

Escape from Shadow Town  
by  
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Rain fell upon the quiet town of Morbel, standing in the cove of Perethos Bay. Once known as the only safe haven on a voyage from Astaroth to Palantheon, the town had since changed into a dreaded place that every traveler attempted to avoid.

The Garkin soldiers, wearing a crude mixture of armor pieces covered by mostly black and grey clothing, dragged a group of young women out from a large building at the center of the town. It was called the breeding hut, for it had just one purpose - to make more Garkin soldiers, for their seed was unable to produce females. History may paint the events of this century in pretty words and say the Garkins mingled with the local Trevlin populace, but the truth is far from that. What began as a wartime cruelty with bloody assaults, ruthless batteries and brutal rapes soon turned into systematic abuse of the enslaved Trevlin women to breed more men for the growing invasion army.

Some of the women moaned quietly as they were haled over the muddy ground, some of them remained eerily silent, and their pasty pale complexion revealed the horrible fate they had suffered. The group was divided in two as they crossed the central square. The one with the deceased headed for the town gate while the other dragged their whining prisoners toward a multitude of cages placed on the ground by the rotting buildings. There were more women, from eight to ten in each pen, waiting behind the iron bars. These were the lucky ones, untouched for the day, leaning against the cold steel and staring at their inevitable future. These captives originated from the surrounding villages across the shores of Perethos Bay, all of them harnessed like cattle to serve the Ironcrown - the Gargoyle overlord, who now ruled the entire southern Belmora.

When the words of consolation were exchanged, even the women with worst injuries turned their heads to give a silent prayer to those who had passed. They watched as the dead were taken to the hill rising behind the town. There they would be hanged on the high maple branches, crucified

on rough, unfinished boards erected in the form of a cross, impaled on tall poles placed randomly here and there, or plainly left lying on the ground where the maggots would slowly consume them. It was a constant reminder of what would happen to those attempting to escape. When a strong northern wind blew down from the slope, the stench of the hill reached the town accompanied with a ghostly howl that gave the morbid ascent its name - the Wailing Hill.

A young woman, dressed in similar rags as the rest of them, reached out her hand to help one of the returning women back to her pile of dirty straws and worn blankets. It was not much, but still something to shelter her from the worst wind and rain.

Keyla of Bengari was new to Morbel. She had arrived only six days ago, but she had already witnessed the horrors of the shadow town over and over again, albeit she had not been taken to the breeding hut personally as of yet. She tried to cope as well as she could, but just like the others, she found herself crying during the hopeless hours of the night. Despair had crushed the boundaries of morale and decency, which, despite the seemingly warm welcome of the brutalized victims, had created an enemy within. For mere crumbs of hope and attention, the women sold each other to the soldiers, causing plenty of bad blood and open hatred among their weakened flock. These, often mostly made up excuses for denounces, earned them an extra piece of bread or an additional mug of water. It caused a lot of unnecessary beatings, public floggings and more abuse than most could bear, but it seemed indifferent to the slaves. The cruelty, disloyalty and occasional signs of compassion mixed together to form a dangerous blend that tested everybody's sanity.

The night fell, and the town became silent like a frozen graveyard. Thin mist covered the waves of the bay and an icy breeze blew the freezing humidity upon the exposed slaves. They shook and shivered under their ragged blankets without a roof to shield off the ruthless downpours.

"Can I borrow your blanket?" one of the tormented women begged, and her desperate eyes gleamed like those of a beaten dog. "I'm so cold."

Glancing at the shivering woman, who was too weak to raise her head from the puddle she was lying in, Keyla felt sympathy, but without hesitation she denied her plea. "No, you cannot," she said coldly. Not because she wanted to, but such act of kindness would only decrease her own chances to make it through the night.

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Squinari of Bengari was not a Garkin, although he wore a very similar outfit compared to the Gargoyle's spawn. He was one of the few male Trevlins who had survived the attack to Bengari because he did not fight back. Having sold his soul to the Garkins in exchange to his life, he did not hold himself in high regard, but merely as a man who did anything to avoid death. As an outsider, as a formal slave, he did not have access to the broken-down establishments that Garkins used as their watering holes. He was constantly subjected to humiliating tasks that no one else wanted to do, beaten and battered to remind him of his rank among the superiors.

But Squinari never complained, never raised his hand against the violent oppressors, and that extensive humility had earned him a certain level of freedom around the town. He had also gained value by visiting the slave pens almost every night. The women never spoke freely to a Garkin, and they rarely shared words with Squinari either, for he was a traitor of the worst kind. A fellow Trevlin who had abandoned all loyalty for his people, but every now and then he fished up a crumb of information concerning starting pregnancies and possible plans to escape before any of it got too far. Squinari was a perfect rat without any delusions of honor or valor, but he had one weakness - Keyla.

Being madly in love with the young woman, it had been heartbreaking for him to see her locked inside like an animal. After witnessing first hand what happened to the slaves in the breeding

hut, he was determined to do anything to help her avoid such fate, but the town was fortified after the brutal conquest over a hundred years earlier. A wall was built around it with an iron fence on top to make sure no one left without authorization from the garrison commander, who happened to be an exceptionally ruthless man called Ilyar Morhag.

"Oh look," one of the women croaked when she saw Squinari approaching. "It's the filthy rat coming to see his love, but we shall see how that love lasts once ten or more winged bastards have encroached her crotch." A laughter rose from among the slaves, shearing with its mockery like the sharpest knife of a slaughterman.

Squinari heard the words, felt the despise burning upon him in thousand little embers of shame, but ignoring the hurtful words, his eyes continued to scan the cage for Keyla.

"Why are you here?" the young woman in a fairly clean outfit, which indicated her not being enslaved for long, asked. It was a mundane question as she knew very well, but it puzzled her greatly why this man continued showing interest toward something he could never have.

"You know why, Keyla," Squinari said in a barely audible tone to prevent the others from hearing him.

"I've told you many times, I don't want anything to do with a man who was too much of a coward to raise a sword when the Garkins came," she whispered bitterly. "You are not a man," she then declared. "You are a worthless, spineless worm."

Allowing the loathing words to hit him without any reaction, Squinari smiled sadly. "They are coming for you tomorrow. I saw Overseer Luzgard's list," he then said without a change of tone.

"So you came to make sure my misery would be complete. What kind of a sick snake are you?" And as she spoke, her eyes turned misty. The darkness of the breeding hut had always seemed so distant, and now all of a sudden it was right there in front of her. It was quickly becoming overwhelming.

"Believe it or not, my dear Keyla," Squinari said quietly, simply bypassing her verbal attack.

"I'm here to help you."

"What could you possibly do to help me in this situation, you slimy squid? You're just after some more leftover bones from your winged masters!"

Squinari raised his hands in gesture to keep her voice down. He was afraid that if any of the other slaves heard about his plan, it would be instantly used as a currency to buy an extra piece of bread or something equally trivial compared to his own goal, and endanger his position in the Shadow Town.

"Do you remember twinklemoss that grew around the hills in Bengari?" he then asked, keeping his voice down to a bare minimum.

It was enough to catch Keyla's attention. "The white moss that brings you deep sleep?" she wondered. "How is that going to help me? Do you think that by sleeping through the entire— thing — will somehow make it easier?" Now she was upset by the man's ridiculous words that made no sense whatsoever.

"It will make the Garkins assume that you're dead," Squinari explained patiently. "You do know who takes the bodies from the breeding hut out to the Wailing Hill, don't you?"

Her eyes widened slightly as she finally realized what Squinari was planning to do. She would receive her share of the pain, but at the same time that pain promised her freedom none of the others had even a chance to dream of.

"You would do that?" she whispered. Perfectly aware of the man's feelings for her, she was still astounded by this selfless offer from a worm who did anything to improve his own standing.

"I would do anything to get you out of here," he answered firmly, and there was no disdain in his voice. "I know twinklemoss works. I've seen it being used on that old hag who used to live at the edge of our village - you know, the one who sang at the blue moon when it was full."

Keyla released an involuntary snort. She remembered old Margi, who always greeted her with a forewarning expression like the silent souls of Morgowel were leaping out of the surrounding hills at any time. Still not looking forward to being gang raped by the Garkins, but the plan did contain a solid chance to escape Morbel alive. As much as she hated to admit it, Squinari seemed to have figured out the only plausible way to sneak out without raising any unwanted ruckus.

"How can I get the moss?" she finally asked quietly, unwillingly accepting the plan.

"Here," Squinari said and dropped a tiny linen pouch to the ground. "Pick it up once I'm gone."

"How will I use it?" Keyla found herself confused. "And when?"

"When you see them walking toward this cage, rub it in your gums. Be careful not to use it too soon though. If they think you're dead already when they come, you may just end up being fed to the dogs, and we don't want that. Those who die during the breeding are always taken out of town to the Wailing Hill, which ensures that I'll get the chance to sneak you out. Timing is of utmost importance, Keyla. Remember that."

The girl said nothing, but nodded as a sign of understanding.

Lowering his voice to a mere mumble, Squinari touched the iron bars with his forehead.

"Now I must leave, for I have already spent too much time around here. I have no words to comfort you for what is coming, but no matter how bad it may seem, remember that your freedom is near."

Following the receding figure in the rain, Keyla shivered. It was cold, but more than anything else, it was fear that crawled up her spine. She had very little experience with men, and none of it came even remotely close to what she would be exposed to. All the tales of what took place in the hut came haunting her. All the memories of chilling screams and cries of unending agony that carried from there now whirled in her frail mind wildly like a southern storm. Closing her eyes, she raised her head to feel the cooling rain upon her face.

Well aware of the fact that the night was going to turn a lot colder than what it already was, she was willing to do anything to make the throbbing in her head stop, to kill the visions her imagination poured out faster than she could handle - visions of unspeakable sin. But they refused to die, refused to let her rest. And when the last of the burning candles in front of the buildings died out, Keyla was no longer able to think clearly. Entering a strange trance-like state where she closed everything out and focused just on breathing, the ghosts of tomorrow, still lingering at the outskirts of her consciousness, faded into a lurking dread that was no longer imminent. Staring at her own hands, she fought to keep her thoughts from straying from what she saw, for unfathomable horrors waited immediately below the erratic calmness.

The night passed, and the grey morning found Keyla still concentrated on her hands, unable to see anything around herself. Her eyes looked red and strained after the sleepless night, and her complexion was ghostly pale, but it did not matter. Nothing really mattered, for she would be ruined that day. Wallowing in her dark thoughts, she did not notice Squinari approaching before he was standing right behind the iron bars.

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"They're coming soon," he whispered intently. "Be ready."

From somewhere under her ragged clothes, Keyla dug out the linen pouch Squinari had given the previous night. She said nothing, just nodded faintly at him.

"You'll get through this, I swear," he said and walked away before raising any suspicions.

It did not take more than half an hour before she spotted a group of three Garkins walking toward her cage. The other women cowered in the corners, for even if they knew about Keyla being next, they always took more than one. No one was safe at that point.

Keyla rushed with the twinklemoss to get an even layer all across her gums before one of the soldiers grabbed her by the hand and jerked her out of the cage. She landed in the mud, still rubbing her mouth to make sure there was enough moss to take effect. The mildly sweet flavor turned into bitter and burning after a few seconds, followed by a tingly sensation as it began to absorb. The Garkins paid no attention to her, for they focused on getting all the women on their list out before Overseer Luzgard would appear in the breeding hut. Luzgard, being the right hand of Commander Morhag, was almost as ruthless as the ruler of the city. Running behind schedule meant pitiless floggings; the soldiers were not safe from those any less than the slaves.

A group of three women was separated from the rest, Keyla being one of them, and escorted to the breeding hut in the middle of the town square. Silence took over as soon as the door was closed. The glazed eyes of those left behind showed no sympathy but relief. They all knew what was waiting for the taken, but it was quickly accepted among the remaining people.

When the doors of the breeding hut opened, Keyla expected to see something similar to a torture chamber, but it did not quite fit the traditional description of one. Like the hut itself, the chamber inside was round. The center had five scaffolds with very specific racks built around them to force the victims into most favorable positions. While these structures were intimidating, the rest of the hut was extremely peculiar by design. The walls were of some dark, glassy material with very fine symbols carved on it. The floor, while a multitude of furry carpets covered it, was made of the same material as the walls. The same mysterious patterns ran across the floor as well. There were candles everywhere, turning the otherwise dark chamber into a flickering grandeur of light as the reflections from the polished surfaces amplified the blaze.

They headed for the scaffolds as soon as they entered, but despite them being rough and careless about how they handled these women, Keyla felt no pain. Her limbs had turned numb and the sharp edges of the racks were becoming blurry as she felt the first symptoms of the twinklemoss

taking effect. Aware of being shackled into the structure that forced her head down and propped her rear up, she barely felt the coldness of iron against her skin. And before the Garkin had finished with his work, Keyla had slipped into a state of unconsciousness, protecting her mind from everything the Garkins were about to do. She never saw Overseer Luzgard arriving, and she never felt the hands that removed all her clothing.

Twinkle Moss worked fast, almost too fast. But the Garkins were impatient to satisfy their carnal lust, thus they paid very little attention to her condition at this point. After all, there were never problems with the slaves until at the end of the breeding session. Over ten Garkins followed in the wake of Overseer Luzgard, for they firmly believed it was the seed of the strongest that inseminated successfully.

It was pure torture for Squinari, who was waiting outside, listening to the grunts and groans blending with terrible high-pitched screams. The simple order of the Overlord Raghtar Tarathon was to multiply and gain numbers. The Garkins followed this order with great enthusiasm and dedication. Lighting his pipe with shivering hands, Squinari waited and prayed for Keyla to have absolutely no memory of what was being done. The pain would still be there, but with her mind in good order, she would have a chance to slip away from this sickening place.

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The first sensation she felt was a painful throbbing between her legs, persistent like the northern wind. The second sensation was movement, which intensified all the other aches around her body. The abrasions on her wrists and ankles burned, and her head was still dizzy from the twinkle moss, but she was alive.

Unable to spare a single thought for what had happened, she focused on keeping her eyes closed and enduring the pain. The loose shroud that was wrapped around her felt almost comfortable, although she knew what it was. She had seen many women leaving the breeding hut in a similar piece of cloth, lifeless and pale.

Then the wagon stopped with a slight jerk. She heard footsteps coming from outside. The large blanket covering the entire platform was removed, and she saw Squinari's serious face.

"Stay still," he said in an eerie manner that froze her in place. Clearly the danger was not over yet. "I will have to do something, and for your own sake it's better if you stay hidden until I've gotten farther away from the town."

There was no need for an answer. Keyla knew how critical this part of the plan was. If any of the watchtowers on each corner of the town spotted her moving, they would come after her, and there would be no chance to escape while they still remained so close. She knew what Squinari was about to do with the body of a woman who had not withstood the brutal incident, and she was rather relieved that her eyes were saved from the view. It was required from Squinari to set examples upon the Wailing Hill that rose behind the somber town. It was his duty to remind all the caged slaves within the city walls of what would be their fate if they attempted to flee. Like any other day of the year, he began his work without giving a glance at the woman he loved. He did not dare, for this was one of the very few things he truly regretted, but he needed to maintain his glorified position as a betrayer.

The Wailing Hill, a place where the wind cries. Once green and beautiful slope had died and decayed along with the rest of the world when the darkness came, and now it was used as a burial ground, but also as a display of utter atrocity. There were rough wooden poles sticking out from the mound, bodies at different stages of decay pierced by the poles. Impaled through the genital crevices, some of them still fairly fresh and some nothing but bones, the corpses creaked and

squeaked in the breeze. Squinari was used to the sound, but Keyla, perfectly aware of where they were and what exactly was all around her, shivered in barely restrained disgust. It did not become any easier when Squinari fetched a hammer and a fresh pole from the wagon and returned to the frigid body.

He saw the terrified look on Keyla's face and said, "Please, cover your ears. This won't take long."

She gladly followed the advice. Anything to muffle the sighs of the breathless echoing in the restless wind.

When Squinari was finished, he jumped back on the wagon and flapped the reins lightly. The ascent to Bleak Mountains, and the endless steppes of Borrea behind them, promised a chance of freedom if the beasts of Dagorrath failed to catch a scent. The Oraks, deep orange-colored hyena-like creatures, and the mighty Aurons, bull-like predators that hungered flesh alongside with fresh grass, awaited for careless travelers to stumble across the desolate lands.

"Where are you taking me?" she finally dared to ask when they had been riding on for what seemed like hours.

"Up to the mountain trails," the man replied without turning his head. "We're still in the vicinity of the watchtowers, so lay low. I have arranged plenty of food and water for us. It's hidden in the foothills, where the cursed eyes of the Ironcrown cannot see."

"Then where?" she asked.

"Faralon," Squinari answered shortly. "If we're lucky, we will run into the scouts of Calathmar before encountering any roaming beasts. We'll be safe there."

Keyla closed her eyes tightly and cried. The fear and anxiety of the day, and the night before, caught up with her, and she was not able to hold back tears any longer. Every bump on the

trail marked more distance between her and the foul town. Soon she would be out of reach and truly free, and the Garkins could never lay their filthy hands on her again.

A light drizzle began to drum on the wooden wagon when Squinari finally stopped and turned his head, finding his secret passenger still with her eyes closed.

Smiling faintly, he announced, "It's time to get off and continue past the rocks on foot."

Keyla flinched at the sudden announcement, but wasted no time. She was down on the ground before the man, ready and eager to leave more miles behind. The dizzy effects of the twinklemoss had receded during their journey, and now she was ready to leap out into freedom.

"We must reach the edge of Dagorrath before nightfall," Squinari said, gazing nervously back where the dark towers of Morbel stood behind a veil of dead thickets.

Leading them away from the haunting hillside, Squinari seemed to know exactly where he was going. His sure steps strengthened Keyla's confidence in this frightening situation. This man clearly had a plan, and it would not be long before they were out of sight and reach of these black creatures of Angarath. The courageous Midbornes of Calathmar would hold them back.

After walking for less than a mile, Squinari suddenly veered from the mountain path and looked carefully around the loose rocks.

"Somewhere in here," he muttered to himself, nudging the stones until, all of a sudden, he pushed one of them aside, revealing a worn leather satchel. Grinning slyly, he picked it up and glanced at Keyla with sparkling eyes. "I found it," he said. "I found the supplies we need to cross the steppes."

The grey of the afternoon turned into blinding dark, and it was time for Squinari to look for a proper camping spot. He started a very small fire, barely higher than that of a candle. Squinari's absence must have been noticed by now, and soon the mountains would be swarming Garkins

looking for him. Their red eyes gleaming in the dark, they would come to fulfill their promise to tear his flesh from his bones for betraying them.

Keyla glanced at her savior over the dwindling fire while chewing her ration of the dried meat. A short gulp of water eased the salt lingering on her lips, then she smiled briefly.

"Thank you for doing all this for me," she then said, and a true appreciation reflected from her weary eyes.

Sneering shortly, he replied, "I should've done this much earlier, and not just for one but many. A lot of our people have died while I did nothing."

"How many times you think you could've pulled it off?" she asked, a faint smile playing on her lips. "To keep doing it, you would've had to release people into Dagorrath on their own. How many of them would've truly had any chance to make it across the plains?"

The man stared into the dying fire, but said nothing. There was nothing to be said. Keyla spoke the truth. No matter how much he thought about it, the ghosts of the fallen would not go away. It was a time of war. The Garkins were getting ready to take on the weakened north, and they had an army that even the Hurons could not resist - not anymore.

Eventually he grunted something what Keyla could not quite comprehend, stomped the fire out and lied down. "Better get some sleep," he croaked quietly. "We have a long day ahead."

With a deep sigh, she allowed her entire body to stretch straight before bending to as comfortable position as it was possible amid the rocks and pebbles, then she closed her eyes and allowed herself a moment of rest. The aches and pains had somewhat eased, but the bruises all over her body would be reminding her of what happened for a good while still.

A lonely crow cawed somewhere nearby, but it did not bother those two, who finally felt the darkness of Morbel recede some. A new hope in their hearts brought peaceful sleep without disturbing visions of terror they had witnessed during their short lives.

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Her eyes opened wide as she felt someone on top of her, sticking their fingers into her mouth. She tried to cry out, but her voice was effectively muffled by the forceful hand. At the same time she tasted a familiar sweetness on her tongue, and she recognized the man as Squinari.

"Please, Keyla," he begged. "Be quiet. We're not alone."

Keyla stopped struggling immediately, glancing around nervously. "But why—?" she whimpered, wanting an explanation for the twinklemoss.

"You must be dead," Squinari said quietly. "Well, as dead as anyone can tell. Crawl under those bushes by the boulders and stay still."

Then he was gone.

The answer to Squinari's odd behavior came not but a moment later when she heard approaching sounds - footsteps and low voices. The Garkins were coming.

They were slowly walking up the hill, their swords and crossbows ready. It was painfully clear that these were not just random scouts, and there was no doubt of who they were after. She heard a slam of a rock hitting the enormous stone formations around her, then rolling somewhere into the distance. And as the world began to whirl around her, she discerned the steps leading away from her hideout. Squinari was capturing the attention of the Garkins, and it worked, but before Keyla passed out, her last thought was a true concern for her savior's life.

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The Garkins spotted Squinari easily as he ran through the narrow pass toward Morbel. He needed to lead them away from Keyla, as far as he could. And they came. The entire party of five or six Garkins charged after him, leaving no one behind. He had no weapons, except the shovel he used to fulfill his grim tasks. Hitting the rocks and trees with the shovel as he ran, he created a respectable amount of noise that quickly earned the undivided attention of the enemy. A few bolts flew across the air at his way, but missed in the dark of the night. It was just a matter of time before they would get him, but he was determined to make his life worth enough to pay for Keyla's escape.

For a moment he thought there might be a chance for him to slip away as well, but then a familiar whish of a crossbow bolt sounded in the darkness, and it did not come from behind but somewhere from ahead. Before realizing what exactly happened, he began to limp involuntarily, for the well aimed shot had pierced his thigh. A massive stream of blood was now running down his leg, and he knew the run was over. He could only hope it was enough as another bolt hit his back with a strong thud, causing him to stumble and fall down. Before he could get up on his feet and continue running, the Garkins surrounded him from all sides.

"Squinari," one of them hissed in mock surprise. "You've earned a personal audience with Commander Ilyar himself. You should be proud of yourself." Then they all burst into scoffing laughter, and Squinari knew exactly what it meant. He was going to die. There were no second guesses about it. But before that he would wish for his fate to arrive sooner, for the Garkins would keep him alive for days if not weeks, making sure that every remaining second of his life was devoted to remind him about the price of treachery.

A man dressed in a tight-fitting, black leather armor and a dark green cloak, which blended him into the scenery in a way that even an eagle would have difficulty to see from above, scanned the horizon with an unsure frown upon his face.

"Is it a Garkin?" another man, dressed in a similar way, asked.

Slowly shaking his head, the man gestured for the rest of the group to wait. "No, she looks like one of us," he then grunted.

"A Trevlin woman wandering the steppes of Dagorrath alone," the other man wondered. "She's either braver than any of us or just plain mad."

They were scouts of Faralon, serving the High Queen Sadrifel in her tireless effort to keep Garkins out of her kingdom. Calathmar was the last southern realm without Garkin occupancy, and they were always watching the endless steppes for incoming war parties. During the passing years, the defenders of Faralon had built several watchtowers along the southern shore of Lake Cresthen, which gave them a good view of the entire southern frontier.

Unable to see the hiding men, Keyla focused on walking. She saw the peaceful water in front of her and the glooming mountains rising behind it, the landmarks of Faralon, although she could not see the city itself yet.

When the effects of twinklemoss had worn off, she woke up to the silence of dawn. Squinari was gone; the Garkins were gone. The only sounds were the wind blowing through the mountain pass and crows cawing somewhere among the boulders. She began to walk toward the same way Squinari had led her to, hoping to make it across the steppes on her own, for there was no turning back. Morbel would offer her nothing but death and torment.

With the supplies brought by her savior, Keyla sneaked from shadow to shadow in the dim daylight and the pitch-black of night. Somehow she avoided most of the beasts, especially the mighty Aurons that would have torn her apart with their horns and fangs, and the rest she fought

with fire and rough poles she cut off from the occasional thickets struggling against the winds of the plains. It was a demanding journey, and more than once or twice she wanted to lie down and let the cruel environment bring her to the end of her trail, but Squinari's sacrifice kept her going. And then, when it seemed like the miles would simply become too great of a toll on her ravaged body, the rations not quite enough for her to make it, and the weakness in her arms insufficient to keep the hungry predators away, she saw the glimmering water in the distance. At first she was certain it was an illusion, a lie created by her foggy mind that would disappear when attempting to walk closer. But it did not. It was real. The border of Calathmar was near, and if she could force her feet to carry just one or two miles more, she would be safe from the dangers of the plains.

Then she saw them, a group of men approaching. Not winged bastards, but real people - Trevlins like her. If she was not too tired to do it, she would have smiled. But instead she bent over and threw up until nothing came out. Holding her stomach with a painful grimace, she wiped her mouth on her sleeve and continued. The same malaise had repeated itself on several days now, and although Keyla was young, she was not too young to recognize the first signs of pregnancy. She could only hope that Faralon would accept a woman carrying an enemy within.