

Illyria

by Cara Strong

Illyria was bored. Not just regular bored, but the kind of bored that made you want to poke holes in your fingers just for something to do. That's why, on that one day last July, she became so stubborn about that book. The stupid book she saw that old man carrying as he walked by her house. It was decorated with strange designs and symbols she had never seen before. When she had finally gathered the courage to ask him about it, he mumbled something under his breath about people asking questions they shouldn't and put the book in his satchel. She attempted again, but he reproached her for her effort and walked quickly away.

Illyria was quite put off by this; she was generally a friendly person, and did not know how to react to such surliness. She went about her way and tried to put the matter out of her mind.

Some hours later, she found herself thirsty and decided to stop by the local tavern. That's when she saw the old man again. The sack holding the book was leaning against his chair, and he was deeply engrossed in some papers on the table in front of him. Illyria acted before thinking. She strolled by his chair, hesitated for just a moment, and then reached down and grabbed the satchel. She continued strolling right out the door and, settling down behind a house a few doors down, pulled the book out of the bag.

She stared at it for several minutes, hoping that something would start to make sense. She turned it upside down and sideways, flipping through the pages, looking at it from the front, back and sides, but still could make no sense of it.

After a while, her legs started to hurt, and she got up to stretch. As she did, the book slipped from her hand and fell to the ground. She bent to pick it up, and noticed a page sticking out slightly more than the others; it had been knocked loose in the fall. She opened the book to put the page back in place, but noticed that she could actually recognize the words on this one. She read the words aloud to herself, wondering at their meaning:

“By wing of bird and fervent greed,
A lengthy night, a speedy pace,
A journey to the point of need,
Not here but there, the yearned-for place”

As she finished the last word, she noticed the air shimmer around her. She dropped the book and parchment, and suddenly found herself looking at a wall. She heard a noise behind her and whirled around to see a young boy as he pushed by. Slightly off-balance, she fell over and scowled at the boy's back as he walked away.

Regaining her composure, Illyria got up and dusted herself off. As she reached her waist, she realized the small pouch that usually resided there was gone. The image of the boy flashed

through her mind, and she looked in the direction he had walked, no longer seeing him.

Sitting down again, Illyria took a moment to consider her dilemma. She was definitely no longer near home, and had no idea where that might be; she was alone; she had just lost all her money; and she still hadn't gotten that blasted drink she had wanted in the tavern.

"Serves me right, stealing from a magician. I'll never play at magic again."

Illyria decided the only thing to do was find out where she was. She walked along the wall in the direction the boy had taken, and soon realized it belonged to a village. She reached the gates and inquired of the guard leaning there as to her location.

"Well, this is your lucky day! This is Bristol, and the Queen herself will be coming through these gates in some hours!" The guard lowered his voice so Illyria had to lean in to hear him.

"Confidentially, though, it isn't all good news – I hear whisperings of the dragon Bloodtharcken in the area. But that's a laugh – no dragon would ever chance coming here on a festival day, especially with us around!" He finished with a loud laugh and waved Illyria in.

As she entered the gates and wandered into town, Illyria smelled something wonderful and turned to see the confectionary. Even though she had no money, she walked closer to enjoy the scent. As she stood outside looking in, she suddenly noticed that the boy from earlier was inside buying candy.

"Hey!" She called out. The boy tried to run out of the store, but she was able to grab him as he tried to pass. "I know you stole my coins!"

"No I didn't! This is mine!" He held up Illyria's pouch, trying to look defiant.

As she glared at him, she softened a bit; behind the challenging look was still a young lad who also seemed alone. She sighed. "If you return the coins to me, I won't tell the guards of your offense."

The boy considered for a moment, and then handed the pouch over. Illyria contemplated letting him go, but then decided it might do both of them some good to stick together for a while.

"What's your name?"

"Nanus."

"Well, Nanus, I've heard a rumor about a dragon nearby. Would you like to check it out with me?"