

Migratory Birds
Chapter 8

MICA



Written by **kodayu**



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In ages long forgotten, during the Age of Dawn, the races lived in a world where magic and technology were united in the last and supreme science. It brought out marvels and wonders beyond imagination and its towers rose into the sky without any limit. The chains of the material world had been broken as the furs had united with the essence of the world itself, had embraced their heritage and throughout it they had entered what lay beyond. Cities grew all over and flourished everywhere and the people walked the paths of the ethereal, listening to the songs of the moons and above them in their minds they build greater and greater designs, beyond mortal grasp so that they dive to the deepest bottoms of the sea and ride in the air even as high as the stars.

But the age did not last as the sun rose to its zenith and put an end to the time of Dawn. Before the people knew what happened the world was ravaged by disaster and the towers, the symbols of the greatest achievements this world had ever put forth tumbled and buried everything beneath the star fires that had once burned at their tops. The world itself cried in pain when the fire of the stars burned its surface and it took a long time before the first furs rose from the debris to build up a new civilization upon the remains of the old.

But even in these times of transition the shadows of the age of Dawn have not vanished yet as the towers were still casting them all over the earth, drowning the world in darkness and the sound of distant thunder that echoes forever through the depths in between the divides...

-from History of the visible World

Thunder rolled, crashed into the sensible pointed ears like it would burst the eardrum. But then it subsided although a constant droning remained just like his head was trapped inside a huge steam engine or something like that. He couldn't hear, he just covered his ears, tried to resist against the pain of this sound.. But it had already reached his brains, was already hurling it around in the cavity of his skull. He tried to drown it out with a cry but it was futile.

He stumbled forward, gasping for breath, desperately trying to find some bubble of air. His entire fur was nothing but a swamp which grew on his skin, his felted hair stuck to his face, covered his eyes, was washed onto them, so that it was futile to push it aside.

He cried out, but he couldn't even hear himself anymore, so it died away in an inaudible moan while he hurled his small body against the walls of water surrounding him. The spats around his feet, full off water, were already much too heavy for him, but sometimes his bare teeth flashed through the rain and so he went forward with wavering steps, his feet sinking deeply into the mud which had been the forest ground.

With a deafening sound, a huge branch crashed on the ground close by. He was startled for a moment, standing still he stared at the heavy branch which had fallen down just some lengths away from him, although he just saw some dark shadow on the ground.

But as he stood there he could feel like another curtain of water formed around his muzzle, covering nose and mouth and thus he stumbled forward, pushing water out of his face and the curtains of rain aside.

He was half unconscious, barely able to walk, he could not see anything but water and some shadows which could have been called trees at a different time. One step after another, trying to stabilize himself with his waving arms while he walked through the rush of falling water. He opened his mouth wide to grasp some air but instead just water entered his muzzle, he coughed.

His limbs had gone numb a long time ago, he could barely feel anything except for the aching cold which flowed around his entire body, the rain carried away all his warmth, all of his strength. The droning of thunder, the rushing rain had washed away the last remains of his mind. Mechanically he stumbled forward, sometimes awaking throughout lack of air, then he coughed, gasped for air in all the surrounding water while the boots tried to get a hold on the slick ground. Sometimes he stumbled over something on the ground he couldn't see, but he didn't fall instead threw himself forward and thus he was able to hold himself upright. The powerful wind almost knocked him over, hurled more water against his face and his entire body.

He yelled, moaned, growled until desperation took over and was crying due to the numb pain which he was unable to escape from. But every sound was drowned out by the rain and then he was too weak to care about his feelings anymore, he just walked on, focussed on walking on, just walked on.

When I reached the region of the Seven Peaks, I was welcomed heartily by the inhabitants of one of the villages and as my way through the Forests of Welcony had been rather challenging I decided to stay in this town for a while. I did not know that this was supposed to be a fateful decision. Nothing prepared me for what to come and I still regret that I lacked wisdom those days.

In exchange for my lodging I helped the townspeople with some minor magic whenever they needed help. These matters were rather profane: I was asked to dislocate heavy obstacles, to magically repair some of their ancient old machines, to chase away a very persistent swarm of Biller Birds that ravaged the farmers' fields from time to time and other such tasks. As none of these little deeds was too demanding I was more than willing to be of help whenever possible and the townspeople were always very positive about my assistance.

One evening after I had supported the renovation of an old house, there was a small festivity I participated in with pleasure. During this event the town's elders took me aside and one of them confessed to me that there was one major task that required talents such as mine to be solved. They explained to me that I was not obliged to do anything I did not want to and that everybody would understand if I considered too risky. In the heat of the moment I answered that I was more than willing to do anything I could if the town was in need of me. Little did I suspect that this task was far beyond my capacities, but my stay with the simple people of this town had went to my head, I thought that I could do everything I wished. What a fool I was.

The elders who talked to me were very pleased by my answer and they told me what was going on: The small brook that flowed through the town was fed by a source in a forest quite near. But nobody ever went there because the source itself was being protected by a spirit. I do not want to conceal from you that I was thrilled by this revelation because I had never dealt with a spirit before. They called the spirit a "nymph", a water spirit that takes the shape of the most beautiful woman to charm young men and to lure them to their doom. This had already happened to two young men some time ago and since that day nobody had ever gone to the source again. But the source was vital to the town and thus he asked me if I could deal with this malevolent spirit. As I have already mentioned I considered myself invincible those days and thus I did not hesitate a moment when the men asked me if I could deal with the spirit. I assured the men that I would go to the source in the morning of the next day. They were very happy about this.

-from Report of my travels to the northern wilderness

The book slammed onto the table. He picked up his pencil again and it scratched on the old paper while he tried to draw a perfect circle with his compasses. He ran his paws over the paper to push away the remains of the pencil, laid the compasses aside and eyed the result. It still made no sense, all the lines of force still didn't expose any kind of distinguishable pattern. He leaned on the table, over the paper and once again grabbed for the book next to it. Carelessly he leafed through the old brittle pages. He should copy it some time but for the moment he had more important things to do, although he was unable to find anything of what he needed. None of the patterns matched. He eyed his structural drawings again, the different lines, the circles and divers geometrical shapes. It didn't make any sense at all. If the patters were intertwined, there still had to be some focal point, some pattern where all the different lines of power were ultimately focussed on, to connect the nexus and the plexus or maybe even exi and plexi. But the mere existence of the vortex, he was convinced to have discovered, didn't make any sense. It didn't even fit with the tellurian flow as far as he knew about it or the moonspheres or whatever. He laid the book aside and stared on his drawings. Maybe he was really dealing with something completely different, something too vast for him to grasp, something beyond his comprehension or maybe he was just too damn stupid.

"Hey!"

"Pardon?" He raised his head.

"I asked if you still don't want something to eat."

In bewilderment he blinked for a moment to gain some seconds before he had to answer. "I..." He blinked again to make the blinking lines in front of his eyes disappear. Now he was able to percept the llama with its inquiring glare sitting by the fireside. He was thinking for a moment and then waved his hand. "No, thanks!" And he leaned over his drawings again.

The llama sighed. "You have to eat. You haven't eaten anything since breakfast."

"Hm!" He grunted.

The llama exhaled audibly and jumped up, throwing the ages old book aside he had been reading. He stretched himself and looked into the fire for a second. Its flames had almost completely died down, just some glowing chunks had remained. His small ears shivered as he noticed the constant rush outside he had almost completely forgotten about while he had been reading. "I wouldn't have expected that we would have to light the fire," he stated.

"Hm!"

The llama sighed and slowly turned around. He eyed the shape of the harvest mouse on his chair by the table, leaning over his papers like there was neither anything nor anyone else in this room. The llama sighed once more and went over to him and quickly embraced him from behind, took a snap at his rodent ear and playfully started chewing on its soft fabric.

"Please, Cheza, I'm trying to concentrate," the harvest mouse complained.



Dhail

Instantly the llama let go and stood up straight again, glaring at his companion. "You're such a bore sometimes... Just wanted to noticed that, maybe you haven't noticed yet."

The harvest mouse sighed and threw his pencil aside. "Listen, Cheza! Maybe you have forgotten it, but contrary to you I am not here for mere pleasure. / got to work."

"Oh, yeah, right!" The llama spun around and went over to the window, without caring for the harvest mouse who was observing him. "There is always something to be done!" Cheza mumbled.

With a sigh the harvest mouse, turned around to his papers and drawings again, took up his pencil and hesitated. He turned the wooden stick in his hands, thoughtfully looking at it although he didn't even percept the brown stick in his paws. He stood up, slowly laid the pencil on the table, pushed the chair aside and went over to the llama. He embraced him, although Cheza tried to shake his arms off, but it was only a faint attempt, so the harvest mouse was able to hold him from behind. "I'm sorry, Cheza," he apologized. "I just don't get along with this stuff! And I'm running out of time, you know that."

The llama didn't answer.

They looked out of the window: The rain was still some kind of a waterfall, there were no individual drops to be seen, just a solid wall of rushing water. There wasn't any light either, it was almost completely dark, just the shapes of the closest trees were almost distinguishable. The constant rushing sound of the rain was the only sound left now, except for the glowing fire which cracked sometimes. But then the wind strengthened again and suddenly the rain pelt violently against the window, the fire hissed as some of the raindrops had found their way down the chimney.

Together they stared out into the dark inferno of the thunderstorm where the thunder could not be heard, nor the lighting be seen.

The harvest mouse had laid his head on the llama's shoulder just when llama tensed.

"What's..." the harvest mouse was able to ask.

"Oh, dear god!" Cheza cried out, freed himself, and dashed to the door.

The startled harvest mouse looked around, out of the window. "Hell!" Instantly he ran to the door too while Cheza had already jumped out into the rain. It was just like running against a wall but he didn't care, just forced his way through the water which thundered down on him. He was instantly completely soaked but he just ran on.

The harvest mouse watched him from the verandah. He was almost as good as blind out in the dark but he could see like his companion had run to the wavering figure between the trees, tried to help it but it just collapsed. With an effort the llama was able to take it in his arms and slowly he came back.

He gulped down the water which flowed down his muzzle and into his mouth. Whoever this was, he was anything but heavy but he was completely soaked, the water adding to his weight. Cheza gasped as he couldn't breathe for a moment, he stumbled forward, he couldn't see but blurs, but he was able to distinguish the



Cheza

light from the house and so he tried to walk on on the slick ground. The wind hurled water into his eyes and he gasped once more due to the sudden pain. He tried to get a hold on the powerless figure as it seemed to slip out of his arms. He strengthened his hold just when another gust of wind hit him, almost threw him over but he braced against the wind and forced his way through the water.

“Over here!” Dhail cried as Cheza had lost his track.

Finally the llama reached the verandah. “Get the boy inside, he’s got hypothermia!” Cheza shouted against the sound of the rain.

“What?” Dhail cried out in disbelief but nevertheless he took the motionless figure over, into his arms and instantly carried it inside.

Cheza went after him, kicked his boots away. “Lay him down at the fireplace and get him something warm to drink! I’ll undress him! He’s got to get out of these clothes.”

Dhail slowly laid the figure down on the carpet next to the glowing fire, while Cheza got out of his own clothes. Carefully the harvest mouse pushed the messy hair out of the boy’s face. He exposed a straight, powerless face, its straight features had smoothed, his eyes with the severe eyebrows were closed, his mouth was slightly opened exposing his bluish lips. “It’s a lynx and a damn young one!”

“And if he was a hyena, get him something to warm to drink!” Cheza ordered while he got into dry clothes. “I’ll take care off him!”

Hesitatingly the harvest mouse stood up, without taking his eyes off the lynx. For a moment he looked at the feline and frowned as he was feeling somehow insecure about it. Maybe because it was a feline. After a moment he spun around and went over to the kitchen

In the meantime Cheza kneeled down next to the lynx, he took hold of the black sweater with the small hood and as quickly as his numb fingers allowed him to, he tried to open the buttons. The lynx seemed to wear nothing but the sweater, a T-shirt, some shorts and feline spats¹. He threw the wet piece of cloth aside, grabbed his legs and tried to undo the spats, threw them aside too, grabbed him at his shoulders, pulled him up, took hold of the T-shirt. The lynx was completely motionless, a feeble body in the llama’s arms. He pulled the soaking wet T-shirt upwards over the lynx’ head, didn’t care about the fluffy chest, although he noticed that the lynx showed a number of hardly healed wounds. Instead he unbuttoned the shorts and tried to get him out of them. He screwed up his eyes as he perceived the loincloth underneath but then went on and loosened it.

Meanwhile Dhail had heated up some water on the stove. As he had not found anything else he prepared some coffee, filled it into a cup and he went back into the only other room of the cabin. He was startled as he saw Cheza kneeling next to the lynx without moving. “What’s up?”

Very slowly the llama turned his head around. His eyes were wide opened, just like his mouth.

Dhail was rather confused as he had never seen Cheza pulling such a face. “What’s up?” he asked once more.

“He...” Cheza laughed nervously. “He’s a girl!”

Dhail did not understand at once, then he eyed the bare, rather flat, fluffy chest of the lynx. “Don’t fool me!” he said shortly.

“Would you call that a penis or what?” Cheza asked, waving his hands above the lynx’ abdomen.

Dhail who had stood in the door frame approached them, carefully eyeing the llama and then the motionless lynx. Then he stared straight at *her* mons hidden underneath the fluffy pubic hair. “Ooops!” he exclaimed ironically.

Cheza tried to say something, waved his hands but then just fell silent again and looked upon the motionless girl just like Dhail did.

The harvest mouse eyed the girl carefully as he was rather surprised by her muscles and her harsh, angular features but then he noticed something shimmering upon her chest and he got a little bit closer. He screwed up his eyes as he recognized the silver piece of jewelry she was wearing around her neck. He exhaled, recognizing the pendant. With a tense face he scrutinized her once more. Despite her muscles she seemed to be somewhat small for her age. His upper lip twitched slightly. “Maybe he should have his coffee now...” he said as neutrally as possible, then he hesitated. “She, I mean!”

“Yeah, sure!” Cheza said. “But perhaps someone should dry her fur first...”

They fell silent.

“She definitely doesn’t look like a girl!” Dhail stated and thus tried to distract the llama.

“Yeah!” Cheza agreed and reached out for a towel which lay on the couch. He took her up and as carefully as possible he started to dry her fur. He rubbed her chest, her stomach and avoided her abdomen and her legs, although he tried to dry her short felted brown hair. He laid the towel aside. “Gimme the cup!” He took over the cup with the steaming hot coffee but then he looked into her face for a second and set the cup aside. “Hey!” He shook her slightly without any effect. “Hey!” Carefully he slapped onto her cheeks. “Hey, come on!” He slapped harder. “Come on!”

The lynx’ eyelids quivered and his eyes underneath moved as if he tried to focus. The lip in the corner of his mouth twitched, shortly exposing a sharp teeth. It looked as if this was some kind of a totally powerless and thus totally futile threat.

“You got to drink!” Cheza said and raised the cup. “Come on, make an effort!” He put the cup to her lips and poured a little bit of the hot liquid into her mouth.

She coughed and spilled half of it out, but somehow instinctively she gulped the rest.

“That’s it!” he encouraged her and offered her some more coffee.

She was drinking slowing, encouraged by the llama, but suddenly she coughed again, spit out some of it. With weak movements she tried to free herself, she moaned, her powerless paws hit the llama without effect, but she didn’t even open her eyes, she tossed although he hold her tightly in his arms, she moaned again, mumbled something and then she fell back again.

“What did she say?” Dhail asked curiously while leaning over them.

“Sounded like a name or something like that,” Cheza stated. Carefully he slapped her cheeks again. “Hey! Hey!” There was no effect. “She lost consciousness.”

“Maybe we should better put her to rest now,” Dhail suggested. “We can’t do anything else as long as she’s unconscious.”

“Can’t you...?” the llama asked.

“No, I am not good at this. I would rather not do it unless it was a real emergency,” Dhail replied.

The llama eyed the girl in his arms again and then nodded. She was still very cold, but at least her lips had lost the bluish color they had had. Her breath was slow but regular and steady. “OK!” he said, took her completely into his arms and stood up. “We better give her the camp bed.”

“Yes!” Dhail agreed and went over to the corner, close to the door to the kitchen where they had put the old wooden camp bed. The harvest mouse quickly put it up and Cheza slowly laid the lynx down on the mattress. He picked up the thick blanket and wrapped it tightly around the nude girl, until she had almost completely disappeared underneath the cloth.

The llama stood up again and side by side they looked down her, eyed their strange visitor. Lost in his troubling speculations the harvest mouse laid his arm on the llama’s shoulder. He eyed the lynx or what was to be seen of her carefully.

The fire cracked silently, while the constant rushing of the rain resounded on the wood of the cabin. The fire hissed as some of the drops had found a way into the chimney again and the wind suddenly strengthened and roared in the forest. Some loose plank or anything like that rattled, a dry sound which was almost drowned out by the other sounds but nevertheless it was there.

The light of the fire was reflected by their eyes, dyed their faces in an alien reddish light while they stared down onto her.

I assure you that I know my mistakes today and I am willingly accepting the blame. But still you have to understand that the recklessness of youth and the enthusiastic support of the townspeople could cloud the mind of an inexperienced young sorcerer as I was back then. Later, whenever I reflected these events I realized that maybe this incident was all my voyage was about: To learn about my limits and to learn moderation and reserve. It is true that ambition is the deadliest foe of even the most devoted sorcerer.

As soon as dawn colored the sky above the town I left the town and travelled up the small brook. Soon I was penetrating the deepest forest where ancient old tree had grown so large and dense that little sunshine reached the ground. It was quite a task to follow the course of the small brook that winded its way through it. If I had not been on a mission I would had rested in order to collect some of the plants I saw along my way. I was certain that I had never heard of them before but I did not slow down my pace as I was not certain how far I still had to go. My way got more and more difficult as the growth got more dense with every step I made. There were roots and stones all over the ground and I had to watch my step all the time.

I lost track of time as I could not see the sun in the sky. But I was certain that I travelled for a long time when suddenly the trees gave way and I stood at the border of a idyllic pool of water. For a moment I lost myself as I was marvelled by its beauty but then something different attracted my attention: I heard singing.

It was beautiful too. It was the most beautiful singing I had ever heard even though I had never heard a song like it ever before. It seemed to defy every musical harmony I knew of and I could not understand a single word of its lyrics but it was still charmed me. Attracted by this strange song, I walked around the pool that I could not overlook completely as there were large rocks resting inside it and trees' huge branches had grown over.

As silently as I could I walked around it, searching for the unseen singer and after a moment when I shoved a branch aside I could see her: The moment I saw her, I knew that she had to be the "nymph" and still this knowledge mattered little to me anymore as she was the most beautiful being I had ever seen before: She was an otter, fair, elegant, vulnerable and graceful like a young tree in the wind. Her long hair shimmered in the sunlight, uncountable drops glistened in her fur and her arms moved slowly while she sang on. She sat at the shore, leaning against a stone as if it was the most comfortable place to be. Charmed by this sight I stood up from where I had been kneeling and stared at her, totally incapable of any rational thought.

I must point out that carnal pleasures have never distracted me from my studies and no woman's sight has ever fogged my mind. I always had little understanding for those men who were neglecting their duties because of women. I had despised these instinct driven animals, although I never had said anything and pursued my magical studies instead.

I did not realize that in this moment I was behaving like one of those. I simply stood there and stared at the nymph like the fool I was.

She went on singing while she weaving a garland out of reed and waterlilies.

Finally she had finished her work and her song ended and she moved her head slightly in order to put the garland on her head. And in this moment she saw me.

And my heart stopped because I feared that she could flee and that was the one thing I wanted to prevent at any cost. But still I was totally unable to move, enthralled by her charm.

But she did not flee, she smiled and looked at me from below her shimmering hair with her perfectly blue, watery eyes. She said that she had expected me, but that she had hoped that she could finish her garland before my arrival and in this moment she swam closer, gracefully moving in the water. She was right below me and smiled at me and I smiled too, not knowing what else to do.

-from Report of my travels to the northern wilderness

“...and then they had said to me that I should go home and tell no one!”

Short laughter. “That’s impossible. They couldn’t let you go like that!”

Her eyelids were encrusted and she felt so heavy. Her whole body was so heavy as if every limb of hers had been filled up with lead.

“No. It’s true. After all they could hardly admit that an eleven year old boy had been able to get across all of their guards.”

“Hell and you didn’t even take one of the jars? That’s a pity!”

“Well, if I had another chance, I would take one. But as far as I know they fired the whole crew and got some new ones with a little bit more experience.”

Short laughter.

It was warm, it was really warm, she was resting in between something soft and there was light but she could not distinguish anything. Everything was blurred, she blinked but she needed a big effort to open her heavy eyelids again.

“But you see: At least I have never been as suicidal as her.”

“Yeah, OK! But she seems to be rather experienced to me. After all she has to be if she’s travelling all on her own.”

Her limbs were numb. She couldn’t feel her hands nor her feet. She felt her stomach which cramped slightly. To reassure herself she tried to raise her arm but it was too heavy and trapped in the cloth. Now she was able to realize that she was resting in between cloth. This was definitely cloth.

“Maybe she’s just crazy. Nobody with any sense of danger would travel this area all on his own. Especially a girl shouldn’t do that!”

“You have to admit that this is no threat as long as she doesn’t reveal her sex. After all we’ve been convinced that she’s a boy too.”

Grunt.

“I rather admire her courage and self-confidence.”

It was warm. It was good. She wanted to sleep, just sleep for a while. Her body was too heavy. Sleep for a moment.

“She is crazy! She is just plain crazy or she has something very specific on her mind.”

I admit that my mistakes were numerous, but my experience with the gentle sex have been limited as my studies always had occupied most of my spare time. Maybe you understand that the nymph was more than just a temptation to me. She was beauty incarnate in this moment and when I kissed her for the very first time I knew that I was lost. But my desire was too strong and my heart burned with an unknown fire of passion that I could not control as I had never known anything quite similar. For the first time in my life I understood why so many ordinary people make such a fuss about relationships.

But- of course- these rational thoughts were not on my mind in this moment. The only thing on my mind was the nymph and I kneeled down as she rose partly from the water so that we could kiss each other gently. Her lips met mine as if she wanted to test me and then jumped backwards and laughed heartily and swam away, laughing. I was startled and watched her in amazement.

She stopped in the middle of the water and said to me that I was even sweeter than she had expected me to be, but she had to go now and she said that she would be pleased if I returned the other day. I asked her for her name while and she told me that she had none and in this moment she dived and disappeared beneath the surface and the pool was all still and calm as if she had never been there at all. The only proof that I had really met her were my burning lips.

I went back to town. I am totally incapable to remember my way back, I was like in trance and suddenly I stood on the town square again and the people around greeted me and I was so confused I could hardly respond.

During the following night I recalled the events of the day and I came to the conclusion that I had been charmed by the nymph's magic as there could be no different explanation for my irrational behavior. I decided to go back to the nymph the other day and to confront her, ready to resist her.

And so I went to the source once again and on my way I prepared all the spells of defense I knew, but the moment I stood at the pool and I saw the nymph sitting on a rock, it seemed to me like all my spells were powerless as the fire in my chest instantly flared up again.

As soon as the nymph noticed my arrival she jumped of the rock, swam over to me and greeted me with the most radiant of smiles. I stammered a reply and she laughed about it, jumped up and embraced me. For the first time I noticed that seaweed grew among her fur- not that it mattered to me in this moment. She whispered loving words to me and before I knew what happened I kissed her myself and soon she was dragging me into the water.

This was a crucial moment, I know now and I do remember that some part of my mind was well aware of the possibility that this could have been her plan all along, dragging me into the water and thus drowning me once I was in her element. All of you know love, don't you. So imagine my addiction, as the feeling I had fallen victim to was love indeed, only a thousand times stronger. Yes, love! I cannot give it any other name and I can only hope that you do understand what this word means. No magic, no charm, no trick of some spirit, it was love.

We shared all the carnal pleasures there are, it was a game, innocent as a child's play and even today I can say that there was nobody like her. She was

more beautiful than any mortal furr could ever hope to be, her passion was limitless and she gave it all to me. In my arms this powerful being seemed to be so vulnerable and fragile...

I spent the next days at her side and she taught me more about nature and her source in particular that I could ever had hoped. Her knowledge even about the smallest creature that lived at the source's shore seemed to be limitless and she shared it with me.

I told her that I had tried to protect myself from her "charm" and both of us laughed a long time about it. She told me that we were meant for each other, that we shared such a strong love that we were linked all for all eternity and I was so happy about it that I forgot why I had ever come to her pool. We swam together, talked, loved each other and swore our love to one another ever and ever again. Time itself became meaningless to me and sometimes I was surprised to see the moons' reflections in the pool as our love-making had overcome yet another day.

I don't know what happened but for some unknown reason I remembered that I was obliged to go back to town.

I curse that day, I curse myself for giving in to this urge and I curse the hour I left her.

She stood at the pool's edge and said good by to me with a smile. I saw the tears in her eyes but they did not reach my love struck heart and I assured her that I would return soon and she said that she was certain I did.

Just to think about this moment hurts me, but I have to finish this report as a warning for all those who do not believe in the power of their very own feelings. I hope that my story will be a guide to all of them. If it does, my suffering might have had a meaning after all.

I returned to the town. I had been absent for days and the people had been upset because of it. I assured them that I was fine and soon they were comforted. As work had waited for me all those days I was busy pretty soon and I did what was expected of me with a new strength. Until the elders showed up...

-from Report of my travels to the northern wilderness

The warmth and the light made her wake up. Very weakly she turned her head, searching for a safe place to hide from the light but whatever she did, it seemed to be impossible. With the light, heat was gathering strongly beneath the thick cloth of her blanket and the warmth was adding to the numb feelings of her limbs. She felt totally powerless.

There was some murmuring coming from somewhere and before she was even conscious about what she did she was standing up. She almost dropped down again as it seemed like her body was rising faster than her head and for a moment she was swaying, trying to hold her own weight upright. But somehow she managed to keep standing and thus she started to walk over to the brightest spot of her blurred surroundings where two voices seemed to be coming from.

“...any longer than absolutely necessary“

“But don’t you see that she needs help?“

“I don’t care. I don’t know nothing precise yet but neither you, nor me can take that risk.“

“How can you be so sure about that.“

“What do you know about magic, Cheza...? See! That’s it.“

“Really I would not have expected you to have such a narrow outlook.“

“Don’t talk to me that way. First and foremost I am concerned about our safety. There is something about her. I can’t figure it out yet, but...“

She grabbed the wood of the door frame to keep herself from falling down. This way she got into the kitchen.

Someone snorted strongly, blowing the content of his mouth all over the kitchen when he perceived the nude girl leaning in the door frame and blindly blinking at the harvest mouse and the llama without being able to recognize them.

Someone sighed. “Speaking of a dark spirit...!“

“Goddess! How can you be up so early?“ Cheza put his mug of coffee on the table and instantly went over to the lynx without hesitating.

She moaned and tried to raise her arm to shove the stranger’s hand away that had been suddenly laid down on her shoulder. But it was just an awkward, powerless movement that was good for nothing. She tried to get away from the hand, moaned, tried to shove the hand away once more, left the door frame behind and instantly stumbled and collapsed right into the surprised llama’s arms who was suddenly holding a nude girl against his chest.

“Easy, easy!“ he mumbled, more than just slightly embarrassed.

The lynx girl’s face was buried in his shirt’s cloth, she mumbled something incomprehensible while he had to hold her so that she would not drop down.

“My, I would have never expected you to wake up before tomorrow morning,“ he said.

A moan escaped the powerless girl.

“Look I’ll bring you back to your bed, OK? Seems like walking around is still too much for you.“ He took the moan in return as an approval and took the light lynx in his arms. When he held her she was suddenly starting to lash about. It was nothing because of her weakness. But he saw the claws of her paws that fell

powerlessly on his chest and the feline bared her sharp teeth to bury them in the arm that held her. But in the end that was hardly more than a gnaw.

Dhail followed after them, observing everyone of the lynx' movements while his companion laid her down in her bed again and pulled the blanket around her again.

For a moment the girl was still struggling like the soft blanket was some kind of a shackle. But moments later exhaustion was already overwhelming her again and she lay still. Somehow she realized that the two shadows that stood around her bed had to be furs and weakly she rose a paw. Once again meaningless sounds escaped her mouth as she mumbled something but then the tiredness was overcoming her like a wave where she drowned in without having the strength to fight it.

Every spell is a mental procedure that leads the wizard through several stages that are accompanying the necessary ritual. Every ritual item is a cornerstone of the mental process as well as it is the aim of the caster's mental process. It is easiest to envision every item as a necessary tool, although it is much more than that. The more talented and gifted a wizard is, the less tools he will need.

After the caster has envisioned the objective of his spell and prepared the ritual he will meditate upon the nature of the ritual. Throughout concentration and meditation the caster will establish a link between himself, his tools and the target of the spell. He must become one with the transformation that will take place as well as he must allow his tools to guide him towards his goal. It is crucial that the wizard finds a way to let himself be guided by his tools, instead of forcing his will upon them. He must therefore know as much as possible about the tools he uses and their nature. Some wizards have limited themselves to certain tools and have achieved unparalleled mastery in their usage, but have equally limited themselves to certain domains of Magic.

The ultimate challenge of every spell is the ability to cast it as quickly as possible. Spells whose preparation might once have taken hours are suddenly released within mere instants if the wizard has attained the necessary skill. Some spells are far too complicated and far-reaching to be ever mastered at such a degree, but the most simple kind should become instantaneous at the end of a wizard's apprenticeship. Even certain tools should become unnecessary as the wizard has found a way to simulate the effect he has experienced himself during previous spellcasting. Still, using Magic always remains a tasking effort that requires all the strength of a wizard and his aids.

-from Magic for Dummies

The ground beneath her moved and instantly her eyes were open.

Light like countless tiny darts pierced into her head. She could feel instant alertness pulling at her muscles but she could also feel that it was futile because it felt as if she did not possess a single muscle at all. But at least it was enough to push this blurring curtain aside a bit so that she could make out more than just a shadow that sat on the edge of whatever she was laying on: There sat a large furr that she instantly recognized as a llama although she had never seen one before. But she had heard enough of them to identify the species this young man belonged to. He was very slender and had a very smooth face with small, narrow eyes that shimmered brightly beneath his lush blonde hair.

"Hello, there!" His voice was low and simple. "I would not have expected you to wake up all by yourself. But I guess I should not have been surprised after this morning's performance." He smiled.

Her eyes narrowed and with surprising speed she was able to sit up. But then a hiss escaped her when the sudden movement was instantly repaid by an hellishly pounding ache in her head.

His arm stopped her. "Hold it, hold it!" He took her gently by her shoulders.

With a hardly audible growl she tried to shake off his hands but that just enforced the pain in her head and thus she could not resist him when he forced her to lay down again.

"You should not move for a little longer," he said.

She tried to speak but nothing but a croak came out of her mouth and she cleared her throat several times before she made another attempt at speaking. When she uttered the first words he had to notice that her voice was very hoarse, unusually hoarse even for a feline. Maybe that was why it sounded slightly aggressive. "Who're you?"

He smiled encouragingly at her. "My name is Cheza. What's yours?"

She blinked and wet her dry lips. "Jid...dy... Jiddy. My name's Jiddy."

"Well, hello, Jiddy!" He smiled again.

"Where am I?" she asked before he had been able to say anything.

"You lost yourself in a thunderstorm, do you remember?" He looked at her but there was no reaction. "No? Well... You are in my... well, our house on Mica Peninsula. It's a miracle that you have managed to get here somehow, despite the most terrible thunderstorm. We have taken care of you because you suffered from hypothermia. So..."

"Where's Sh...", she blurred out but suddenly stopped and turned her head away.

"What? Who?"

The lynx did not reply anything. "Nothin'," she mumbled after a moment.

The llama sighed and scratched his head. "Actually I wanted to feed you some soup. Maybe you want that to do yourself now..."

"Thanks..." She did not look at him.

"I will put this bowl down here by your side, OK?" He hold out the bowl with the steaming content that he had been holding in his hand all the time. As she did not react he simply stood up and carefully put the bowl down. From above he

eyed the lynx again: From her posture he could tell that she still had to be very weak. That she was able to move at all was astounding but her behavior was pretty obviously telling him that she did not want his help. After all how would he have reacted if he had been her, waking up naked in the house of a stranger? "If you need anything just say so!" Slowly he headed for the door outside.

In the late sunlight Dhail was sitting in the rocking chair, holding a book in his paws, a pile of even more books next to him. He rose his head when Cheza was stepped out on the verandah. "Now...?"

Cheza sighed and went over to him. "She's awake. But..."

"What?" He had screwed up his eyes because of the reddish sunlight that shimmered through the trees, right onto his face.

"Aw, I don't know." He sat down on the only other chair and looked at the distant sun. "I guess she needs some time..."

"See!"

"What?"

"She is not what she seems to be!"

Cheza put on a playfully ironic smile. "But you know of course!"

Dhail nodded. "No! But I have an idea."

The llama sighed and kept silent. After a while Dhail started to read again and Cheza just sat on his stool and watched the play of the sunlight and the trees it shone through.

Someone cleared his throat and instantly the two men were looking to the door where the lynx girl stood. She had wrapped the blanket around her body that she held with one hand. With the other one she held the empty bowl of soup.

"I..." Her voice sounded like a rasp. She cleared her throat again. "Do you've got any more of this soup?"

Cheza needed a moment to realize she had spoken to him. "Yes, of course," he mumbled and before he had been able to think about sending her back to her bed he had stood up, taken the bowl out of her paw and disappeared inside again, leaving Jiddy and Dhail behind.

The harvest mouse eyed the lynx from teeth to toe: She had to be older than she looked like. Unlike any feline he had met before she was not much bigger than him. "Already up again?"

She nodded. She was also eyeing him: He was a rather harsh looking harvest mouse, rather large for his species. His eyes were narrow and deep-set and beneath the strong eyebrow it looked like he was constantly testing the person opposite. His wiry hair was short.

"In this area one can never be safe from unpleasant surprises. It is much too unpredictable by nature. Or maybe nature itself is much too unpredictable." He observed her from below. "Some people might call that fate. But I do not believe in some such thing. Everything has got an origin and a reason even tough these might be complicated and beyond ordinary people's understanding. But that does not matter as long as one knows that one is oneself responsible for the ripple of the lake one is jumping in, don't you think so?" He rose his eyebrows.

Although her strange slanting eyes had narrowed she stayed quiet.

“So you cannot have arrived here by mere lucky coincidence. The only question that remains unanswered up to now is- of course- the question why you have arrived here. But in the end it’s just a matter of time before one finds out.” He smiled strangely at her and waited for an answer.

“What you’re talkin’ ’bout?” she mumbled. Her dizzy mind had hardly been able to follow his explanations.

In the meantime Cheza came back again with a full bowl of hot soup. “Here,” he said and gave it to the girl.

“Thanks!” She took the bowl, put it at her lips and instantly started to drink.

The llama and the harvest mouse observed her somehow surprised.

Within moments the bowl was empty again and she sighed in satisfaction.

“Eh... You should not leave your bed, you know,” Cheza mumbled, still staring at the empty bowl in her paw like he could not believe that she had simply drunken it.

“Don’t you see, Cheza, that despite the very short time she has stayed there, she is already fine again,” Dhail mentioned almost casually. “Wonder how she is doing that...” When she looked at him he just put on yet another strange smile.

“Yeah, better go back...” she mumbled, turned around and walked back inside. Her slow, awkward movements displayed clearly that she was in no good shape yet. From the inside the two men could hear the rustling of the cloth when she lied down on her temporary bed again.

“What was this about?” Cheza turned around and looked at his companion.

The harvest mouse sighed. “Do you really believe that an ordinary girl her age is up again in such a short time?”

“She is anything but fit again,” Cheza intervened.

Dhail hmphe.

“Or are you afraid of her?” he teased the harvest mouse. “Because she is a feline and you are a mouse?”

Dhail pulled a mocking face of amusement. “At least she could have told us something about her,” he replied hard. “Taking shelter in a house of two men is anything but an ordinary girl’s behavior.”

“Maybe she doesn’t want to talk about that yet,” Cheza tried to explain.

“Maybe she doesn’t want to talk about it at all,” Dhail snapped.

Cheza looked at him. “What’s wrong?”

“You know what is wrong!” He rose an eyebrow. “I have my theories about her presence.”

“That’s just a suspicion of yours, Dhail. In the end she could just be a roaming girl that lost herself in a thunderstorm,” Cheza replied, waving his hands. He had walked down from the verandah and stood in the grass.

“Oh, yes!” Dhail mimicked amusement. “A single girl that roams the country all by herself! She overcomes hardship after hardship all alone and all of a sudden she is foolish enough to let herself be taken by surprise by an ordinary thunderstorm in the middle of nowhere! And! Miracle after miracle she finds a

nice little house and is willingly staying with two men!" He looked harshly at the llama. "Dream on, Cheza!"

The llama observed the harvest mouse, slightly pulled a face and then turned away from him to look at the last rays of sunlight that shone through the trees, dyed everything in a gentle reddish light that carried along the last warmth. There was no wind and it was so silent for a few moments that one could have been convinced that there was absolutely no life in their surroundings. Then some bird croaked and the llama rose his head to watch some bird of prey circling far above them.

Keep in mind, dear reader, that the unification is neither of the body's, nor of the soul's. It is all embracing, defying definition and mortal notion. It is a vile attempt to reduce it to a mere matter of matter as it is futile to adore it as divine inspiration. Only those that are willing to accept it as a gift of their mortality, as the bond with everyone's savage legacy is truly able to grasp its meaning. Because in this truth, dear reader, lies the greatest knowledge of all things: The link to the sphere beyond our perception that allows us to change and to take things with us on our way. Magic, in the end, is nothing but change: By altering us, we are altering the world.

-from The Book of Dreams

When she woke up there was darkness all around except for the faint distant shimmer of a single candle that she could not see. Everything was a blur and her limbs were heavy and tired, her impressions reached into her mind but she was not really able to realize what she was seeing, hearing, smelling or feeling. It seemed to her like the quilt that covered her was as heavy as lead and pressed her down between the sheets. There was some scent lingering in the air, something more than just the scent of the ash of the fire that had burned down in the fireplace, although she was totally unable to recognize what it was. She was hardly able to turn around when she heard the faint rustle of cloth and something like a moan that instinctively attracted her interest. With incredible slowness she turned around and when her half opened eyes penetrated the twilight of the dimly lit room she was finally able to see where the faint noises came from.

Opposite her temporary bed stood a different broad bed which she had not really noticed before. Its quilts and sheets moved sometimes, sometimes a tail showed up in the flickering light of the candle, sometimes an ear showed and then the uppermost quilt fell aside and after the short moment Jiddy needed to understand what happened her eyes opened wide in the hiding place of her quilt.

One hand of the llama took hold of one hand of the mouse that resisted it for a short moment until they took hold of each other and looped themselves together while the fingers pressed hard into the muscled fabric of the hands as if the two men were fighting with each other, wrestling, trying to force each other to the bed. But in this moment the head of the harvest mouse showed up in between the joined furs as it was about to wander across the llama's chest searching for a mouth to kiss that joined it from above and when the men's lips met, the heads disappeared again behind fur, hair and quilts as the two bodies sunk down again.

Jiddy inhaled deeply and instantly her nostrils were filled with the intense scents of male arousal, musky, bitter, salty, pungent, repulsive and intoxicating. Instantly a cold shiver run up her spine as her own body was unwillingly reacting to it, she could feel how she tensed, how her skin was about to tighten around her flesh. Her sleepy, dizzy mind was suddenly aware that the entire room was filled with the most intense of scents of the two males she observed.

Cheza and Dhail rolled on the bed, kissing each other with hasty movements, licking their faces, deeply inhaling the smell of their sweaty furs. Cheza hissed something Jiddy could not understand and suddenly the two men turned over again and she looked straight at Cheza's firm, tight buttocks with their clearly defined muscles that pulled them apart and revealed the cleft in between, from the the two dangling, furry globes of his balls to the dark spot of his tailhole and his erected tail that was pointing upwards. For a moment one of his legs glided forward and the two men's members came forth, lying on each other, their light, heated skin flashing up in between the pubic furs. They slipped across one another and pulsed almost imperceptibly while the tightened balls of the men pressed into each other as if the genitals of the two men were lovers themselves and caressed each other.

Her nipples itched on the rough surface of the linen beneath her.

Quiet words, too silent even for her pointed ears were exchanged just before they got lost in the sounds of rustling cloth and panting again. Hands ran through the short fur of the harvest mouse and brushed the longer one of the llama, uncovering the curves underneath the scape of light brown fur, the muscles and blade bones, the softer fabric below them where Dhail's fingers dug into, pulling his lover even closer while this one licked the harvest mouse's chest, the muzzle wandering downwards until Dhail's hands took hold of Cheza's head whose fingers reached out for his lover's erected sex. For a moment the fingers flickered across the shimmering skin, brushed through the pubic fur and rolled the balls before the shaft disappeared entirely inside Cheza's mouth.

Jiddy gulped.

In the same moment Dhail let go a moan of pleasure and his hands cramped around Cheza's head

Jiddy's heartbeat had gotten so loud that she would have feared discovery if she had been aware of it. But her eyes were fixed on the two males, her tail twitching randomly as it was prevented from wagging by the surrounding quilt that had gotten quite hot by now.

Just Cheza's lips moved. His muzzle was buried in the harvest mouse's pubic fur, just his balls showed up underneath. Although the llama did not seem to do anything Dhail's reactions proved that this was far from truth. The harvest mouse gasped strongly, tossed and turned. "Yes...," he gasped from time to time. "Yessss, my love... Ah..." And Cheza's hands stretched out, caressed the harvest mouse's chest that rose towards the caressing hands that tousled the chestfur and what hid underneath. Little drops of fluid shimmered on Cheza's lips despite the dim light of a sole candle, a tight ring of shimmering light that engulfed the base of the member. The llama opened his mouth and for a moment the whole sex got visible while Cheza's tongue ran across its entire length, licked its glans for a moment and then he took it in whole again and the harvest mouse moaned in pleasure, his loins coming up to meet his lover's lips that started to move stronger, releasing and taking possession of the member in a regular rhythm, uncovering the dripping wet shaft.

A drop of sweat fell from her forehead onto her muzzle.

Cheza got faster and Dhail's movements became erratic. The harvest mouse threw his head around, mumbling senselessly. Cheza's fingers played around with his balls and the harvest mouse trembled from tip to toe, gasped aloud, his hands grabbed the surrounding cloth while he pressed his loins up towards Cheza's mouth that never let go of the member that passed by its lips faster and faster. The rustle of the cloth of the two men's bed almost drowned out the little slurping noise.

And suddenly Dhail's body bucked, a muffled yell escaped him and Cheza's mouth closed as tightly around the sex as possible. Dhail twitched powerfully, was thrown around by little spasms. He moaned, gasped and a moment later all his power seemed to escape him and he dropped down again and for a short instant the pulsing member slipped out of Cheza's mouth. Male juice dropped

from his lips, but then he had already taken the sex into his mouth again and gulped strongly while Dhail moaned long drawn-out, lying still again.

Jiddy did not dare to breathe, her heart hammered inside her chest like a hammer on an anvil.

It took quite some time before Cheza let go of Dhail's now limp sex. Carefully he licked it and its surrounding fur clean, carefully fondling the balls with his tongue. When he had finished he lay down next to Dhail, embraced the weak harvest mouse with one arm while the other one remained between Dhail's thighs and played around with the softened sex.

They partly disappeared from Jiddy's sight, as they lay behind the sheets and quilts. The only thing she could hear was the sound of rustling fur. Now the whole air of the cabin was saturated with pungent male scent that agitated her, made her nervous, although she was relaxing slightly too. Her entire skin was as hot as scorching coals. She was sweating underneath her bed's covers but she did not dare to move. It was not really fear that made her hold still... It was rather curiosity... She could feel that it was not over yet.

For quite some time she could not hear much, her pointed ears quivered nervously as she listened carefully.

Finally one of the two men moved his legs a little bit and the quilt the two had been hidden behind dropped down and revealed their loins, Cheza's hand carefully caressing Dhail's sex that had hardened again while the two men seemed to engaged in kissing. Cheza's big hand ran along the shaft, rubbed the shimmering glans, ran down again, fondled the balls, weighed them carefully, then went further down, passed between the harvest mouse's thighs and finally reached the base of the long, slick tail. Attentively the hand stroked the crack between the balls and the tail, carefully putting pressure on the tailhole and every time the fingers ran across it, the tight ring of muscles gave in a little bit more, adapting to the size of the fingers. The hand went up again until the very top of the member, trapping the glans in the most possibly hot palm that surrounded it completely and for a moment the harvest mouse's loin rose towards the caressing hand.

One of the two hissed something, an urgent request that allowed no refusal. Jiddy could not understand the words, she did not even care. She knew this tone and she could imagine what it meant. The rhombic pupils of her eyes widened.

Cheza rose in the bed, showing his rock-hard member for a moment. Meanwhile Dhail turned onto his belly and rose to all fours, clearly exposing his backside to Cheza who sat down behind him and buried his muzzle between the buttocks. Dhail breathed strongly while Cheza's muzzle moved slightly just beneath his tail. It did not last long as the two men were quivering in anticipation and moments later Cheza let go off the now dripping wet tailhole, rose to his knees, licked his hand and quickly spread the saliva on his member.

"Come on," Dhail hissed.

The strong hands of the llama parted the harvest mouse's perfectly round, firm buttocks. The harvest mouse's tail was already standing up, thus exposing the moistened ring of muscles, the shimmering wet pucker Cheza placed his stiff

member against. He let go the firm buttocks that embraced the male sex and with a mutual effort- Dhail pushed backwards while Cheza had grabbed his waist and pushed forwards- the two men joined and Dhail gave a groan of pain that changed to a moan of pleasure while he lowered his chest onto the bed, offering Cheza an easier access to his backside that the llama used by plunging his member up to the hilt inside the tight harvest mouse's hole until their balls met.

Jiddy was mostly hidden underneath her quilt. Her lynx eyes penetrated the dim twilight as if it was bright daylight.

Cheza leaned forward and she could hear the man whisper something although she could not understand what he said. Dhail answered something and for a moment the two men engaged in something like a quiet conversation made of gentle words. One of Cheza's paw played around with Dhail's short hair while his other one stroked the stiff member between the mouse's legs, ran up and down its length, fondled the furry balls and caressed the smooth glans with his thumb.

Dhail's breath got faster as Cheza's caresses became more insistent and arousing and in this moment Cheza started to work his hips, pulling his member out of the hole that held on tightly to the uneven, rough but wet member until he had almost completely retired it, then he slowly shoved it back in and Dhail moaned wantonly, shuddering, visibly enjoying their love-making. With slow movements that were equally coming from both of them they went on, panting and moaning accordingly, their furs shimmering in the twilight, wet by their sweat. Occasionally the harvest mouse let go a louder moan when Cheza was fully inside him and the llama seemed to speak to him from time to time, whispering words of affection while his paw went on caressing the throbbing sex of the harvest mouse.

She could smell them, their arousal, their sweat and the scent of their semen. She was absolutely unable to take their eyes off them.

The two men rocked slowly, prolonging their pleasure, the duration of their joint. Cheza's paw caressed the stiff sex of the harvest mouse, fondled his tightened balls, stroke the pubic fur and the abdomen until it rose towards the chest and brushed its short fur while Dhail merged with the feeling of Cheza's throbbing member in the strong hold of his tailhole, the pleasure and the subsiding left-overs of pain, his breath got faster as he was being overwhelmed by the feeling of his insides being caressed by the long, smooth sex.

Jiddy could see it whenever Cheza pulled it out, almost all the way until nothing but his glans were still inside the warm hole and she could see its smooth, veined skin and the large, furry balls underneath. Then they disappeared again as Cheza and Dhail moved closer and joined more deeply.

"Yessssss," Dhail hissed. "Yesssssssss." And he let go a moan of pleasure as he could feel like Cheza was once again fully inside him. "Faster," he gasped. "Faster."

And Cheza obliged with pleasure, took Dhail's waist with both paws and quicken his pace until his groin slapped against the smaller furr's buttocks and Dhail started to move in total accordance with Cheza's rhythm, the sounds of the two furs seemed to become one and suddenly Cheza leaned forward and

embraced the harvest mouse fully without stopping his movements and now nothing but the loins of the two men moved in unity as if the two had become one being that pleased itself, took itself to new heights. Cheza whispered constantly now, words of affection flowed from his tongue without his knowing while Dhail responded with pants of lust and they were still getting faster. Dhail's paw grabbed Cheza's hair with full power and he yanked his lover's down as much as possible while those hands were all over the harvest mouse's body.

Jiddy watched the two men totally motionlessly.

And finally Cheza threw his head backwards, no matter how strong Dhail held his hair and the llama let go an silent cry of pleasure while whitish jets shot forth from the ring of the tailhole that could not hold the pressure of the llama's climax. Dhail gasped for breath and shuddered while he could feel like his lover spend himself into him. Cheza collapsed onto Dhail and lay there for a moment.

The lynx could see his powerfully throbbing balls and she shuddered.

Dhail slumped down too and the two men lay on the bed. Cheza's sex was still tightly caught inside Dhail. The llama started to talk lowly, caressing his lover with gentle strokes of his paw.

From underneath her cloth Jiddy could not understand a word but the tension inside her that had gotten stronger every moment she had watched the love-making of the two men was starting to subside. Her cheeks were burning and she could feel a certain moisture between her thighs. She closed her eyes and tried to slow down her breath. Her heart beat strongly. She was surrounded by warmth, intense male scents and her entire body was burning with its own heat. She lay this way for some time, she was not sure how long but before she was able to open her eyes again sleep came over her and her relaxed body welcomed it.

The effect of the disastrously failed ritual does not surprise me. I still think that I am getting closer. But to my own surprise, the orichalkum² I used is nothing more but a piece of brittle stone. It reminds me of pumice. I certainly cannot use it anymore. Even though I really do not know how the spell could consume it entirely.

I remember Master Oisin having said something about the ability of orichalkum to store magical power, but I still can't imagine how this could possibly be. How can a simple stone store something as ephemeral as Magic? I must search the library for books about this matter.

I found a book about it, called "Mineralogy of the Northern Aiseach". I have never heard anything about such a mountainside, maybe it is an archaic name. The book itself looks as if it is some copy from the time of the Mole Empire. The original book might date back to the time of the Mystic Empires, but I might be mistaken about that. I notice that my knowledge of orichalkum is sketchy at best. I have definitely missed out something.

The book is nearly unreadable, the paper is terribly stained. What I have deciphered up to now is mostly mystical gibberish. But there are still some interesting clues: The author is convinced that orichalkum is a leftover of the supreme science³ from the Age of Dawn, it was scattered at the end of this period. It is definitely an interesting idea even though it is not particularly helpful.

But at least I can dare to draw a few conclusions (provided that the author is right):

- 1. Orichalkum is the product of a process and no natural mineral.*
- 2. Its magical abilities could be intentional.*
- 3. It might originate from the Age of Dawn.*

If it was made, what was it made of? I would be crucial to know if it was artificially made or if it was created in a random process. Maybe it was even some kind of by-product. Considering its value, the idea is as funny, as it is blasphemous. As far as I know orichalkum is mined just like any other ore. How could something that was artificially made end up in the stone far beneath the ground?

And once again my studies are thwarted by the shroud that encloses the Age of Dawn. It still is an interesting matter. I must study on. I hope my finances allow me to do so.

-from the diaries of Leachia Cuchaelin

In the morning Dhail got up first. As usual his back had reminded him of his daily schedule and when he had risen to his feet he stretched extensively to get somehow rid of the pain. But of course it was not very much of a help and when he walked over to the toilet his back did not feel any better than before. Every step of his hurt and as it had awakened him so early in the morning he did not even feel fully refreshed either. But on the other hand he knew pretty well how much work was waiting for him and thus it was maybe best this way.

He opened the door and instantly the coolness of the morning surrounded him, rubbed on his skin like emery paper. The very same instant he was fully awake and jumped out of the door and ran behind the house where their toilet was supposed to be.

After having relieved himself he ran back around the house. But when he stepped on the verandah he stopped instantly.

On the edge of the wooden verandah sat the lynx girl. She was hardly dressed at all except for the strange pendant that she never let go, instead her fur was looking very messy and now that he saw it that way he noticed for the first time that it was much longer than any furr's fur he had ever seen before. The only thing she wore was some cloth wrapped around her abdomen and her loin and despite this inconvenient clothing she did not seem to mind the temperature. For a moment when she leaned forward he was convinced to see something like scars beneath her back's fur.

She had a huge backpack on her knees and was busy taking out whatever she found inside: Most of it seemed to be clothing but it was not only all wet and dirty, even it had been dry and clean there was not much one could get from these rags.

"Where do you got that one from?" Dhail asked, forgetting about the cold that was tormenting his nude body.

She did not even rise her head. "Lost it in that thunderstorm....," she mumbled while she was busy with her clothing, spreading it on the ground to make it dry in the morning sunlight.

"Who are you? Where are you from?" he asked all of a sudden, carefully eyeing the girl.

"Black Pit!" she answered without looking at him.

For an instant he just stared at her, then he broke out laughing, his melodious voice echoing all over the misty clearing the house had been build on. All of a sudden his laughter stopped again and he glared at her. "Try to bullshit somebody else! Black Pit's nothing but story to scare children with," he said brutally but he was distracted when she was suddenly taking out some strange rectangular piece of leather of something similar.

"Fuck!" she blurred out when she held the thing in her hands. Heavy drops were falling down from it. Carefully she unfolded it.

The harvest mouse recognized it as a map. Although it was in a very miserable condition he was astonished when he looked at it from the distance. First he had not been able to make any sense out of it as it had taken him a while to recognize the outlines. He had to suppress a whistle: The scale was absolutely awesome. He

had seen such maps in the inner libraries of the sorcerers' council where they were jealously protected from being damaged or taken away. They were considered to be irreplaceable. "Where did you get that map?" he asked. Instinctively he had wrapped his arms around his body.

"Bought it," she said simply.

"Such a map cannot be bought," he replied. "It is priceless. That makes me wonder how some roaming girl like you could pay for it..."

Slowly she turned her head towards him. Her glare was ice-cold when she eyed the man who got now fully aware that he was not wearing anything at all. "What d'you wanna say?"

Now that he had realized that he was still nude he was starting to feel cold again. "It is hard to believe that someone like you got such a map by ordinary means," he mentioned. "Even I could not get something like that if I did not steal it or if it was handed to me for some very specific purpose."

"I paid for it," she said icily.

"Really?!" He faked understanding. "Well, next time you spend a fortune on some map, get yourself some decent clothes for free," he advised. "Or did you really have to pay for these rags too?"

If her stare might have been able to become more icily than it had already been it would have become now. Her tail was wagging frantically while she stared at the man with narrowed eyes. Then all of a sudden she turned away and started to rummage around in the backpack again.

"How did you conjure up that backpack anyway? I would like to know that spell too," he mentioned.

She did not respond, just seemed to dig herself deeper into the backpack.

"Or did you just realize that a roamer needs luggage too...?"

"Left it behind in the thunderstorm," she growled without looking at him. "Searched it half of the night."

"Oh..." For a moment he was thinking about what it meant that she had been able to sneak out of the house without him or Cheza noticing anything. She certainly had to possess this specifically feline stealthiness, if she did not possess other... *skills*... Without any other comment he walked past her and back into the house, ignoring her glare that followed him inside.

He left the door wide open so that the stale air would improve a little bit. But it was not the only effect. The cold took hold of the naked llama that had still been lying between the sheets of their bed and the cold crept into his light brown fur and soon he was feeling a little bit chilly and tossed and turned, instinctively trying to evade the cold that was now surrounding him entirely. But of course he could not and shortly thereafter he opened his heavy eyelids just to see the blurred shape of Dhail who was about to get dressed. "Hi, there," Cheza mumbled weakly.

"Morning," Dhail mumbled while getting into his shirt.

Cheza blinked, powerlessly lying in the bed. "What time is it?" he asked.

"Time to get up," Dhail replied. "You could make some breakfast, for example."

Cheza sighed. "Whatever you say, master!" With a groan the llama sat up in the bed and scratched his messy hair. He needed a moment to get fully back to his senses but then he jumped animatedly out of the sheets, stretched himself and yawned extensively. He was standing right opposite the open door and when he looked outside he perceived the half nude lynx sitting on the edge of the verandah. She showed him her back but what he saw of that startled him for a moment: She was leaning over something and as she did so her muscles poked out of the surrounding fur. Her entire back looked like a landscape of brown grass with deep valleys and gentle, but high hills. Whenever she just moved slightly her muscles started to perform a complicated play that waved around the stiff line of her spine like she was having wings that were just about to hatch from beneath her shoulders. When she stretched the base of her backside showed which was hardly covered by the cloth she wore, then the sensible base of her tail just above the crevice of her buttocks was uncovered and along the straight line of her sides he could see the outline of her ribs beneath the tight muscles and the thin fabric of her breasts. A faint breeze blew hair into her face and with a graceful, but also powerful gesture she pushed it away again so that the entire hair waved around her head with her pointed ears for a moment and all of a sudden a ray of sunlight shone through and seemed to dissolve it, bathing her body in light and warmth while she did not seem to notice it at all.

Dhail looked over his shoulder, perceiving his motionless companion with a stiff member between his strong thighs. He noticed where the llama was looking as well and the harvest mouse pressed his lips together and turned away again, gritting his teeth and stared at his maps and papers again like he wanted to pierce it with his look. His fingers held so tightly to the pen that it hurt.

"I guess I will make us some breakfast now," Cheza mumbled somewhen.

"Do that!" Dhail hissed.

Bit by Bit the small house on the clearing was being freed from the long-drawn shadows of the night when the sun rose higher into the sky. There was almost no wind but the sloshing of Lake Moonfire's water seemed to be closer today as if the lake had decided to move during the night.

After some time Jiddy had been able to get some almost dry clothes from her backpack and put these on while she spread the rest so that they would dry in the morning sun. Now she wore an old ragged T-shirt which was even worse than the stuff she was used to. It was rather consisting of holes than connected tissue and the cloth she had wrapped her breast in showed all the time. As she had found no dry shorts she had wrapped some pieces of cloth around her hips as if it was some kind of sarong. The result looked rather funny. She did not feel very comfortable in this as she tried to readjust it again and again but at a certain point she just gave up.

She went back inside casually looked over Dhail's shoulder and looked down onto his maps and all the other papers and books which occupied most of the table.

He tried not to care about her and focussed on his maps even harder, searching for a usable pattern.

"What's that?" she asked and put one finger on the map, right in front of his face.

"Would you please let me...", he started angrily but then he fell silent and stared at the line she was indicating with her finger. Then he looked at her from the corner of his eyes. He could not really see her face as he was sitting and she was standing right next to him. But what he saw was the cloth she had clumsily wrapped around her breasts through the holes in her shirt. Additionally he could smell her: It was the typical, menacing scent of a feline mixed with different stuff he could not distinguish. But he could certainly smell the female note, heavy and moist, mixed with the salty scent of sweat.

He inhaled. "Whatever you intend, it is not working, alright?" he snarled.

The lynx frowned.

Violently he pulled the map away she had been pointing on, quickly folded it and laid it at the other end of his table. "And now I will work, if you allow me to do so!" he added.

For an instant she observed him, then she sniffed noisily, violently brushed over her muzzle with her forearm. Then she pushed herself off the table she had been leaning on and went away while Dhail was busy with his maps. She growled quietly while she went outside as she urgently needed a little bit of fresh air again.

Shortly thereafter Cheza yelled cheerfully: "Come and get it!" and she had to go back inside, into the small kitchen where Cheza had neatly set a small kitchen table. When Jiddy saw the marmalade, the jars of honey, the porridge mixed grains and topped with a little bit of brown sugar, the bread and all the other stuff she could feel that it had been some time since she had had such a meal or any meal at all.

Cheza was just getting finished with the tea he had prepared while Dhail was already sitting at the table.

"Sit down!" Cheza invited her and did so himself.

The llama poured steaming hot tea into their mugs. First into Dhail's, then into Jiddy's and last into his own. Then he smiled at the lynx. "Serve yourself," he offered her and the feline did not wait much longer, grabbed the loaf of bread and tore off a part of it.

Without caring for manners she took the jar of honey and simply poured some of the golden liquid on the bread and started to eat even before Cheza and Dhail had been able to pick up their mugs.

"Imagine, Cheza,..." Dhail mentioned while he drank some of his tea. "...she was terribly sick for two days but now she was busy all night long, searching for her backpack."

"Yeah, couldn't stand watchin' you fuck any longer!"

Cheza spewed the content of his mouth all over the table. Beneath his fur Dhail had gotten as pale as a sheet of paper.

Cheza wiped the tea from his muzzle. "How did you know?" he mumbled in disbelief.

“Y’couldn’t expect me to sleep with all this groanin’,” she said while biting off something from her slice of bread. She went on with a full mouth.

The two men stared at the feline. Cheza gulped. Dhail was slowly getting back his ability to think. “Do you want to threaten...,” he started to growl.

“It’s a crime where’re you from⁴?” she interrupted the harvest mouse.

From the corner of his eyes Cheza noticed the harvest mouse’s anger. He looked at the lynx girl who was eating as if her comment had not been of any importance. Before Dhail was able to say anything Cheza quickly replied: “No, but that doesn’t mean much⁴.”

Dhail was about to gather his wits again. “If you tell anyone...” he aggressively started anew.

“I don’t give a damn,” she mumbled and devoured hungrily the leftovers of her piece of bread, noisily sucking her fingers.

For a moment the two men observed the lynx girl, then Dhail stood up noisily.

“I am finished,” he said hard and left the kitchen.

Cheza looked after him before he turned towards the girl again who was just about to fall upon another huge slice of bread.

During the Age of Dawn, in between two high mountain chains lay the Silver Land, a country that carried its name with right because the soil was rich with ore and the earth was fertile and the rivers that flew through the valley carried along the treasures of distant countries just like they transported the goods that this wonderful country produced. The inhabitants of this land were happy and peaceful and did not fear any threat because their own guards were strong and proud warriors that were said to be able to deal with any opponent. But the Silver Land knew no enemies because the kings and queens were certain that no war could ever bring them as much fortune as their own land and thus the small nations around this blessed land lived all in peace as well and the moons smiled upon this land during every night while the sages in the city of Nomo, the capital, studied the sky to uncover the secrets of the stars.

The Silver Land was ruled by an eon old dynasty, the family of the minks. They were a proud and honorable family and their only interest was the good of the people because they knew that their own good was depending upon theirs and thus the minks ruled the Silver Land with wisdom and magic that they had learned from the sages that studied the sky and in the darkest nights when only the moons were truly strong enough to carry along their light through the hazes of mortality the sages took the minks up into the sky where they could listen to the murmur of the Spirits that danced around the moons. Thus the minks learned about the present, the past and the future and they used the newly gained knowledge to lead the Silver Land through the ages. While the nations and lands around crumbled to pieces the Silver Land remained and flourished like a garden the Spirits had blessed with their smile.

But times changed and although the Silver Land was safe under the mink's wise rule the world around it was not. And thus it happened that City of the Mirror fell, the mighty nation was reduced to cinder while the city itself and all its marvels disappeared in a gigantic fissure and will remain there until the dusk of time. But lots of the sages from this distant land escaped the downfall and they headed for the peaceful Silver Land to ask for asylum and the minks who had never been mean with the richness of their country welcomed them, hoping to learn from these foreigners that had studied the science of the mirrors for a long time.

Soon the newcomers showed the astonished people of the Silver Lands their unique craftsmanship and designed objects the inhabitants of the Silver Land had never seen before: Unique tools and toys of metal that could fly through the air without magic, that shimmered in the night without burning, that measured the course of the time all by themselves, that stored a lot of things in a very small space and lots of other things that marveled the people and made the sages from the City of the Mirror well known and well respected.

The mink kings and queens were happy that all had turned out so well and when the sages came to them asking the permission to save their families from the savage lands that were where the City of the Mirror had been once, the minks did not object and soon more new citizens came to the Silver Land, finding asylum in its peaceful cities.

But alas the stream of furs did not seize and the minks were troubled as they saw how more and more people came into their land, demanding asylum just like their kin. First the minks did not object but then they started to hesitate and wondered about this change. Because these people were no sages anymore and the cities seemed to overflow with them, in every street there seemed to be more strangers than original inhabitants and unlike their leaders they were not willing to work for the benefit of the country that had welcomed them.

It was the Prince Da'baye who was the most troubled and he went to the royal sages and asked their advise about these strange newcomers that walked through the shadows of streets like they wanted to hide from the rich lights of their country. But when he walked into the great library there was no sage but the oldest of them all and the old man sighed when he saw the young man arriving. The prince asked where all the others had gone and the only thing the old sage did was to guide the prince out into the night and carry him to the moons where he could hear for himself. And there Da'baye heard the murmur of the Spirits that told the story of the future and that the mirror would cut through the silver and shatter it both beneath the waters. The prince was troubled by this vision and he told his family about what he had heard and these were frightened about this revelation and decided to act before this dark vision could come true.

The minks let the guards seal the gates of the Silver Land so that none could trespass its border anymore and so that no threat could ever harm the people. Soon the sages from the City of Mirrors came before the minks and asked why their relatives had been abandoned beyond the gates and had no right to enter this land. The minks were frightened by the sages and told them that this was a mere precaution to prevent a disaster that the Spirits had foretold. But the sages were not satisfied with this answer as they did not believe in the power of the Spirits and so they came a second time and asked for permission to accommodate their relatives. But once more the minks rejected and when the sages came a third time they did no longer ask but demanded the permission. The minks were enraged by this and they told the sages that they would drive out all the former inhabitants of the City of the Mirror if they did ever ask about this again.

The sages were furious and they decided that they would not follow these orders and they started to construct a device that would allow them to undo the minks' orders. At first the minks did not even notice anything but then one morning after a stormy night they could see the dark shape of metal that rose above the houses of Nomo, a giant of abhorrent outlook that steamed above the houses like he was alive. Instantly they sent emissaries to the sages and asked them about the purpose of this abhorrent creature of metal. But the sages just replied that this creature would activate in three days if the minks did not allow all people from the City of Mirrors to join them in the Silver Land.

The minks were town apart by fury and fear as they did not know what to do. The few sages that had not fled yet were unable to tell them anything about this creature as they had never seen anything like that before and even in the old tomes the royal library possessed there was nothing to be found about this

device. The minks called every sorcerer and every warrior of the Silver Land to ask about their opinion but there was none who could give them any advice while time was running out on them.

Finally they were so desperate that they called for a nameless man who had been banished from their country a long time ago but who had always lived close by. None knew how old he was, nor did anyone know his name. Everyone knew where he could be found but up to now nobody had ever dared to search for him. But the minks were much more frightened by the creature that the sages had build than by this nameless man and they send soldiers to him and soon he stood in front of the throne.

He was a disgusting figure, nothing but a an old cloak with nothing to be seen underneath and the minks were repulsed by him but they asked him for help nevertheless. After he had heard their tale he paused and then he answered that he knew a way to defeat the creature and when he told them what he had in mind everyone shuddered in terror but nobody dared to object.

The minks were frightened by the insanity of the proposal but they were more frightened by the creature they could see from the windows of their castle than from some long forgotten threat the nameless man had proposed to use against the metal giant and thus they gave the man the order to begin the summoning as the three days were almost over now. Only the Princess Beshallha objected, calling the stranger a liar but the other members of the royal family did not want to listen to hear and decided to hold her captive until all this was over.

And so the nameless man started his unholy business in the deepest depth of the castle, where the minks had buried their ancestors and their treasures and where the shadows lurked while above the metal creature started to move with deafening noise, slowly coming to life.

One last time the sages from the City of the Mirror called on the minks about their relatives, warning them about the consequences of a refusal. But the minks did not falter, now that they knew that they could defeat the creature the sages had build and instead they let the guards arrest the sages so that they could do no more harm to the Silver Land. But those knew now what the minks were up to and in their cells they freed their own power from their bodies to empower the creature furthermore and thus it came alive and the city trembled when it rose.

But the ground shook a second time and every woman and every man in the Silver Land was stricken with horror when an old nightmare awoke. The Dark Spirits rose, called by the nameless man, they followed his call, descending upon the city from every direction. All of a sudden they were among the ordinary people of this land and ready to destroy everything that stood in their way. And the battle started the very same instant as the creature knew what it faced now, empowered by the sacrifice of the sages and the shadowy beings from the past drained the life from their surrounding as they headed for the capital, corrupting the ground they walked upon, uncovering the chasms of the land until the sky was dark with their poisonous breath. And the creature battled the ancient curse, reducing the capital to cinders and every punch made the earth tremble and

shake and landslides destroyed the Silver Land while the people tried to flee in terror.

One of the blasts freed the princess Beshallha from the prison of her chamber and instantly she ran through the castle to stop the nameless man who was still busy in the deep of the castle. And she flew down the stairs and ran through the hallways, deeper and deeper into the castle and the ground below while the battle went on outside beneath a cloud clad sky as the earth was no longer able to bear the burden of the creature and the dark ones that fought and devastated the Silver Land. When she reached the deepest bottom there was the nameless man standing and she ran over to him and tore the cloak away and beneath the cloth there was a girl and the girl was herself and she cried out in pain when she saw herself under that cloak.

The creature and the shadows ravaged the Silver Land and all the people that got into their way. The dark metal was brightened by the lightning that shot down from the sky while the dark one merged with the shadows that ruled whenever the thunder rolled and just the fire of their battle burned all the time and the spirits of nature cried out as the pain got unbearable and then the rain set in and drowned their cries while the battle went on without a victor. But more and more of the shadows crept up from their prisons and the creature was all by itself and finally it fell to the ground while uncountable hands of dark and cold drowned it in the floods of the rain. But then thunder rolled like the earth had burst and even the dark one rose to see what happened and then it came-unstoppable and merciless- the tidal wave that buried all, Nomo and the Silver Land.

In these days, there is just a lake. They call it Lake Moonfire because it reflects the moons' light unlike any other lake. But beneath its shimmering surface are buried the remains of the Silver Land that the Spirits had drowned to prevent their dark sisters and brothers from haunting the world again. All its treasures, all the wisdom and the knowledge are buried beneath the waves. But ruins are everywhere to be seen although the land is no longer the same. Strange weather is ruling the area, as the weather spirits are responding to the presence of the shadows beneath the water but when it is silent one can hear a murmur that lingers above the lake and that is the crying of Princess Beshallha, the only one who knew the truth, the only one who knew that there...

-from Collected Myths and Legends of the Midlands

"Gimme that!" He tore the book out of the feline's paws and slammed it onto the table. "Don't touch my books!" he added coldly.

She glared at the harvest mouse.

"Can you read anyway? You would be the first roamer who could do that..." He arranged the books that laid on the table to a pile, not confronting her glare.

"It's forbidden or what?" she growled, hardly hiding her anger.

"No! No! I was just asking myself what kind of a roamer is able to read, that is all," he replied.

"Me!" she growled.

"I see!" He picked up the book she had been reading and looked at the title for a moment. "*Collected Myths and Legends of the Midlands*," he read out loud. "Ha! Nothing but mystic nonsense in there!" He put it back on the pile. "In the future keep your hands off my books!" He picked them all up and carried the heavy pile over to a shelf where he all set them down and then went back on the verandah where Cheza was waiting for him.

She looked after him.

"Now she is looking through my books," he whispered to the llama while he sat down on the rocking chair.

Cheza was sitting on simple chair from the kitchen and had been busy peeling the turnips for dinner. "She is just curious," he said to him.

"Oh yes, she is," Dhail agreed coldly. "Curious about who we are and what we do and what I have planned and what we do in the night and so on and so on and so on." He folded his hands in front of his face. He seemed to disappear completely in this chair which was somehow too big for him.

"Don't you think your reaction is somehow over-the-top?" the other man asked quietly, carefully peeling another reddish vegetable.

"Damn! Don't you see? All this is a little bit too much of a coincidence, don't you think? She gets lost here, she is wearing a shamanic pendant, she heals within a few days, she spies out our love life, she pries my books, she tries to hit on us..."

"You are exaggerating..." Cheza mumbled.

"She is running around naked and smells like a kitty in heat..." the sorcerer added.

Cheza gave Dhail a look. "As if that would affect one of us," he said, grinning.

Dhail narrowed his eyes and carefully studied Cheza for a moment who did not seem to notice anything and just went on with peeling the vegetables. Dhail folded his arms and started to brood.

The night was already close again, the sun had already weakened and its light was much more reddish now. The leaves of the trees rustled as a little bit of wind had risen and the birds chirped in the distance. One could have called it peaceful, but Dhail could not find anything peaceful in there as did the girl who was observing the two men from inside.

Time, dear reader, is an enigma besides its role as the first pillar of the world. It is a conundrum, a force Heya^s is guarding unyieldingly. It plays its tricks on us mortals like a malevolent jester that has to remind us of our weakness and its very own tyranny. Time is our merciless ruler, judging the bold and the brave as well as the weak and the old. There is no mercy in its eyes and no pity left as it works hard on turning the wheel of fate that will carry us to the stars above and crushes us the next instant. Time is a predator that we cannot escape and when we see this deadly shimmer in the eyes of our fellow furs we are not seeing into their eyes at all, but into those of Heya herself, the incessant turner of the wheel. Thus we do neither have to fear our fellows as they are nothing but puppets in this play too and nothing but the executor of fate. Nor do we have to fear time at all: No one knows the hour of one's death, but it will come to him for certain. Instead we should rather let us be carried along by this power and enjoy our uprising when it is our turn to ascend to top of things. And when the fall comes thereafter, calm your heart and strengthen your guard, so that you can walk this way with dignity too. Even the most powerful magic has never been powerful enough, even the most sophisticated technology could not stop time. It is the flame of life itself that feeds on us and drives us on and one day everything is burned and nothing but cinders remain.

But like I said, dear reader, time is mysterious and although one can depend on it executing the rules of nature, it is not without flaw and wit. Sometimes it flows like a big stream, slow and powerful, sometimes like a childish rivulet, changing its pace and its way everytime it meets an obstacle, and sometimes it is nothing but a giant waterfall, sweeping away everything and tearing it to the very bottom of existence. So the only thing one can do is swimming and when you feel the waves of time washing over your mortal body, then you might have come to the true understanding of your life, that life itself is the greatest magic that can be.

-from The arcane and the profane

It was still mostly dark inside, the first light was fleetingly lingering in the room, rather reminding of left-overs from the last day than of the avant-garde of the next. In the beam strange shimmering spots flashed brightly, performing a dance in the twilight, touching the bed and the cold fireplace with nimble steps like small fairies before they disappeared into the nothingness of this early morning again.

This association was anything but to his liking and as his back was hurting once again. He could not stand it inside the bed anymore and even before Cheza had waken up he rose quietly and dressed in all silence. He wrote a short note, took some equipment from the table and then he sneaked out as silently as possible. When he went past the camp bed that stood close to the kitchen door he eyed the sleeping feline for an instant. There was no one to be seen beneath the cloth as the girl had wrapped herself completely into the cloth, adapting some kind of a baby like position: Lying on her side, arms and legs bent like a hibernating animal that tried to protect its own warmth. He could not resist the urge to look over to his mate that lied in their bed and to compare their position: Cheza lay relaxed on his back, one arm resting on his chest, the other next to his head so that his face was turned towards an invisible sky, his mouth slightly opened and his regular breath brushing through the short fur of his muzzle. He looked like there was nothing that could harm him, he was timeless and... Dhail did not really want to admit that: Beautiful. The two sleepers could not have been more different.

The harvest mouse pulled a face and went on, headed for the door and opened it as silently as he was able to.

Outside he was welcomed by the cool moisture of the passing night that lingered all over the grass of the small clearing their hut had been build on. The foggy haze loosened itself from the ground in slow-motion and with incredible slowness rose into the air where it dissolved in the first rays of the sunlight from far beyond the Blue Ridge Mountains that shone through the trees. There were some birds chirping and as the air was still and windless it felt so peaceful as he would never had expected it to be in this region. He knew pretty well how unpredictable the weather on the Silver Coast was, but in this moment this day promised to be a beautiful summer day, something he simply had to mistrust: It was just too good.

The cool air did him good and when he inhaled deeply the freshness cleared his sleepy mind and he yawned freely, allowing the coolness to caress his warm limbs. But then he had to go on and he walked down the verandah and into the reddish twilight of the morning sun that shone through the trees in blinding rays while other parts remained in the darkness, not yet awakened by the dawn. His boots were wet by the dew while he went through the grass and soon he penetrated the forest where the few, low sounds of the morning where enforced by the staccato of drops of dew that fell down from the branches.

He headed directly for the lake's shore, paying no attention to the beauty of nature around him. He was aware of it but he had already seen it far too often to waste any time on it. And soon he found himself on the low shore of the lake where the waves weakly sloshed against the grassy border.

He took a small jewel from a box he had been carrying under his arm. The dark red jewel was set into a ring of gold that was decorated with complicated patterns and signs.

He looked around, searching for a specific small rock in the water he needed as a landmark. He did not find it at once because upon Lake Moonfire was still lingering the fog that the people who lived at the shore in their typical exaggerated manner called Moons' Haze. For him it was fog and in this moment it hid his landmark!

It took him quite some time before he had found it in between the waves and the haze that seemed to turn into one another. But finally he found it: Nothing but a small dark grayish stone, hardly above the waterline.

He looked at the rock in the lake. He was absolutely sure that this rock was the remain of an old landmark which had already existed before the formation of the lake. It was a leftover from an era he knew virtually nothing of (except mystical crap), but the time had change it and the water had eroded it and now there was nothing but this simple rock between the waves left. But he had felt the powers that gathered in this spot, that seemed to linger in the air all around. They were all still there and with the time he had even come to the conviction that there had to be even more beneath the waves: Some ruin, some magical leftover, some treasure he could unearth if he just succeeded to get his calculations right. But he didn't! He had studied it again and again, had examined and tested it various times with every mean he knew of and in the end after months of study his knowledge was virtually as limited as upon his day of arrival. The summer was as good as gone, autumn was coming fast, he ran out of time. The Sorcerer's council expected results.

In an outbreak of emotions his hand cramped about the paper he carried in his hands and when he noticed that he was just about to destroy his precious notes he swallowed his anger and forced himself to calm down.

Damn! This lynx was exactly what he had needed right now! She was not just making things even more difficult, she was obviously messing everything up she dealt with and he had been so lucky to meet her right now. She was trouble, a damn living unknown in his calculations, turning everything upside down and inside out while he was trying to make any sense out of it. Basically he had been sure that she could not be any good, the moment he had seen her shamanic pendant: Chaos incarnate! A mess of powers held captive in a piece of metal, totally unpredictable and uncontrollable as well. Why she did she turn up here? What was the purpose of her presence?

His jaw had been working the whole time while he had motionlessly stared at the water of the lake which gleamed with the first sunlight as the yellow and red sphere was just about to free itself from the rocky outline of the Blue Ridge Mountains to gain the open sky. The fog had almost completely vanished now and except for the dark shape of the Andeleau Mountains that looked like a giant who refused to wake up, everything was shimmering in the light, glistening with dew, displaying its fresh morning colors.

He picked up his jewel again and looked at one of his maps.

The basics were simple and he had not needed more than a few days to determine them: The lake was there, the islands, the ruins... It was like a magical trap, a settling pit. The powers that had been at work here a long time ago had been so powerful that they were still all around. Magic never faded entirely, it left its traces behind and he had found them. But it was too much. The left-overs were weak, hardly detectable if one did not know what to look out for, but once he had started to get into it, he had been totally overwhelmed by the results. It had cost him all of his skills not to break down. The traces were so weak that a single one was hardly worth the effort, but the sheer amount was too much even for him. He had known about this before he had presented his plan to the council. But he had been too optimistic, he had obviously overestimated himself, even though the mere thought made him furious. He had walked right into an open trap, an endless study that would not bring no results at all. He wondered if the members of the council had known about this, if they had allowed him to go on this pointless journey because they wanted him to fail. It was just the kind of intrigue the council would use against him and his family.

His ground his teeth in futile rage while he stared at his map. But the longer he stared on paper that was crumpled between his paws the more his mind raced and the more confident he became that it was no use. The powers that had once ruled this place had been tremendous. But in the end he did not even know what he was dealing with. Was this a remain of the Age of Dawn, was it the Silver Land as the traditional legends suggested? The ruins suggested the latter, but the sages of the Mystic Empires used the knowledge from the Age of Dawn and thus it was possible that he was dealing with something even older, something far more mysterious, spiritual powers... Maybe it was spiritual powers, forces of nature far beyond a mortal's grasp. He had checked any magical alignment he knew of, every pattern and nothing seemed to match. But it would have been too easy if nothing made any sense at all, that would have been far too simple. Some of the stuff made perfect sense. It was as if he held the pieces of several puzzles in his paws. He just did not know how many there were...

For a moment he allowed his mind to wander and as if it was an instinct it wandered towards the jewel in his paw and then it was projected upon his surroundings and instantly he saw the landscape around him in an entirely different light. It was as if the lake rose suddenly, the trees and all of the flowers sunk beneath the water, the mountainside formed a ring around the whole lake that looked impenetrable. And in the water stood the ruins, swirling shapes of a long forgotten past, stones and distorted, irrecognizable reflections. He got goose-bumps when he felt how the magical power surrounded him, how it seemed to pull on his body that had suddenly shrunk in comparison to the hidden world. He was insignificant.

He opened his eyes and instantly the vision vanished. A cry of frustration escaped his throat when he threw the map on the ground and in the very same instant it was set afire by the spell he had cast without any effort. Quickly the dry paper was starting to be consumed by the flames.

He was panting strongly, trembling slightly while he watched the paper blacken and all of a sudden he jumped over to it, grabbed it by the end that was not burning yet and hit it against the ground to extinguish the flames he had invoked himself.

Panting strongly he slowly stood up again. But when his eyes went by the wood he stopped the very same instant: A familiar shape stood there, observed him coldly, hardly dressed with some ragged pieces of cloth wrapped around her loin and her chest.

"Who are you?" he hissed through his teeth while he rose to full size, walking over to the lynx.

"Uh?" She eyed the oncoming harvest mouse.

"Who are you?" he growled, opened the fingers of his hand and his papers and tools dropped to the ground. His face was distorted, his eyes flashed hatred, his small rodent teeth were gritted. His entire body trembled due to restraint aggression and then he hurled his hand towards her. "Where did you come from? What do you do here? I don't believe in no damn coincidences! You are here on purpose and I want to know why!" He dashed forward until he stood right in front of her and looked into her brown eyes. His index was right under her muzzle.

She didn't retire, didn't even twitch an eyelid or so. Instead she returned his glare. Slowly she opened her mouth. "You're nuts!" she stated coldly. Her dark eyes shimmered in the sunlight.

His breath was heavy and his face had lost any trace of blood. His short fur was bristled. His screwed up eyes focussed on this damn lynx' face. He felt the void in his stomach and every muscle in his body was stretched, ready to attack but she didn't display any kind of excitement at all, her eyes just shimmered in the early sunlight and the lines of her face exposed nothing but cynical pity. His hand was shaking. He put it down. "You damn..." he hissed.

"What?" she asked defiantly.

He pressed his lips together. Everything he wanted was to bury his fists in her face but then he perceived like a muscle in her shoulder twitched: She was as tense as he was but she was able not to show it. After all he was able to guess what such a small bastard was able to do in comparison with himself. He swallowed the bitter saliva in his mouth and exhaled a hot jet of air. "Whore!" His lips merely parted when he spoke the word with any possible abhorrence.

He noticed with satisfaction who she reacted to this word. Her ears lied back and a shudder ran through her tail while her features hardened.

The knee hit him faster than he had been able to realize that she was attacking him. It seemed to him like she had pushed his balls up into his throat, he coughed while the vacuum in his abdomen tore him apart. Instinctively he took hold of his member while he collapsed, gasping for breath and groaning in pain.

She hissed furiously then spun around and walked away, leaving the moaning harvest mouse behind.

The town's elders who had sent me to the source came to me and made me remember my mission. It seemed to me like scales fell from my eyes, as if a spell was taken from me. Suddenly all the stuff they had told me about the nymph's malevolence came back to my mind as I had totally repressed these matters. I was stunned while they told me about the nymph's evil, her diabolic nature and her magic and the longer they spoke the more angry I became. My rage grew stronger and stronger as I felt betrayed by the nymph, she had fooled me, used me, charmed me with her evil magic and had abused my feelings. The old men shook me, told me the truth and I felt free again.

I did not hesitate long. They encouraged me to go off once again, to deal with the malevolent spirit at once. And so I marched off, walked the way I knew so well by now and in my mind I recalled all the spells I knew, to find those that I could use against such a perfidious being. Soon I realized that I could not dare to approach the pool as it was the creature's focus, where it was strongest.

The day changed to dusk, the shadows got longer, the whole forest seemed to pull closer together. Due to my rage I was hardly able to hear the rustle of the leaves around me, but wind had arisen and blew around me. My boots sunk deep into the muddy ground but it never slowed my step that got stronger and more purposeful with every moment. The wind tore at my hair and my clothes.

I stopped at a safe distance and started my incantations. I called on to the powers of cleansing fire and soon the sky above me was burning with an incandescent red as all my power gathered there. My body was afire with magic energy that was powerful enough to tear me apart at any moment. I conjured a power that had been far beyond my grasp up to that moment. My rage fuelled me like nothing I had ever felt before. On my mind were visions of destruction and devastation that transformed to spells again and again as they passed my lips. Until my hand lowered itself and the fire shot through me and crashed down where the damned pool had to be.

Trees were torn apart like matches, rocks were crashed like dry wood, water evaporated and the ground shook like during an earthquake. In front of me everything had transformed into an inferno I stared upon like a madman. I did not even notice the splinters that shot around me or the flames that burned my clothes and my fur. The only thing I could feel was the magic that flew through my body like an insurmountable torrent. It tore away what little was left of my mind.

And then I heard her voice...

From the midst of destruction I could hear her voice calling my name...

I do not know what I thought. Mostly possibly I did not think anymore. Blindly I ran straight into the blaze I had caused myself. The heat, the flames, the trees crashing down next to me did not matter while I tried to reach her. I remember my fur burning, I remember crying in pain but the more pain I felt the faster I ran. And finally I threw myself into what was left of the pool, grabbed the lithe body I found underwater and took it up with me, hardly realizing what I had done or what I did.

Uncountable wounds covered her beautiful body, I was hardly able to recognize her. But in this moment her mouth formed a smile and I knew that it was her and in the same instant I started crying. I was hardly able to hold her any longer, I pressed my head against the soot that had been her hair and I begged for forgiveness. With what was left of her power she started to talk to me, she spoke so gently as if she spoke to a child: She said that she had known that I was her fate, she had known it all along. She had known that her love would kill her...

And my cry of pain tore the fire apart. It was extinguished by my magic while I begged for her forgiveness, for my sins and my crime. I held onto her while I could feel like life vanished from her ethereal body. I covered her with kisses, prayed to the Mother Goddess to return the life I had taken myself, promised to redeem my crime if she was spared. But the only thing I could feel was her powerless hand that rose to my face and stroke my cheek just before her body transformed to water and she ran through my fingers. A last cry of mine accompanied her.

I don't know how long I remained there. Half mad with the pain of my loss. I cried all the tears I had until my eyes ran dry.

I thought about avenging her. But such a thought would never had crossed the mind of a gentle creature like her and so I left the town without any word, not leaving anything behind. I did not want to be paid for having committed vile murder.

You ask me why I do still remember this event that goes back such a long time?

When I came back from my journey to the North I passed by this place once again. Several summers had passed and the the damages of my crime had diminished, although not disappeared entirely. There are things that never disappear fully. The town was nothing but a few overgrown ruins anymore. As the nymph that had protected the source had died, the source had run dry and so did the brook the town had depended on.

Where the source had been was nothing but a dry forest and crashed rocks. But among these was a tiny stream that came up from beneath one of the rocks and it gurgled and bubbled innocently.

-from Report of my travels to the northern wilderness

End of Chapter 8

Annotation 1: As feline furs are strongly perspiring by their furless pads lots of them prefer not wearing shoes. They so-called feline spats look like knee-length socks with the parts for the toes and the ankle cut out. Jiddy does never wear any boots.

Annotation 2: Orichalkum is a magical, metallic element that looks like bloodstone with an oily, prism like surface. It is extremely rare and thus very valuable too as it can store magical power and is being used for many spells.

Annotation 3: During the fabled Age of Dawn, magic and technology were united in one supreme science. Its mysteries were lost when the Age of Dawn ended.

Annotation 4: Even though homosexuality is widely tolerated among furs, an openly homosexual lifestyle is not considered to be acceptable. Most furs consider homosexual experiences as “youthful follies” or excessive outbreaks which are given up in “real life”. Dhail fears discrimination, especially because he is the member of a renowned family.

Annotation 5: One of the Moon Goddesses, present in the night sky as the moon of the same name, also referred to as the golden moon. Because of its regular, clearly visible phases it is the base of the calendar and thus the Goddess is considered to be the guardian of time.