

## A Familiar New Face

As my vision adjusted to the bright sun outside Talis' house, I saw that not much had changed. It was relatively warm, but a chilling breeze made sure I knew that winter was coming. I look around for Talis and his guest, but saw no one. I listened for his voice. I heard him talking, but it was from behind me. He must be in the house already. I turned to go back in. Turning the handle on the door, I prepared for the confrontation.

"Talis, Are you back?" I called. I heard from the next room away.

"Ah, Caius is well again. Come, let us greet him." I watched as Talis and another figure came into the room. It was a woman whom I've never seen before.

"Talis, I didn't expect you back so soon." I said. He gave a small chuckle.

"Well, I found what I was looking for." I smiled.

"A person? I was thinking you were going after some magical item again."

"You would be surprised what sizes magic comes in." I nodded, looking at the woman. She seemed on edge, as if she was hiding something. Or it could be she's a bit uneasy around strangers.

"So, Talis, who is your friend?" I asked. Talis looked at her, and gave a nod. She hesitated, looking around the room real quick, and looked back at me.

"My name is Esmeralda Frostburn." She said with a bit of uneasiness in her voice. I nodded.

"It's a pleasure." I looked back at Talis.

"Not to seem in a rush, but I thank you for your generous hospitality and healing. But I must get going. Lady Tso is getting to far away." I noticed Esmeralda's eyes gained a shocked look as I mentioned the name. Thinking nothing of it, I listened to Talis.

"I understand, but I do believe you promised me an explanation as to how you got this way." I nodded.

"Aye, I do. It began when I entered London. I was trying to find Tso, as she was reported last in this area. So I followed some Dracos to a house in the center of town. After getting inside, I found Tso, and a room full of Dracos. They reported on the whereabouts of the Guardians.

According to them, most of the guardians stayed to guard the egg. But a few went off on other quests. I, myself, was included, intended to be farther north from here looking for the Temple of Chaos. But I guess what really set me off was the news of Drusilla Snowfire."

"Is that so?" He asked, looking at Esmeralda. She seemed to be listening with great intent.

"Aye. They reported her as... as..." I had to fight back the tears and rage that were building up inside of me again. Talis was waiting for me to finish.

"They said she was dead." I finished, as hard as it seemed. Talis looked confused. So I continued.

"After I heard that, I kind of lost it. I told Tso once before, as I left Bristol, if she ever hurt Snowfire in any way, that I would kill her. And after hearing that, I tried."

"You attacked Tso?" Talis said. I nodded.

"It wasn't easy to get through all of those Dracos, but I didn't have to do much. I kind of... lost control. As if something inside of me just took over. But then, as I was down, and about to die, I changed."

"You changed?" Talis said. I nodded.

"Aye. I became this...monster. It just took over. But it felt good, strangely. Watching the Dracos die, the power, the fear. It was exhilarating. Then I set my eyes on Tso. She was scarred. I tried to attack, but she did some sort of spell and I regained control. I must find out what that spell

was.”

“That’s enough!” Esmeralda yelled. “What were you thinking! You could have killed yourself and did you ever even stop to think about the other Guardians, you know your friends! What about The Egg or the other Magi! Did you stop for one moment to think about them! Next time you want to throw your life away do it on someone else’s time!” I looked at her with confusion. Why would a stranger to me be so protective? Maybe the bond of the Guardians is stronger than I thought.

“Talis, thank you for allowing me into your home but the company has twisted my stomach. I believe that there is a pub near here, so I will meet you there. Good day Gentlemen!” The company, I thought as she stormed out of the house. Something about her isn’t right. Curiosity struck me.

“Forgive me Talis, but had I known my “company” would strike a nerve, I would have left, to spare you that scene.” I said apologetically to him.

“Tis no worry,” He said, “She has been on edge after recent events. Seems the Dracos are not making any guardian’s journey a pleasant one.” I nodded, as I knew this. But still, something was out of place. She reminded me of...

“Talis, I do thank you with my life, for you have spared it. But there are matters at hand I must attend to.” He nodded to me.

“Aye, you have a long journey ahead of you. I cannot blame you for being hasty.” He was right, I have to find that staff. But after a quick stop.

“Thank you, and may our paths cross again.” I told him as I walked to the door.

“Sooner than later, friend!” he called to me. I gave a nod and turned into the street. Only a few houses down there was a pub. I have to follow Esmeralda. Something is not right. And I will get to the bottom of this. Easy or hard, whatever is going on, I am going to get answers.