

Nikola's Mission

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The journey had been long for Nikola. She gazed at the wide entrance to the Draco Disciple's London manse and felt her stomach flop as she made the realization. She was at the Draco Disciple's London manse to spy on their -- according to some of the Band -- new allies.

She had been sent to discover what exactly Robert O'Coppe had collected for Peter Hellebore in the...unfortunate adventure. It had been a sorrowful scene. Robert limping back to camp while Avis wept. Robert had nearly passed, but the adventurers had saved him with the mages guidance. Yet, the wound was corrupt, leaking aether. Even Zephora, arguably the most powerful healer in England could not heal him. It was only a few weeks after the Draco Disciples had returned to London that the Council had insisted that she figure out what the gem that Robert had retrieved was. She had tried at first through divination and magic; this was her last resort.

"Find a way of entry?" asked Rhydian.

Nikola was glad that Rhydian was with her. This task would be far too daunting alone. While the Draco Disciples had been almost friendly over the last few years, she would never forget how they had nearly driven her and her master to ruin. "None. I suppose I could conjure some sort of confounding spell to confuse them. But...I fear it would not actually work, and we would be caught."

Rhydian nodded. "I agree. Wan' ta' see something amusing I learned?"

Nikola did not like Rhydian's tone in the slightest. It was one he used whenever he was about to do something that wasn't good for anyone. She sighed. There was no choice. "Do not get caught. I would like to wish Holly and Cale congratulations on their wedding."

Rhydian grinned as he fished something out of his pocket. Nikola caught a glance of it for a moment. Some sort of scroll? Without warning he tore it, and then -- without warning -- he was gone.

"Rhydian?!"

She heard a whisper from her left. "Dun'nae panic. I am still here. Just a new technique that one of our new recruits taught us. Amplifies my natural ability to sneak. Wait here."

It was fascinating! Rhydian was truly gone from sight. She felt the air around her for magic, but she could not sense the slightest crackle of energy nor a hum of power. She was uncertain how this worked without magic. Some sort of new science perhaps? Or a technique that had been

lost to time that had resurfaced? Perhaps the Library of Alexandria had some answers. She would have to look into that when next she was able to --

Rhydian appeared before her with the gem. "Here."

Without thinking, her mind still focused on trying to suss out Rhydian's confounding stealth scroll, Nikola took the gem from his outstretched hand. Suddenly, its memory filled her, and her vision blacked out as the past replayed in her head, her Keeper's Sight revealing the item's troublesome past in a near instant. Once more, her memory melded with that of another in the past, and she saw things as they once had been.

She stood over a workbench covered some of the more powerful magical ingredients that she had gathered in her travels. She needed to get this right. Bloodtharken's might was far greater than she or the others could have ever predicted.

She took the mortar and pestle and began to grind the moonstone to dust. It was extremely difficult work, but a necessary step. She could do it with magic, but that would make it imperfect. After the dust had been gathered, she dropped in a few strands of Baba Yaga's hair and willed them to bind the dust together into the shape of a gem.

Now it had shape, yes. But it was missing so much. It needed to amplify her magic. "Aha! Something specific to me!"

That was it! But what would suffice? Had she anything potent and personal enough on hand? She paced around the laboratory searching the various jars and pots. Griffin feathers? The water of life? Essence of a pooka? No.... Aha! This would do. A wing of a sylph. She dropped it gingerly into the container, and Baba Yaga's hair wound it within.

Now that it could be attuned to her it needed a way to amplify, and she knew just the thing. Power came through wisdom and mastery, so she needed something that would augment their wisdom. A scale of the Salmon of Wisdom.

After that had been added, she willed her magic into it. The container of hair writhed as the contents within it heated and hardened. Suddenly, there was a flash of light and a loud crack. Jumping back, she blinked as her vision focused.

"Fie upon it all!" Her sharp oath resounded in the empty room. It wasn't working! As she fixed her focus on the container, she realized her error, and swore again. Baba Yaga's hair wasn't strong enough to contain the power. The mortar and pestle had shattered, as had the table

under it. She searched the refuse, holding out hope. "Please, Father. Let it have held form. We need it."

There! A sudden glint under the refuse. She shuffled through the mess until her fingers grasped the glint and pulled it better into sight. It was a palm-sized, clear gem. She pressed it to her lips in excitement before calling out, "I did it!"

The door to the study burst open and a man ran to her side. "Are you okay? I heard the boom."

She smiled. "I did it. The gem is complete. I just need to test it."

Holding the gem aloft, she focused on the refuse. A strong gale blew down upon it, grinding the remaining wood into dust on the stone. She laughed. Such power! With this they would surely be able to defeat Bloodtharken!

The man held out a hand. "May I try?"

She frowned. "It is attuned to only me. It should not work for you until I make you yours."

The man nodded. "Very well. Let me try something else then. Something feels...off."

The man pushed his magic forward and a whirl of flames shot forth, singeing the edge of an empty bookshelf in front of him. He gasped. It was far more than he had conjured with such little effort. He had only meant to create a single spark. "It is as I feared."

She sighed. She saw exactly what had been done and understood. The gem wasn't only amplifying her magic, but the magic of everything in proximity to it -- this gem would likely be more harm in a fight against Bloodtharken than a benefit. Where had she gone wrong? Something with the attunement, perhaps? She sighed and placed the gem in a chest in the corner of the room. The thing was worthless.

The man patted her on the back soothingly. "Do not worry, Aria. 'Tis just a prototype gem. I am confident your next version will work and we will correct our mistake with Druscilla."

Nikola gasped. "Rhydian. It is Aria, the Air Paragon's prototype gem! We must --"

Suddenly another memory assaulted her mind. Nikola recognized the scene. It had, in fact, only happened a few months before.

She stood and clutched at the tender spot on her cheek where Liam Bloodroot had hit her. Her brother entered the Traveller Camp with a few of the others and Lady Efah behind him. Peter demanded who hit her.

She was uncertain if she should lie. She knew if she told the truth things would go poorly. "It...it was an accident, Peter. Liam did not mean to. He was just so enraged that he --"

Her brother's face twisted in rage. "'Twas... Liam that hit you? Our own Knight?! Liam. I made my will VERY clear. Robert was NOT to be harmed! Look at the mess you have made, the alliances you have tested. This is the last time you act on your own and disobey my will!

Peter raised his cane up, and it was then that she knew this situation would not be able to be salvaged. Peter's magic burst forth and struck Liam. Once. Twice. Liam hit the ground with a sickening thud. She hoped Liam would be wise enough to stay down and hold his tongue, but alas, he proved too stupid for that. From the ground he growled at Peter, "My revenge will not be stayed by your stupid plans of kindness and friendship! It is weakness, Peter!"

Hatred flashed on Peter's face, and Poppy was momentarily horrified. She wanted to throw herself between Peter and Liam, to try and save what they had been working together for, but she knew there would be no use.

Peter raised his hand "Enough! I am done with you, Liam! Say hello to our Goddess for me!" The magic shot forth and in an instant Liam began to choke. She saw the tendrils of magic wrapped around his neck. No matter how he clawed at them, he would not be able to breathe.

Then, Lady Efah spoke, her voice even and eerily calm. "My Lord Praetor, if I may, I have a far worse fate for him."

Nikola grabbed her head and swayed. Rhydian caught her. Nikola was uncertain what was happening. She had never experienced memory this strongly. Was it because of the gem? She cried out as the memory continued, but her perspective shifted to Efah.

She felt such power. It was in the air all around her. It was unlike anything she had ever seen. She focused to find its source. Of course! The gem that Robert held. It was no wonder that Peter had desired it! A wicked idea crossed her mind as Peter's power assaulted Liam and stole the breath from him. Peter's fate for him was too kind. She had a much better idea.

She spoke. "My Lord Praetor, if I may, I have a far worse fate for him."

Peter stopped the flow of his power, and Liam collapsed taking long, deep, gasping breaths. "Oh?"

She smirked. "Let me make him my thrall until next summer. Let me help him see the benefits of obedience. Perhaps he will, with some... reindoctrination... learn his place."

Peter paused as he considered the idea. "As long as you can assure his... obedience."

She nodded. She had no doubt that she could assure his certainty. He would have no will of his own.

"Very well, Lady Efah. Make it so."

She stepped forward towards Liam, watching the fear in his eyes. She had been looking forward to this day for so long. Liam was always so insolent. A risk to their Goddess' plan. With the extra power that flooded the area from the gem, she would be able to instantly cast a spell that would take her days and a considerable amount of power, even with the vial of Liam's blood that she possessed in her pouch. She let down her hair, and pulled a strand free, winding the magic of the gem within it, before pulling it taut and cascading it upon Liam. "Bound ekess sia geou ihk fogah seasons. Dout iejir ui sini. Dout yobolat ui sini. Dout sepa ui sini."

Liam stood. There was no life of his own in his eyes. She gently caressed his cheek. "Go back to the Manor, Liam."

He only nodded. "Aye, Lady."

It was then that she realized that the magic in the area had returned to normal. She forced her face into a mask. No! When she had used it to amplify her magic, she had inadvertently used all of the power the blasted thing had still contained! She could not tell Peter it was her, otherwise he would see her killed. She silently prayed to Tiamat that he had another use for it.

Nikola awoke in Rhydian's arms. For a moment she was distracted, remembering a time not so long ago when she had longed for just that. "R-Rhydian. Lady Efah used all of the power of Aria's prototype gem. It holds no power. It is worthless. We can report back to the Council and everyone can sleep safe."

He smiled down at her, and again she was distracted. "Good. Let me return this within, and then we will return ta' Bristol with haste."