

Dyna followed her grandmother, Carissa, through the streets of Augeas. Dyna scanned the street around them with her mind's eye. She saw nothing to cause concern, but an uneasiness followed her. They traveled to a small house nearer to the castle than they lived. Another ancient one lived there and a meeting of some of those remaining within Augeas was arranged. They were to discuss their "plan".

Dyna had begged her grandmother to stay home, but the old woman wouldn't hear of it. Carissa insisted there was much to discuss and decisions to be made.

They were both ancient ones, though Dyna was but twenty and still considered a child. By rights, they should wear purple robes with gold cord, but instead Carissa wore the orange of a healer and she the gray of the poor to hide their identities.

They entered a part of Augeas that wasn't quite so rundown and poor as where they lived. No dead animals lay in the streets and the smell of fecal matter wasn't overwhelming. This was the area where the merchants who serviced the castle and Lord Dorjan lived. This was also where Inuus lived. He walked a dangerous road, an ancient one unknown to Dorjan, yet the one who provided dancing girls for Dorjan's entertainment. He had insinuated himself into Dorjan's good graces.

Inuus led the ancient ones within the city, but he hadn't the power Carissa had. He was only coming to his hundredth birthday, but his powers had never developed as some others. He did have the power to shield himself from those who could read minds and might betray him. But few of those were still alive and none near Dorjan.

Carissa rapped once on the door to Inuus' house and entered without waiting for anyone to answer. Dyna slipped in behind her and breathed a sigh of relief that they had journeyed through the city without incident. She went and sat on one of the purple cushions trimmed in gold that Inuus kept in his visiting room. She always wondered at his gall at displaying the colors of the ancient ones. Carissa said the cushions were only displayed when the ancient ones met, but that still meant the cushions were in the house somewhere waiting to be discovered.

Sitting in the middle of the floor was a boy of about four, playing with several carved wooden animals. Oistin smiled at Dyna and held up a toy horse.

Dyna sat down next to him. The others ignored her, thinking her nothing more than a child and beneath their notice. They didn't realize she listened to all they said, though at times, she didn't understand them, as they seemed to have developed a code.

"How are you this morning, Oistin?" Dyna ruffled his blond hair.

Oistin, dressed in a gold tunic and breeches, smiled at her. "Horse." Only male children wore breeches until they gained the age of fifteen when they received their first robes. And only royal children wore gold, which had caused Dyna often to wonder at his parentage. Carissa had told her it wasn't of import.

"Yes, a horse." She wondered if the child's mind was weak because he didn't speak but in one word statements and seemed content to play for hours with the wooden animals.

Inuus appeared and went to Carissa, kissing her on both cheeks. He was a tall man with red hair like a flame upon his head. "It is so good to see you."

"And you, Inuus." Carissa allowed the kisses, then stepped back. "Who else is joining us today?"

"Govert, Elga, and Helgi will join us shortly." He motioned to a cushion. "Have a seat and I shall have refreshments served."

Carissa sat upon one of the cushions. Dyna wished the others would arrive and they would discuss whatever was so important that they needed to come together. She wished to be away from this place. Her stomach churned and she was glad no one would offer her refreshment. She picked up Oistin's horse and trotted it in front of him. He giggled and grabbed the horse from her. At least someone within the city was happy.

Someone rapped on the door and Govert entered. He was the oldest of the group, nearing one hundred and eighty. He wore brown robes and owned a robe shop. It was convenient when they needed disguises. Dyna liked him. He crossed the room and kissed her cheek before he greeted Inuus and Carissa.

"It is time we acted." Carissa sipped at the nectar Inuus had supplied.

“We need to wait until everyone is here before a decision is made.” Inuus reclined on one of the cushions.

arrive.” She turned back to Inuus. “Dorjan becomes stronger each day. We must stop him before we are unable.”

Dyna wondered what they needed to act upon. They had been in hiding the last five years, ever since Dorjan had set out to exterminate all of the ancient ones. Those with magical powers were all called ancient ones, no matter their age.

Carissa had barely escaped Lord Dorjan’s extermination guard. Only the fact that Dyna had seen them coming in her mind’s eye had saved them. They had moved from spot to spot within the city until Dorjan was convinced he had exterminated every ancient one. Now they had a small house near the city wall. They no longer lived in the beautiful homes behind the castle where the ancient ones had resided for centuries, ever since they came from far away.

Carissa set down her cup. “I care not what the others think. If we are to defeat Dorjan, we must act quickly.”

“The boy is too young.” Inuus sat forward and stared at Carissa.

“We don’t need the boy. It is time we ruled.” Carissa folded her arms over her chest and glowered at Inuus.

Govert laid his hand on Carissa’s arm. “I shan’t allow you to harm the boy.”

“He is useless.” Carissa brushed Govert’s hand from her arm. “He is nothing more than a nuisance and we have spent too much time on him.”

Dyna studied Oistin playing quietly and wondered what he had to do with their plan.

“We were never meant...”

Dyna stopped listening to Inuus. Tingles ran through her body and she wanted to grab her grandmother and insist they leave. Something wasn’t right. She could feel danger. She tried to check the street, but her grandmother’s mind seemed to be blocking hers. Standing, she went to Carissa. Leaning close, she whispered in her ear. “Grandmother, we must leave.”

Carissa patted her shoulder. “Sit with the boy. We won’t stay long, but we must wait for the rest to