

Tales of Azeroth

Medusa

By Florian "Mystler" Meißner

It was a beautiful day, Alarea decided, as she walked through the corridors of the Eversong Blades' headquarters. She had just returned from a recent mission with Zeno which involved tracking down and defeating a mad fugitive elf who had been a notorious crime lord in Quel'Thalas. The mission now complete, she had earned a few days off.

Today was also the day Alen was supposed to return. Almost a year had passed since their first kiss, and she was eager to spend some time with him. She didn't really mind having a relationship with Alen despite the two of them being apart quite often. It made their shared moments even more important. Today, she was just happy to be able to see him while they both had a break in their duties.

As Alarea continued to make her way through the complex, Zeno passed by, silent and with a grim expression on his face. Surprisingly, he did not make his usual mocking commentary about the "lovebirds" like he'd been doing over the last year. He must have been lost in thought, she guessed. Most of the other Blades were busy with their various chores.

She decided to join her colleagues in the sparring area to hone some of her skills to pass the time. Usually, she liked to read, but she was too excited for such focus now.

Finally, after some intense training, a Blade came in to tell her that Alen had arrived. Almost immediately, she half-walked, half-jogged to his room. After knocking on the door, she entered. He was busy with his backpack and seemed very nervous and stressed.

"Hey. Are you alright? Something happen on your mission?", she asked worriedly.

"Ugh. No, I'm fine. It was just exhausting. A rather large group of trolls keeps raiding travelers on the streets. Nothing of large scale, but still very annoying. Got into a fight with them here, there...practically all over."

He looked physically unharmed, so Alarea concluded that he prevailed admirably.

"At least you have a few days off now. Try to calm down and worry about it later", she suggested.

"You're right." He turned his full attention towards her for a warm embrace and kiss. "Actually, would you mind going out with me for a picnic into the garden? That'll help me to relax, I'm sure."

"I'd like that", she said.

The "garden" was what they called a little area with a pond in the forest just a few minutes away from the Blades' base. It didn't really resemble an actual traditional garden, but since they loved to spend some of their time there, they had dubbed it as such. After Alarea had gone to get her own bag with some food, they met up at their

base's hidden entrance and walked hand in hand to the garden. The wind was silent and the weather perfect as they set up a little table for them to sit by the pond.

"I brought some water, but I also found some of your favorite juice left in the kitchen. Here, give it a taste. I hope it's still good", Alen said as he took out cups and prepared their drinks.

"Awesome", Alarea reacted and took the cup he handed her. She took a sip when she had to make a grimace and laughed. "Ugh, I think this may have been stored in the kitchen for too long. Tastes like it fermented."

"Really? Oh, I'm sorry", he said and emptied their cups in order to get the water instead.

"Don't worry", she said and kissed him on the cheek. "I appreciate the thought."

She had brought some grapes and bread and they began to eat, but Alarea quickly realized that she was not very hungry. Alen did not eat very much either, so instead of picnicking, they just sat there, enjoying the silence and each others' company.

She leaned onto his shoulder and realized that she was quite tired. It was both strange and funny; she had been so excited for Alen's return, and now, she started to feel sleepy. There was a topic she had wanted to talk about, but she could not remember what it was. Maybe she would remember after a quick nap. Yes, a quick nap would feel good right now. Alen held her when she closed her eyes and fell asleep.

It was rather cold when she woke up and opened her eyes. The presence of a ceiling told her that she was no longer in the garden. Still groggy, she looked around to inspect the area. She was lying on a blanket inside a small cave. Around her, she spotted four strange metal posts. Further towards the other side of the cave, Alen was sitting at a campfire rummaging through a few bags. The darkness suggested that the sun had already set.

She sat up and stretched out a hand. Suddenly, the air shimmered and stopped her movement as her hand reached the height of two of the metal posts. It was some kind of force field. The posts created a prison. Now, her adrenaline kicked in and she rose up. "Alen, what's going on?", she asked and realized, "You drugged me!"

He jumped up and ran over to her. "Alarea, I'm so sorry. I didn't have much time and I had to get you out."

"Get me out?"

"Yes, they might have attacked if I had waited much longer."

"Attacked? By who? What the hell are you talking about?", she asked, seriously confused.

He sighed nervously. "Alright, let me explain from the start. When I joined the Blades, it was always supposed to be a temporary membership." She frowned and he continued, "I once told you my father was a powerful mage and visionary, right? That is still an understatement. He leads an organization that is about to change the world, and he would have trained me himself had I not lacked his magical talent.

“So instead, when he learned about the Blades’ recruitment, he sent me with them to achieve two goals: to find out more about them while also training my combat skills. I have been reporting back to him this whole time.”

Alarea was even more confused and tried to piece together exactly what he was implying. He explained, “Things changed when he found out about the Mana Cube. The Cube is his chance to take his vision to the next level.”

Her head raced trying to make sense of what he said when something dawned on her. “Wait, was he behind the attack in Silvermoon as well? He knew about the Cube from you?”

“Yes, he did.”

“But-”, she could not believe he had confirmed her suspicion, “but you fought with us.”

“I did not, remember? I was taken out by Lady Vivesse before the fight started.”

She swallowed, her eyes wide open. “That was all staged?”

“I had to maintain my cover in case something went wrong, and it had. I did not expect the bomb, though.”

“Alen, no. No, stop. This is not true. You’re not saying you and your father were behind the attack in Silvermoon. It had to have been any number of terrorist groups.”

“No”, he cried, “if you want to change the world, you have to make sacrifices. And I’m sure the bomb was not part of any plan.”

Alarea stared at him in disbelief and Alen got desperate.

“Listen, what the Blades do does not matter. We were trained well, but since then, all we’ve done is roam around, wasting our time with unimportant and small matters. If you want to change the world, you need power and control. Medusa can do that.”

She backed away from him, repulsed. “Medusa? Is that what your father’s club of super soldiers is called?”

“This is only the beginning.”

Having difficulties to organize her thoughts, she asked, “I don’t understand, I-, you mentioned an attack.”

“Soon, his soldiers will be raiding the Eversong Blades’ headquarters to get the Cube. That’s why I had to get you to safety. Alarea, I convinced my father that you are very dear to me. Please, you have to join us. I was never supposed to fall in love with you, but I could not resist. I need you at my side, so together, we can really make a difference.”

Now, she could see both madness and distress in his eyes. He had told her that he worked for an organization that was raiding her base and home while inviting her to join him in their madness in one breath. Her trust was shattered in that very instant. “You’re joking. You *must* be joking!”

“I’m not. We can do this. I’m here for you. Father will send someone to get us soon and then-”

“Alen,” she interrupted, “I’m not coming with you.”

He desperately shook his head, “Please, you have to. He can better show you what his plans are and I know you’ll understand, but you have to come out of your own free will. Otherwise-”, he choked off the rest of the sentence.

“Otherwise, he’ll consider me a liability and deal with me as such”, she finished for him. She tried not to think about what that would entail.

He nodded, his eyes wide with a fearful gaze.

Filled with anger towards the betrayal of the elf she had loved enough to spend the rest of her days only with him, she said, “You realize he made you his puppet. You’re just his pawn. He made you betray all of us to get what he wants, Alen. And you honestly believe I’d stand with you?”

“I-”, Alen stuttered, his face faltering after a moment. “If you’re part of his vision, you don’t always have a choice.” He looked back up. “I had to save you. That was *my* choice. I was hoping you would-”

Another voice thundered through the cave, “ENOUGH!”

There in the entrance stood an enraged Zeno, his sword drawn and ready to fight. “I have heard all I care to hear”, he said. “So Tasarion was right all along. He had been collecting intel on Medusa for a while now. Just a few days ago, he uncovered disturbing rumours that you might be related to their leader. I didn’t believe him one bit, but he still told me to keep an eye on you. I’m now glad he persisted.” He slowly advanced towards Alen. “Now let Alarea go so she and I may have a chance to go back and help.”

“I can’t”, Alen said and quickly drew his own sword from behind him. “You’re not supposed to be here.”

“Maybe not, but I’m glad I am. Now I’ll only say this once more: Let Alarea go so we can return and try to correct some of your mistakes. Even in your obvious madness, I don’t want to fight you, old friend, but if I have to-”

“I’m afraid you *will* have to. I won’t let you take her away from me!” Alen responded furiously and, with a mad roar, charged towards Zeno. Their blades clashed upon each other as the two became locked in a flurry of blows. Seeing the two of them fight was something Alarea could never have imagined before. She tried to find a way out of her cage, but there was nothing she could do.

“You’ve *already* lost her”, Zeno said as he parried another one of Alen’s attacks and struck back for a quick counter-attack. Alen jumped back in the last moment, parrying two more blows. Slowly, Zeno was forcing Alen further towards the wall of the cave in a wild frenzy of well-placed hits. Trying to use the space to his advantage, he spun around, focusing on Alen’s side and forcing him to turn around halfway in order to parry. Then, he immediately spun back for another attack.

Alarea gasped. She remembered this from their training. “Zeno, no!” she cried. It was a very efficient move that Zeno had used multiple times with great success, but Alen knew it just as well. With his free hand, he caught Zeno’s sword arm and with the hilt of his own sword he knocked Zeno’s weapon away flying through the cave. As Zeno realized his mistake, Alen’s counter-attack cut him deep across his mid-section.

Time seemed to stop and a strange quiet descended on the cave. All three knew instantly that such a wound was fatal.

“NO!”

Alarea cried out as Zeno staggered back to the cave wall and sank down, blood quickly pooling around him. “Look what you’ve done, Alen! You doomed him to *die!*”, she shouted, glaring at her former lover.

For a while, it remained silent. Alen just stood there, watching the bleeding body of his old friend in shock, standing as if in a trance. Finally, after what seemed like ages, he looked up and stared right at her, the desperation in his gaze replaced by a strange determination.

“You’re right”, he said in a melancholic tone. “My whole life was driven by my father. I betrayed the Eversong Blades’ for his cause, and in so doing, I have even sentenced my own friend to death by my blade and obliterated our relationship. He made me spit on the pride of everything I have achieved on my own.”

He looked down, thinking for a moment. “I think it’s time for yet another betrayal.”

He reached under his shirt and took out a necklace holding a small stone. With it, he came over to her prison. “It’s clear to me you would never join us and I cannot bear thinking of what he would do to you. It’s a fate worse than death.” Into a socket that was carved into one of the posts composing her prison, he inserted the small stone. The force field dropped and they stood before each other.

Something in his eyes made her freeze. She did not move or say a word. He lifted a hand and put it on her cheek. Then, he closed his eyes. Slowly, he walked away from her, reaching into one of his pockets. “-and a life without you?”, he said, his eyes still closed, “I welcome death.”

Suddenly, Alarea saw that he held something small close to his chest. It was a grenade. “Farewell, my love.”

She jumped away with all her strength, narrowly avoiding the explosion. It had not been a very powerful grenade, with only enough force to send her flying only a short distance. As she looked back, however, she only saw what was left of Alen. It was a gruesome sight, and she quickly turned away.

Zeno made a movement from where he had fallen against the cave wall. Alarea sprinted to him, doing her best to keep from getting sick at the sight of his lethal wound. She knew there was nothing she could do for him.

“Alarea”, he said with a hoarse voice as she leaned over him. “I had a hunch...and I’m...glad Tasarion...agreed with me.” With all of his remaining strength he took the glowing Mana Cube from his pocket and placed it in her hands. “You have to...get rid of it”, he choked out in pain. “You have to hide it...where nobody will ever find it...”

“Good luck, Daggers”, he sighed and passed away.

She staggered through the forest, desperately trying to find the way to the Blades’ headquarters in the night. Her thoughts were racing in all directions and she tried to keep them under control. She concentrated on just getting to their base, but was finding it difficult. Maybe Alen had lied. Maybe there was no attack or maybe she could warn them. Maybe she could at least be in time to help.

After she had left the cave, she was sure she had seen it on a walk before, so she could not be too far away from her destination. The dark of the night, however, made finding the way challenging. A pathway appeared in front of her, and looking around allowed her to pinpoint her location further. If she would follow that path east, she should be there soon.

When Alarea finally came to the entrance to the Blade's mountain complex, the large, wooden gateway stood wide open. She groaned because she could see and smell smoke coming from behind it. The heat was almost unbearable, but she had no other choice. After taking a deep breath, she charged through.

Keeping her head down, she passed through the first corridors. Every single room along the way had been set on fire, her own room no exception. The flames had already died away to leave glowing embers behind. With everything underground, the flames must have exhausted the surrounding air rather quickly.

Soon, she saw the first corpses. All of them were familiar colleagues from the Blades. They had been caught by surprise when they met their end. Desperately, Alarea ran forward. When she reached the community hall with its connected rooms, she saw a battlefield in ashes.

There were charred bodies everywhere. Looking over them, she recognized most as her colleagues, but some unfamiliar faces were no doubt the attackers. Among the unknown, she noticed three very tall and strong looking elves. Were those more super soldiers? Had the Blades at least managed to take them out in their hopeless defense?

Next to one of the tall elves she found the dead body of Tasarion. Lormandil was there too, and further in the back was Gaelin, still holding onto his staff. There was nothing Alarea could do. It was clear that the Blades had made their last stand here. They had fought admirably if they managed to take out three super elves, but ultimately, they had lost to the victorious agents of Medusa. As a final insult, they had set everything on fire.

The base now lay in complete ruin, its warriors all dead.

The Eversong Blades were no more.

Alarea hurried out to get fresh air again. Outside, she sank down in desperation whilst coughing and retching over what she'd just seen. All of this must be a bad dream. It could *not* be true. Just this morning, she had been so happy and eager to see her love, but by now, he and this goddamned Medusa had destroyed everything she had cared about: the Blades were gone, her home was in ashes, and her love was shattered. She wanted to wake up, to make it all go back to normal, but that would not happen.

Anger began to settle in her heart. This was *her* fault. How could she not see through Alen's deception? It would have been so easy if she hadn't been so blinded by her love for him.

She then remembered the Mana Cube in her pocket. No, this *thing* was the root of all evil. This would have never happened without the damned Cube. In a burst of fury, she swung the alien object and smashed it as hard as she could against the nearby rock

several times, hoping to destroy it. Not a scratch. She had no weapons with her, but they would probably have been in vain as well.

You have to hide it... where nobody will ever find it...

Zeno's last words echoed in her head. There was one last mission for her. She rose up and walked through the forest. If her memory served her right, there was one old, inactive Runestone not far away. These Runestones once created the incredible magical barrier that hid Quel'Thalas magic and protected them from outsiders. Even after the scourge destroyed most of them, the remaining inactive monoliths still radiated a magical aura. If she hid the Cube at the nearby Runestone, its magical presence would hopefully be mistaken for that of the monolith.

After what felt like an endless walk through the night, left only with her own thoughts, she finally reached the Runestone. She dug a small but deep hole very close to the footing and buried the Mana Cube within. People almost never got lost here, so weather and time would hide her little digsite again before she expected anyone to notice it.

Alarea was relieved to finally be rid of the Cube. Nevertheless, her emotional state was far from stable. She had nowhere to go now and her losses gnawed at her soul. Her mind still failed to process all of what had happened. She picked a random direction and continued to walk through the night.

Her inner conflict made her body itch. She had to move, no matter where; just away, away from everything. As she kept going and going, haunted by the images of the day, she began to call out for supernatural help. Where was the holy light of the sun her people revered so much? Where were the makers, the elements, the gods, anything? Weren't they supposed to help you? She challenged the sun to undo everything, to make the betrayal she had been the victim of never happen. There was no response. Of course, there was none.

She only had herself, lost to her thoughts and walking through the night in the middle of nowhere.

Alarea noticed the sky getting slightly brighter again when exhaustion overcame her. Exhausted, she sank down upon the grass and closed her eyes. As she fell asleep, part of her wished she would not wake up again.

The sun stood high in the sky, warming her face when Alarea finally woke up. The gentle rocking to the rhythm of waves unmistakably told her that she was on a boat. Opening her eyes, she saw an old human man. He was rowing the boat in perfect harmony with the water. At the bow of the boat, right in front of the old man, she was lying on a pile of comfortable cushions. Alarea had no idea who this man was nor how she had gotten here.

"Where am I?", she asked. The old man did not say anything. He just smiled and continued rowing. "Who are you?", she tried again but got the same response. She wondered if the old man had kidnapped her, but he did not look hostile. "Can you even talk? Are you going to answer any of my questions?"

“That depends on the question”, he said. For a moment, he released the paddles and reached into a small barrel at his feet. From it, he produced an apple and held it out to her. “Would you like an apple?”, he asked. Alarea hesitated. “They taste really good and you must be hungry.”

Her stomach told her that she was quite hungry indeed, so she took the apple, sat up, and began to nibble on it. He was right, the apple did taste very good. She took a look around. Their boat was not far from the coast. From the trees, she could easily make it out as the Eversong Woods. “Where are we going?”

“I am bringing you where you belong”, the old man said.

Alarea gave a sarcastic snort. “I belong nowhere. I have nothing.” For a moment, she considered if this was some kind of afterlife. However, she still felt pretty much alive, physically at least.

Water splashed not far away from them and the old man said, “Look! The dolphins are jumping. What an amazing sight, isn’t it?”

She turned to follow his gaze. There was a group of dolphins jumping out of the sea, some of them pirouetting artistically before they dove back into the water. Then, she leaned back again. “Sorry, I’m not in the mood for that.”

The old man gave her a thoughtful look. “It’s a strange thing, this mood, isn’t it? Why do people deliberately not want to see beautiful things when they are in a mood where one might think they should be glad to see something nice for a change.”

Staring at the old man, she commented, “Did you have a philosopher for breakfast?”

He broke out into deep, roaring laughter, so loud and genuine that she could not resist laughing with him for a moment.

The sun slowly faded from the old man’s face and the sky darkened. Clouds started to cover the sky as the air became more and more dense. This sudden change of weather seemed very unnatural to her.

“Ah, the mist is rising. We are getting closer”, the man said. Behind him, she could make out a growing shape. It formed the silhouette of a lighthouse. As the old man rowed them towards the lonely building on the misty coast, she could not say that she had any idea of what this place was, where it lay or what its purpose was. She had certainly never heard of it.

“Is this where you think I belong?”, she asked but again got no answer. The old man steered towards a wooden pier and bound the boat to a post as they reached it. He stood up stepped out of the boat and held out a hand to her.

“May I help you out, m’lady?”, he offered. Alarea took his hand and followed him onto the pier.

“What is this place?”, she wondered.

“This is my home, but it is not what I brought you here for. You have to continue on your own now.”

Left in confusion, she watched the old man walk up the way to the lighthouse. Before he entered, he smiled at her once again, then closed the door. The tower and the connected shack were completely dark. Even after he had entered, she expected a light to

appear, but there was nothing. She hurried up to the door and knocked. “Hello?” No answer came. She tried to open the door, but it was locked.

With a sigh, she walked back down, puzzled by what the meaning of all of this was. Apart from the lighthouse, she could not make out anything on this rough shore except for a small pathway leading deeper into the mist. Did she have somewhere else to go? Her curiosity piqued, she set out to follow it.

She had not walked for very long when the path split in front of her. There were no signpost telling her where each led to. However, she could see two wooden tables, each standing several yards along one way.

Alarea could not believe her eyes as she approached the table on the right trail. There was only one object on the table: her little sister’s ruby necklace. She could not imagine how it got here. In fact, she would have been sure it was still buried in the remains of her room, where she had left it the other day. This, however was definitely the same necklace. It was still broken the same way Eireenia had given it to her to fix. Hesitating to touch it, she then went over to the other table. Here, she found her two daggers and was equally surprised to see them.

It dawned on her that this was not just about a fork in the road, it was about a choice: a choice she had to make if she wanted to move on. Her sisters were still out there. She had lost much, but she had not lost them. Maybe if she went back, they would accept her back, even after all these years. The thought of seeing her sisters again filled her with the desire to have a family again.

Then she looked at her daggers. She remembered how she had made the choice to leave her siblings; how she had joined the Blades to do her part in fighting for those left of her race; how she had trained and mastered the Eversong Blades’ trials. And, above all, she felt like she had still not proved that decision; not to her sisters or anyone else, but to herself.

She had lost so much, but turning her back on her choices and everything she had learned meant she would also betray herself. She had to stay true to her ideals. Even without the Blades, she could hold onto those. Besides, she now had Medusa to put alongside the Scourge onto the list of enemies she had to stop.

Taking the daggers that had accompanied her so often and with which she had developed lethal proficiency, she fastened them to her belt. The choice was made.

Another thought occurred to her and she walked back over to the other table. Before she continued down the path that her daggers had indicated, she put her sister’s necklace in her pocket.

No choice is ever black-and-white. I have to remember that.

The mist cleared more and more as she followed the path she had chosen. After a while, it was completely gone and the sun shone brightly once more. She closed in on a bridge. To the left and the right, she could make out the shore to the open sea and realized that the lighthouse must have been on a connected island. Crossing the bridge,

she noticed an elf busy with repairing a boat on the coast. She walked over to him and greeted him.

The elf jumped up with a start and asked, "Where do you come from?"

"From the island over there", she said and gestured over her shoulder.

"What island?", the elf asked with a puzzled expression on his face.

Alarea whirled around. There was nothing except for the open sea. No bridge, no island, no lighthouse, no mist.

"Nevermind", she said thoughtfully. "Where am I?"

The elf gave her a strange look, but answered, "You're on the Sunstrider Isle. Are you alright? You should probably head over to the Sunspire and rest."

She thanked him for the direction and walked up from the coast. After everything that had happened, she still had a lot to process. Only one thing remained constant:

Hope.

THE END

Author's note: Thank you so much for reading so far. This was the final episode of the first season of Tales of Azeroth. A reader familiar with the WoW universe may have recognized that this episode ends where the blood elf journey in the game begins. So far (except for the frame story of the first episode) everything took place before the events of the Burning Crusade expansion and this is the tie in to some of the things that have happened since. With the next season, the story will jump ahead into modern times. There are a couple of unanswered questions and, after all, Medusa may have suffered a blowback but they are still out there...