our obnoxious and vaguely sexist crew leader, he cleared his throat and made the request I should have seen coming from roughly ten miles away.

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“Divinian, use that Finder’s spell of yours to guide us through this infernal maze, would you?”

There’s an old saying that, if you want to find treasure, all you need to do is follow a wizard. After all, the Finder’s charm is one of the first spells every young magic-wielder learns to cast.

With the Finder’s charm, a hidden door would look like a beacon to my eyes. A man’s disguise would fade away, leaving him proverbially naked and unmasked. No one but the charm’s wielder can see or feel its effects, but if you spend enough time following a wizard, as that old saying goes... eventually, he really may just lead you to treasure.

Even with the Finder’s charm, a dragon’s hoard would be a tough nut to crack. At best, the Finder’s charm worked like a lighted string tethering me to the object of my search. In a labyrinth such as the Night Terror’s lair, I could follow that string around in circles for hours before we made it to whatever chamber the beast had stowed the Gems of Drear away inside.

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I didn't want to tell Brendan that, though. He understood magic about as well as a goblin understood Algenish table manners. In this case, the truth would only look like I was making excuses. Looking like I was making excuses would only invite questions, and questions about my magic were the very last thing I needed at that moment.

Avoiding Selina's ever-suspicious eye, I nodded and drew my coat closer around my neck, hiding the fact that the Amulet of Orginthal was not hanging there, where it belonged. Then I muttered the words of the Finder's charm, closing my eyes and then jolting them open as soon as I finished speaking, hoping that would contribute to the illusion that I was doing magic.

Truthfully, I *was* doing magic... just a different sort of magic. A brand of magic I liked to call *the bullshitter's art*.

Caelan was the easiest to fool—no surprises there. Brendan was nearly equally simple to outwit, not because he shared his brother's stupidity, just because he possessed the incredible cockiness of a man who was used to being in



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charge and unused to being challenged or lied to. Selina was the one I needed to watch out for. As I led us around one winding corner, then another, I found myself wishing we'd left her at the mouth of the cave and brought Quickstrike with us instead.

Not that Quickstrike was any dumber than Selina. He was just a hell of a lot quieter.

As I turned the third corner, I saw something that sparked a tiny seed of hope inside my mind. Something that meant I might not have to wander these caves until I either stumbled upon the Gems of Drear or the party figured out I was currently little better than one of the sham wizards selling their jars of fake potions in the city markets.

On the floor of the cavernous hall stretching in front of us was a long, arcing claw mark. Nearly indistinguishable from the thousands of other scrapes and scratches in the stone, the mark stretched from the southeast corner of the hall all the way to the northwest one, then was fanned out with smaller marks stretching from the curved edge. It looked almost like a

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sunburst.

As my boots clomped over the marks, I was mentally transported back to the study of Gavalon the Wise, nodding off in my usual seat beside the fire as he pored over his latest research, dictating his findings to me.

*“Fascinating, simply fascinating,” he’d said. “The dragons have no language that I’ve been able to decipher, but they seem to rely on a system of symbols. As lone creatures, there would be no need for symbolic language, I told myself, but then, then I considered this: What if each dragon had its own system of symbols?”*

I had missed several sentences then to the crackle of the fire and the sleepy lull of the wine in my belly. I cursed my younger self for not having more respect for my elder, no matter how many times I’d heard him wax poetic on the brilliance of dragons in the past.

*“...regardless, I think it all comes back to their innate obsession with the sun,”* Gavalon had been saying when I blinked my heavy eyelids open again. *“All things gravitate*

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*toward the sun. More specifically, to the point where the sun meets the earth. Curious, so curious...”*

After that, I had truly fallen asleep. Or perhaps I’d had another glass of wine. Either way, I didn’t remember the rest of the conversation, but at this point, I wasn’t sure I needed to.

Dragons were obsessed with the sun. With the place where the sun met the earth. Either the position of its rising or its falling. In the mind of a dragon, then, wouldn’t the most important position in any hoard be the cavern closest to that point? The easternmost or westernmost position of the cave.

The Gems of Drear were almost certainly the most coveted item in the Night Terror’s hoard. They surpassed the beauty of the neatly-placed golden goblets and sparkling stacks of coins we passed by about a hundredfold. Surely they would warrant the most coveted spot in the labyrinth, then, wouldn’t they?

Just as that thought hit me, we reached the end of the roughly dug corridor. The hoard split here, one cavernous,

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gaping pathway leading east, the other leading west. That was the question, then, wasn't it? Would the Night Terror place her most precious gems in the position nearest the sunset or the sunrise?

I dithered for a second on the spot, my feet stuck with indecision.

“What’s the hold-up?” Caelan asked.

“Did you step in toffee again?” Selina snorted.

I shot the druidess what I hoped appeared to be a good-natured glare. “*One* mishap in a sweets shop, and I’ve never heard the end of it,” I said. “No, the path is just very faint. We’re still quite far from the gems.”

I was inventing wildly, and Selina knew it. Her eyes were already narrowing, transforming into increasingly cat-like slits. I turned away quickly, choosing a direction and forcing my steps to look confident. West. Surely with a name like the *Night* Terror, this beast would be obsessed with the sunset.

By all the fates, I hoped so.

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But before we had made it another three gilded, cavernous chambers into the depths of the hoard, the location of the Gems of Drear fell down about five pegs on my list of most pressing concerns. We had a new problem: We weren't alone.

The faint glow of firelight flickered up ahead, bathing the floor outside the adjoining chamber in buttery orange light. I started to hold up one hand to halt the party, then remembered that Brendan didn't tend to be tolerant of anyone else taking on any role that could be misconstrued as "leadership." Instead, I just slowed my steps, waiting for him to notice the light.

By the time Brendan raised his left hand in a clenched fist, signaling for us to stop, Caelan was the only one still clomping forward at his usual pace.

"What is—Oh, shit," Caelan said. He ducked back behind a stack of polished shields stretching up toward the thirty-foot ceilings of the cavern, then peered back out. "Is it her?"

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Clearly, he was referencing the Night Terror herself. Not a terrible guess, given the presence of fire, but I could tell from the placement and color of the flames that we were looking at torches, not dragonfire. Though, *whose* torches was still unclear.

An arrow whizzed around the corner from the torchlit chamber, speeding straight for our party. Brendan swung his sword up with lightning speed, deflecting the projectile with a soft *ting*.

“It’s goblins, isn’t it?” Caelan hissed. His sword rang loudly and shrilly enough to wake all the bats slumbering against the cavern’s ceiling as he yanked it from its sheath. They whooshed from their perches in a single cloud of leathery wings, beating their way toward the hoard’s entryway.

Selina picked the arrow up from the floor where it fell, examining the tip. “Human-made,” she said.

“Raiders?” Brendan asked, readying his sword.

“No,” I answered grimly. I’d seen the way that arrow curved. Not even Quentin could curve a shot like that without

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my help. “There’s a wizard here. This is another adventuring crew. I just hope it’s not—”

Before I could even get the words out, I heard the sound that would tell me it was the last adventuring crew I’d want to come across in this dark, foul-smelling cave system.

The deep, throaty war cry of Prythia Battlesworn, the berserker currently running with none other than the Fated Saviors of Drizzleford. That meant the wizard who had tried to guide that arrow into Brendan the Bold’s throat was exactly the wizard he wanted so badly to replace me with.

Maybe after encountering Liminal the Magnificent’s impressive asshole in person, Brendan would change his mind. Somehow, I rather doubted it.

Prythia came roaring around the corner, battleaxe raised over her head. Caelan turned to face her, but Selina beat him to the punch. Her skin seemed to slither in the flickering torchlight, stretching and elongating and sprouting thick, dark fur. Within seconds, there was nothing but a snarling panther standing where our druidess had been a moment before. Her

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claws extended from the tips of her newly sprouted paw pads with a *schick*, and she dove for the berserker.

The leader of the Fated Saviors, a woman named Liah Grayford, emerged next, sword aloft, smirk dancing across her battle-scarred features. Liah had a nickname, of course. It was a nod to her penchant for removing the testicles of her male opponents. Not the kind of term you used in polite company.

“Miss Grayford,” Brendan said, raising his own sword dramatically before him. “I wouldn’t want to fight a lady, please, lay down your arms, and I’ll allow you to pass peaceably.”

“Just be glad it’s me you’re fighting and not her, you twat,” Liah said, nodding at Prythia. Then, her pace went from a walk to a run as she charged for Brendan.

“Very well, Miss Grayford,” Brendan said. “Summon Quentin,” he added in an undertone to me. Then, he matched the opposing warrior’s charge, meeting her sword with his in a clang that rattled and shook the stacks of treasure piled high



all around us.

*Shit.* Would these people never stop asking me to use my magic? We'd left Quentin at least half a mile back as the crow flies. Traveling back through the winding path we'd taken, it would take at least a quarter-hour to get there and back. Without a Summoner's spell, there's no way in hell I'd get Quentin back here in time to make a difference in this fight.

Thankfully, the fates decided to take a small amount of pity on me then. An arrow whizzed overhead, flicking from behind my left shoulder and soaring toward the Fated Saviors. He must have heard some kind of commotion. Or maybe the rumors were true and he could see the future. Either way, I didn't give a shit, I was just glad to see him on the scene.

Quentin's arrow took the enemy ranger's next arrow down midair. Then, he nocked and shot another arrow so quickly that the other ranger had to dive behind a massive vase to avoid the shot. Quickstrike's arrow smashed into a row of neat columns of gold coins on the far side of the chamber, blasting them up into the air like the splash a rock made

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when it was thrown into still water.

Two-by-two, our party paired off, Selina taking on the berserker in a tangle of fur and axe blades and shattering pottery while Caelan and Brendan faced off against the swordsman and woman of the Fated Saviors, respectively. I'd never seen the swordsman Caelan was fighting before. He looked greener than fresh bamboo, though, so I figured he must be new to the team. Good, maybe Caelan would actually survive longer than fifteen seconds against the man without my help.

The question, now, was whether or not *I* could survive fifteen seconds against Liminal the Magnificent. Without magic. And without letting on to the fact that I didn't have access to my magic. And without letting the enemy wizard's crew chase us out of this hoard before we got our hands on the Gems of Drear.

As the enemy wizard emerged, I had to admit, however begrudgingly, that Liminal did look pretty damn magnificent. He was nearly as tall as Brendan, handsome in the same way a particularly well-kept wolf might be, and absolutely

glimmering with magical power. The source of the Fated Saviors' light was revealed as he entered the hall where our two adventuring crews were squabbling like squirrels over the last acorns of autumn. There was no torch: Liminal himself was the source of the light. It emanated from him, making him look almost like one of the heathen gods of old.

“What charm is that?” I asked, unable to help myself.

The other wizard just smirked his glowing lips, then began to whisper another charm.

I only caught a few murmured words, but I caught enough to know what it was: A Transformation spell. I reached out and grabbed the thing nearest to me—a particularly ornate golden helmet—and held it out like a shield. It vibrated like a gong in my hands as Liminal's spell struck it. Then, it began to morph and change, finally taking the shape of a small, feathered creature. A pigeon. It cooed, flapping its new wings clumsily as I dropped it to the cavern floor.

“A pigeon? Really, Liminal?” I said.

Brendan and Liah surged past, their swords clanking

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together noisily. Another arrow whizzed overhead, followed by a pair of daggers that just barely missed their marks, clattering to the stone floor close enough to the helmet-turned-pigeon that the bird fluttered in irritation, skittering into the shadows on its nimble little feet. Selina's growls echoed through the cavern from somewhere in the shadows, punctuated by Prythia's grunts and the sound of claws on stone.

Liminal's next attack came almost too swiftly for me to dodge. Thankfully, my somewhere-between-forty-five-and-sixty-year-old knees still had some life in them. I sprang to one side, diving behind a massive golden bust of King Reginald. Liminal's Binding spell wrapped around the bust like writhing snakes, tethering the long-dead king's golden arms to his golden torso. When Liminal pulled back, the bust toppled over with a resounding *clang*.

I crawled arm-over-arm on the claw-marked stone, pulling myself behind a traveler's trunk filled to the brim with thick gold bars stacked in neat rows like wheat in a farmer's field.

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“Oh, Divinian,” Liminal said, his voice sing-songy and mocking. “Where are you? Is the powerful wizard of Golden Dawn truly hiding from a lowly magician like me?”

Sweat dripped off the end of my hooked nose onto the floor in front of my face. As I reached forward to pull myself further into the maze of treasure, my hand hit something wooden. A ball of flame flew overhead—a Comet charm. It crashed into a carefully organized pile of finely-carved lutes behind me. The resulting fire illuminated the treasure trove of weaponry I’d just crawled into.

Swords, spears, and javelins lined the wall a few paces away. And directly in front of me were a dozen different bows, all inlaid with some kind of gold filigree or carved of the most vivid cherry wood. I was no archer. Even in my prime, I hadn’t been able to fire a bow with a draw strong enough to bring down anything larger than a rabbit. But the bow nearest to my outstretched hand was no ordinary bow: It was a crossbow.

Pulling myself farther into the shadows, I snatched up

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the weapon, then batted around on the floor until my fingers closed around a bolt. It had been a long time since I had last fired a crossbow, but the mechanism was simple enough that I remembered how it was done.

I wound the crank, pulling the string tight, grunted to heft the thing up against my right shoulder, and stumbled to my feet.

“Fancy yourself a soldier now, Divinian?” Liminal cackled as I emerged from my hunkered-down position. He could cackle all he wanted: Old, tired men aren’t goaded nearly as easily as young, foolish ones. And this old, tired man had a plan.

For a competent archer, a glowing man in a dark room would be easy enough to hit. But I knew two things: First, that Liminal was a skilled enough wizard to fend off any direct shot, and second, that I was *not* a competent archer. If I aimed for Liminal, I was just as likely to inadvertently hit Brendan or Quentin or nothing at all, even if Liminal somehow failed to divert my shot.

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I didn't aim the crossbow at Liminal. Instead, I aimed for the massive stack of ceramics beside him. The target was roughly as broad as a damned barn, and still, I barely hit it.

The pot I nicked exploded in a blast of ceramic shrapnel just as Liminal began muttering his next charm. Before he had the chance to finish his words, the ceramics above the pot I'd hit began to wobble. Then, the entire pile descended upon the enemy magician like an avalanche, burying the man in a clatter of splintered dishware and crockery.

It wouldn't be enough to kill the man, but hopefully it would distract him long enough for me to find a new amulet. Then, I'd teach Liminal the Magnificent to show his elders some fucking respect. I sprinted back toward the burning lutes, grabbing one and holding it before me like a torch as I ran toward the chamber the Fated Savivors had emerged from when all this nonsense began.

If my estimate was correct, the farther west I moved into the cavern, the more valuable the treasure would become. We'd made it to the point of expensive weaponry, golden

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statues, and ornate pottery. Enchanted amulets might be just a few chambers away.

“Where in the fates are you going?” Caelan shouted as I ran past. He was locked in combat with the young swordsman from the Fated Saviors, sporting a new cut on his right cheek and so covered in sweat that his not-quite-as-golden-as-Brendan’s hair was plastered to his forehead.

But I didn’t have time to stop and chat. I ran past without acknowledging his question.

My free hand skittered like a pale spider over the benches and tables laden with the Night Terror’s treasures as my left hand rotated its grip on the burning lute, careful not to let the flames gnaw their way up my sleeve. Gem-encrusted daggers and ancient crowns preceded carefully-laid rings humming with sinister magic. If there was a single wizard’s amulet in this hoard, it would be here somewhere.

*There.*

My heart leaped into my throat as I saw it. It looked just like any ordinary pendant: Silver in color, carved with the



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image of a rose. But I could feel the buzz of power emanating from the medallion-like disc. Just as I reached out to grab it, the entire table exploded.

Crowns, rings, and gems burst into the air, then rained back down like hail, mixed in with splinters of wood that had once been the table. I threw up my hands to protect my head, dropping the lute in the process. The flames flickered and died, leaving me alone in the darkness. But I wasn't alone for long.

Liminal had freed himself from the pile of crockery. I turned to see him standing, head cocked to one side, still glowing. His own amulet almost seemed to float as he took another step toward me.

“Now, everything is clear as day,” he said. His eyes flicked to the neckline of my cloak—the place where the Amulet of Orginthal should be, gleaming in the light of Divinian's glowing skin. “A wizard without his amulet is like a wolf without fangs,” he recited. An old lesson every magician-in-training heard time and time again.

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I licked my lips, thinking. There were no golden busts to hide behind here. No crossbows or piles of shields. There was nothing but rubble. “Some would say it’s dishonorable to attack an unarmed man,” I said.

“It’s a good thing I’ve never cared much for honor, then,” Liminal said.

The spell was forming on his lips when we both heard it.

The growl.

It wasn’t the sound of Selina preparing to pounce, nor was it any sound a man could make. It sounded like the mountain above us was growling. Like the cavern walls were rumbling, like Mother Earth herself was murmuring in displeasure. There was only one beast large enough to make a growl like that.

The very beast whose home we were currently in the process of demolishing.

The Night Terror had returned to her lair.

Her timing was fucking impeccable.

Liminal froze, mid-charm, pivoting on one heel like a ballet dancer toward the noise. The rest of the Fated Saviors and Golden Dawn had heard it, too. The sounds of clashing swords, Selina's growls, and the slashing of knives and daggers slowly faded into a silence punctuated only by heavy, crashing footfalls and the scrape of claws against stone.

"There wouldn't happen to be a back door to this mountain, would there?" I asked. My voice sounded small. Liminal's full-body glow expired, sending the cavern careening into blackness. The last thing I saw was the other wizard shaking his head mutely.

"Right," I said. Then, I dropped to my knees and started digging blindly through the rubble at my feet, heedless of the splinters the wood left in my fingertips.

"What are you doing?" Liminal said.

"Looking for the amulet you just sent flying halfway to Drearyton with that Fulmination spell of yours." I thrust aside a handful of scattered rings, feeling my way further along the floor, hoping to feel a whisper of magic and the

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coolness of silver beneath my fingers. “It’d be a lot easier if you’d lend a hand with that glowing spell, again.”

“And why would I help you?” Liminal scoffed, some of his usual, irritating energy returning to his tone at last.

Another deafening roar echoed through the hoard, much closer this time. The dragon clearly knew someone had disturbed her hoard. And she was pissed about it.

I swallowed. “If you want to take *that* on by yourself, be my fucking guest.”

Liminal was quiet for a heartbeat, then he muttered the ancient words, and his skin resumed its orangey glow. He then dropped to his knees beside me and started shuffling through the wreckage with his own hands. If the item we sought wasn’t an amulet of power, Liminal could use a Finder’s charm to guide us to the right area of the room. Or, if we were near enough to the item, he could simply Summon it directly to his palm. Unfortunately for me, enchanted items didn’t give up their location quite that easily.

Admittedly, an amulet’s resistance to magical in-

fluence was a handy thing when fighting an enemy wizard. It was considerably less handy when desperately searching for the only thing that might be able to save me from certain death by means of three-foot-long teeth.

I sustained at least four more splinters and found a whole host of powerful-looking bracelets, cursed daggers, and other odd, enchanted tokens before the next roar sounded. I felt almost as though the sound was echoing inside my own head it was so close.

“Liminal! To me!” Liah shouted from the chamber behind us. I turned to look over my shoulder, and in that moment, my stomach dropped out of my body altogether.

We had officially run out of time.

The Night Terror had found us.

She was at least twice as large as I had envisioned her. Each of her scaly hind legs was as large as an archer’s outpost, and even furred, her wings looked large enough to serve as sails for the largest galleon in a lord’s fleet. Gathered before her, the battered forces of both Golden Dawn and the

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Fated Saviors looked like children's toys.

If Quentin hadn't left his post at the entrance, he would have seen this beast coming from miles away. He could have warned us all to get the hell out of here before it was too late to run. But now, our only option was to fight.

I shook myself out of my horror-induced stupor, returning to my frantic search for the amulet just in time for the last bits of Liminal's glow to fade from my view. He was pacing back toward the rest of the group, arms raised. A Shield spell flowed from his lips, sending up an invisible fortification between our tiny fighters and the Night Terror.

"Liminal, where are you going? We need to find this damn amulet before—"

"It's too late, old man," Liminal said. "Someone's got to help get our people out of here, and it looks like it isn't going to be you."

"Shit, shit, shit," I said under my breath, continuing to scabble around in the wreckage, searching for the amulet. Why in the fates had Liminal had to burst this table? Why did

we all have to start fighting, in the first place? We could have teamed up and returned the Gems of Dreary to the Lord of Drearyton together. Not that Brendan would ever have considered exploring a peaceful solution when swinging his sword at someone was an option.

But it was useless: It was so dark in this part of the cavern, I couldn't even see the tip of my nose if I crossed my eyes. Wherever the amulet was in this mess, I wasn't going to find it before the Night Terror chewed her way through both the Fated Savivors and Golden Dawn, then came to snack on me for dessert.

Still swearing, I grabbed the nearest ruby-encrusted dagger I could find and pushed myself back to my feet, hobbling for a few steps until my old knees warmed up to the idea of walking again. The massive chamber where our skirmish had taken place was now filled with the sounds of scraping claws, guttural growls, and clattering valuables.

The Night Terror opened her jaws. A gout of vivid blue flame erupted from her maw, melting and burning every-

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thing in its path. Liminal's Shield charm folded like a piece of parchment under the pressure of the attack, forcing Brendan and Liah to dive out of the way before the gnawing flames consumed them.

The Night Terror's flaming breath was hotter than any fire I'd ever encountered before in my life. It seemed almost to suck the air from my lungs. The stack of lutes Liminal had set afire earlier erupted into flame again, the vivid blue tongues of fire fading to white, then yellow, finally settling on the reddish-orange hue of a crackling campfire.

The dragon lunged, attempting to swallow Prythia whole. Liminal managed to hit the beast with a Staying spell just in time. The charm gave Prythia a half-second to roll out of the way, but the Night Terror broke through Liminal's charm within seconds, lunging for the berserker again.

Selina Skinsplitter entered the fray next. She dodged, leaping forward and pouncing between the dragon's hind legs, barely managing to avoid the beast's rear claws. The Night Terror struck forward with the claws on her winged forelegs.



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The only thing that saved Selina from getting swatted like a gnat was Quentin Quickstrike. He shot a pair of flaming arrows straight into the beast's eyes. In the instant it took the beast to claw the arrows and flames away, Selina had vanished into the shadows to lick her wounds.

“Divinian! Fucking do something!” Caelan screamed.

He and the younger swordsman from the Fated Sav-  
iors paced behind the Night Terror, trying to avoid the lashes of her spiny tail as they waited for their opening. But there was no opening. There would be no opening. Even if there was, even Caelan's bastard sword would injure the Night Terror as much as a jab from a toothpick would injure a man.

My brain started working furiously, and I picked up the speed of my hobbling, running back into the main room. I charged into the mayhem, armed with a single cursed dagger and a single purpose. If I could prick the dragon's hide, the dagger's curse would come into effect.

What sort of curse lay on the dagger? Would it be strong enough to have any sort of impact on a creature as mas-

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sive and powerful as the Night Terror? Was this just a glorified way of committing suicide? I didn't know, and I wouldn't know the answers to any of those questions until I managed to stick this three-inch blade somewhere into the flesh of the dragon. Which was inconvenient, because the entirety of the Night Terror's body was covered in scales twice as hard as diamond and as thick as Caelan the Secondary's skull.

"Divinian! Duck!" Selina shouted.

I didn't need a second warning: I hit the deck. The air *whooshed* from my lungs as I landed on the stone floor. The Night Terror's winged foreleg swept overhead. As the wing surged past, a flutter of hope flickered to life deep in my belly: There was a part of the dragon that was *not* covered in scales. A pretty big part, honestly. Her wings. If I could prick her wing with the cursed dagger... Maybe I could make a difference in this fight after all.

The next few moments passed in a blur of scaled limbs, flailing swords, and slashing claws. The combined might of the Fated Saviors and Golden Dawn was barely

enough to keep the Night Terror at bay. Finally, I saw my opening. The Night Terror's snapping jaws were occupied by Selina and Caelan's efforts while Liminal and Prythia attempted to muzzle the beast from behind using a combination of magic and a gigantic tapestry Prythia had found in the hoard.

"Brendan, give me a boost!" I shouted. Technically an order, but if Brendan was going to be offended by that at a time like this, he could go fuck himself.

Thankfully, Brendan was too tired to challenge me. Instead, he nodded and readied his shield. I ran toward him, using the steel surface as a launch pad to leap ten feet into the air, slashing with the dagger. I stretched my aging arms as long as they would go... barely managing to clip the underside of one leathery wing at the apex of my leap.

The floor shook as the Night Terror shrieked in protest. I landed bodily on the quivering stone. Were my legs broken? Maybe. It was hard to tell. I lay immobile for a few seconds, listening to the sound of my own ragged breathing echoing in my ears.

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Then, the smell reached me. The telltale stench of dark spellwork. The dagger's curse was working. I recognized the distinct tenor of the smell. The cloying sweetness of it. It was a Sleeping curse. Any man pricked with a blade set with a Sleeping curse would fall into a deep sleep that he couldn't wake from unless revived by the same wizard who had set the curse.

There was no chance we'd be lucky enough for the curse to work the same way on a ten-thousand-pound dragon... but it might just slow the beast down.

"Divinian! Watch out!" Liminal shouted from the far side of the cavern.

I looked up, cringing.

Rows of glistening teeth snarled in the air above my head. The Sleeping curse had not knocked the dragon out. What was more, she had identified the source of her pain: Me. The good news was that it seemed the curse had done *something* against the dragon's might. Her motions were slowed and clumsy, almost like she was trying to maneuver through

water instead of air. She was still powerful, but she was moving slowly enough that I avoided the snap of her jaws by rolling to one side.

I pulled myself to my feet, limping toward the nearest stack of treasure on thankfully unbroken legs. The Night Terror snapped at me once more, but she missed again. I hobbled behind the stack of treasure—a now-haphazard collection of filigree decorative shields. Seconds later, I felt it.

The heat.

Vivid blue flames washed over the treasure pile. The shields protected me from the worst of the blast, but my entire backside still got engulfed in white-hot fire. I ripped off my burning cloak, thrusting it from me before attempting to beat out the flames that had spread to the back of my shirt and the seat of my pants. I felt my flesh began to sizzle. My brain was still too panicked to register the pain, but my nostrils did register a smell disturbingly similar to bacon frying in a pan.

“Stop that, you’ll burn the shit out of your hands,” said a voice nearby. Liminal. He muttered a spell that doused

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the flames. I ran my hands over the back side of my body. I'd need a new pair of pants and some ointment, but I would survive the burns.

Then, I felt something that made me freeze in my tracks. Something I had to be imagining.

Liminal must have seen something on my face because he frowned. "What's wrong?"

"Not wrong," I said slowly. I reached into the ruined tatters of my back pants pocket, drawing out the item within. "Right. Very, very right."

The Amulet of Orginthal glinted in the light of the dwindling dragonfire. The chain was mangled, the design indecipherable, the metal melted into a twisted mass of silver. But the pendant that had cracked in half was once again whole. It was misshapen and clumsy, but that burst of white-hot flame had melted it back together.

I could feel my magic fluttering out, reaching for the amulet, desperate to use it as a conduit once again.

I looked up, meeting Liminal's eye, and he cocked

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one eyebrow. “Looks like you got your amulet after all.”

“Yeah, no thanks to you,” I griped. Then I gave the other man a sly smile. “Are you ready?”

“What spell?” Liminal said, licking his lips.

“I need you to cast an Illusion spell. Something that will distract this beast for more than a few seconds. I think your best option is—”

“The sun,” Liminal said.

I paused, blinking. “Yeah, how did you...”

“You aren’t the only wizard in this land who studied under Gavalon the Wise,” he said.

Liminal began muttering the words for the Illusion spell. Seconds later, a light burst into life in the far corner of the ceiling. It was massive and round, lighting up the entire chamber with a warming, burnt-orange glow. Not just a sun, a sunset. Liminal was not only a more powerful wizard than I’d anticipated but a smarter one, as well. Perhaps I’d been too harsh on him.

He was still an egotistical little prick, though.

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The Night Terror froze midway through a lunge that would have taken Liah's head clean off. She lifted her scaly face toward the sun, utterly entranced, still slightly bleary from the effects of the cursed dagger. Not knowing how long either of those things would last, I set my own work into motion.

My magic felt as backed up as a dammed river. As soon as I started speaking the words of the spell, I felt the dam break free, setting loose a flow of magic more powerful than anything I had cast since the days before I had back pain.

The air surrounding the Night Terror took on an iridescent sheen. The sheen spread around the beast in the shape of a sphere. By the time she realized what was happening, it was too late—the Bubble spell was already complete. Normally, a Bubble spell would float the occupants of the bubble away into the sky, then dash them back down to the ground when the bubble eventually popped. But the Night Terror didn't float up toward the ceiling. Instead, she flapped her wings and slashed her claws, struggling to break free as the



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bubble stretched and strained, keeping her contained.

“Go, go, go!” Brendan shouted.

Selina took the lead, guiding the two parties through the maze of cavernous corridors and back out into the fresh air. The sun had fallen in the time we spent in the hoard, and the land was now drenched in silvery moonlight.

For a few moments, we stood, panting at the hoard’s entrance. Then, Brendan turned to me. “Why did you not start with that Bubble thing, Divinian?” he snapped.

I looked up, sharing a glance with Liminal, certain the other wizard would give me up—let Brendan know I’d broken my amulet and we’d been saved only by pure luck and a chance shot of dragonfire to my rear end. But Liminal said nothing. So, I simply shrugged.

“I didn’t think of it until the end.”

“Lucky you did,” Liah said. “We’d never have gotten out of there without it.”

“What the hell are we going to do now, though?” Caelan asked. “We didn’t get the Gems of Drear. The Lord of

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Drearyton will never let us return without them.”

“We’ll have to go back in, then,” Brendan said, squaring his shoulders toward the entrance. He looked a good deal less grand than he had back on the hill this morning—his hair was mussed, his lip swollen and bleeding, his eyes blackened and his eyebrows singed off.

“Settle down there, Mister Hero,” Prythia said. She shared a look with Liah, then nodded at their archer. “Franklin, show ‘em.”

Franklin, the archer who had started the whole skirmish between our crews to begin with, pulled something from his pocket. A small velvet pouch. Inside lay fifteen shining, shimmering gems. They seemed to glow, throwing off the sun’s light even though there was no sunlight for them to throw. The Gems of Drear.

“I guess we’ve discovered that the whole ‘increased luck’ thing is bullshit, then,” Selina said.

“I don’t know about that,” I mused. “We did survive the day.”

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“What now?” asked Caelan. He shot a suspicious glare at the Fated Saviors, hand hovering near his sword.

“I assume you’ll want to take the gems back to Drizzleford?” Brendan said, drawing his sword and looking about as excited to resume fighting as a cat was excited for a swim. “I can’t let you do that.”

A feral roar burst from the mouth of the hoard, and I shared a look with Liminal. The other wizard cleared his throat. “Look, why don’t we resume fighting once we’re out of the immediate range of a ten-thousand-pound murderous lizard.”

Liah nodded, pointing. “An excellent suggestion.” She held a hand out to Brendan. “Save the killing until tomorrow?”

Brendan’s harsh expression softened into a smile. “Until tomorrow.”

As the mountain shook with the roars of the still-caged Night Terror, the combined parties of the Fated Saviors and Golden Dawn began our trek back across the prairie,

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heading back toward the Wending Wood and, ultimately, civilization. I was tired, bone-weary, burned, and bruised. But I had my magic back.

I pulled the awkward lump of metal that was now the Amulet of Orginthal from my pocket, threading the half-melted chain back around my neck where it belonged. If it strangled me in my sleep, so be it. I never planned to go without my magic again.



# THE END