

Tales of Eskarra: Of Faith/Thursday Prompt:Char

Silence. Save for the soft creak of insects in the oasis brush. It was this stillness of the air that tore Ophelia from her sleep. The darkness greeted her eyes, and with it, a primordial fear ingrained into her people since long before her birth. Silence. No crackle of flames or glow of embers. *Where is Mas'syr... why is the fire out...*

The human woman rolled from her bedroll, gripping Legacy, her sword. Sacred steel scraped free of the scabbard that gloved it. A shimmer gripped the blade as holy magic amplified what little light existed. Coldness pierced the tunic wrapped shieldmaiden. Sands were shifting beyond the starlit sword's faint glow *My shield...*

It was absent from her rucksack beside her bedroll. Hisses preceded the creaking of bones and ancient sinew. Ophelia's heart pounded in her ears. *I have come too far... I will not fall here!*

In the faint glow of Legacy aloft, Ophelia could see a stricken ghoul. Clawing at the ground with bone tipped digits, its skin long dried and shriveled. Its thin, bisected figure was wrapped in loose linens, a man, possibly. It held a haunted expression of pain and hunger. Try as it might to ascend the sand dune, it was not able, sliding back down with an increasing wave of sand across its figure.

The sand was beset in drawn trenches all around camp. *A struggle... How did I not waken...*

Was she really so exhausted, or had there been more than ghouls in the night? She shook her head and twisted Legacy deftly. The tip of the blade bit through undead flesh. She wicked the head from shriveled shoulders with the smooth glide of her cutting edge. The body went limp, and the darkness within ruptured into flames under Purity's bite. Ophelia exhaled and turned away, her nose scrunched to the smell of charring flesh.

*There is certainly more than ambient treachery at play.* Her green eyes looked out over the camp, lit now by the glow of the burning corpse. She could see clearly in the sand the outline of a struggle. *Mas'syr was taken... swiftly and by many.*

She traced the paths from the camp, guided in the darkness by Legacy's glow. She halted and held the shimmering sword aloft.

Green eyes took in wisps of scarlet hair weighted in a pool of blood within a platter. A candle, extinguished, rested in the center. *Blood magic... I was bespelled...*

A growl escaped the human woman's face as she trudged back to camp. "Foolish fish... how could you let this happen?"

She hefted her rucksack up, leaving behind her bedroll. There wasn't any time to lose.

*Spare not an inch for the heretic, the blasphemer, and the shadow souled...*

The Tenant of Purity erupted into the forefront of Ophelia's mind with such ferocity as to pause her step. She wavered and released a breath shivered between her clenched jaw.

*Mas'syr is a blood mage...*, the shield-maiden thought to herself. Her blood ran hot, a pent up fury garnered at the dozens of times she trusted the fishwoman. She could feel a scorching of her soul wrought from the dozen more times she had aided and abetted the heretic offworlder.

"No," She said aloud, reaffirming her commitment, "The Grandmaster entrusted me with this mission. I must find the Knight-Commander."

In hearing her words fall upon the desert sands, Ophelia felt her determination rise. *I must have faith in my elders.*

"I need Mas'syr..." She affirmed. Closing her eyes, Ophelia felt the fire within lessen. Turning away from the dying light of the burning corpse, the maiden of Purity trekked into the night lit sand. Her legs ached with each stride up the dune. Her breath bit at the cool air, and in time a dampness collected in the coolness of the desert air. Panting, she reached the top. Green eyes set out upon the expanse.

"Destiny, alight with the luminescence of Purity Unbound," She commanded, feeling the warmth of Purity's embrace sweep through her. A comforting hold upon her body supported the weary knight-sister as she held Legacy aloft. The sparkling blade emitted a pulse of light and in the distance an equally brilliant flash answered it. A distant shriek echoed in Opehlia's ears, carried on the faint winds.

She set off, guided with knowledge of where she would find Mas'syr. The flames in her soul smouldered with distaste for the fishwoman, but she steered her mind toward her objectives. *Apprehend my mother, locate Knight-Commander Gowen...*

She took a deep breath as she descended the dune in lopsided gaits, Legacy lighting her way. Ophelia swallowed the swill upon her tongue.

*Purge the heretic...*