

BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT

Seeds of Faith

Valerie Watrous

She could have been asleep. The night elf's features were perfectly relaxed except for her mouth, which frowned slightly as though her dreams were not pleasant ones. Her body was intact and largely unharmed, unlike many of the others they had seen in recent days. Tyrande Whisperwind knelt by the corpse to take a closer look. There was bloody kelp in the dead woman's hair and she reeked of the sea and slow rot. Dead several days. She had probably been one of the first victims of the Cataclysm, swept away by the flood. No priestess of Elune could bring her back now.

"Tyrande!" The high priestess's head snapped up as the voice of one of her closest confidants, Merende, rang through the air. Searching the shores along Rut'theran Village, she saw Merende comforting a younger priestess who sobbed into her white robes. Walking over, Tyrande began to understand why. The tangled body of a young night elf girl lay before them.

Her sister, Merende mouthed silently, indicating the grief-stricken priestess. Tyrande nodded and motioned for them to move away. When the area was clear, she turned her gaze to the corpse. She knew right away that there was no hope—the limbs were twisted at sickening angles and the wounds had been drained bloodless—but the night elves did not abandon their dead. The body would be cleansed, the injuries hidden, and the broken joints set right, before being committed back to the earth.

Tyrande crouched down and wiped the mud from the girl's face, whispering soft prayers for the moon goddess to guide her spirit and comfort her sister's grief. The grit slid away, revealing light violet skin and waves of dark blue hair. The almond-shaped eyes were still open, staring up into the clouded sky. It was a face much like one she had first seen many thousands of years ago. Tyrande shut her eyes against the oncoming tears.

Shandris... if only I could hear from you....

"How far were you able to travel, Morthis?" Malfurion Stormrage asked, handing the scout a mug of steaming hot cider. The other night elf gulped it down gratefully and suppressed a shiver. He was soaked to the skin after returning from his patrol, but comfort could wait until his findings were shared. The two druids took shelter in the uppermost room of the Cenarion Enclave.

"The winds were terrible. I could only reach Maestra's Post, but they had received some reports from Astranaar and Feralas." The scout settled himself on one of the wooden benches in the chamber, watching nervously as the branches of Darnassus's trees swayed outside.

"Astranaar still stands?" Malfurion's voice swelled with relief. He had been coordinating scouting patrols for days, but half of the druids couldn't even reach the mainland despite their best efforts. They were starved for news, and many had feared the worst.

"Yes, it was spared along with Nijel's Point, but the settlements along the coast have been less fortunate."

"What do you mean?"

"Darkshore is unapproachable. None of the druids who have been sent there has returned," the scout's voice broke with sorrow. Some of his friends were among the missing. "I had to fly all the way around to avoid getting caught in the gale winds."

"What of Feathermoon Stronghold?" Malfurion asked. Just as he had spoken, Tyrande's slim frame appeared in the doorway of the room.

"Feathermoon?" Morthis glanced at the archdruid as if uncertain whether or not he should continue. "The scouts were unable to make contact with anyone there. From a distance, they saw churning seas and... naga." His voice sunk to a whisper as he noticed Tyrande approaching them. "... Hundreds of naga." The monstrous, serpent-like creatures had mounted attacks against Feathermoon Stronghold in the past, but a full-scale assault was unheard of.

"Did they see anyone on the isle? Any survivors?" the high priestess asked sharply.

The scout shook his head. "No one." Tyrande's expression was crushing, and he felt, more than guessed at, her heartache. "But the skies were dark and it was raining heavily. I doubt the general is—" He paused, rethinking his words. "I mean, the Sentinels at Feathermoon Stronghold are most capable, High Priestess."

Tyrande sighed and placed her hand on his shoulder reassuringly. "Your courage and steadfastness have brought us this news, Morthis. Thank you for that. This is the first we have heard from the mainland since this tragedy struck. We will ask no more of you now. Please, rest."

The scout nodded and walked out in slow, tired strides.

Malfurion turned to his wife. Her beautiful, nearly ageless face was stricken with worry, fear, and a trace of the immovable determination he had come to recognize over their long courtship.

"There were five victims at Rut'theran," she said. "None whom I could save."

"Tyrande..." Malfurion enclosed her hands in his comfortingly.

"I have to go to her, Mal. Shandris is like a daughter to me." She paused. "Perhaps the only daughter I will ever have."

Her words stung. There had been a time when the future was limitless for the night elves, but sacrificing the World Tree Nordrassil's blessings had meant the end of that dream as well. The consequences of the night elves' new mortality were still unclear, but many felt a silent dread resting upon their shoulders. The children of the stars were no longer as ageless as their name implied.

"I understand, but why now? How do you know that the stronghold's fate is not already decided?" he asked, his brow furrowing in concern.

"Shandris has been in my thoughts since this all began. I cannot tell you how I know, only that I am certain of it."

"You have had a vision, then?" Malfurion knew that the moon goddess, Elune, had granted Tyrande such insights in the past.

"No, not this time. Elune has been veiled of late. My feelings come from within.... A mother knows when her child is in peril." She paused as he looked at her skeptically. "Not all bonds are in blood, Mal."

"But ever since this tragedy struck, we have been telling our people to stay in Teldrassil—not to search for their relatives on the mainland lest they find nothing but their deaths."

"Do you believe that I go to my death, then?" Her eyes glinted like ice.

"No," he admitted. There was no denying that the high priestess was one of Elune's favored and also a formidable warrior in her own right. "But I would not leave Darnassus during such dire times. I know that I have been absent too often before—it troubles me. I wish I had been there when Teldrassil was formed, when my brother met his end in Outland...." He sighed. "Yet I cannot change the past. I can only be here now." *And I would have you here by my side*, he would have added, but her expression silenced him.

"Illidan's fate was unfortunate, Mal. We were all helpless against it. His madness overwhelmed him until there was nothing left." She could still remember how strange he had seemed, almost alien, when Sargeras had burned out his eyes thousands of years ago. "We must spend our efforts on those who can be saved... or else we shall regret our choices time and time again."

She turned and walked out, her ivory robes swirling about her like a fast-rising storm.

General Shandris Feathermoon steadied herself as she balanced on the rain-slick beams of the inn roof. A dozen Sentinels were perched around her, each of them battered and bruised but nowhere near surrender. She raised her hand in a familiar signal.

"Volley!" The archers loosed their arrows toward the army of naga swarming below them. They were tired; only half of the arrows killed their targets, including Shandris's, which penetrated the eye of a naga siren. She thrashed violently for a few seconds before her serpentine form disappeared in the waves, but tens of others rose to take her place. The naga were in their element in the water, and their reinforcements arrived more swiftly than Shandris and her Sentinels could kill them.

"Brace yourselves," Shandris instructed as a wall of water rose up from the churning sea. The wave crashed into the inn's weakening façade, drenching the general and her forces. The Sentinel on her left, Nelara, took the impact hard and slid halfway down the roof before Shandris rushed after her and caught her arm. With some effort, the general pulled her up and back onto her feet. Glancing below, she saw that the bottom level of the inn was flooding rapidly.

"We have to get the survivors out and move to higher ground," Shandris ordered. "This building could snap at any moment. Nelara, take them to the tower! Everyone to my right, follow her." She signaled to half of the Sentinels. "Our chances will be better there." Nelara nodded and edged to the end of the roof before swinging onto the balcony below it. The others followed her, and Shandris winced to see the fatigue in their steps.

"As for the rest of you: we are going to cause such havoc that our enemies will not even notice that the others are leaving. *Ash karath!*" the general cried, raising her bow and firing off arrows furiously. She knew that her forces hung by a thread. Any slip in their concentration meant death for the rest.

To her relief, the elves rallied. Arrows rained down into the water, sending the naga scattering and hissing in frustration. The invaders' attacks slowed and it began to seem as though they were actually retreating. Moments later, none of them was clearly visible—just shadows beneath the waves. Shandris stole a covert glance at the rear of the inn. Most of the isle had flooded, but the Sentinels and civilians were still making good time on their way to the tower. When she returned her gaze to the sea, however, she realized where the naga had gone.

Their warriors had retrieved an enormous shell large enough to shelter more than ten of them at once, and were using it as a shield against the arrows as they trudged forward. Shandris signaled for her Sentinels to cease fire. "Meet up with the others. I will handle this." The other night elves exchanged a few incredulous glances and began moving off hesitantly. "To Nelara. Now!" she added.

Without waiting for acknowledgement, Shandris leapt down from the roof into the water below. The naga turned, rushing toward her with renewed vigor. She couldn't help but think of their long, twisted past. The aristocratic Highborne, led by Queen Azshara, had foolishly summoned the Burning Legion into the world and let the demons rampage until they were defeated by an army composed of night elves and other races. In the aftermath, the surviving Highborne had been cast to the bottom of the sea, where they had transformed into hideous mutations of their former selves... the naga.

She had been young at the time, but Shandris herself had fought in the war by Tyrande's side. The naga had failed to reclaim the glory of their ancestors, but she hated them with a ferocity that set her teeth on edge. Still, she waited, letting them move in until the timing was right. Closing her eyes, she began to whisper an ancient prayer to Elune, each word grounded in faith and reverence, just as Tyrande had taught her long ago when she had trained as a priestess of the moon goddess. The serpents encircled the night elf general, and she heard more than one low laugh of amusement ripple among them as she finished uttering the sacred words.

Elune's answer came swiftly. Streams of energy felled all of the naga around her even as they gaped in disbelief. When the last rattling death cry was silenced, Shandris surveyed the corpses in grim satisfaction.

"Your faith was always weak, Highborne filth."

It was a risky move, but it had worked. Though Shandris had never been half as powerful as her mentor, Tyrande, she remained fond of her early days in the temple. Her training had given her powers far greater than other Sentinels could claim and a solid alternative when bows, arrows, and glaives weren't enough. But the prayer was draining: it could not be said without a great cost.

Struggling against the waves, Shandris swam toward the shore until her feet hit the ground and then began trudging through the water toward the escaping civilians and the Sentinels. Something was wrong; they hadn't gained much ground since she had last seen them. As she closed in, she saw Nelara and her companions facing off against a much larger group of myrmidons. The residents of Feathermoon ran around them, panicked and desperate for shelter—each one of them as familiar and precious to her as a piece of her heart.

The researcher Quintis Jonespyre dashed ahead of the others, making for a risky opening between the Sentinels and a second group of approaching myrmidons as he headed for cover. Shandris remembered the long conversations she had shared with Quintis about Fandral Staghelm. Both of them had futilely hoped that Tyrande would formally reprimand Staghelm for his strange activities, but the high priestess had only reminded them that the Cenarion Circle operated outside of her authority. Still, Quintis had been shrewd enough to see the darkness growing within Staghelm before the others, and shrewder still to know that he would be safe from the archdruid while under Shandris's watch in the stronghold.

But none of Quintis's wits could save him now. The leader of the myrmidons caught sight of the sprinting night elf and raised his weapon. Shandris called out to warn Quintis, but he looked up just as the naga's trident sunk into his back. He stared at her in helpless uncertainty and then fell, his blood darkening the water until it slowly faded into the sea.

The light of dawn was masked by the stormy skies, but the citizens of Darnassus still found themselves retiring to their chambers at the usual hour. Perhaps for some, it was a means of solace—a familiar routine in the turbulent wake of disaster. For others, it was an excuse for time alone to dwell on their grief. For Tyrande, it was a chance to escape.

The high priestess took a quick look around, then stole out of the temple, making for a quiet path that ran behind the prominent structures in Darnassus. It was an inefficient route; however, she was anxious to remain unseen this evening. Rounding another corner, she reached the humble lodgings that she shared with her husband.

Tyrande opened the door, and a beam of light yawned across the dark floorboards. The rooms were deserted. She surmised that Malfurion was still at the enclave, and began to pack for the perilous journey ahead. It didn't take long for Tyrande to exchange her temple robes for her plate armor, which resembled that of a Sentinel. She retained only her simple crescent moon circlet as a symbol of her station.

Shifting through a large trunk, Tyrande removed her bow and quiver, then lifted out her beautifully crafted moonblade. The dim light rippled over the weapon's three blades as she untied its coverings, and she could sense that all of the blessings it had received were as strong as ever. If Morthis's reports were correct, she would need them—along with every possible advantage—in order to succeed.

Tyrande was turning to leave when a familiar object caught her eye. A large potted plant sat on the shelf in front of her, its heart-shaped leaves curling along graceful branches. It was known as the *alor'el*, or "lover's leaf," and though they had been common thousands of years ago, the plants were gradually dying out across Kalimdor.

Somehow Shandris had procured one and bestowed it upon Tyrande and Malfurion on their wedding day. Smiling slyly, Tyrande's adopted daughter had been only too happy to tell all of the guests that, according to an ancient but completely unfounded kaldorei legend, the *alor'el* would only bloom for a couple who shared a perfect love. Naturally, she was confident that Malfurion and his wife would be the ideal candidates to test the legend's veracity. The other guests had cheered and toasted them, proclaiming their good faith, but the plant had yet to yield as much as a bud.

Still, it was the kind of gift that only Shandris could give. And Tyrande hoped it would not be her last.

"I will not let you die here today. I swear it." Shandris tightened her grip on Vestia Moonspear's wrist, but the priestess only wept harder.

"Latro—he fell behind! Oh, Elune, watch over him. He is gone; he is gone...." Her sobs increased, and Shandris noticed the few remaining refugees rustling nervously. Each of them fought back the same tide of emotion as they struggled to leave the war-torn isle.

"Your husband would want you to go on, Vestia. You must do this for him. For everyone who gave their lives here today. Please." Shandris gazed imploringly at the reluctant night elf. She could feel the tree tower shifting beneath her feet as its roots weakened; they didn't have much time left.

To her great relief, Vestia contained her sobs and allowed Shandris to guide her onto the hippogryph. The bird-like creature's navy plumage was nearly black from the rain, but his eyes remained bright and alert.

"Take her to the mainland. Be careful of the winds," Shandris warned, feeling grateful for the hippogryph's considerable intelligence. No ordinary bird could fly in such turbulent weather, but the noble creature before her stood a chance.

Vestia and the hippogryph disappeared into the filmy clouds, and Nelara came running up the ramp. "General! They need you below: the naga are trying to break down the tower!"

"Get the rest of the survivors to the mainland, Nelara. There are enough hippogryphs for you and most of the Sentinels. Request aid from Thalanaar as soon as possible."

Nelara rounded on her in surprise. "I am not leaving here. Even you cannot defeat all of the naga without aid—"

"You have done your duty, Sentinel," Shandris responded stiffly. "Your orders are to retreat."

"You will not reconsider, will you...?" Nelara lowered her head, and Shandris thought she saw a tear mingle with the raindrops sliding down her cheek.

"Someone once saved my life when I thought everything was lost," the general said slowly. "It would be my greatest honor to give that gift to another." She began heading down the ramp, toward the sounds of the battle. "*Ande'thoras-ethil*, Nelara."

"I will send a hippogryph back for you once we arrive!" she cried. "Wait at the top of the tower!"

It was hard for Shandris not to tell the younger Sentinel that the plan was impossible, but after a moment she heard Nelara call for the remaining hippogryphs and decided to leave her alone.

With her final orders in motion, Shandris dove into the chaotic battle that raged at the base of the tower. The narrow building was a natural chokepoint, and so far only a handful of Sentinels had successfully defended the structure from within by barricading part of the entryway and firing arrows at the naga who attacked from the other side.

Shandris took up her bow and began shooting with a steady, practiced rhythm. "You are relieved, Sentinels. Head to the topmost chamber; there are hippogryphs waiting for you."

The other night elves were too tired and wounded to question her orders. It pained Shandris to see that a few of their number had fallen and their corpses lay stiffening on the ground. One by one, the surviving elves filed out, leaving thin trails of blood in their footsteps. But seeing each of them depart filled Shandris with a newfound strength. Her arrows were buying lives now: every dead naga meant a few more seconds of peace for the fleeing residents of Feathermoon Stronghold.

But she knew that the tower's defenses couldn't last long. The naga's attacks were steadily breaking the barricade, and a flash of light appeared as a siren cast a spell in Shandris's direction. The general uttered a kaldorei oath and shielded her face as the barrier splintered, the fractured wood sending shards across the room. When she lowered her arm, the siren stood before her, flanked by a pair of imposing myrmidons. Her fine regalia, a sign of rank, sparkled in the low light. More and more naga massed behind them.

"You must be the general. I serve the lady Szenastra," she intoned. "Such a pleasure."

Shandris tightened her grip on the bow. "We shall see."

The naga commander examined her archly. For all of the scales and spines, her mannerisms were such a perfect imitation of Highborne condescension that they made the general's blood run cold. "This does not have to continue, you know. My lady has authorized me to offer you the terms of our peace."

"How overwhelmingly generous of her. What does she want, then?"

"Give us the head of your mistress, the false queen, Tyrande."

Shandris fired an arrow into the naga's sycophantic smile. The creature convulsed, grasping for her throat, but her screams only emerged as sprays of blood. Choking, she sank to the ground.

Shandris eyed the guards coldly. "Take *that* to your lady."

A second later, they were upon her. Shandris lashed out with her glaive, dispatching the first two myrmidons easily, but a trident struck her arm and knocked the weapon out of reach. Another blade buried itself deep into her side, tearing her breath away as she staggered back. The naga were everywhere, striking furiously, and there was only one defense she had left.

Shandris called to Elune and forced the last reserve of her strength into the prayer, though it flickered and died within her like a guttered candle.

Faith is the beginning of all things. That was the first lesson she had learned and memorized as a Sister of Elune. Tyrande recalled High Priestess Dejahna's severity as she examined the girls, quick to weed out any half-hearted pupils who had simply joined the Sisters because of their lack of magical aptitude. *If your skill with the arcane is passable, but not strong, you may still become a sorceress. If your skill with a needle and thread is passable, but not strong, you may still become a seamstress. But if your faith is only passable and not strong, you will never become a priestess.*

It was strange how clearly the words came back to her as she struggled to stay on the hippogryph. The winds were against them and the rain plastered her cerulean hair to her shoulders, but part of her mind was still in the old Temple of Elune in Suramar, where Dejahna's sharp eyes had gazed on her skeptically.

Why have you chosen this path, Tyrande Whisperwind?

Because, she had said, I want to protect others. Especially the ones I love. The high priestess had regarded her for a long moment afterward, and Tyrande never knew exactly what Dejahna had thought about that exchange, but she had long suspected that somehow the seed for her nomination as successor had been planted in that brief, earnest sentence.

There had been many times when she had questioned her predecessor's decision to appoint her as high priestess. How different would her life have been without the burden of leadership? Would she have needed to slay the Watchers to secure Illidan's aid against the Burning Legion? Would she have been forced to wait for thousands of years to finally wed her beloved? Would her people have suffered less during the War of the Ancients if their ruler had been more experienced?

Dejahna had been right: faith was her only guide. Now it drove her through a relentless storm to rescue the most capable general she had ever known from a danger that was vague but unavoidable in her mind. And she was alone. None of her words had moved Malfurion, even though she was certain of them.... It seemed that faith was a rare gift indeed.

The hippogryph squawked, and Tyrande peered over his antlered head. Feralas lay before them, and Sardor Isle was barely visible through a wall of fog. Somewhere beneath it, Shandris was waiting. Tyrande had to believe that she was still alive.

She tapped the hippogryph's neck, indicating that he should land to the south. It was easier to communicate through touch in the driving wind, and the creatures always understood the code. The hippogryph surged forward in response and spread his wings wide in an attempt to buffer the turbulence. Despite his efforts, the gale toyed with them, nearly sending the pair into the thrashing sea below. Tyrande slid to the far right edge of the saddle, hoping that the shift of weight would help the hippogryph correct himself. For a moment they hung like a leaf in the wind, and then the creature dropped sideways and swiftly banked toward the shore.

Tyrande clung to him fiercely. "Well, that was foolhardy, but effective." The hippogryph puffed up his feathers proudly as he landed on a patch of dry ground just outside of Feathermoon Stronghold. "I suppose that is why we are in this together. Stay close," she said, dismounting from him and treading cautiously toward the settlement.

Morthis hadn't lied. Feathermoon was in shambles, its structures crumbling and flooded. The naga were everywhere, rifling through the wreckage and patrolling the coast as if they expected reinforcements at any moment. Somehow in the rain and wind, they had missed her approach from the south. Or perhaps one lone night elf had not been a cause for concern.

It crossed her mind that Shandris could have escaped from the isle before the invasion, but she would not be content until she had completed a thorough search. Her fear for Shandris gnawed at her, turning her thoughts back to the dead girl on the Rut'theran shore. Tyrande pressed on, edging toward the nearest building and keeping an eye on the patrols as she went. She didn't mind the prospect of combat, but her mission would go more quickly without any unnecessary engagements.

The floorboards creaked beneath her feet and water streamed down from cracks in the roof as she entered the battered shelter. Scanning the area, Tyrande spotted a patch of lavender near one of the bookshelves—the tip of an ear? She ran forward, hoping that she was not too late. The bookshelf was wedged in a corner, and it took a sharp kick to move it, but the high priestess managed to shove it

aside and find the body below. Reaching down, she lifted the night elf up out of the muddy water that had filled the structure.

She recognized his long braided hair quickly. Latronicus Moonspear, one of the foremost fighters against the naga in Feathermoon Stronghold. Now he rested in the arms of Elune. She closed his eyes and murmured the prayer for the dead. The words had become all too familiar on her lips in the past few days.

The rest of the room yielded only the body of another slain Sentinel, almost certainly killed by the naga, and dozens of abandoned supplies that had been ruined in the flooding. As she left, a party of naga scouts rounded the corner and saw her. The high priestess extended her arms and uttered a few words, sending beams of moonlight down upon her enemies before they could attack. The naga collapsed under her assault and she ran for the inn, searching beneath the water for any tracks—any signs of battle that could lead her to Shandris and the other survivors—but the floods had churned the earth into mud.

A shadow passed over her head, and Tyrande raised her glaive in alarm. An enormous bird circled in the sky above her. She paused, watching the creature in disbelief. It dove into a steep descent, and she began to recognize the dark plumage and the certain spark that lit the storm crow's eyes. The bird landed and, in a matter of seconds, shifted into the familiar figure of her beloved.

"I am sorry for making you wait." He smiled.

"Mal..." She embraced him. "You came after all."

"We fight as one now. Our friend Broll Bearmantle has taken my place organizing the druid scouts, and Merende tends to your duties in Darnassus."

"Thank you, my love. Feathermoon Stronghold is in dire need of our aid. I have not been able to find any survivors, and it is impossible to track them in this flood."

He nodded. "Perhaps I can help with that." The archdruid closed his eyes in meditation and reached out in front of himself, stretching his palms over the devastated land. Gusts of wind gathered around Malfurion as he drew them together in a massive cyclone. The murky waters began to ripple and recede as the fierce vortex drove them back into the sea. Then only the broken landscape of Sardor Isle lay before them, revealing a trail of corpses that led to the giant tree tower to the northeast.

But the spell had also alerted the naga. They came in from all sides, eager to investigate the cause of the receding water. When they saw the night elves, the serpentine creatures cried out in alarm, drawing in more of their troops. They were readying an attack. A naga sorceress, Lady Szenastra, appeared in the center of the growing group. Judging by the deference that the lady commanded from her subjects, Tyrande could tell that she was the leader of this army.

"Sardor Isle is ours now. You have come to your death, 'Your Majesty,'" Szenastra sneered.

"I am no queen," Tyrande snapped. "And I would sooner die than take that title. What have you done with the kaldorei who have made their homes here?"

"Your people sleep eternally now. Do you not see them?" Szenastra gestured to the corpses idly. "You may join them now, if you wish. My lady Szallah would find it most agreeable if you would be obliging. If not, I shall have to see to you myself." She signaled, and a cadre of myrmidons slithered forward.

Tyrande and Malfurion exchanged a look.

"How easily these fools forget defeat," the high priestess muttered through clenched teeth.

"We must give them a reminder, then," Malfurion said. Tyrande gave a quick nod. Lightning crackled through the air as the archdruid began to craft his spell. The clouds above the isle blackened even further, and the naga's heads shot up in alarm. Szenastra hissed out an order, and the naga army advanced on the pair of night elves.

Malfurion watched, unperturbed, waiting for the energies to coalesce. When the storm was fully formed, he slowly tilted his antlered head to the sky, and the heavens poured their wrath down upon the naga forces. Lightning shot to the earth—each bolt splitting into forks that seared through dozens of hapless myrmidons. As the troops dispersed in chaos, Tyrande began closing in on the sorceress.

Lady Szenastra was already trying to escape, but the high priestess unleashed a massive column of moonfire above her. The naga convulsed for a moment while the energy blazed through her, then she slammed to the ground, her glittering adornments swallowed by the mud.

Tyrande pressed on to the tower. The entrance was blocked by rubble, as though it had been sealed from the inside. Undaunted, she managed to clear away an opening with a few furious strikes from her glaive.

Inside the room, Shandris Feathermoon lay in a pool of blood that glistened across the floorboards.

A sob caught in Tyrande's throat as she rushed to the wounded elf's side. She fell to her knees and began to pray, scarcely able to form the words in her grief. "Elune, grant me this, if nothing else. Spare her; please... she is my daughter. She believes that I saved her, but it is she who has saved me... again and again. My life would be empty without her in it." Tears streamed down her cheeks, glittering like the trails of stars.

Malfurion ran up behind her, but she was too distraught to notice his presence until his hand had grasped hers. The simple gesture anchored her and, beneath it all, she could feel him add his power to hers as they tried to heal Shandris.

They watched her for a long moment, barely breathing. Then Shandris's eyelashes fluttered and she opened her eyes drowsily. Rolling her head slightly to the side, she tried to focus on the shapes

hovering before her—shapes of people she knew. "*Min'da? An'da?*" she asked blearily, her brow knitted in confusion.

Tyrande had no words. Her tears dripped to the floor, further darkening the stained wood. She placed her hand on Shandris's shoulder and took a long breath. "Your parents still rest with Elune, Shandris. But you do not, thanks to Mal's aid."

"Tyrande knew you were in danger all along. She could think of nothing else," Malfurion added.

Shandris regarded them. "Well, perhaps I was not too far off the mark." She laughed, then winced in pain. "I-it... seems Elune has answered my prayers in the end."

Tyrande raised her eyes to Malfurion. "I believe she has answered all of ours."

Shandris woke to the strains of an ancient funeral hymn. Sitting up carefully, she gazed at the nearby window that looked out on central Darnassus. The familiar waterways were aglow with candles, each of the small round lights floating along the glassy surface like a wisp in the forest. Malfurion and Tyrande stood solemnly in the center of the proceedings as the people of Darnassus and the refugees from Kalimdor gathered around them.

Many of the night elves' faces were swollen and flushed from crying. Some looked as though they hadn't slept for days. Shandris knew their grief too well. Searching the crowd, she even saw Vestia standing alone at the edge of the gathering. They had lost so many. Nearly everyone had known someone who had perished in the past few weeks of turmoil.

Funeral biers began to roll in on wagons pulled by pairs of nightsabers who strained against the weight of the bodies. Tyrande stepped forward to bless the dead one final time before their interment. There was no sound save for the priestesses' hauntingly forlorn melody.

It hurt to watch, but healing could not come without first releasing the grief. Shandris knew that their people needed this time before they could face the challenges that lay ahead. She looked again to Malfurion and Tyrande, who stood together against the tide of pain and loss. Far above them, the clouds began to shift, and a thin sliver of moonlight illuminated their features. *Elune knows her own*, Shandris thought. *We are not alone in this fight.*

Reassured, she rose and limped across the room to take a dose of the soothing medicinal roots Malfurion had left for her. The large *alor'el* plant, her wedding gift to the happy couple, had grown tremendously since she had last seen it, and one of its tendrils tumbled down over the edge of the shelf. With a cry of joy, she noticed it was covered with buds on the verge of blooming.