

The story of Chi Si Chen (Autumn Silver Reed)

Chapter 32: Wood Woes (1st ride of Flamerule 1370)

Dawn felt a bit surreal, as so much had already occurred. Nethander and Felina joined us – they had been lucky to miss the encounter – and we had a nice breakfast together. Was it me or were the guards looking oddly at us, or were they just staring at me? With the Way in harmony with the Elements, it would be best to make sure that I kept this internal balance. Would I be strong enough to handle that? Wasn't more asked? And why did Nethander feel so cold. I better pay attention to what Felina was telling.

Our honored leader had used our defeat of the dragon to get the mayor to promise us cold iron and other material needed by Grimwald. That silenced our esteemed craftsman, it even evoked a rare smile. But that success was not what Felina wanted to inform us about. It seems the mayor has done something rather stupid: he has sold the logging rights of the forests west of Nashkel! Now the poor state of the trees on the east take a totally different meaning.

I could not but conclude that the mayor must be truly desperate to tell this to a relative stranger, and he must be fearing what would happen if this became public. Still that was a matter for later – first we must ensure that the populace will not pay the price for his extravagance. It was a pity that some of us saw the reward as reason to intervene, but if profit followed the path of righteousness, then who was I to complain.

According to Marian the woods west were left alone for two reasons: the first was that Fey were active there, the second that in the hills behind many cruel creatures roamed. We traveled there sans Grimwald who wanted to beat the iron while it was still cold, and the traces of the Fey were everywhere – at least to Kendalan and me. The others learned how to see, and near the end of the day we finally met one who was 'here' enough so we could discuss current matters.

Nethander was so nice as to offer her a drink, which she reciprocated, and after she told us about the 'Old One' and his general location, we fell asleep due to the dryad's drink. Awaking we found ourselves bedecked in flowers and our weapons safely put some distance away. This would have been a nuisance if danger had been close, but now it was only something that made us smell nice.

After some travel and searching we found the local lord of this forest – an Elder Ghaleb Dhur. Actually we had been walking over him for some time – he's as big as a small hill. Oddly enough he totally focused on Zhae! I had to admit I rather enjoyed it, it was a bit like grandmother questioning Moon's Mirror, but contrary to my sister Zhae might actually have learned something. The creature did actually listen to our requests for information, and told us to retrace our path to the meeting place of the twelve, and pay attention this time.

Nethander and Zhae could not think of anything else but the fact they had missed something in the cave, but I have been trained to pay attention to language and I was quite convinced it talked about the route, not the destination. Indeed when we returned Kendalan and I discovered somebody had cast a blight on the forest, limiting its growth to less than needed by the mines. Add a decade and we saw the end result.

The cave and its access had lost its special aura. No more shadows. It told us something about the masters, but also about the traps. Politics, deadly and twisted. I wonder how many masters are still alive?