

“Seer?”

Tara’s eyes were gazing through Maurean, unfocused and distant. Her eyes had faded to grey for the moment, not her usual blue that could appear like the ocean when she was happy or ice when she was enraged. Her wavy hair was loose, falling over her shoulders in a gentle, red wave. She wore the long, grey robes that were required when meeting with high ranking military, but had opted against shoes in her own tent. It was a rare benefit that came with her position and one that she exercised often.

“Tara!” Maurean repeated, firmly.

“Hmm?” Tara responded, startled. “Yes?”

“Did you agree?”

“Agree?”

“With the scout’s reports?” Maurean said, firmer. She was still wearing her leather armor with an ash tree engraved on her right shoulder guard. Her pin-straight, black hair was pulled back and bound with dark cloth to keep it out of her face. The captain came straight to consult with her old friend once she had made it to the camp, excessively formal once she entered the Seer’s tent. Since arriving at the military camp, Tara had only seen Maurean as the strict, military captain with her own unit to command.

“Of course.” Tara shook awake. “Uh, from what I’m reading his assumptions are correct. He’s just missing what’s happening on the north border. I’m worried that there’s a weakness there.”

“The northern border?” Maurean asked, examining a map on the wall. “Nothing up there but ice and mountain.”

“Yes, a great deal of mountain. An uphill battle will give Lord Ballison a tactical advantage that we could not counter before they, um...”

“They advance?”

“Yes, advance...”

“I think the Seer is a bit drawn out this afternoon, Captain.” Peter announced. The older man was dressed in fine blues, trimmed with silver that matched his thinning hair. “Perhaps once she’s had time to rest, she could undergo a proper meditation and give you a more precise conclusion to her visions? She’s been reporting to the general almost daily. You can understand her exhaustion.”

“Of course.” Maurean nodded, making a worried glance toward her oldest friend. “I’m sorry, I didn’t think. I’ll let you finish your report to the general.”

“Thank you, Mau—I mean, Captain.”

“You’re welcome, Seer.” Maurean said, with a stiff bow. “I’ll be back later.”

Tara said nothing as the young woman left her tent. Tara placed her hands over her eyes, rubbing the sockets with the heels of her palms. “If I have to read one more scout’s report, I’m going to cut my own eyes out...”

“Like so many great oracles before you.” Peter chuckled, returning to his knitting. “I imagine they’ll become relics in His Majesty’s collection.”

“I’m serious!” Tara groaned, standing and pacing in her tent. “And it’s bad enough I have to shuffle through all these general’s propositions to tell the old geezers they’re following the basic logic. If they’re acting incorrectly, my visions will come to them too late to be of any good. At best, I’m stroking their egos in order to save a few battalions from walking to their death.”

“Be glad they take your council, Seer.” Peter said. “Many a young woman has had an important vision that has gone unheeded.”

“Yes, I was trained by the Order of Cassandra, I know the stories.” Tara said. “If I had a moment of peace, maybe I could properly summon a vision! Something useful. Right now, I’m just rereading their proposals, congratulating their foresight and pointing out obvious flaws that Maurean had already warned them about. I’ve faked more visions to cover their blunders than I’ve had true visions in my life!”

“You’re frustrated, I can see that.” Peter set his half finished scarf aside. “But I think you’re worried about disappointing the good captain. I doubt it’s all from obeying stuffed shirt generals who can’t tell their ass from their elbow.”

“Peter!” Tara grinned, sitting at her desk. “Such language! And I thought you were a monk.”

“There’s nothing in our bylaws against cursing.” Peter corrected. “I’m merely trying to match the colorful vernacular of the gentlemen in the mess tent.”

“She won’t even look at me, Peter.” Tara said, dropping her hands. “We were best friends growing up. And now, rules of decorum weigh heavier on her than her armor.”

“I have seen it weigh heavily on you, too.” Peter nodded. “But Maurean had to work hard for her position...harder than most. Being a Shield Captain, glamorous as the stories make it seem, is a life of strict conduct. Maurean is happy when she gets to see you. So much so, she makes up reasons to visit.”

“Is that right?”

“You received that same scout report from the generals two days ago. You said the same thing then, too.”

“Perhaps I didn’t notice through the repetitive nature of these reports. I figured it might have been something I’ve seen in a vision.”

“For all your Sight grants you, Seer,” Peter laughed, “you lack the skill to see what is right in front of you.”

Tara sighed and set her chin in the palm of her hand, resting it on the desk. Her eyes dulled briefly, but not quite the same as before. Piercing the layers of her sight, she peered into the Space Between Spaces, hoping to find the vision that had come so close to the surface before. Small specks danced in her vision, taunting her. She focused on one, trying to peer deeper into the Space Between Spaces.

“You’re chasing it.”

“It’s...important.” Tara said, dully focusing on the space before her. “A real vision might actually do something.”

“Chasing a vision only makes it unreliable.” Peter counseled. “The future wants to be undetermined, you know forcing a vision only changes the present.”

“I—it wants to be seen, Peter.” Tara whispered, rubbing her sore eyes. “I know it.”

“Far be it from me to correct the Seer, my lady.” Peter picked up his knitting again. “Merely making an observation from my years with the previous seer.”

“Visions wouldn’t come if they didn’t want to be known.” Tara relaxed her eyes and

“Your best visions have come when you aren’t looking.” Peter noted. “However, if you truly feel it is meant to be seen, maybe you should change your focus. Perhaps it doesn’t have anything to do with the war.”

“What do you mean?”

“Grand visions? Illusions of things to come as grand scale as war are hard to come by. Seeing visions of your personal destiny? Most people can get those if they know where to look. But if you’re focused so hard on the great visions, you won’t have the sight of your own future.”

“My future?” Tara asked. “Do you think that’s what it is?”

“You’ve been so focused on the war, you might have forgotten what’s right in front of you.”

“I always felt my place was here.” Tara said. “I didn’t think of what came after.” As the thought crossed her mind, the image became a little clearer, showing a broad cliff face. She couldn’t see the girl’s face, but the other girl extended a rose to her.

“Peter, a quill...”

“Tara?”

“Quickly!” Tara urged. “I need to remember this...”

Tara felt the quill placed in her open palm, her wrist placed on a piece of smooth, linen paper. She started moving her wrist, focusing on the space away from the paper and not turning her head in fear of losing the vision. Peter would guide her arm to the inkpot when the pen ran out and placed it back on the page where she had left off. After a moment, Tara lost sight of the vision and recoiled from the Space Between Spaces. She brought a finger up to the corner of her eye and noted the drop of blood that had pooled in her tear duct.

“A vision!” Peter confirmed, handing her a handkerchief. “A vision of truth! The blood means it is firm.”

Tara dabbed the bleeding spot on her eyelid and looked at what she had created. Tara had drawn herself with another woman, the perspective just behind the other woman. The stranger was dressed in a dress that showed her bare, scarred shoulders. The woman offered a flower to Tara in the drawing. The rose extended to Tara in the image was so detailed that Tara could make out the individual petals.

“Who is this?”

“I do not know, Seer.” Peter shook his head. “I don’t think I’ve seen her. Perhaps it is a sign? Maybe it is a symbol rather than a true face? Perhaps it signifies a political alliance or a skill you’ll need to learn?”

Immediately, Peter opened his book of symbols he had collected with other Seers over his years. He flipped through the pages, his eyes darting between his tiny notebook and the image. Tara placed her palm on the paper's edge, keeping Peter from taking it away.

“Peter, could I discover this vision on my own?”

“You don't want to have it interpreted?”

“No, it's not that. I just...if this vision is truly mine, as I believe it to be, I wish to discover it's meaning on my own. As you said, forcing a vision makes it unreliable.”

“Wouldn't want to lose your flower, would we?” Peter smirked, taking the pen and ink from the desk. “Fret not, my lady. I am, as always, your servant. Then I am a servant to the Order.”

“You haven't been my servant for that long, Peter.” Tara said, focusing on the picture. “Though, I'd like to think you are my friend.”

“I am.” Peter nodded. “And I shall remain even if the Order burns around us.”

“Thank you, Peter.” Tara nodded, looking at the image again. The rose seemed like something she could pull out of the page, as taunting as the vision had first been before she knew it was her own.