

The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed)

Chapter 18: Love and Fear (1st ride of Mirtul 1370)

Sometimes things hit you, but you only feel the pain later. After I woke it finally registered what the Ninja had said. My Great Aunt was dead. Fallen because of me. Sadness overwhelmed me and I could but cry as the coach wove an erratic route north toward the High Moor. I finally managed to collect myself a bit when Grimwald prayed to Dumathoin for the power of growth captured from the earth. His manner is odd in a way I only now understand, but it is his way, so any comment would be presumptuous. He then performed the Augury – after Felina had almost ordered him to do so, and the results were fairly clear: we were to go to Candlekeep, or our fundamental understanding would be flawed. I did not pray, or at least I did as much as I had done the last weeks, but I now also contemplated the needs of this little group: nature itself might be sometimes uncaring, but it is the curse and the boon of awareness that makes us care, and nature gives freely to those that ask in the right manner. Was it the way I asked? Was it why I asked? A question that could only be answered by doing. Changing my perception of nature I could learn how nature perceived me. I walked the path my aunt put me on. To embrace it was the sole way to repay my debt.

Grimwald can be so adamant about accepting ones doom, but he tried to use divine magic to lessen the light radiated by Cuura, with predictable results. It is well know that lesser magic cannot be used to cancel that of a relic, and it did so with a bang. Luckily the backlash did not really harm Grimwald – his intention had been for the best. Cuura, however, started to ask Felina and myself some questions about deities, and Sune in particular. What I knew of this it seemed an unlikely match, but... but... it did make some sense, and it also promised a better path for her to follow. Not to kill, but to stand first and foremost. An aspect of her dreams which I could much more relate to.

Kendalan and Cuura proposed we should travel through some old, elements-carved, rock field. Grimwald informed us it was an ancient volcano residue, which he thought did not quite belong here, but such occurrences are not unknown in a world like ours. Only a few minutes in the elf spotted a dust cloud gaining on us and went in hiding. At most two horsemen, one it turned out – a scout of the Zhentarim. Formerly from a tribe not unlike Cuura, he came to warn her that the Captain had sworn revenge on her. No doubt he has all of us on his list, but Cuura seemed to be on his number one spot. Relieved that we did not need to fight it only now became apparent that Nethander had slept though all of this. Not slept: poisoned! Grimwald confirmed this, but there was little he could do. Kendalan found half a dozen other needles embedded in the coach: we had been lucky that only one found its mark.

Zhae told us that he had been here before with his master. He had waited here for a day as his master went somewhere. Felina proposed we could try to find where he went, but Zhae had no inkling of the reason or location. Still men needed water, so water we followed. We were spotted, tracked, studied with malice, focus, and design. Felina cowered in the arms of her sergeant, while even Cuura felt unwelcome and wished to leave. To me, however, the threat felt unreal in comparison to the Ninja or the Banshee, and Grimwald, Zhae, and the others decided to continue. A sword dancing menace, a morphing shape, and other shapes we could not easily discern. The mental barrage increased as we crested a low hill and – gone. The pressure on our minds vanished like yesterdays dreams. We had found a dell with a shallow lake in the middle, surrounded by twelve simple stone 'seats' and several flat areas where our trackers could still find traces of combat moves, but little of blood.

Twelve master, twelve different styles, a meeting of equals? We will need to study more!