

City of the Lost God

Part 12 – Elections & Artefacts

“You are what you are child,” she said, “nothing can now change that, but I can help you to control the urges. With time you’ll be able to choose when and how you’ll feed.”



Muzzie only had a few things to pack, but he’d been doing it noisily for a while to emphasise he was serious.

“It’s day ten Lilleth,” he said, “day eleven if you count the evening we arrived.”

“We owe Annun our lives. Give it today and if Sajaha is still messing around I’ll leave with you tomorrow.”

It sounded reasonable to Muzzie, so he nodded at her and put his bag beside their bed roll.

“I want a promise you’ll leave tomorrow,” he added, “or I’m carrying you out of here right now !” Sajaha had been reading from his book and moving around the Ring of Volkin, but since they’d retrieved the maps, nothing had happened. There had been no ground tremors, no more strange noises, nothing. To both of them it looked as though Sajaha had no idea where to look next and Annun had said nothing in the last two days.

“I promise,” she replied, “but it would have been nice to get that bonus out of him.”

To get a full day on the ring they arrived at the waggon before first light and were eating breakfast as the first ultra violet glow hit the rift.

“I’m actually getting to like this again.” Said Muzzie.

Breakfast was the same every morning, fresh bread and dried meat, but they both knew the waggon handler who made their meals was doing his best with what he had. There was no time for Muzzie to have his usual second helping, as Sajaha was beckoning them to join him.

“I won’t be sorry to see the back of him.” Muttered Lilleth.

“Me neither.”

As they walked to yet another barrow it was Lilleth who gave Sajaha their decision.

“Win or lose we’re going home in the morning and I’d advise you and Annun to come with us.”

The answer surprised them and even Annun looked shocked.

“My dear girl I’m not stupid. I have no wish to be the next victim of whatever phantom guards the ring. If we find nothing today, I’ll order the waggon packed and we’ll all leave in the morning.”

The barrow Sajaha took them to had been thoroughly excavated; there were several deep pits around the outside. Muzzie dug into one of the pits with his sword and brought a lizard of some kind scurrying out onto the surface. It may have been harmless, but Lilleth quickly killed it with an arrow to the head. Once they were certain there was nothing likely to attack the sorcerer, Sajaha had Annun place the stand and book in front of the barrow.

“Silence is important here,” said Sajaha, “a wrong word may spoil the invocation.”

Muzzie sank to the ground, sitting himself cross legged, while Lilleth kept standing with her bow handy. Sajaha began reading the book, but unlike other times it was like a song, with Annun joining in for the chorus. All of it was in a language Muzzie had never heard before, but a few of the words stirred memories in his mind. As the sorcerer sang the final line the ground began to tremble. The tremors built up, a few of the larger bushes started to sway from side to side, a few half toppled stones lost their fight with gravity and tumbled over. The top of the barrow seemed to split in two

and then everything was lost in a cloud of fine dust. Muzzie got up and ran to see if Sajaha was in trouble, he was after all hired as a guard.

"It didn't quite work as I imagine it was supposed to." Said Sajaha.

As the dust settled they could see the barrow had split in two, the sides had collapsed to reveal a passage going down at a steep angle. At the bottom of the passage was a huge set of stone doors, but just the top half of the doors were visible.

"It's the grave robbers," said Lilleth, "all their holes stopped the barrow from splitting cleanly."

At least a ton of loose gravel and stones had fallen into the passage, most of it landing against the doors at the bottom. Muzzie crunched his way over the loose material, often looking perilously close to falling. As he got to the doors he picked up a large rock, only to have the hole instantly fill up.

"It'll all need removing." He shouted.

Muzzie looked at the rubble, quickly assessing the amount to be removed and the relative inexperience of the people available to shift it.

"If we all work at it, we should easily get the doors cleared by early afternoon."

"Let's get started then," said Sajaha, "and Annun, get the waggon handlers and tell them to bring all the shovels."

Muzzie started back up, but it was like trying to climb loose shale and he kept slipping back. Lilleth had to throw him a rope and help pull him back to the surface. By the time Muzzie was stood next to Lilleth again, Sajaha had gone and Annun was on his way back to the main camp.

"It's going to mess up our time table." Said Lilleth.

Muzzie would have happily left that morning, but now, there was just something about the look of those huge double doors that almost mesmerised him.

"It depends," he said, "on what we find behind those doors."

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Olvir had been getting used to the good life and being back out on the rift wasn't pleasing him. They'd found something, the crazy sorcerer and his party of misfits. He'd seen the dust go up and then the manservant head off to the camp site. Guild warriors lived well compared to many, but Olvir had only owned two sets of clothes and a bed roll. He'd often had to go several days without food and been forced to drink from rivers. It had all seemed so normal, but now he was used to three decent meals a day, clean clothes, bathing and sleeping in a soft bed. The sex was good too, though Silsk wasn't as good a lover as she liked to think. The dark angel was far too vain and selfish to be a truly memorable lover.

"Shall I try to move closer sir?"

Aeony had provided them with seven fairly good observers from the slums. They were all keen on the pay and quite liked being away from the City and the plague. The only problem was that they all wanted to do more than just sit and watch.

"No. Just watch and report anything unusual to me." He replied.

Silsk had become rather excited when the observers had reported that something had been found, something that looked like pages of a metal book. She'd immediately sent Olvir to take charge of the operation and he'd said goodbye to his daily bath and decent bed. Olvir wanted that life back and he wanted that life to carry on for a very long time. Silsk had given him a single order and he was going to obey it to the letter.

"Watch them until they leave," she'd told him, "then follow them, kill them all on the road back to the City and bring whatever they've found back to me."

He had seven highly motivated and greedy slum dwellers, all with past experience as cut throats and assassins. Olvir thought that killing Sajaha and his party would be an easy order to accomplish.

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Babaef was in his garden when the messengers arrived. Three of them, all dressed in the uniform of guards of the guild and all smiling furiously at him. Babaef didn't really need to read the scroll that was being offered to him, to know what it contained, but he did anyway.

'..... the honourable and most gracious..... have pleasure in informing Babaef..... That today you were selected to be Head of the Guild of Sorcerers, Seers and Necromancers, by a free and open election process by your peers.....'

The scroll went on for pages, but Babaef never really saw the words past that point, he was just pretending to read it all, he knew it was expected of him. The old Babaef, the Babaef from before the visitation would have mumbled a thank you and spent the rest of the day anxiously wondering if he was up to the job. The new Babaef understood that his new role included control of salaries and staff stipends, the three guards in his garden wanted to please him.

"Perhaps you'd like to see my garden," he said, "or have a drink?"

They spent some time looking at his plants and taking an interest in the place where the visitation took place. Nothing would now grow in that spot, but Babaef decided to tell them nothing about the event itself.

"Do you have plans for the guild?" He was asked.

It was nice to see three faces, all hanging on his every word. Babaef had been given his instruction by Nigon and they were after all the avowed aims and goals of the guild for the last ten millennia.

"I'm going to reinstate a few old values and traditions." He said.

They liked that, it was safe ground. Everyone looked back on the past as some sort of golden age, even if the truth didn't back up those beliefs.

"This will be our time," he continued, "the time when we will finally harness the powers within the catacombs for our own use."

The three guards gave him a spontaneous cheer, every new head of the guild had announced that his or her tenure was going to be the golden age of the guild. He knew that none of them really believed it would happen. There were a few of the old time sorcerers with wild eyes and tales of invoking the Lords of Chaos when they were younger. They were all famous for being crazy people and most were, though Babaef often thought old Chillan knew something about real power.

"Yes thank you; please give my message of acceptance to Pinthrad." He said.

The guards were going, one with some fruit he'd admired in the garden. Babaef wondered how the guild would react when they realised he really did intend to use the dark forces within the catacombs? Babaef would get himself settled in the position as head of the guild, give them all the comfort of believing he was harmless. Then he'd invite Chillan the Ancient to join him in his workroom and together they'd work on releasing Nigon from his prison.

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"Are you looking for company tonight?" Asked Vella.

The bar customer looked at her a little oddly, Vella had never earned extra by selling sexual favours, but she was very attractive, the customer leant towards her. She'd chosen someone who wasn't a regular; Vella didn't want word of what she was doing becoming known.

"Do you have anywhere we can go?" He asked.

Sara was busy without Muzzie to help, insanely busy. Vella had been left to run the front of the bar, while Sara dealt with orders for food, or anyone wanting company. Vella escorting a gentleman to the rooms at the back wasn't unusual, but providing the service itself was.

"There are rooms out the back," she said, "they're clean and they only cost a little extra."

He was a little drunk and quite old, but Vella liked the customer, he'd been nice to her all evening. She supposed that caring for the clients was a bit of an occupational hazard for the girls who usually looked after those kind of needs.

"You're very pretty," he said, "how much is this going to cost me?"

Pretty girls charged more, it seemed very unfair to Vella. After all the same amount of work was required and some guys said the plain girls tried harder. Vella had heard the words spoken by many girls in the bar, she just adjusted the price a little, she didn't want to scare him off with high prices.

"Three silver for the best two hours of your life," she said, "anything extra we can talk about when we're there."

He smiled and put a purse on the table and took out a few coins, they came to more than she'd asked for, but he pressed them all into her hands. Vella gave him a soft kiss on the lips and holding his hand, took him through Muzzie's rooms and into the back alley. There was an unpleasant stench coming from the old stables, where the animals were kept, but people in the City were used to strange stench.

"We need to go through the stables," she said, "but then the rooms are nice and clean."

The customer seemed happy, still smiling as she held his hand and led him across the straw in the stable. He was still smiling as Caspian hit him over the head with an ironwood club. Vella backed away a few paces and sat on the straw, hands over her eyes. But she could still hear the man almost crying as Caspian hit him again and again.

"It'll be easier than getting another animal into our rooms." Caspian had told her.

It may have been easier, but the Shuud hadn't been sat in the bar being nice to her all night. Caspian had changed since they'd returned from the upper dome, he'd become hardened, even his eyes didn't look quite the same.

"Vella, get up. I can't do this on my own!" He was shouting.

There was a winch on the ceiling for lifting boxes and Caspian was fixing the ropes to the man's feet.

"You have to help me Vella!"

It was impossible for Caspian to winch him up alone, so she got to her feet and helped pull on the ropes. The man's eyes fluttered.

"Oh Casp, he's still alive."

"Not for much longer, come on, pull harder."

In tears she pulled until his head was about two feet off the ground and Caspian was about to put a deep wide bowl under him. As Caspian dug a blade deep into the man's throat she felt faint and had to turn away, then the smell of hot blood hit her and she vomited into the straw. It definitely wasn't easier than killing an animal.

"You have to help me Vella, or we'll be caught."

Reluctantly she helped him lift the heavy bowl and pour the hot blood into two metal jugs, both with stoppers to seal the contents from the air. They knew the blood would congeal, but it would still be runny enough to throw on the wall of his old room. Caspian then released the lock on the winch, allowing the now bloodless body to fall to the ground.

"I'll get the gate." She said.

Muzzie had the stables gates strengthened the previous year and several extra bolts fitted. Vella had opened the gates for deliveries, so she'd become quite good at pulling the heavy bolts back. Opening the gate a few inches she looked into the alley, it was completely deserted. She returned to Caspian. "Did you strip him of anything of value?" She asked.

Caspian looked at her in disbelief.

"Casp! A stripped body in the alley is just another robbery. A body with valuables left on it is a mystery. We don't want to give the local gossips a mystery."

"Sorry Vella, you're right."

Vella didn't like stripping the man of his final bit of dignity, but it had to be done. By the time they dragged the body over to the door, it was naked and already starting to get covered in dirt. Vella took another look along the alley before they dragged the body out and threw it against a wall, just a few yards away. Vella bolted the gates again and looked at Caspian.

"Never again Casp," she said, "or we're through!"

"We won't need to do this again."

"We don't kill anyone else. I want your promise."

"I promise."

Vella rolled the man's clothes up into a small bundle and threw them into the bins of rotting food waste, no one ever looked in there. The purse containing a few silver coins she decided to keep. The two metal jugs they placed in a dark corner, ready to be picked up and taken to the Dome once Vella finished her shift.

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They'd cleared the rubble in fairly good time and Sajaha was stood in front of the doors and looking for a way to open them.

"So this is it," asked Muzzie, "the final hole in the ground?"

Annun was helping his master examine the doors, but he took the time to reply.

"Yes, what we seek is behind these doors."

Muzzie knew there was no point in asking what the object or treasure was, he'd been asking Annun for days and still knew nothing.

"It might just need brute force." Said Lilleth.

Every face in the group looked in her direction.

"The doors," she said, "we've all spent quite some time examining the doors, maybe we just need to push them open?"

Sajaha snorted at her and began moving his hands over the doors and intoning in various long dead languages. The doors were still firmly locked and Muzzie decided that it was time he took some kind of decisive action. Walking back to main camp he found the bag of metal spikes they'd used before.

"You'll need this."

Lilleth had the hammer, a nice large solid hammer, it looked very old and well used. Together they walked back to the doors and faced Sajaha.

"Time for us to try." Said Muzzie.

"You have no idea what is behind the doors," said Annun, "there may be traps, poison gas, you don't know."

"The day is two thirds gone," said Lilleth, "we'd like to try."

Sajaha merely nodded at her and walked to one side of the doors.

"We should move further away master."

Annun escorted the sorcerer away from the doors, until he thought they were far enough away to avoid any traps that might be set off.

“Nothing like showing a bit of confidence, is there ?” Muttered Muzzie.

Lilleth held the spike in the slight gap between the doors, while Muzzie hit it with the hammer. The spike started to widen the gap, pieces of stone breaking off and flying away like angry imps.

“Look away while I hit it, or you’ll lose an eye.” Said Muzzie.

As the spike went in the door started to crack, a single great crack that started at the spike and was reaching towards the top of the door.

“Another nearer the top.” Said Lilleth.

Lilleth placed another spike a foot from the top of the door and Muzzie gave it an enormous hit with the hammer. A slither of stone hit his arm and drew blood, but he ignored it and hit the spike again.

“It’s going Lilleth, it’s going.”

They both stepped back as a piece of door broke off and fell backwards into the chamber beyond. Giving up on the spikes Muzzie started using the hammer on the door itself, concentrating on the areas around the cracks. Eventually there was a pile of rubble at his feet and a hole in the door big enough to climb through.

“I need a lamp.” He called up to Annun.

Annun came down with a lamp and Sajaha, all of them trying to look into the murk behind the doors.

“I’ll climb in, I’m lightest.” Said Lilleth glaring at Muzzie.

Muzzie groaned inwardly, knowing she’d use that line on him for years, if they survived that long. He helped her through the hole and passed her the lamp.

“It’s clean in here, once you get away from the door.” She called.

Muzzie could hear her moving around and became impatient, dragging himself through the hole in the door, quickly followed by Annun. Even the sorcerer scrambled through, constantly moaning about the damage to his clothes. They found Lilleth looking at a set of thick metal doors about ten yards down the passage, these door were open.

“The stone doors have no hinges,” she said, “I looked. The only way past them is to dig them out or break through them.”

“How about these doors ?” Asked Sajaha.

Lilleth led them through and shone the lamp on the inside of the doors.

“Solid metal, good strong hinges and four heavy bolts on the inside,” she said, “If these had been closed we’d have needed to tunnel under them.”

They all knew the problem, time was against them. No one knew what or who the beast of the Ring of Volkin was, but it brutally killed anyone who remained too long.

“We could bury the passage again and come back in a few months.” Said Muzzie.

“We’re being watched,” said Lilleth, “they’re very good and keep their distance, but they know where we are. If we go they’ll dig the passage out again.”

Muzzie had noticed the watchers, but it was obviously news to Sajaha, who looked devastated by the news.

“What do you suggest ?” He asked her.

Lilleth talked to him as though he was a young child.

“We leave, we leave today !” She said.

Muzzie put his hand on her arm.

“I think Sajaha wants a suggestion that doesn’t involve leaving.”

Lilleth sat on the dusty floor and looked up at them. Slowly they all sat down and waited for her to begin.

“So you’re all going to stay?”

No one said anything, but Muzzie nodded at her for them all.

“We work all night,” she said, “get the hole in the door wider and bring in everything we are likely to need from the wagon, stack it this side of the door. We bring in everyone, including the surviving waggon handlers and then we close and bolt the metal doors.”

“Will the air stay fresh?” Asked Muzzie.

“It is fresh, it was when I climbed in, so there must be ventilation coming from somewhere.”

Sajaha folded his left foot under himself and looked content with the plan.

“Do we need the handlers,” he asked, “I could pay them off and send them back to the City?”

Muzzie couldn’t quite believe how naïve Sajaha was, he thought the sorcerer hadn’t been in close contact with many people in the City.

“The handlers aren’t bad people,” he said, “I know them as regulars in the bar. In a day they’ll be back in my bar, telling everyone about this trip. In two days you’ll have a hundred hungry hybrids, hammering on the doors, all looking for enough treasure to buy a meal.”

“Muzzie has a point.” Added Annun.

Sajaha stood up and started heading towards the hole in the doors.

“Very well,” he said, “everyone comes inside. There’s a lot to do, let’s get busy.”

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“How far can we extend the back of the house?” Asked Nethra.

They were at the back of their one room house and examining the pile of rubble where their neighbour’s house had been. The plague wasn’t all bad news, the living would have the space to spread out a little.

“About twenty feet,” said Merrick, “we can’t take all the space, our other neighbours will want to expand a little too.”

They’d known the elderly couple for a few years, yet Nethra had to think to remember the woman’s name. It was like that in the slums, everyone looked after one another, but you never got too close. Knowing them as the old folk out back had been names enough. No children, no kin had come to claim the few items of value. A few days later Merrick had spoken to the other neighbours and an eager group had pulled the house down. Even the planks and wooden posts would be recycled in the new extensions.

“I want a proper bedroom,” said Nethra, “no more coming straight in the front door to where we sleep.”

Merrick picked up a few of the better looking planks and began tying them together.

“We’ve a little money now,” he said, “I’ll get a basement dug out. Everything in my old trunks can go in the basement and we should have room for a bedroom and somewhere for a bath.”

Nethra beamed at him, keeping clean in the slums was a constant problem. Everyone had the perfume of the slums about them, or the stench as the honest called it.

“Nothing fancy,” said Merrick, “no hot water, just a tub you can fill from the river.”

Nethra hadn’t expected hot water, or anyway to drain it. A tub full of river water would keep her clean for a week and then she’d find a way to drain it into the street.

“Podd knows a few good builders,” said Merrick, “I’ll start them building and digging tomorrow.”

For a girl off the rifts who had grown up in a tent made of animal skin it was going to be a palace. She leant close to Merrick and told him how she was going to show her gratitude, enjoying the way his pupils dilated.

“What is Galla saying about the plague.” He asked

“She thinks it will peak in the next few days. About eight in every hundred in the slums will die, most of them adults.”

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Caspian and Vella left Muzzie’s with a metal jug each, they weighed less than they’d thought. Caspian brought quite a bit of clean water to Vella, so taking jugs back the other way wasn’t a strange sight.

“Suppose it needs to be fresh ?” Asked Vella.

“Then I’ll buy another Shuud from Sara.”

They passed the Guild of Sorcerers building, Caspian nodding to one of the guards and eventually they walked past the main entrance to the towers and came to the secret entrance. Vella was so used to using the portal that she made the sign on the wall to start the rippling purple hole in reality that would take them into the Dome.

“If anyone asks, tell them it’s your favourite bath oil in the flasks.” Caspian said.

There was no one to ask and in a few minutes they were in their old bedroom. Caspian had already arranged for a heavy tapestry to be laid over the rear wall. A portrayal of the final battle to drive the hated humans from the City.

“Just to add a bit of interest to the bare walls.” Caspian had told Adamaz.

Not that Adamaz really cared, the plague was the only thing that seemed to interest the ancient librarian these days. Vella sat on a comfortable chair and looked around.

“I like the way you’ve arranged the room.” She said.

It looked like a lounge room, a room where they relaxed and read, perhaps even made love on the sofa below the windows.

“I’ll pour the first jug.”

Caspian took the jug over to the wall and folded back a section of the colourful tapestry. The stopper had been glued in place by the blood, but Caspian soon had it off. He put the lip of the jug against the wall and attempted to pour the blood onto the wall, but a crust of congealed blood had formed on the surface.

“Use this.” Said Vella, offering him a knife.

The crust smelled bad as he cut it away, but the blood below still looked fresh and fluid. Caspian poured it onto the wall and they both heard the doorway opening once more. While he poured Vella opened the second jug and brought it over to him. It took both jugs for the door to open fully.

“The light globe is still on.”

Caspian entered the room first and apart from the missing skeleton, it looked the same as the first time they had looked at the small library. The books were all there, the tables, even the scribbled notes Caspian had forgotten to pick up. They quickly ran to the other rooms, without bothering to open the blinds, just relying on the chinks of lights coming through gaps in the ancient blinds.

“For some reason I thought they’d be gone.” Said Vella.

The beautiful statues were still there, the life size Genova was exactly where Caspian had left it.

“Let’s check upstairs.” Said Vella.

They climbed the spiral stairs and at the top was a solid wall, it was as though there had never been a doorway there. It was what they'd expected to find, but it still upset them. They descended the stair and came back to the library, Caspian picked up one of the old human books.

"We still have these," said Caspian, "and I'll learn how to read them. The statues too are priceless. One day we'll find a way back into the upper dome Vella."

"Do we need to?" She asked.

She saw his face crumple and hated upsetting him.

"We have enough gold to move to Tandalla and live like royalty," she said, "we can take the books, perhaps even find a way to take the statues. Do we need to stay in this awful City?"

Caspian sat on the chair and looked around the room.

"Awful City!? This is the only real home I've ever known," he said, "Adamaz wants me to become head librarian one day, we live better than most in the City and we're under the protection of the dark angels."

They both knew that what he'd left unsaid was the most important thing. It might be two, or three thousand years until Caspian became head librarian and by then Vella would be dead, dust and forgotten. Adamaz might give Caspian the blessing of immortality, but they both knew he wasn't going to give it to a barmaid.

"Is that really what you want Casp, to be head librarian?"

"More than anything in the world."

He moved to the door and locked it, then he took off her dress and led her to sofa under window and started to kiss her neck.

"It's not as if we're in danger now," he said, "if we were, or if we are again, then we can join a pilgrim caravan to Quron or perhaps Tandalla."

He undressed and lay next to her, gently fondling her breasts.

"How do you intend to look for a way back into the upper dome." She asked.

As his fingers entered her, she tensed, holding them still for a few seconds. Then she relaxed and felt his fingers expertly work on parts of her body even she had never seen.

"When Muzzie returns," he said, "I will hire him to accompany me on a search of the cellars beneath the towers. There must be a portal down there."

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"I just feel there's something missing inside me." Said Tarin.

Louelle the seer had been surprised to see Tarin approaching her camp, she thought no one knew the position of any of her regular camp sites. The weapon smith had appeared calm though and she kept her guards close.

"It's a miracle you're alive at all." She said.

The seer gave her guards the secret signal, the one that meant she wasn't quite sure if Tarin was quite as harmless as he seemed. With a Moullay hybrid who'd survived being almost diced, she wasn't going to take any chances. Tarin put his head in his hands and wept, loud and uncontrollably.

"I have needs now, appetites I've never had before." He said.

"Would you like to tell me of these needs," she asked, "it is after all, the reason you sought me out?"

Louelle lay back in her chair, knowing that Tarin could jump one of two ways and knowing one way would mean his death. He sat cross legged on the ground, close enough to be heard, but far enough away to keep her guards happy.

"I sometimes go to the slums seeking company, female company." Began Tarin.

“That’s understandable, you’ve been alone for a long time, perhaps too long.”

Tarin moved around uncurling his legs and stretching them out in front of him. He had the look of someone who would rather be somewhere else.

“The last time was a few days ago,” he continued, “and I had the urge to kill her after we’d coupled.”

“Did you give in to the urge Tarin ?”

Louelle was far from harmless herself and she knew the moment was approaching. She felt for one of the more brutal spells, the kind she rarely used.

“Tell me Tarin, did you kill the woman ?” She shouted.

“Yes.”

Louelle held the spell in her mind, the one that hopefully would incinerate the weapon smith if he attacked her.

“That isn’t all you did is it ?” She asked

“No.”

She waited while he looked at the ground, saying nothing for several minutes.

“How did you find me ?” She asked.

“I don’t know. I just knew where you’d be.”

Her guards looked anxious, a lot of time and trouble went into making sure very few people knew where the seer would be, far too many wanted her dead.

“The woman Tarin, what else did you do ? There’s no point in seeing me if you don’t tell me.”

“I consumed part of her.”

“Which part did you eat ?”

Another long silence with Tarin tucking his legs under himself and trying to fit himself into as tiny a space as possible.

“Tell me ! Which part of her did you eat ?”

“Part of her heart. Just some tubes, the muscle was too tough to bite through.”

He was telling the truth, Louelle could tell, she could always tell. The moment was approaching and she prepared to launch the spell at him.

“Did you enjoy it ?” She asked.

“What ?”

“Don’t be a fool Tarin, I know you enjoyed the sex, you’re a male. Did you enjoy eating some of her ?

Tell me the truth, you know I can see lies.”

His eyes glared at her and his muscles tensed, her guards looked to her for a signal, but it never came.

“Yes.” Said Tarin.

He was crying again, but the rage in him had passed, exorcised, at least for a while.

“Come here,” she said, “sit at my feet, I’m too old to keep shouting at you.”

Tarin moved to a spot right in front of her and sat on the ground. Louelle put her hand out for his and was pleased that he willingly held her hand.

“First things first,” she said, “where is the body now ?”

He looked at the ground again.

“No more long pauses Tarin,” she said, “answer my question.”

“Podd can’t cope with the plague bodies,” he said, “they dig a pit to the west of the City every evening now for the bodies, it’s covered over with soil the next morning. I put her body in with the others, it’s gone forever.”

“So part of your mind still thinks clearly, good.”

Louelle rubbed his hand.

“Tarin, you can’t provoke chaos the way you did and expect to remain unchanged. You’re not the only inhabitant of the City to feed in the slums and you won’t be the last.”

“Then I’m cursed to be a killer ? I’ll take my own life before I’ll become some kind of ghoul.”

Louelle knew the feelings he felt would pass, she remembered Adamaz having similar thoughts, until he’d learned to control the appetite.

“You are what you are child,” she said, “nothing can now change that, but I can help you to control the urges. With time you’ll be able to choose when and how you’ll feed. You’ll even be able to bed a woman and resist the urge to kill.”

Tarin was in tears yet again, which was pleasing in some ways, but was also becoming tiresome.

“Stop feeling sorry for yourself,” she said, “you invoked chaos, now you must cope with the results as best you can.”

“Can I travel with you, then you can teach me ?”

Louelle rested back in her chair, it was time for her to leave a long pause while she thought things over.

“No, the City needs a weapon smith and, thanks to your Moullay side, you are immune to the plague. I will come to the City in a few days and teach you for a while. There is a building in the old town that I use, I’m sure you’ll be able to find me.”

“Thank you, thank you.”

She rubbed his hand and looked into the grateful eyes.

“If you need to feed there are those already dying of the plague, drug addicts and others the City will not miss. I will be with you in a few days.”

Tarin stood up and bowed to her.

“Please hurry.” He said.

He ran into the scrub, heading in the direction of the City.

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The next part will be posted at the end of October