

Short preview

Curse of the Fallen – Chapter nine – Paragraph three

BEFORE:

The elf retrieved a vial of brown liquid and dripped it over the flames, and the small space around them became brighter, while the rest of the crypt remained shrouded in darkness. The trickling sound of water dripping from the ceiling fell silent. Neer reached out into the darkness, and her palm pressed against an invisible barrier.

AFTER:

The elf collected a vial of brown liquid from a pouch on his belt and dripped it over the flames. Shimmering magic rose from the heat like a cloud of iridescent mist and formed around them to create the translucent outline of a dome-shaped barrier.

The trickling sound of water fell silent as the magic solidified and became invisible around them. Neer touched the barrier in amazement. She had always known that alchemy was possible, but it was banned from her country long ago, so she had never seen it in practice.

Long preview

Curse of the Fallen – Chapter three – Paragraph one

BEFORE:

Neer slowly woke from a long and restless sleep. Thick bandages wrapped her shoulder and her skin had regained its color during her rest. She stood with Gil at the wall, and with a deep breath, she hesitantly stepped through.

AFTER:

Neer slowly woke from a long and restless sleep. Thick bandages wrapped her shoulder and her skin had regained its color during her rest. She leaned forward and rubbed her face with a groan. Peering at her surroundings, she found she was still tucked within the confines of the small cave.

Loryk and Gil rested nearby, sleeping soundly with heavy snores that shook the air. Her shoulder ached as she stood and stretched. Stepping to the entry, she watched the heavy storm as rain and lightning flashed through the sky. With such an overcast, she couldn't be sure if it was morning or night, and either way, it didn't matter. Until the sun brightened this dreary marshland, they'd be stuck inside the cave. Vleland was too dangerous a place to travel in the shadow of darkness. Even the smallest glimmer of sunlight was the difference between life and death.

"Nerana..."

She turned sharply as a voice whispered through her mind. Chills settled across her skin as she glanced through the empty cave. Clutching the hilt of her sword, she stepped away from the entry. Water pattered beneath her feet as she examined her surroundings.

“Hello?” she called. Her voice was timid as she clutched hard to her sword. “Who’s there?”

Loryk sighed as he stretched and rose from his sleep. She turned quickly with her sword drawn, and he leapt from his slumber. “What’re you doin’?” he remarked. “‘Ave you lost your mind?”

She stepped back and looked around. “Something’s here,” she said. “It spoke to me.”

He groaned while climbing to his feet. “This is Anaemiril, Neer. There’s magic all around us.”

“This was different.” She sheathed her sword and stepped to the walls. Her eyes scanned the stone as she hurriedly swiped her hands across the surface.

“What’re you doin’?” He ran his fingers through his hair. “God’s body, Neer!” With a kick to Gil, he woke the sleeping dreled. “Wake up, you! Neer’s gone mad!”

Gil sat up with an exasperated groan. “Don’t you know not to wake a man in such a way, boy?”

“Look!” Loryk pointed to Neer as she continued searching the walls.

“What in the...” Gil stood and carefully made his way to her side. “What’s gotten into you, lass? Why don’t you calm down?”

He reached for her arm, and she pulled away. “Something is here,” she remarked. “It’s—”

A sudden gasp interrupted her words as her hand dipped beneath the solid stone. Cold air swirled around her fingers as they hovered behind the wall. She turned to the others with wide eyes.

“Whoa!” Loryk called. “Did you just... how did you—”

“It’s a mirage,” Gil said in a hushed tone that displayed with surprise and fear. “I’ve heard about it in lore but never thought it to be true.”

“Well, let’s go inside!”

Gil gripped tight to Loryk’s trousers and pulled the man back with a heave. “You’ve got a wrong mind if you think I’m going in there while our only chance of survival was just lying like a fawn fresh out the womb!”

Loryk’s face twisted in disgust.

“I’m fine,” Neer explained. “And my *mind* is fine.” She shot a quick glare to Loryk, who had referred to her as mad just moments ago. “Something spoke to me. It called my name.”

“Neer,” Gil said as he took her hand in the way a father would his child. “We cannot enter these caves. They’re too dangerous a place for the likes of us.”

“I’m a sorceress. What is—”

“No. We stay out here, and we wait. Then we head home.”

She turned back to the cave, where the strong sense of magic beckoned her forward. Shaking her head, she marched across the cave and dug through her belongings. Retrieving the arun, she carefully touched the inscriptions along its top.

Closing her eyes, she exhaled a deep breath. “The aruns are too dangerous and mysterious for normal scholars to understand.” She turned back to the others. “It isn’t a coincidence that we wound up here – in a cave of the ancients! Everyone knows the ahn’clave were magic users! This was their home! Something is calling me inside, and I think it can lead me to the answers. *Fate* has brought us here. I know it.”

Loryk groaned while shaking his head. Fate was something he wasn't too keen to believe. It was reserved mostly for those who followed the six Divines, and with his deep hatred for the all-powerful beings came his refusal to believe in anything that could be of their will or judgement.

Neer wasn't a firm believer in the Divines, either, at least, not in the way the Order had forced the population to be. She understood there were Divines that oversaw the world, but their will and judgement was their own, and the Order was a roadblock to their truth and power.

Fate, on the other hand, was something entirely different. She had seen it in action, and understood that although it couldn't be proven, fate was real, and she would follow it despite the resistance of others.

Her eyes shifted to Gil as he stepped to her side. "Are you sure about this, lass?"

She met his gaze, thankful that he at least believed in fate, too. "I'm sure."

He nodded his head and backed away. With a gesture to the mirage, he said with reluctance, "Then... lead the way."

She tucked the arun safely into her leather pack and stood with Gil and Loryk at the wall.

Glancing at each of them for reassurance, she held her breath and hesitantly stepped inside.