

Seen from above, the ritual might have some sort of distinguishable shape, but standing before it, seeing it from a human perspective, it seemed nonsensical and disorganised.

Many dozens of lines of carefully-placed silver fragments flowed around the ground, some straight, some curved and bending up towards the raised platforms of compacted dirt. At least the number of platforms made sense, as it matched the required number of tolls, though there was none for the final toll that Heskell still would not tell Jakob about, even while insisting they already held it within their grasp.

As the Wight continued to work on the Great Undertaking by himself, Ciana and Jakob riffled through the abandoned houses. Seeing how the ritual would still not be done for a while, he had decided to try and setup a makeshift labororium, despite his initial apprehensions. Grandfather had taught him to use anything he could get his hands on, in order to achieve his goals, though right now it was mostly just to have *something* to do, as sitting on the side and watching Heskell work was making him feel useless.

“You know,” Ciana started. “I lived here with my father for a time.”

Jakob looked up from the cabinet he was searching. He did not say anything, but he also did not know what exactly to reply.

“The place looks the same now as it did back then.”

He was unsure why, but it seemed she felt like she had to get something off her chest.

“Of course, being born with these horns and my wing...” she continued, pointing to her head and her back in succession. “I was immediately an outcast. At first, I believe my father actually wanted to care for me, but it must have been hard.”

Jakob nodded. “Parenthood is no simple thing.”

“Especially not when your child is seen as a demonic omen,” she replied.

He lifted a cup up to the meagre light that fell through the open window, its surface was damaged and it looked so stained and worn that it might have been older than the former inhabitants, perhaps a family heirloom, even though it was by all means of simple construction.

“I do not remember much of my true parents,” Jakob admitting despite himself. It was not something he thought about a lot, mostly because it seemed futile, but also because he rarely had time to delve into his past, busy as he always was with one thing or another.

“Would you try to find them again, if you could?” she asked, not knowing his unique circumstances.

He considered it for a moment and then answered truthfully, “What is the point? I was taken by Grandfather and moulded by his will and tutelage. Do you believe my true parents would wish to see me?”

“If they loved you, they would.”

“You seem sure about that.”

She nodded to herself. “They definitely would want to see you.”

Jakob gave it a brief thought then replied, “Perhaps, if I find the means to see them again, it could be an interesting insight in what could have been.”

“If you find the means?” she asked.

“Ciana. I am not of this world. Grandfather used his Chthonic spells to wrench me from the grips of another realm adjacent to this one, all to suit his own machinations.”

“I had no idea such a thing was possible.”

“It may have only worked that one time. I have never since seen him cast such spells.”

“I’m sure there is a way. If your faith in the Great Ones is strong enough, they will reveal the path to you. You could ask Nharlla to gift the means to you, couldn’t you?”

“I won’t squander my gift on such a frivolous thing.”

“I don’t believe it to be frivolous.”

“There are things I seek more than answers about my true parents,” he told her.

Ciana looked down at her feet. “If possible, I would wish to see my mother. Even if she’s a demon who discarded me out after I was born.”

“Is that what you’ll ask of Nharlla?”

“No.”

They were in a different building, one that was now something akin to a carpentry workshop, but which Ciana assured him had once been two separate houses. It seemed she still had something she wanted to discuss, because she continued their prior conversation, as Jakob looked over the tools collected within the workshop. Thus far, they had found nothing of any significant value or use that he could utilise for a laboratory.

“You know what I’ll ask of Nharlla.”

Jakob nodded. “It means a lot to you.”

“Of course it does!” she replied, getting worked-up over his blasé response.

He set the handsaw down and looked at her, where she stood opposite the workbench covered in tools and unfinished little sculptures and wooden gears.

“Is it so weird that I want what my kind deserves!?”

“No.”

“We may be treated as misbegotten freaks and our infertility might be seen as punishment for our mixed heritage, but we just want to be able to create life, like anyone else!”

“I understand.”

“Do you *really* understand!?”

“Ciana, settle down. I am not judging you.”

She took a step back, seeming to realise she had been yelling this whole time.

“It is the desire of all living entities, sentient or not, to pass on their legacy and achieve immortality for their species. To be denied the ability to bear offspring is a cruel fate. But I was unaware it meant so much to you.”

“It means everything to me.”

Jakob nodded. He was still trying to figure out the depths of Ciana’s character. Though, he was also still trying to figure out Heskell’s character, after all, so much of the Wight’s past was kept from him, but Heskell himself, but also Grandfather. He wanted to know everything about them.

“My life has been shaped by the pursuit of knowledge. Knowledge is the gift I’ll seek from Nharlla. Knowledge about all the things I do not know.”

“Omniscience?” she asked, surprised.

“If such a thing is possible to attain, yes.”

“You wish to become the Ninth Saint? The Saint of Knowledge?” she joked.

“I do not require followers, praise, nor power. I seek knowledge for its own sake. With knowledge in your hand, all other things are insignificant.”

Ciana looked like she didn't agree with him, though she held her tongue.

“Seeking knowledge is also not a vice,” he added.

“Are you sure?” she joked.

Jakob and Ciana returned to Heskell sometime later, when the sun had vanished from the sky, with its waning light still illuminating the clouds above. He gave the ritual site a scrutinising gaze, then met Heskell's eyes.

“**It is ready.**”

Jakob nodded. “Teach me how to invoke it.”

Heskell shook his head. “**I will do it.**”

“What is the point of me being here,” he asked, once again feeling useless, when Heskell held all the cards in his hands.

“**To witness.**”

Jakob's eyes trailed across the work that the Wight had slaved away on completing. What struck him most was how perfectly each fragment of silver lay, the thin slices placed in a way that the seams between them were practically invisible.

He left his two companions and went to a nearby house, where he moved some pots and crates chairs outside, so he could climb up onto the roof. Once up there, I could properly appreciate the ritual that Heskell had made, following the Tungsten Scroll's instructions.

It was a work of art. It was a flawless execution of an utterly-foreign design, which drew the eye in a certain way and made a tingling electrical sensation fizz around inside his head. It felt somewhat wasteful to commit so marvellous to so dreary a place as Jon's Hamlet. But then again, Jakob supposed there was no place in this world that would be worthy of such a ritual as what they were performing.

Such thoughts however were dreadfully human in perspective. To a Great One, vanity was no doubt an alien concept, even for so miserable a creature as the Flayed Lady, who seemed to exhibit all the worst of human vices and desires.

Ciana hopped onto the roof, and shortly after the Wight joined them as well.

They stood there, the trio of unlikely companions, beholding the enormous ritual, its countless interwoven sigils, raised tiers of perfectly-compacted earth, and all experience their own unique cocktail of emotions as their eyes fell upon it.

The light of the sleeping sun eventually vanished from the sky above, but even in the darkness its magnificence was no less amazing.