

It took about an hour before the *Fenris* docked into the Font's alcove. The ship's deck was as silent and still as the grave, its crew hypnotized by the mere presence of the place. Even the mages, who doubted that something like this even existed at first, could not deny the awe-inspiring presence that a creation of the Lord of Light possessed; it was as if the Paragons were (all) with them once again.

The waves crashed in an ivory mist upon the jagged rocks along the cliff face. The ocean roared, pounding against the stone, as though hoping to tear it down. The alcove, however, was still and serene. The waters were clear enough to see the bottom, though some ice caps had formed within it. The water only moved to give way to the *Fenris* as she approached the shore.

The gigantic cliff face was a virtual wall, barring anything from coming through. It was a wonder that it was even identifiable as the Font Garoux when there was no cave mouth from which to enter. Most would wonder if they were led to the correct location.

But keen eyes spotted the cracks in the cliff that formed a near-perfect archway, as well as four monoliths that stood vigil in the cove. Closer inspection of these large stones revealed a small carving upon each of them; Ancient alchemical symbols of Air, Fire, Water, and Earth, respectively.

They had made it. After a week of trials and tribulations, they had finally arrived.

Talis was the first to break the silence. "So... now what?"

"Aren't we supposed to...?" Skylana answered, still in awe.

"You're the ones who've been talking about it," Ryder reminded them. "You seemed to have a better idea about it than anyone else.

"Nemo," Talis called back towards the quarterdeck, "can you get us closer to those stones there? I want to inspect them." Nemo nodded and motioned Ecks to keep heading towards the monoliths, aiming for the gap between the Fire and Water symbols. Talis leaned over the bowsprit, hoping to get a better look.

A loud scraping came from below just as they neared the rocks. There was no way they could advance any further, but what progress they had made allowed the mages to get a better look at the guardian monoliths.

Skylana and Talis looked to the stones of their respective faction leaders and studied them carefully. The rocks were very weathered and had accumulated algae at the base where they met the ocean. The Paragon's symbol proudly faced the horizon, but as the mages neared it, they felt it; a small, yet very tangible, pulse of power. It was like a heart that was faintly beating, as if its body been at rest for so long that it no longer had to beat as hard anymore. They each felt a distinct beat from each monolith. From Aria's came the quickest, like children's feet scampering along the floor. Ignis' had the most potent beat; it would have some softer beats before one that resonated more strongly than the rest. The beat from Terranus' was the steadiest. The tempo never changed, never raised and never lowered; it was constant. From Nais came a more rhythmic beat. It had its own time at which it beat, going faster and slower as it pleased, but usually adhering to the waves that washed over it.

There was no mistaking it: this was the power of the Paragons.

"I think," Talis began softly, "that we need to activate each of these monoliths in order to open the gate."

"So... two spells from us each?" Skylana asked in awe.

“That sounds accurate.”

The mages stood at the stone representations of their former masters for some time. They hadn't even noticed until Hands approached and put a hand on Skylana's shoulder.

“I 'ate to interrupt such a moment, but if ye know wha' yer doin' dove, ye should do it now. We've almost lost the sun an' we don' know 'ow much time we've got for the Cap'n.”

The elf blinked, snapping out of her trance. If this needed the power of the Paragons, the power of the factions, then it made sense to perform the ritual when their magic was equal. What better time to do so than twilight?

“R-right. Talis, you know what you're going to do?”

“I've got one from Ignis and one from Aria. Do you know which of Terranus' you'll do?”

“I think so,” she whispered.

“Then it's time to open the way.”

Skylana set out to the starboard bow while Talis went portside. Ryder kept at the bow, watching the archway, wondering and hoping that this makeshift plan would work. He looked towards Skylana, who nodded towards him in preparation. Talis returned the same nod. Finally, he looked back towards Gwendolyn Gwilt, who was still staring in as much awe as they had been. Her decades-long search was finally coming to an end. Looking back, it almost seemed so simple; All she had to do was find this place with a couple of mages. He wondered why she didn't try to do so sooner.

Ryder watched Nemo grip his captain's shoulder hard. Her only response was to bite her lip, still staring in the face of her impending release. She nodded towards the three of them... and their magic began.

Talis cast his first spell on the monolith of the youngest paragon. He raised a hand in the air, letting the wind brush through his fingers. Both of his hands slowly began to swirl around each other, collecting the wind between them, and forming it into his own little gust. The more they swirled, the fiercer the it became until it transformed into a concentrated gale in the palm of his hand. Talis motioned outside the ship, and the tiny breeze erupted into a fierce whirlwind. The crew held onto their effects for dear life, preparing to catch any hold they could lest they were blown away. But Talis was calculating. He carefully aimed the gale to hit Aria's symbol with full force. When it had become a complete cyclone, he guided it to envelop the entire monolith.

The crew tensed together as he Talis kept the spell going. Their breaths stilled, waiting for something, anything to happen. No one was sure quite what anyone was doing or what was supposed to be done. All they could do was hope, but the longer nothing happened, the more anxious they grew.

Just when Talis was about to end the spell, it happened.

The alchemical symbol of Air began to glow in a brilliant golden light. Soon, the whole ship felt the pulse of Aria's monolith as it beat with newfound vigor, faster and more intense than ever. Talis let out a sigh of relief as he relaxed on the ship's edge. Ryder let out a small smile before nodding towards Skylana.

She focused on all the algae and moss that surrounded Terranus' monolith. She presented her staff in front of her, concentrating on the weeded life in the water. The crystal began to glow softly and the elf's eyes shone green.

The crew watched as the moss began to take on a life and form of its own. What began

as simple patches scattered on an ancient rock soon blossomed into a singular coat of moss. It wrapped around the monolith like swaddling clothes, covering it in a warm, grassy fuzz. A few moments after it was fully enveloped, Shade pointed out a single white bud that had begun to grow. Another crewman saw another and another. After some time, the rock was green and growing its own life, with lilies sprouting from the ancient guardian.

The green glow from the symbol of the Earth Paragon began to blaze through the moss, which parted to allow its light to escape. A steady drum-like power beat in time with Aria's. The power of Terranus had been awakened. Only two more remained.

Skylana didn't wait for Talis to begin. They had started with the youngest Paragon and so they might as well continue thusly. She set her staff down this time, and extended her arms out towards the sea. Ryder shouted back for everyone to hang on again, and the crew obliged without any protest.

With fragile grace, her arms began to sway along with the waves. When they crashed onto the shore, her arms flew forward. When they receded into the ocean, they flowed backwards. It became a strange dance until she did it so much, it was uncertain if she was following the waves or if they were following her. They moved as one, and soon, the waves grew more and more intense, rocking the ship back and forth like a cradle. She was careful, but the crew braced themselves nevertheless.

One giant wave crashed up onto the shore, drenching the monolith in its cold embrace. Skylana's eyes flashed for a brief moment, and suddenly her hands slapped together. The clap echoed in the cove and the wave turned into solid ice.

Nais' effigy stared out at them until a faint blue light emerged in the shape of an upside-down triangle, piercing through the frozen shell. Her tempo of power, as undulating as the sea, echoed throughout the cove. Skylana could hear the crew growing restless behind her and she was lying if she denied that she was just as anxious.

It was up to Talis to awaken the power of the Fire Paragon. Fortunately for him, this was his specialty. This was the first time that he could use his fire for a true purpose since he recovered it. He wished that Lady Tso could witness this triumph as he showed off the mastery of his power.

"Ignitus!" he shouted over the gale he had previously created. An inferno shot forth from his hands and coiled themselves around the final monolith. Everyone nearly had to shield their eyes from the heat, but Talis made sure the flames would not touch the *Fennis* again.

As the column of fire blazed, the whole ship waited, still as death. Just then, from behind the inferno, a piercing red light erupted outwards, dispersing flames that were directly in front of it. The powerful tempo emerged and the fire seemed to resonate along with it, joining the others and creating a primal rhythm of the elements.

All four of the monoliths had been activated with the power granted by the Paragons themselves, their alchemical symbols illuminating the dusk. The *Fennis* stood stunned by the raw divinity which these stones were emitting. As the symbols continued to glow, the spells around them seemed to weaken. The column of fire began to dim and the ice was melting quickly. The lilies started to fade and the cyclone was dying down.

But they were not, in fact, growing weaker. Instead, the monoliths were absorbing their elemental power. As it happened, each stone started to resonate more in sync with one another.

Their resonations became one and bright veins coiled and surged from the symbols, covering the rocks in their own lifeblood.

One heartbeat echoed throughout the cove, as if they had awakened the Lord of Light, himself. The power he bestowed upon his children had reawakened this guardian. Everyone felt the presence of something more than ethereal, more than spiritual, around the cove. This feeling transcended that of ghosts and spirits of the land. The very cosmos was present here.

As the monoliths pulsed, their energy began to flow into the cliff face, combining into brilliant white light. It snaked through the outlines of the rocks encircled within the massive cracked archway that overlooked the cove. As the white light began to overtake the cliff, parts of it began falling, crumbling away. But they were not falling into the cove.

They were falling inside of themselves.

One by one, stones were chipped away, opening the massive mouth of a cave. The water flowed through freely and swiftly, like beer to an ale knight. Once the stones that rested against the arched crack were removed, the cliff's gaping entrance to the Font Garoux stood before the *Fenris*.

The mages would have smiled at each other had they not been completely baffled by what lay before them. Something that they had never even heard legends about until a few nights prior now stood before them, almost inviting them within.

The crew of the *Fenris* was also dumbstruck, but for different reasons. Each of them looked back to their captain. Gwen clutched the rune around her neck and squeezed it tightly. Her face, stone-like and stoic as ever, was betrayed by her shivering anticipation. But not even a smile creased her face. This was far from over. One trial was complete, but it was not *the* trial.

Very slowly, Gwendolyn descended the steps to the main deck, then joined the mages at the forecabin. In silent reverence, she gazed at what would either be her salvation or her damnation.

"Riverwind," she breathed, "The Scroll of Alchemy is down in the cargo hold. If I do not succeed, Nemo will show you where it is... and then he'll take you all back to London, as we agreed. Your role here is at an end."

"Excuse me?" Talis questioned.

"I still have to face the wolf. As strong of a fighter as I might be, I know not what to expect... but I imagine fighting for my very soul will not be anything like physical- or even magical combat. In the event that I fail, I will be executed, and Nemo will take command of the ship. But there's nothing more for you to do. You may return to the cabin, if you wish."

"No," Skylana replied, almost indignantly. "We're coming with you."

"That will not be necessary –"

"So?"

Gwen turned to meet her gaze, full of determination and hope.

"You brought us here to help you. We got you into the Font, but that doesn't mean our work here is done."

"Even you admitted that I desire to learn more about this place," Talis added. "Do you really expect me to stay in a cabin and ignore the discovery of a lifetime? Besides, you need to know exactly how it works, don't you? Perhaps our assistance would still be valuable."

Part of Gwen didn't understand why they were still so willing to help her after how she

and her crew had treated them. They had every right to just abandon ship and cut their losses.

*Why are they staying?*

“We’re coming with you. Like it or not.”

Gwen opened her mouth to protest, but Ryder merely laughed. “You won’t win this argument. They’re both pretty stubborn when they’ve made a decision. There’s no way you’ll get them to change their mind, trust me.”

There was a small part of her that was touched by their determination, even though she hardly understood. She let out a sigh and nodded her head.

The crew of the *Fenris* looked to their captain as she descended back down to the main deck. She knew that she had to address them, too. The conversation with Ryder was still very fresh in her mind; although the crew had been made fully aware of what might be asked of them, she no longer wished to force them to do such a thing. The very thought of it now sickened her.

Gwen mounted herself up on the edge of the ship, hanging onto the ratlines she had crawled underneath not so long ago. She faced her crew, all looking to her for their next order.

“This is it, men,” she began, “The Font Garoux. I’ve spent a lifetime looking for this and you have all searched with me. Each and every one of you has been faithful to me and your loyalty shines through, despite the setbacks we have encountered. Despite the monster within me, you’ve all remained at my side and I am forever grateful for everything you have done. Never... never forget that.

“But now comes my trial by fire. You all know what awaits within. If I succeed, then you no longer have to live in fear, but if I fail... then I suppose the same outcome will happen. You will no longer live in fear of me, nor will you ever suffer my wrath again. But I cannot let this beast take control of my life anymore. I will no longer live in fear of the moonlight, and neither should any of you.

“I understand that this journey has been difficult for all of you as well as for myself. But I will ask none of you to come with me. And I hope you do not. If the worst should happen, I do not want your last memory of me to be the monster that you were trained to fight and hate. I want you to remember your Captain... as I am. Now, in this moment.

“I’ve watched all of you become the men you are today. You have proven to me time and again why you belong on this ship. You have faced dangers the likes of which you have never imagined before, and yet here you all stand. I could never trust better men to watch over my ship. All I would ask of you is –”

“Save it, Cap’n.”

Gwen turned to Hands, surprised that he had spoken out of turn. But he stood his ground, with fire in his eyes, the same as his captain’s had been.

“Even you know this speech ain’t you. You command the most feared ship in all the seven seas an’ you talk as if you will not win. All due respect, that’s horse shit.”

“None of us dare cross you because we know what you can do,” Shade piped up, “but your position was earned, and it’s not because of the wolf. That’s all you and you know it.”

“You gave us a life again... a second chance,” Seamus added. “What kind of crew would we be if we did not help you reclaim yours?”

More of the crew cheered and added to their support. Gwen bit her lower lip and clenched her fist.

“No,” she whispered. “You must remain on this ship.”

“Sorry, Cap’n,” Ecks stepped forward, “but this is the one command we will not heed.”

“You are our captain, Gwendolyn Gwilt,” Scarbeth nearly shouted. “We are your crew!”

“We are your pack!” Nicholas echoed.

“Your brothers.”

Gwen turned to the side and finally saw Nemo. He had followed her without her notice somehow. But he wrapped an arm around her shoulders, squeezing softly, yet firmly. She looked to her first mate and clutched his hand, squeezing it back. Her crew began to shout until they all sounded like one voice. She could no longer distinguish who was saying whom anymore.

“We are yours!” someone finally shouted.

“HAAAAOOOOUUUUU! HAAAAOOOOUUUUU! HAAAAOOOOUUUUU!”

The *Fenris* howled their loyalty to their captain, their alpha. The warrior’s cry rang throughout the cove, showing even the Lord of Light that this woman was a soul worth saving. Their dedication shimmered brighter than the four elemental monoliths, and it touched her.

Trying to keep up her image, Gwen did all that she could to not let a single tear fall. She had never expected them to be this fiercely loyal to her. It touched her in a way that she hadn’t felt in so long.

She had a family again.

Breathing deeply, she drew her cutlass and raised it towards the heavens, silencing her men.

“Then I swear you this, in the presence of God and the Paragons! Your Captain will return.”

Their cheers echoed in the night. Even the mages felt overwhelmed by the support and joined in, hollering and whooping their approval. Gwen motioned her cutlass towards the longboats, and soon the men were ready to descend into the cove and enter the Font Garoux.

Ryder, Skylana and Talis rushed forth towards the boat where Gwen boarded, giving her only a nod of approval. She replied with nothing but a motion towards the empty seats behind her. It didn’t take long for the rest of the crew to be ready to descend. Before they knew it, they lowered the longboats into the waters and rowed to the mouth of the cave.

The further they floated in, the stronger the magical energies felt. They had awakened something and for a brief moment, they thought that some terrible beast might actually lay inside, worse than a transformed werewolf. But the fear quickly dissolved. Perhaps Skylana felt the strongest auras, due to her full-blooded elven nature, but Talis and Ryder had also felt the comfort of the Lord of Light. Even in the deep darkness of the cave, they still felt He was present and with them.

Skylana moved towards the front of the boat, which led the others. Gwen almost gave her a look as if to keep her back.

“What are you doing?”

“Please,” she insisted. “My eyes are good in the dark.”

“You’ll still need light to see.”

“The moon’s bright enough, but there should be a torch or two lit when it’s gone.”

Skylana’s eyes were more powerful than most humans and even with Gwen’s wolf, she wagered that she might be able to see in the darkness better, at least at this point in time. Gwen

signaled the men to prepare the torches, waiting for Skylana's signal.

When they could no longer see the mouth of the cave, she gave the order for the crew to light torches. Talis offered some light of his own, but Nemo halted him.

"Just in case," was all he said. Talis harrumphed and sat back in the boat. He knew that they wanted to keep his magic in reserve in the event it was needed to subdue Gwen. But truth be told, he was getting tired of hearing about the possibility of failure. He trusted that if Gwendolyn Gwilt was powerful enough to defeat one of the most feared Draco commanders, then she could defeat a simple wolf. She had trained her crew to do the same, so why wouldn't she be able to?

At last, Skylana found a dry spot to leave the boats. The crew poured forth, helping each other out and pressed forward, with her leading Gwen and the rest of the crew. The cavern was winding, but navigable. What surprised them was how clean it smelled. They expected something rotten to have been here, but this cavern had been sealed until just recently. It made sense that nothing would have molded over. Nothing would have polluted the water within. Whatever life that lay within this cave was pure and untainted.

They traveled for what seemed like an eternity in those caverns, but eventually, Skylana stopped advancing, halting the entire ensemble.

"Put out your torches," she ordered.

"What for?" one of the crewmen shouted back.

"You won't be needing them anymore."

One by one, the torches were hesitantly extinguished, but by the time the last one faded out, they realized what Skylana meant. A light from ahead illuminated the rest of the path for them. It seemed almost like said light was brighter than that which their torchlight provided. Gwen took over as the leader and silently bade her men to move forward.

The path opened up to a gigantic cavern. As Skylana had stated, there was no more need for torchlight; littered around the cavern walls were specks that softly lit the cavern. It was still rather dim, but it provided more light around the whole cavern than the torches would have.

On the far end of the cavern was a large pool of water about a hundred feet across. From what little light they could get, the water was pure and clear, allowing them to see the bottom of the pond. No life existed within. No fish, no algae, not even a speck of cave debris could be seen in there. All that lay within was the water and the rock formation that contained it.

Gwen stood, still as the waters she stared at. Her crew emerged from behind to explore the rest of the cavern (though there was little else to discover), but she continued to stare into the clear pool, almost unable to move out of uncertainty.

"What happens now?" Nemo asked her.

"I... I suppose I need to bathe in them," she nearly stammered, still amazed that she was actually in the Font.

"I don't think it's that simple."

Everyone turned to Talis, who had taken out the page from Nais' tome and huddled near a patch of illuminated cave wall to see the page better. "We need to wait."

"For what?" Nemo asked.

"According to the page, there's supposed to be moonlight that shines through and charge the waters. Once that happens, then you will be able to bathe in them."

“Well when is that supposed to happen?” Gwen anxiously demanded.

“The moon’s not near its apex yet,” Ryder commented. “When you’re a werewolf, you don’t turn once the sun sets, right? You turn once the moon has gained enough power. I imagine that at midnight, it will be at its most powerful.”

“Tha’s all well an’ good,” Hands interjected, “but where the hell’s it gonna shine from? There ain’t no place it can get in here!”

“Maybe one will form,” Skylana theorized. “This place is alive. I know that sounds strange, but it knows that someone has come to utilize its power... it wants to help. When it’s ready, I think we’ll know.”

The crew were hardly reassured by that, but there was little other choice. Gwen swallowed hard and nodded. “I’ve waited twenty years already. What’s another couple of hours? We wait.”

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As expected, the waiting turned out to be the most difficult part. No one could sit still while they waited for something to happen. Some of the crew took out whetstones and sharpened their blades. Others took out a deck of cards and played their own little pirate games. While most of them seemed focused on their own little activity or task, they were ready to quickly engage in another if need be. Everyone tried to relax, but the uncertainty of everything forbade them to.

Meanwhile, Talis explored every inch of the Font Garoux. The entire place fascinated him with what mysteries it had to offer. He brought out one of his journals and scribbled as many notes as he could, detailing the patterns of the bioluminescence around the cavern, which turned out to be tiny little worms. He didn’t know whether or not they naturally or magically emitted that light, but it intrigued him either way. He wanted to take a sample and study it for his own purposes, but he was advised against taking anything as of yet. They still had no idea how the Font worked and they did not wish to risk the possibility of disturbing anything and ruining the ritual.

Ryder and Skylana watched Talis examining the Font, but the two of them sat with the majority of the crew. They informed them about Talis’ wonder with the caverns and that there was no malicious intent behind it.

“He thinks that its power might be harnessed so that others can be helped,” Ryder explained. “But sometimes, he just doesn’t know that some things should be kept as they are.”

“Some things shouldn’t be tampered with,” Crow agreed as he began to collect the cards and distributed dice to the men. He offered the two to play with them, but they respectfully declined.

“I get what he’s trying to do, though,” Skylana chimed in, “and I do agree with him. The sole purpose of this place is to help werewolves revert to themselves. To lift their curse.”

“Didje forget wha’ ‘appens when ye don’ win, dove?” Hands asked.

“No, I didn’t, but I don’t think that it would benefit anyone if it was constantly locked away.”

“How could you even get it anywhere else?” Shade asked. “It’s somewhat difficult to move an entire cave across the Channel.”

“Talis thinks that the cave might have some of the properties,” she explained. “If he can

take a fragment, then he might be able to enchant any body of water with its same properties.”

“But that’s merely a theory,” Ecks chimed in.

“Everythin’ that’s happened so far has been only theories,” Nicholas argued.

The debate continued for some time. Its mere purpose was only to serve as a distraction and to help pass the time. Others sat away from the water’s edge near the cavern walls. Scarbeth drew the whetstone across his blades over and over again, watching his former crew mingle with what would have been easy targets. He had tried this whole journey to behave as his captain wished, but every day was a challenge. His blade was whetted harder and harder with each passing stroke, still wishing that it could be their heads instead.

“Ain’t gonna help much,” Zachary finally sighed.

“I know.”

“Then why do it?”

Scarbeth pursed his lips together and shook his head, his eyes drawing back to the sword. “If I don’, then I will go after ‘em.”

“They ain’t all that bad, y’know,” Seamus assured, finally putting his sword away.

“An’ ‘ow many mages made us think the same thing?”

“If the Cap’n trusts them, then can’t you just trust her judgment?”

“Ye don’ think I tried?” he snapped back at Seamus.

“I don’ actually.”

Scarbeth’s sharpening ceased and he carefully put the stone away in his pouch. Staring at the Irishman, he leaned back against the cavern wall and smirked.

“I s’pose tha’s a fair assessment.” Both Zachary and Seamus glanced at each other out of sheer surprise. They were so used to anger coming from him that acquiescence to his own faults seemed so contradictory. “But Cap’n’s word is law, right?”

With hollowed eyes, he glanced over to where Gwendolyn was, sitting calmly at the water’s edge, waiting and hoping for something to happen. Cross-legged and relaxed, her eyes remained closed and her torso was perfectly aligned. Gwen couldn’t remember the last time she had rested and meditated. Nais had suggested it once to help quell her anger when she was much younger. It helped, but now she used it only to calm herself down, which she didn’t need to do in so long. But the past few days had been incredibly hectic. If she had any hope of surviving, she needed a clear head.

Gwen didn’t know how long she was focusing for, but she heard quiet footsteps approach her after quite some time.

“You may approach, Nemo.”

A small snicker of laughter came and soon enough, first mate and captain sat side by side.

“You doin’ well?” he asked.

“Honestly?” she responded, still with her eyes closed. “I do not know if you would call it ‘well’, but I know I am better than before.”

“It’s a start.” Finally, Gwen took a deep breath and opened her eyes. “Do you know that you can do this yet?”

To her, it was a strange question for him to ask. He had never doubted her once and now if he was asking if she did.

“I have no choice. I must do this.”

“Right, but that’s not what I asked. I asked if you think you can.”

“I…”

Before Gwen could think of any answer, a bright light caught the corner of her eye. Looking towards the pond, a sliver of light was shining down onto the pool. At the roof, somehow, a hole had manifested itself and began to grow, allowing the moonlight to pour into the cavern. Once the beam hit the surface of the water, the entire pool slowly began to glow in a heavenly light, making the cavern almost as bright as day. Everyone had ceased their activities and rushed to the edge of the pool, where Gwen and Nemo stood almost bewildered. The water almost seemed to be absorbing the moon’s power until the entire pond itself was awash in light. Eventually, it seemed as if there was no water left in it and all that stood in front of them was a celestial abyss.

Everyone was abuzz with excitement and amazement.

“What now?” Skylana asked

“I thought she was supposed to bathe in it.” Crow thought aloud.

“She might still be able to,” Talis suggested.

“In light?” Ryder almost objected.

“‘Tis possible, isn’t it?”

“I don’t know! I’ve never bathed in light before.”

As the two argued semantics, Skylana noticed that Gwen’s gaze had not turned away from the light. She was almost transfixed with the scene before her. Nemo saw it, too, and eventually, everyone recognized their captain’s silence. Her eyes were wide and her breath was deep and heavy. No one could tell if there was also fear, anticipation, or anxiety in her eyes.

Dreamlike, Gwen ignored all eyes upon her and took a step into the pool of light. But her foot never sank below the water. It remained on the surface, as if it had turned into ice to support her. Slowly, she advanced towards the center of the pool, staring at the light that descended from the outside. Everyone noticed that her stride was much less haggard or tired. Instead of the dominating confidence that they were all used to, she walked gracefully, like an ethereal lady, towards the magic that compelled her.

Finally, her gaze towards the moon, Gwen reached the center of the pool, directly under the opening from which the holy light poured. She stared straight up at it, feeling its magic fill her. Normally, she would be doing everything in her power to resist its effects, but this time was different. Relinquishing control was not something that she was accustomed to, but Gwen had to let go. Gazing into the silver beams, she let go of all fear that she might have had. She let go of her anger. She let go of her pride. She let go of her control.

Soon enough, she thought that she might lose herself.

In an instant, the crew helplessly watched as she dropped below the water from sight, as if someone had opened a trapdoor beneath her. Nemo nearly panicked, almost ready to jump in after her.

“Wait!” Talis urged as everyone else tried to hold him back.

The moonlight reached a blinding intensity, forcing everyone to shield their eyes… but only for an instant, before it vanished altogether, leaving both mages and pirates in the glimmering illumination they had started with. The only addition was the light that came from

what the opening at the top of the cavern.

They stood at the water's edge, shocked and confused.

"Wha' 'appened?" Hands asked.

He was quickly answered as the waters rippled before them, creating an image of their captain slowly sinking down below, still staring up at the moon.

"It's begun," Nemo whispered.