

0-THE GREAT LIBRARY

Secrets never stay hidden forever.

Kemplan sat in front of the fireplace watching salamanders dance among the flames. His eyelids were droopy, and he needed sleep. He drifted, then shot up, realizing he needed to add another log to the fire. He pushed off the old leather chair with the high back and waddled over to the stack of logs. He picked one up with his chubby hands, removed the gold fence surrounding the fire, and threw it on top of the other logs. The new log was instantly devoured by the flames. He smiled and turned towards his chair.

There, perched on the bottom cushion was a piece of parchment. Kemplan glanced into the skies of the library, the ceiling too high to see due to the shadows collecting above him. Kemplan gawked at the parchment. Never in all his time had a page appeared like that. He waddled over to the chair and delicately grasped the parchment.

He turned it over and inspected at the images before him. A Ferryman perched on a throne, wearing the royal colors of black and gold—across from him—a Flame. They gazed upon each other with a look that meant one thing—soul mates. Kemplan blinked and shook his head. He wanted to shove the parchment back into the high shelf it had come from. Memories clouded his mind as he revisited the past he barely survived. He nervously cleared his throat, clenched his fist. There weren't many things in the Great Library that were forbidden, but this was one of them.

Kemplan dared a peek at it in the hopes he had been hallucinating, but the parchment was unchanged. The sun showered them in golden

Surrender

beams of light. Two ankhs, shaped like crosses with hoops at the top, hung at the edges of the beams of light, a symbol of their importance to the Lands Across the Stars. Kemplan knew which Ferryman and which Flame these were, the only two that had ever met, Krishani Mekallow Mekelle of Terra, and Kaliel, The Amethyst Flame, her name burned into her very soul by the enemies she defeated.

Kemplan scoffed and threw the parchment on the chair. He paced the small embroidered rug, wringing his hands out. He was afraid to look at it anymore, afraid of what horrendous things would prick his mind. He balled up his fists; glancing at the parchment each time he turned.

After a few paces stared the parchment down, crossed the floor, seized it, and tossed it into the fire. He tried not to watch as the flames licked away the edges of it. He knew it wouldn't burn easily.

Kemplan expected to find it devoured, but instead he was met with staggering symbols that appeared overtop of the images. His stomach lurched, the message too blatant to mistake—infinity. He fell on his back and mouthed the word 'no'. Scrambling backwards, he tried to put as much distance between himself and that vile thing defying the fire.

A deafening screech erupted from the fireplace and Kemplan instinctively brought his hands to his ears, trying to dull the sound. He closed his eyes seeing nothing but fire. He wanted to escape the past but memories came on hot and strong. As he blinked he saw a flash of his wife, charred. He begged not to see the images of his children, his house, his life, but whether he recalled them or not, they were emblazoned on his mind.

He would never forget.

He let out a gasp and looked at the fireplace. It crackled like it was about to explode. He rolled over and squeezed his eyes shut. Chaos. His life had become nothing but chaos. He let out a whimper as crippling sadness rippled through him. He could never have that life back. He would always be trapped in the Great Library, and it would always be their fault.

He closed his eyes, trying to force the images away. He remembered the words of High King Tor, 'It was said long ago that one of the Flames would fulfill a great prophecy.'

Kemplan snarled. Precious but dangerous, the Flames were never to be trusted. Life was better when they were hidden. He couldn't

believe High King Tor would return them to the Lands Across the Stars—especially not her, The Amethyst Flame. And yet the parchment was clear, Kaliel would return, as would the Ferryman, and no doubt by some grand accident they would meet.

He gritted his teeth and waited for the fire to explode, hoping it would erase him from existence for good. A dead calm washed through the Great Library as darkness covered him. Smoke rose from the fireplace and Kemplan sat up. He pawed through the smoke to where the parchment was, glowing, unburned. He stifled his disgust but his heart dropped, the symbol for the Isle of Avristar appearing overtop of the infinity symbol.

And so it begins, he thought bitterly.

This is the legend of The Ferryman and the Flame.

1-SAMHAIN

The merfolk were dangerous. Everyone on Avristar knew that. The kinfolk stayed away from the lake and the mists that curled around them, concealing the island from the Lands of Men. Avristar was safely tucked away from the humans and their wars, but the merfolk gravitated to the shores, living in an underwater paradise below the island. They slid their slick black bodies through the cracks in the rocks and pooled forth into the chasm underneath the mountain. There were stories about them finding their way to the surface, but the stories were centuries old. Fear flooded the kinfolk and forced them away.

Krishani shifted his weight on the stone platform behind the forbidden falls and peered out from sheets of water blocking the entrance to the cave. The falls were on the south side of Mount Tirion, and they were off limits. Krishani narrowed his gaze at the banks of the pond, his heart thudding. A girl kneeled on the edge, her white hair cascading down her back in curls and waves, her pasty hands pressed against the ledge. She peered into the depths of the pond. He never saw anyone do that before and it made him nervous. He was brave enough to ignore the elders when they said not to travel to the waterfall. When he was forced to be in the royal city of Orlondir for the Fire Festivals he preferred the cave behind the falls over the dancing girls, the hairy feorns and the sparring matches.

He slid a fraction of an inch down the stone as the girl backed away from the ledge and a fin on top of a smooth black head bobbed along the surface. The girl ran her hands through her hair, trying to