

Tales of Azeroth

The Secrets of Power

By Florian "Mystler" Meißner

"News travels fast", Tassarion said. "A mysterious blood elf and a Forsaken caught the mad, former mayor Sunpride."

Alen, Zeno and Alarea looked at each other.

"I can't say your mission went as well as I'd hoped", he continued, "but nevertheless, well done."

"I didn't expect them to make our help public", Alarea said.

"Well, it happened, but an unknown hero is all there is to it. Now, tell me everything that's happened and who that Forsaken is", Tassarion ordered.

The three of them went on describing everything that had happened on their mission.

"If it hadn't been for Rupert, we'd all be dead now and the mission would have been a disaster", Alarea said sadly.

"It was your approach to the situation and your encounter with him that allowed him to save you in the first place", Tassarion replied. "Sure, it was close, but your mission was a success. How much does Rupert know about the Blades?"

"Nothing really", Zeno answered. "He didn't want to know anything. I suspect he has his own secrets and thus respected ours. Anyway, he's a lot like us. Maybe he's working for a secret organization too."

Gaelin, who had been mostly silent during their debriefing in the conference room, stirred and said, "Can you tell me more about that artifact the mayor was using? Do you know how he could access such amounts of power?"

"We don't know anything about that artifact", Alen said. "But maybe you can figure it out."

He opened his bag, revealed the Mana Cube, and placed it on the desk. For a while, everyone in the room was silently watching the object. Finally, Gaelin carefully took it for closer examination.

"I have never seen anything like it", he announced while turning it around. "This is remarkable."

"We feel it should be destroyed", Alarea said, "but it may be too dangerous to do so."

"Destroying mysterious magical objects is indeed a bad idea", Gaelin agreed. "Besides, I think it'd be a wasted opportunity to not understand what we have here."

They waited quite a while for Gaelin to examine the Mana Cube. Every now and then, he made gestures when he tried analytical spells on the object. Ultimately, his attempts resulted in him shaking his head doubtfully.

"There is nothing familiar about this object at all. I need much more time and resources to research the nature of this 'Mana Cube'."

“What kind of resources?”, Tassarion inquired.

“Basically, a whole Magister’s lab: tools, devices and books about rare artifacts”, Gaelin replied. He already had a small laboratory at the Eversong Blades’ Headquarters, but it was lacking the rather expensive gadgets and extensive libraries to which elven Magisters usually had access.

“That might be difficult”, Tassarion said.

“Don’t you have connections to other mages that you can consult for help?”, Alen asked.

Gaelin thought about it for a moment. “I’m not sure if I’d trust anyone with such a delicate matter, but there is a Magister I know pretty well.”

Tassarion said, “I don’t like the other option of breaking into a lab either.”

“We could accompany you to Silvermoon and make sure the Cube doesn’t fall into the wrong hands”, Alen suggested.

With a nod, Gaelin sighed. “That might be our best bet.”

“Fine”, Tassarion said. “Contact your associate and prepare to leave for Silvermoon as soon as possible. But make sure that nobody else knows about that artifact and do not let it out of sight before you’ve found a way to contain, deactivate or destroy it.”

The Blood Elves had indeed been busy rebuilding Silvermoon City. When they had traveled through, Alarea had still noticed many areas, like the district she had grown up in, that were completely forsaken and might never be restored to its former glory. Nevertheless, the central part of Silvermoon was a nice place once again. All signs of the undead invasion during the Third War were gone and she reveled in seeing the big city of her childhood again, after several years in a hidden base.

Just one thing looked off. Every here and there, she noticed large glowing green crystals. Quickly she realized that they were mana crystals - an attempt of replacing the lost Sunwell as a source of magic. They did not really fit into the beautiful scenery of the new Silvermoon, but Alarea tossed that thought away. *Who cares about prettiness when your people have a mana addiction to overcome, right?*

After arranging a place to stay, Gaelin wanted to get started right away. So they headed to the University of Silvermoon immediately. The University was quite a sight - a huge multi-level building with many rooms, hallways, towers and courtyards. When they entered, Alarea was sure that they would get lost way too easily without a guide.

Gaelin quickly found and spoke to a concierge, who signaled them to follow him.

“So, how’d you get to know this Lady Vivesse?”, Alen asked on their way.

Gaelin said, “She is a Magister who I used to study with a long time ago. Back then, we had been researching together quite a lot. She was eager to help when I told her that we had found a strange source of power to examine. She’s made clear that she would honour the secrecy of our little project.”

The concierge led them to a door in the next level and, after receiving a tip from Gaelin, left them alone. Gaelin knocked and a voice from the other side told them to enter.

“Magister”, Gaelin greeted the tall blood elf at the desk when they entered.

The woman stood up and laughed, “Greetings travelers! And don’t you ‘Magister’ me, Gae!” Vivesse welcomed Gaelin with a short hug and shook the other Blades’ hands. “I reckon you have brought something exciting for us to inspect?”

“Yes”, Gaelin replied.

“Great”, Vivesse said, “but we won’t stay here. I’ve set up a safe place for us to work.” She turned towards Alarea. “You’re here to help as well?”

“Uh, right. We were the ones who found”, she hesitated, “-it.”

“Alright, follow me then”, Lady Vivesse said and led them out of her office on another journey through the ever-winding corridors.

On their way, Zeno could not help but whisper to Gaelin, “Did she just call you Gae?”

Gaelin gave an embarrassed smirk. “Well, that may be a habit from when we were-kind of, uh-romantically involved.”

At some point, they arrived in one of the outer towers. They were standing in a small circular room with only a few shelves. There was a window just below the ceiling that allowed some light to enter the room. Below that window, an empty frame was positioned.

Lady Vivesse closed the door, pointed at the frame and spoke, “Now, in order to activate it, you have to say a line.”

She moved closer to the frame and said, “In the name of Magister Vivesse-open!”

Something sparked in the center of the frame and expanded quickly until it was filled with a shimmering, blue surface: a portal.

Vivesse motioned towards the mystical doorway and Gaelin stepped through. Alen and Zeno followed after him. Alarea took a deep breath and walked into the magical tunnel. It felt as if her body was compressed and sucked to another place, but the sensation was over just as quickly as it had begun.

The others waited for her in another dark room. Alarea had expected to find a magician’s laboratory, but she was wrong. Instead they were surrounded by eight more portals, all of them active and waiting for them to pass through.

“What the-”, Alarea gasped.

Behind her, Magister Vivesse strode out of the portal and grinned. “Now, this is the part that assures that nobody can follow us without being part of our little project.”

She pointed at one of the portals. “You see that light at the top? To reach the lab, you must remember this color code: red, green, red, blue, red.”

“Naturally-”, Gaelin said. “You always fancied games like this.”

“Wait, you mean there are more rooms like this and we have to take the portals with those colors, in that order?”, Zeno wanted to clarify.

“Exactly”, Vivesse replied. “You know the code now. Everyone else would have more than thirty-two thousand combinations to try.”

“And what happens if we take the wrong sequence?”, Alarea asked.

Vivesse hesitated. “Just don’t. You will be stuck in another room until I get you out.” She exchanged glances with Gaelin and continued, “Well then, let’s go, and remember: red, green, red, blue, red.”

One after the other, they went through the portal with the red light and appeared in another room that looked just like the one they had left. This time they took the portal with the green light and repeated that process with the red, blue, and red portals.

Finally, they came out in a bright, circular marble room that did indeed look like a laboratory almost exactly as Alarea had imagined it. Huge, multi-colored elven windows allowed sunlight into the room and gave it a somewhat mystical appearance. Every free inch of the wall space was occupied by book shelves. The ceiling turned out to be an impressive, hemispherical, red roof and suggested that they were in the top of one of the University’s biggest towers. There was some free space in the area of the portal, but further into the room there were desks filled almost to capacity with magical tools, gadgets, and devices. In some places, books and pens hovered patiently. Furthermore, the lab featured a small but comfortable resting area with a couch.

“Wow”, Zeno expressed his amazement when he entered the lab. “This is where you work?”

“When I need some peace and quiet for my thoughts, yes”, the Magister answered. “The lab is also magically sealed. The portals are the only way to get in and out”, Vivesse explained.

“I somehow doubt everyone has a secret lab like this right at the top of a University tower”, he said.

“It’s true: being a Magister allows me a certain degree of luxury.”

Alarea went to one of the windows and looked out. Below her, she saw one of Silvermoon’s busy streets. Although she had grown up in this city, after many years in the Eversong Blades’ base, and even after having been to Easthaven City recently, the sight impressed her. Overseeing the proudly rebuilt elven capital city from this high up gave her a true sense of coming home.

“It’s beautiful”, she said when Alen joined her at the window, emphasizing his comment with a nod.

Behind them, Gaelin clapped his hands and produced the Mana Cube from his bag. “Alright, let’s get to work.”

Gaelin and Vivesse were noticeably excited to work together on uncovering the secrets of the Cube. Alen, Zeno and Alarea did their best to help them - a task that mostly consisted of finding specific books, certain passages, or fetching the right tools. Sometimes they simply sat on the couch and listened to the mages’ babbling in magical terms. While Alen and Alarea also tried to learn a few things about the tools they were working with, Zeno mostly strolled around the lab, sometimes being reprimanded by Vivesse not to touch anything.

They worked until late afternoon and had the rest of the day as free time. On the first evening, Zeno decided to check out a tavern. After her last encounter with that devilish alcohol, Alarea preferred to go for a walk through the city. Much to her surprise, Alen chose to accompany her instead of Zeno.

The city center was still a busy place and, right now, she favored quiet, away from the city turmoil. She considered visiting the area of her old home, but she did not really want to. That part of her life was over and she had to let it go. However, she had heard of a place that seemed perfect.

They walked slowly and made small-talk for a while. When they arrived in a relatively empty district further away from the center, Alen asked, "Where are we going?"

"You'll see."

Not long after that, Alarea stopped at a small, opened gate and stepped through. The two of them looked around the yard they had entered. In the middle, there was an impressive memorial pillar that was built for remembering those who had died in the Third War and what had shaped their new identity as "Blood Elves". Spread around the area, there were numerous smaller memorial stones.

"A cemetery?", Alen asked with a confused expression on his face. "Our first evening in the new Silvermoon City, and when we go sightseeing, you choose a place of death?"

Alarea chuckled and shook her head. "No. Cemeteries are not a place of death. Take a look around: this is a place of remembrance, a place of peace, and a place of hope."

She watched Alen eyeing the area. The marble memorial in front of them was quite a sight with all of its golden ornaments and reliefs. Elves had decorated many of the memorial stones with flowers, ever-burning magical candles, and personal items such as small jewels and other trinkets. There were even a painting and a lute.

"I learned to see it this way when I was a child. 'No matter how big and hectic the city', my parents always said, 'a cemetery is a place where you can find quiet and be with your thoughts. People really make an effort to have the place look nice and inspiring.'"

"You-", he responded, before reconsidering his words, "I suppose I see your point."

They sat down on a bench near the big memorial. What Alarea had said was true: she found the effect of this place calming and appealing. But there was something else that troubled her and made her avoid the lively city center.

After a few minutes, she took a deep breath and said, "You know... I lied when I joined the Blades."

Alen frowned. "Lied?"

"I had said that I had no family," she paused, "-but that's not true."

"You mean...", he paused thoughtfully, "you said that because you wanted to join, didn't you?"

Alarea nodded. "They wouldn't have accepted me if I had family to go back to. Joining just felt like the right thing to do."

"So your parents are still alive?"

"No, they died in the war and we fled from our home here in Silvermoon."

“ ‘We’?”

Alarea sighed. “Yes. I have two sisters.”

“Ouch. That must have been a tough decision to leave them behind.”

“Yeah. Please don’t tell anyone.”

“I won’t. Do you know where they are now?”

“They’re living here in Silvermoon again. Apparently, my older sister is already in a position of command among the Rangers”, she said. “That guy I met in Easthaven, he was working for her.”

“Wow”, he said.

“That’s another reason why we went here. I know it sounds absurd, but I don’t really want the chance to encounter my sisters, if possible. They probably think I’m dead, which is for the best.”

“I see”, Alen said.

After a pause, Alarea asked, “You once said you left your father behind?”

“Right”, he nodded. “My father is a great man, and an intelligent and passionate worker. But he’s also a mage and I could never follow in his footsteps. I lack the magical talent he’s got.”

“So you joined to find your own destiny?”

“Kinda. I want to make a difference with my own skillset - and I prefer a sword over a staff”, he chuckled.

“Do you regret joining?”

He shook his head. “No, I know I’m part of a greater good. Do you?”

She reached into her pocket and revealed the broken ruby necklace. “This belonged to my little sister. She gave it to me to repair just before I left. I’m still carrying it around as a memento. I want to prove that my decision was worth it.” Putting it back in her pocket, she continued, “I don’t regret it, no.”

“Good”, Alen said, “because we need you.”

He had laid his hand on her forearm and Alarea felt a sudden surge of warmth running through her body. She looked him in the eyes and what she saw was a gaze of compassion, but she also sensed a little bit of fear.

Then, Alen blushed, looked away, and stood up. “I think it’s getting late. We should go.”

Alarea blushed as well and followed. “Yes. Of course. Thanks for coming here with me though.”

“You’re welcome.”

Neither of them said another word on their way back.

Over the course of the next week, their research turned out to be quite disappointing. The two mages made some progress in harnessing the power of the Mana Cube and channeled a few, very demanding spells. With everything they tried,

however, they did not get any closer to understanding the source of the Cube's power. One could see them getting more and more frustrated as time went on.

It was in the middle of the second week when Gaelin decided to try a different approach; something that made Magister Vivesse strikingly nervous the whole day. His plan was to trace the energies of the artifact with his own soul. Vivesse had warned him about the dangers of such a spell and even offered doing it herself, but he insisted on being the one to try. Vivesse had good reason to worry: if something went wrong, his very soul would be lost and the thread binding him to his body would be severed.

Even so, with all other options exhausted, Gaelin strongly felt this was the only way to learn what they needed to know.

"It's either this or never knowing just how dangerous this Cube could be", he had argued.

They had prepared a number of magical circles that would serve as beacons that would guide him back to the lab. It was well past noon before Gaelin was ready to proceed.

He sat in the middle of a glowing circle, his legs crossed as if in meditation. Soon, he closed his eyes and froze. Utter silence filled the room and began to weigh heavy on everyone's shoulders. They waited and waited. Alarea was not sure how much time had passed.

Suddenly, Gaelin fell back, his body collapsing without control. Everyone jumped and gathered where the pale mage lay.

"Gae, you there?", Vivesse talked to him.

He did not respond. Neither did he react to somebody touching him.

"No", the Magister said and cast a spell. Nothing.

She tried another, then a third.

Still no response. Vivesse simply stared at Gaelin, searching for any sign of life.

The silence was incredibly unsettling. Everyone waited.

I knew I should have just destroyed that thing! This is what seems to happen if you play with fire, Alarea thought.

Finally, Gaelin jolted as if being struck by lightning and he gasped for breath. His eyes were wide open now as life returned to his body.

"*There you are. Say something, Gae*", Vivesse said, the relief in her voice quite clear to all.

He answered with low, unintelligible muttering.

"We should get him to rest", Alen proposed and, together with Zeno, they carried him over to the couch. Alarea fetched some water and helped the mage drink. Slowly the color returned to his face, and Gaelin began to come around.

"That was... intense", he groaned after a few more moments.

"Did you find anything?", Vivesse wanted to know.

"I've never experienced anything like this. When I entered the Cube, trying to follow its energies, it was as if I'd entered a labyrinth without exit. It was leading me everywhere and nowhere at the same time. Imagine a four way junction with every

direction being right and still leading nowhere or even back to that junction. So confusing. I can't even describe it, I-

Vivesse shook her head. "Damn. So the beacons-?"

"Without them, I'd have been lost, yes; and even then, I had difficulty locating them."

Nobody dared to say something, for a moment.

"However that thing works", Gaelin concluded, "it would seem it's possible to find out."

"That's unfortunate", a strange voice sounded through the lab.

Everyone turned around towards the entrance portal. There were men standing there: tall elves - and they carried weapons.

"-but it doesn't matter *how* it works," the voice continued. "The important thing is that it *does*."

"Who are you?", Alen asked.

"We're the ones who are going to take care of the artifact now", the same voice, apparently the leader of the intruders, answered.

Zeno said, "I thought the only way to get in here is-

"With the code from the Magister, yes."

Now their eyes focused on Lady Vivesse and Gaelin ordered, "Explain."

She backed off a bit and, with an expression mixed with guilt and nervousness, said, "I'm sorry, but the Cube- it has too much potential to be in your hands."

Gaelin shook his head. "And you think elves armed with weapons to take it are better hands for handling it?"

The Magister remained silent. Alarea noticed that Alen had used the conversation to slowly back up towards the desk with the Mana Cube and was prepared to fight in order to defend it.

The tall elf at the portal must have realized that as well and drew his sword. "The Cube, do not let him have it", he said pointing at Alen. His two henchmen began charging when an arcane bolt of energy, fired by Lady Vivesse, hurled into Alen's side and sent him crashing against the wall.

"Alen!", Alarea screamed and drew her daggers. She threw Vivesse an evil look. "You're gonna pay for your betrayal."

The tall elf grinned and said, "Right, enough talking. When the Magister called us, our orders were perfectly clear: there are people in this room who know too much. I guess it's one down," he readied his sword and prepared for battle, "three to go."

Alarea knew she didn't have much time. Not only were they outnumbered, their opponents included a mage that looked formidable. She had to do something quickly in order for them to get the upper hand in this imminent fight. This time, using all the focus she could, she drew upon even more energies stored in her mana ring's crystal. She stepped through the shadows, appeared behind one of the henchmen and dispatched him before anyone knew what was happening. Giving nobody the time to react, she shadow-stepped a second time and successfully assaulted the other henchman.

She felt a sense of reward, since she had not been sure whether her plan would work. Fortunately, they had the upper hand now, having to fight only two enemies. Her double shadowstep, however, had been quite demanding; she would have to continue fighting without magical combat tricks for awhile.

Kicking away the body of the elf she had just stabbed, she closed in on the leader of the intruders. Her adversary lunged out with his sword and Alarea barely managed to dodge the attack. She was quicker than the other elf and swung out for a counter attack before he could parry.

She was not quick enough as her enemy hit her in her stomach with his free hand.

Alarea felt an overwhelming amount of pain and could not breathe. She felt her body hit the wall and sink down. The elf's punch had been so powerful it had sent her flying a few metres through the lab. Slowly, she pulled herself up and forced herself to breathe again.

He shouldn't be that strong, Alarea thought. Something else must be going on.

Zeno was fighting the elf now, while Gaelin was in combat with Magister Vivesse. She was glad that both of their enemies were busy. Otherwise, it would have been way too easy for them to kill her in her defenseless state after the punch.

Back up on her feet, she decided to help Gaelin first. No matter how strong the other guy seemed to be, the mage was probably the greater threat.

Vivesse and Gaelin's duel resembled a strange light show as they fired and blocked magical projectiles at each other. Often, those blocked spells crashed into the furniture or book shelves of the room. All the while, Gaelin's face was a mixture of rage and hurt as he fought his former friend and lover.

The Magister noticed Alarea joining the fight again and immediately sent bolts towards her. Carefully, Alarea dodged them and hoped for Gaelin to counter as soon as possible. He did just that and created winds of frost to engulf the other mage. The Magister was ready for the attack; a shimmering barrier appeared around her, blocking off the spell.

"Get her *now!*", Gaelin yelled.

Alarea was not sure what Gaelin had in mind. Obviously, Vivesse had no problems countering his spells, and besides which, the Magister still had the shield up. Nevertheless, she trusted Gaelin and lept forward. Vivesse conjured a ball of fire in front of her.

Alarea prepared to dodge the missile, but there was no need; a bright thread of energy connected Gaelin with the other mage's barrier and reversed its polarity. The fireball crashed against the inside of the barrier and exploded. Without hesitation, Alarea attacked and stabbed the confused Magister, making sure she would never betray them again.

In a brief pause to take a deep breath, Alarea exchanged glances with Gaelin. She was surprised what Gaelin had just done and would not have believed it possible. Gaelin briefly looked upon Vivesse's body, his face etched with thinly-masked sorrow. He was clearly troubled by seeing the corpse of his old friend.

Adrenaline kept them from thinking further thoughts as there was still one enemy left and they had to take him down. She looked over at Zeno, still fighting the tall elf with all he had. He had been careful enough not to be flung around the room like her, but it did not look as if he stood much of a chance alone either. He was just striking at his opponent again, when the other caught his sword mid-air, laughed mockingly, and bent it around.

Definitely not a normal elf!

She hurried towards Zeno's side and tossed him one of her daggers. The two of them tried to circle around the elf, but even together, they had to concentrate to dodge his overpowered blows, hoping for an opening to put an end to this.

From the other side of the laboratory, an arcane missile shot towards the elf. Alarea could not believe what she saw. Just before impact, it changed its course and began spiraling down around the elf until it hit the ground.

Damn, what was that!? He's got some kind of magical lightning rod as well?

Zeno used the moment to strike at the "super elf". His blow was parried, but it gave Alarea the chance to bury her dagger in their enemy's back. Pulling it back out, she left behind a noticeable flesh wound causing the elf to scream in agony, but his capability to fight was not hampered in any way. He lashed back and forced her to retreat.

The air around the tall elf shimmered and ignited, but once again Gaelin's spell was sucked away and directed into the ground.

When their opponent attacked Alarea again, she dodged by rolling to his side and sliced his lower leg. That caused him to fall to his knees. This time, Zeno landed a blow and opened another wound on his chest.

Still, the strong elf would not give up and continued his rampage.

"Get back", Gaelin called and the two Blades followed his order. Their mage now held the Mana Cube in his hand and launched a whole wave of arcane missiles. At first, it seemed as if the spell was conducted as it had been before, but this time the missiles began swirling around their enemy faster and faster. Even more missiles joined the spectacle until, at some point, there were too many for the redirection spell to handle. The spiral dissolved and all of the energy jolted into the super elf. He slumped to the ground and did not move again.

Alarea ran over to Alen, who was still lying motionless, and felt for his pulse. Relief overcame her when she felt that he was still alive.

Zeno joined her and returned her dagger. "Nice fight, Daggers", he said. "So, that was your first kill, eh?"

She had not thought about it before, but he was right. She looked at the two henchmen she had dispatched so quickly and felt somewhat sorry for them. While they had been her enemies, intent on killing her, she had done so to them first. Despite its efficiency, it was also frightening how easily she had pierced their bodies with her weapons, how easily she had taken the life of another blood elf. Alarea did not doubt the necessity, but still, it felt sad to finally do that for which she had trained.

Gaelin interrupted her thoughts. "We should get out of here immediately."

"What's wrong?", Zeno asked.

The mage pointed at a small, pulsating orb that was lying near the super elf's corpse. "Get Alen now. I think it's a bomb that activated when he died."

"Can you disable it?", Alarea asked.

"I can sense magical wards that may set it off early when we touch it or someone uses magic nearby. We don't have the time."

"Shit", Zeno said.

Gaelin put the Mana Cube in his bag while Zeno and Alarea took Alen. Then, they hurried through the portal and left the lab. In the first room with eight portals, they took the portals in backwards order: red, blue, red, green, red.

They realized something was wrong when they did not come out in the initial University tower room. Instead a huge wall of fire rolled towards them. Gaelin created a magical shield just in time and allowed them to return through the portal, which was already about to close behind them.

"She has changed the code", Alarea stated the obvious.

"Wow", Zeno said. "So much for what happens when you take the wrong portal combination."

Gaelin looked puzzled. "This complicates things."

Zeno wondered, "Can you shield us the same way while we try other combinations?"

The mage shook his head. "No. Even with the Cube, we have more than thirty-two thousand possibilities to try and we barely managed to survive this one. Even if we had enough power for each encounter, we're likely to starve long before we find the right combination."

Zeno wanted to backtrack another portal when Alarea noticed something.

"Stop", she called out. "The colors. They've changed."

It was true. The portal Zeno was about to enter featured not a green light, but an orange one.

„Looks like the portals swap randomly when you use a faulty combination“, Gaelin concluded.

Carefully, with respect to the new positions of the portals, they headed back to the first hub and laid Alen on the ground while trying to figure out how to proceed.

"Any idea what to do?", Alarea asked.

Nobody said anything.

We're stuck.

"Hang on", Zeno suddenly said and paced around the room nervously.

"What?", Alarea wanted to know.

He seemed to consider something and waved his hand dismissively, "Wait here and give me a minute."

Without waiting for an answer, he approached the portal with a cyan light and stepped through.

Gaelin and Alarea looked at each other skeptically and expected the lights of the portals to change any moment. Instead Zeno returned with a big smile on his face.

"Allow me to guide you out of here", he said, clearly amused by their surprised expressions.

Together they carried Alen and followed Zeno through a completely different sequence of portals: cyan, red, orange, purple, green. It worked. They were indeed back in the University tower – alive and well.

Gaelin said, “Impressive.”

“How did you know?”, Alarea asked.

“Remember all the times when I was browsing the Magister’s stuff and she reprimanded me for touching everything?”, Zeno said. “One of those times, I had found a book in one of the desk drawers. It was about colors and included a loose sheet of paper with colored circles on it: green, purple, orange, red, cyan. The sequence we just reversed to get out.”

“And how did you know that this was the right one?”, she wondered.

“I didn’t. I just guessed.” Everyone gaped in disbelief at him. “Now let’s get the hell out of here.”

Eireenia was on her way back home and deeply lost in her thoughts when the explosion happened. She had just come around the corner of the University of Silvermoon when the top windows of the tower about fifty meters in front of her were blasted out with a huge explosion. Shards of broken glass flung everywhere on the street. People ducked and covered their heads with their arms to shield from the glass.

Moments later, Eireenia forced herself to recover from the shock and looked down the street. All eyes were looking at the tower, confused at what had just happened. Further in the distance, she noticed a small group of elves running away. They seemed to carry another elf and were in a suspicious hurry.

Before she had time to pursue and investigate, she heard someone cry. Not far away from her location, there was a small boy lying curled up on the street, grasping his leg.

Oh no.

Quickly, Eireenia ran towards the boy and knelt beside him. He was maybe about five years old and clearly in pain. She then noticed with a grimace that a rather large shard of broken glass had gotten stuck in his thigh.

“Hey, little guy”, she said with a kind tone and a calming smile on her face. “You’re hurt, but don’t worry, we can fix that, okay?”

The crying boy calmed down a little bit while Eireenia helped him get into a more comfortable position. There was still the shard in his leg, however, and she knew she had to remove it.

“What’s your name?”, she asked.

The boy blinked and said, “Fi- Findel.”

“Findel. That’s a nice name! Tell me, Findel, you know any good stories? Do you have a favorite hero?”

Even more confused, the boy hesitated. “I- I like the story ab-OUCH!”

Asking the boy the question had distracted him from expecting the pain when she pulled the glass from his wound.

“Look, it’s out now. It won’t hurt you any further, I promise”, she explained. “Now I have to stop the bleeding, okay?”

The boy nodded while Eireenia took the hem of her dress and tore a tatter from it. It was a little bit unfortunate, since that was one of her favorite dresses or- no, actually it was one of her sister’s favorite dresses, but it did not matter.

With the tatter, she started gently bandaging Findel’s leg. There were still some tears, but the boy had calmed down was now watching her with interest.

“Are you an angel?” he asked.

That question caught her completely off guard and she paused for a second. “Now what makes you think that?”

He replied, “Because you’re kind and you help people who are hurt like me. That’s what angels do, right?”

“I-”, she struggled for words, “probably, yes.”

Finally, she had finished the makeshift bandage. She noticed that, while helping the boy, several curious onlookers had gathered around them, but nobody dared to interfere.

“Done! Now we can get you to a healer. Someone who can fix you up completely”, she said. “I’ll carry you, alright?”

After another nod from the boy, she took him on her arms, carefully holding his head, and stood up. One of the bystanders broke the silence and told her the way to the nearest medical center. Eireenia thanked him for his help and set off. Findel had cuddled up in her arms, obviously enjoying the free ride.

“How do you feel, Findel?”, she wanted to know.

“It still hurts, but it’s much better already”, he said.

She smiled, “Good. Hang in there, brave boy!”

Eventually, they arrived at the medical center. Eireenia carefully handed Findel over to a healer for closer examination and described what had happened. She then made arrangements for the medics to locate the child’s parents. With all the formalities done, she returned to the boy’s bedside and knelt down.

“Hey Findel. I’ve spoken to some people, and your parents are on their way here to see you. It shouldn’t be long.”

“Okay”, the boy replied. “The doctors said I’ll be fine.”

“I’m sure you will”, she said.

She stayed with the boy until his parents arrived. They thanked her profusely for her help. By then, it was about time for her to go home. She had a lot to think about.

“I should be on my way now”, she said to the boy. “Get well soon!”

They waved each other goodbye and Eireenia left, deeply lost in her thoughts again.

Are you an angel?

The child’s words echoed in her head again and again. She had spent quite some time thinking when her sister came home and greeted her.

“You won’t believe what happened at the Univ-” Silvarea said, stopping cold in her tracks when she turned to see her sister. “By the light, look at your dress! You’ve ruined it”, Silvarea said. “What happened?”

Eireenia explained what had occurred on her way home, and her big sister listened closely. When she was finished, Silvarea said, “I’m so glad you’re alright and I’m happy you were able to help the boy.”

“Thank you, but there’s something I have to tell you”, Eireenia said. “All of it has made me think. Not about the explosion, but about what I did. As long as I can remember, everyone in our family has always expected me to become a mage one day. But today? Today, I realized how happy I felt when I was able to help the boy. I realized that this is what I want to do: help others. I don’t want to be a mage.”

She leaned forward and stared intently into her sister’s eyes.

“I want to be a priest.”

THE END