



Epilogue

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No one paid any mind to one more sylvari walking into the Grove that day, especially not when there were so many Vigil soldiers to gawk at. Some few did notice her, but they looked away hastily from the bedraggled hound that limped at her heels. While some color had come back to him, his new leaves were growing in slowly and unevenly, leaving him thin and still mostly bare. The question was plain in every eye that fled the sight: what had she done to the poor animal? Did it teeter on the edge of Nightmare?

The clamor of their emotions washed against her, and a sliver of fear whispered, *How many of you can feel me as well?* It tightened her throat, but she was determined to give her weary hound rest.

Up she climbed through the city, through the white roots that were the bones of her people to where they gathered into one great trunk. Step by step she dragged herself out of the tide of lives that swirled below. Few came up here to this sacred place, and then only when summoned by the Tree, but she had not been summoned. The voice of the Mother was as silent as it had been since she had first lost hound and hope.

Well, I have won back the first, at least. She leaned back against the ivory bark as her hound nestled himself in a bed of flowers. The journey had been hard on him, and he groaned in the way that only hounds could as he rolled onto

his side to let the sun warm his belly. It seemed such a waste. The Hunt she had chased was not worth the price they had paid for it, and now she longed for the voice of the Mother to whisper reassurances, to tell her she was wrong and it had all been for a larger purpose. But still the Mother did not appear.

Instead it was another sylvari who eventually joined her, an elder of her cycle. Niamh, the Luminary of Noon, first to be born in the strong light of day and first to take up arms against a foe.

"Dagonet felt your return," she said plainly as she leaned back beside Laurel and looked up. The great trunk stretched like a mountain above them. "A shadow clings to you."

Laurel winced at the bluntness, but the elder sylvari only watched skyward, unconcerned. "The brightest light casts the sharpest shadows. We are of the Noon, blazing like the high sun, and so we must learn to live with the shadows we cast."

"There is too much darkness," Laurel replied. "It spills out into the Dream; that's why Dagonet could feel my approach. How can I just accept that? How can I inflict these things on new saplings? I should leave, go into hiding, take this away where it can hurt no one else."

Niamh shook her head gently, rattling the long tail of branches that arched back in place of hair.

"You will have to forgive me. Words are not as easy for me as they are for Aife or Kahedins." Her sky blue eyes met Laurel's and an understanding passed between them. Dawn was for the talkers and Night for the thinkers, but those of Noon were of action and their words often failed them. The familiar struggle eased Laurel's tension a notch, and when her elder continued, she tried to listen past just the words.

"Kahedins would quote Ventari. He would say, 'The only lasting peace is the peace within your soul.' It is true, of course, but not so easy as that to understand." Niamh paused a moment, considering. "When I say to accept the shadows

you cast, I mean you must make peace with yourself. Make peace with the things done against you, and the things you yourself have done. Then bring that peace and understanding to the Mother. It will shape the Dream far more than any cruelty you have seen in the world."

Laurel breathed out slowly, letting go of a weight she had carried too long. "You are wise, Luminary."

"You mean I am old." Niamh chuckled as she pushed away from the smooth bark. "Yours is not the first hardship faced by our people, and it will not be the last. There is much darkness and danger to be found in Tyria, but learning to face these things without losing sight of Ventari's wisdom, that is what it means to be sylvari."

Niamh retreated, and once more Laurel was left alone with her sleeping hound in the place where the Mother sometimes spoke. Still the Mother's voice was silent, but it was alright. There were new saplings that needed tending more than her. She could live with her shadows, thrive beside them. She had proved that much, and in time she would even cast new ones, for she knew that she would again blaze brightly. She stretched out beside her hound in the sun. They both would.