

Frozen Hazard

by Yangi

With my goal finally in sight, I decided to take another last break. I didn't know what lay ahead of me. There was talk about revolution and the waves of hatred and desperation reached out across the sand. It was scary. Alert, I sat down on a dune, facing the royal city and exhaled. My mind ran down the plan endlessly: Avoid the main gates, find the passage, reach the regents, hopefully get their help, sneak back out and travel straight back to the old couple. Avoid the main gates, find the passage... It was tiring but helped to keep my mind off of any concerns. At some point I got up and started walking. It took several hours and when I reached the western wall, one sun was already hitting the horizon, painting the sky in a fiery red. The black shapes became clearer, growing into an impressive heap of buildings that ended in a mighty dark stone palace at the top of a hill. My steps slowed down until they stopped. There were the western gates and there was a lot of movement in front. From a distance it looked like ants hurrying from left to right. It didn't matter though. The land surrounding the city was dry and empty. There was no place to hide, no hope of shade. I had to go straight and pray that no-one would notice me. A blue-ish shimmer lit up my chest and the wings had gone. Hesitant I continued my walk. Step after step I moved forward while the noise from the gates grew louder until it rang in my ears like the buzzing of a bee-stock. The people were storming the gates with whatever they had, shouting, screaming, throwing their few possessions at the guards that looked down from their posts on the 3 meter high wall. Before anyone could notice me, I turned left and pushed my way through the raging masses. I thought it would feel like the anxiety of a crowd attending a concert, pushing forward to see the band. It was nothing like it. I had barely moved inside when the people shoved me away from my path, dragging me directly towards the gates. I kicked, screamed and pulled, in other words: I panicked. Truth be told: I don't know how I made it out. All I remember is that suddenly I was alone and that I rested my forehead against the cool stone wall of the city to catch my breath. It was one of the most terrible moments of my young life, or so I had thought.

Once I had left the crowd, locating the passage had proven surprisingly easy. It was mostly thanks to the heart, I have to admit that much. Its magical light scanned the wall with each crack, every single tiny notch until they shaped a triangle. It was pretty small but big enough for a person to crawl through on all fours. My knees didn't like the trip of course. They had been meeting all kinds of grounds by now and were more than sick of it. The tunnel was long and the air damp and for once in a long time, I was happy about the hearts company. Thanks to that pendant's light, my knees didn't receive a long lasting damage but only a few more bruises. At some point the tunnel ended and I met a wall. I had to push pretty hard but eventually it gave way and I found myself in the palace. "Hey! You! Who are you?" I jumped at the sudden noise and ran down the corridor. Then I stopped. I had gotten so used to avoiding people, my body fled on its own but my brain assured me there was a better way this time. Slowly I turned around and faced the two guards coming after me. "Sorry I ran, but your people can be very unkind. I'm here to see the regents." The guards halted, spears in hand. "Who are you? Why should we listen to-" The heart of Kandrakar shimmered on my cold eyes. "You will bring me to the regents, now."

Hours of explaining followed. The young king and queen were very interested in Kandrakar and its politics, as well as the guardians, their powers and Earth. Whenever I would try to steer the conversation back towards the actual problem, another five questions would be asked. It was clear I had to answer as truthfully as I dared to get what I wanted. I sighed with relief when the queen began chatting casually about Tarzea until her husband stopped her and they both looked at me with smiling eyes. "You've been very informative and honest with us. We shall return the favor. Many of our people have family on Tarzea. We will help its people however we can if equivalent help is being provided for our people."

"I promise it will", I answered gratefully and bowed.

"You look weary. Why not stay as our guest and tell us more about the many worlds you've seen?" I shivered at the reckless tone of his majesties proposal. "I'm afraid I have to leave immediately. Thank you deeply, your majesties. I will deliver your good will to Tarzea and return with help as soon as possible. May I suggest, your majesties also think about a group of people to be taken to Tarzea for assistance against the cold?"

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“So we shall.”, the queen nodded solemnly and her husband ended: “And you shall be known to them upon your next visit.”

On my way back to the secret passage my feet barely lifted from the ground. Pondering I slurped through the many corridors, each one as big as the entrance hall of the Sheffield Institute. My mind was hot, my body drained and all I wanted was to go home. Something clanked. A bronze ring rolled out of a room, across the corridor where it wiggled and dropped right before my feet. I blinked at it stupidly. Seconds later I heard a gasp from the doorway. It was a young boy about the age of 8, I would say. He looked shocked and stared at me until a girl pulled him back into the room. I sighed, picked up the ring and followed them. The room I entered had a comfortable size and seemed to be used for studies. I remember the dark wooden desks with golden ornaments, chairs of the size of a throne with raven-like birds carved into the back and many, many books. They were old, no doubt and probably valuable. The children saw me coming and ran to hide. “I think you lost this.”, I said, offering the ring in my hand for them to see. Nothing happened. “I’ll leave it on the desk by the door, okay?” I turned to leave when something dragged at my uniform. The boy looked at me with big sad eyes. “Don’t go! Y-you’re here to save us, right?” I smiled at him and kneeled down so our eyes were on the same level: “That’s right. You two are twins?” My head bend to the side and caught a glimpse of the girl that hurriedly jumped back behind the desk. The boy nodded. Judging by their clothing they were the regents’ children. Very adorable. At least for someone who had always wished for siblings. “Will you make things alright again?”, he asked me. Something wasn’t right. Something in this child’s behavior, in his way of questioning seemed strange, as if he knew more. I chose my next words with care, confronting him with a kind but demanding expression: “That depends. We only know that the weather of Tarzea and Aressy has been exchanged. Right now we can only speculate how that came to happen. Finding a way to reverse it could take a long time.” I sighed regretfully and looked idly around the room. “If only we knew what caused all this! Such a shame.” A pause for effect, then I continued more cheerfully: “But don’t worry. Your parents agreed to send help for Tarzea and they will send people to help you here until I’ve found a way to return your climate back to normal.”

“So...” The girl peaked out from behind the desk. Slowly she came out, and then quickly ran to her brother’s side. “If you knew what had happened... you could get everything back to normal?” They did know something after all. My inner self danced in triumph! “It certainly would speed things up.”, I admitted. The kids looked at each other. It was the boy who started to explain: “We didn’t want this to happen. We never thought that it would really work, the magic I mean.”

When he didn’t continue, my forehead wrinkled. “What magic? What did you do?”

“They never play with us so we were bored...”, the girl said.

The boy nodded and carried on: “...all this snow. It’s all we ever see so one day we came here and...” “...there was this book.”, the girl said. “It looked pretty. We didn’t know it was magic.” She shrugged her shoulders shamefully and the boy took over again: “One story was about changing the weather. We thought it could be fun. We didn’t even use the right things so we never thought it would work. It was just a game.”

They looked at me expectantly. I sighed and nodded. “So that’s what happened. You didn’t take the right ingredients but something similar, I guess. That’s probably why it backfired. You see magic isn’t like a button that you push and it either works or doesn’t. Magic, once it’s been activated, always does something in some way. All you did was alter the spell.”

“So it really is our fault!”, they cried out with tears in their eyes. “Please don’t tell our parents! I swear we didn’t mean to!” “You can undo it, please! Help us!” With one motion I stopped their whaling and fixed their attention on me. They came closer and with a hushed voice I told them what to do: “Don’t cry, that won’t get us anywhere. It is your fault, you’re right with that. But I know that you didn’t want this to happen so I don’t see any reason to tell anyone about your little experiment. Just promise me that you’ll never do something like that again!”

Immediately they blabbered various versions of “I promise” until I lifted my hand again. “Now, where’s the book?”

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A bright light illuminated the royal study. Fascinated the twins watched as the old, massive book shrunk and finally dissolved into the glow of the heart. My hand closed and the heart disappeared. They blinked in astonishment. "Remember, don't do it again!", I reminded them and they heavily nodded.

It took another hour to get back out of the city but I was high-spirited! I finally had a lead! If we knew the spell that caused this we might be able to find a way to reverse it. All I had to do was get back to the girls safely. It was high time to leave that desert behind!

The night outside was cool but dark, no stars to shed light. I ran at full speed until the city gates lay far behind me and the first rocks rose from the ground. Then I flapped my wings, until they glittered in response and shot up into the air. I flew the entire night without rest, eating the last bit of my food supply as I flew. With day break I landed on a plateau of a mountain, shielded my eyes and observed the surroundings. I had made quite the distance during the night but I would have to slow down, now that both suns were about to awaken. For a moment the temptation was there to retrieve the book and turn some pages but I quickly shook my head. It was too risky. Not only that I could lose it, damage it or lose track of time, but I didn't trust myself. There was a longing within me that made me shiver! A longing for the book and the powers it possessed. I had to get back to the girls before my wall of resistance crumbled under the heat! With one last glance onto the map, I dropped from the mountain.

The wind was tricky that day. The gusts came without warning, blowing sand into my face as I darted along. I dared not to fly higher where everyone could spot me, so I stuck close to the ground, tolerating nature's moods.

Later I learned that something else had happened that day. Something, that would influence the outcome of our mission greatly. We only read about it in Cassidy's diary. Had we known about it earlier, had we known the weight it carried; Yan Lin kept saying, things might have taken a different turn and many tragedies could have been prevented. I agree, but I played my cards. There's no turning back, now running from the future I chose. So let me at least share this rare knowledge. Maybe your generation will come across such a thing and when it does, I want to be the one who prevented another disaster.

This is what we read in Cassidy's diary:

"Dear diary,

I can't sleep. Soon as I close my eyes I see that... thing! It stares right at me and I don't know if it's dream or if it's really there, somewhere in the shadows of my room!

I don't know what it wants or why no one else can see it. I don't want it to be there!

Why won't it leave me alone?!

First time I saw it was in Aressy. We were on our way to that old woman to meet with Nerissa. She had been gone several days and we were so excited to hear her news we even skipped classes. We took a different route than last time, a short-cut. (Supposedly!) Suddenly the ground gave way and I fell through a tunnel and into a cave. The air was dry and dusty but my landing had been soft. I must have hit one of those things then. Maybe that's why I'm the only one seeing them?

I had my eyes closed when I sensed the presence of something... someone else and then I 'saw' it right before me! I screamed but when I opened my eyes it had gone! Whenever I

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closed them it was there, flashing each time I blinked! I panicked and ran as fast as I could! The others said I hadn't been gone very long but it felt like an eternity. I didn't see it after that. Not until I had gone to bed.

Maybe I'm sleeping and this is all just a dream? But what if not? Maybe it followed me here... but why?

I should tell the girls about it... I think..."

She never did.

On the last page of that entry she had sketched the thing we later called the Eyelurker. I never saw one myself, though I know one of the other girls did. A hideous creature that made my hair stand on end. Its brown round head had two giant holes resembling a tall triangle upside down instead of eyes. Another red triangle was on its forehead, the tip parting the face all the way down. To both sides it had strange yellow-greenish fans and sharp spikes in between. The rest was just a wide and white robe with a giant red painted triangular symbol. It was that symbol with its black spot in the middle that stood out the most, the picture that lingered longest from what I was told. But back then none of us suspected the impact of that short meeting.