

The southern edge of the settlement was fenced by a sparse, deciduous forest. The wind was also coming from this direction. The dog present there, dressed like a peasant, was sitting on a bench not far from the outermost chamber. He was looking up at the sky and it seemed as if he was looking out for something.

He focused his gaze on the looming shape, which was getting bigger by each second. The figure was also moving quite fast, making it possible to see its mostly dark colors after a while.

The figure landed not far from the sitting dog. After a quick analysis, one could tell that it was a man. Specifically, it was a bat that had wings instead of normal hands. Three fingers were elongated and there was a membrane between them. The thumb and index finger were fully functional. The newcomer was wearing only pants, over which was knotted a dark red cloth.

The dog slowly got up from the bench and started walking toward the visitor, who was looking around. Long-eared one looked away only when the shirt-clad native approached him.

"Blessings of Vyrai to you, traveler", the dog began, bowing to respect the visitor.

"Peace be with you", the bat replied politely.

"Are you Sulmir, friend of the high priestess?"

"Yes, that's me. And who are you?"

"Forgive me...", the dog bowed again. "I am Kanmil, the messenger."

"Will you take me to the priestess?", the newcomer asked.

"That's why I came here."

"Before we continue, however, I would like to dress well. That fabric on my pants is my robe. Could you help me put it on?"

"Of course."

Kanmil stood right next to the bat and untied the dark red fabric from the visitor's legs. After briefly examining it, the dog carefully placed it properly over the bat's body and wrapped the remaining cord around his waist. After a quick assessment, the newcomer thanked him and the two began their journey.

Sulmir was able to look at the current huts that dominated the outskirts of the settlement. Almost all of them were made of wood and those built of stone could be counted on the fingers of one hand. In general, the houses looked like they were in good condition.

Even the fields that were right next to the buildings looked like they had been treated well. It was not yet harvest time, but the emerging crops forecast a truly successful harvest.

Turning into another path, two travelers noticed an unpleasant situation. A certain group began to bully a person, refusing to let them leave their company. The dog dragged the bat away into another path to avoid a confrontation.

"Don't you want me to interfere?", Sulmir asked with disappointment in his voice.

"Not at this point", Kanmil asked, while remaining calm.

"What do you mean by that?"

"You were summoned for a purpose that is related to the situation we saw."

"Unrest in the local community?", the bat asked, opening his eyes wider. "I don't deal with that kind of problems."

"However, you are the one who was invited to solve this issue."

"Don't play with me, Kanmil", the newcomer got slightly angry. "I think you know more than what you are telling me."

"I am a messenger, as I have already mentioned", the dog tilted his head for a moment. "I know as much as I was told."

"I understand. I wonder what problem my friend has..."

"You will have to find out for yourself when you reach the high priestess' hut."

"Indeed. It's not far from here."

The said hut did not differ from the others in the building material it was constructed from. It was made of wood that looked fairly fresh. However, one detail made it unique in its own way, as it was clearly larger than the surrounding buildings.

It was impossible to see the fields that might belong to the occupants of the building. Instead, it was located close to the forest. There was quite a large patch of land between the two, which was quite often occupied, judging by the ceremony items located on the grassy ground.

After walking around the hut, the men stopped in front of the main entrance. Kanmil moved a few steps aside from the door. The bat knocked twice on the wood and the entrance opened. The being standing in it was a doe, who was clad in a white and green robe, tied at the hips with a wide red belt.

"You've arrived...", the woman said with a soft voice. "Come in."

The newcomer nodded and entered the chamber. It was sizable and there was a reason behind this. It contained a lot of seating, as well as a massive table covered with a tablecloth, on which there were no objects at the moment. On top of that, the walls were decorated with twigs and multicolored flowers, mostly woven into garlands.

"Now we can properly greet each other", smiled the doe. "Greetings, Sulmir."

"Blessings to you, Dalbora", the bat bowed. "I am glad to see you again."

"The feeling is mutual."

"I also wanted to personally offer you my congratulations. You have become the high priestess of this settlement."

"Not without your help", Dalbora giggled. "Sit down, please. I will bring food and drink."

The newcomer nodded and wandered to the nearest seat, while the priestess went to the neighboring chamber to get the aforementioned meal. The man closed his eyes and started smelling the air, relishing in the scent of the plants present in the room.

"Herbal drink and breads with honey," Dalbora said. "I hope it will be enough."

"More than enough", Sulmir replied, opening his eyes. "Thank you."

The doe sat down next to her guest, placing the food she had brought on another

seat. For a few minutes they didn't talk to each other and just ate the food. Judging by the look on their faces, they enjoyed the meal.

"That's better...", sighed the priestess. "How are the things on the trail?"

"I'm just doing my job", the bat shrugged. "Sometimes someone drags me into an intrigue, sometimes I get into open conflict, sometimes I end up in extremely nice places..."

"So you have stories to tell..."

"Indeed. However, I would like to talk about the situation in the settlement."

"Ah, this...", Dalbora saddened. "How did you find out?"

"Heading here with your messenger, we came across a peculiar event. And that was the abuse of a person living in this settlement by other settlers. What is the reason behind this?"

"Our native faith is not the only one in the area. With every day, the number of followers of this new religion in our village increases. Conflicts are occurring. I even managed to get information that they have hired warriors to slaughter "heretics and foreign forces", as they said."

"These wicked people will bring their own filth with them."

"Eh...", the doe sighed. "I know this extremely well... That's why you were summoned."

"And what do you want me to do?", Sulmir raised his tone. "Massacre them in a brutal manner?"

"I'd rather avoid that... Listen, I will be conducting a ceremony soon. Would you be willing to help me with the preparations?"

"With pleasure."

The two rose from their seats and conceived the necessary steps to make the ceremony go as good as possible. Bat mainly listened to the instructions of her friend, who had more experience in this matter.

The whole process took them a long time, but they completed everything without any problems before the first followers began to arrive. People of different species could be seen. After seeing them, Sulmir sensed that some of them were special. After that, however, his gaze was fixed on the lit bonfire.

"Greetings, brothers and sisters", Dalbora began the speech. "May the gods of Vyrai favor us in these turbulent times."

The believers slowly bowed their heads and stood in this position for a long moment. Then, they raised them and stood so as to make as few movements as possible. The priestess looked around, paying special attention to the people accompanying her.

"Unfortunately, this is the time of trial for our community", the doe continued speaking. "Still, we can gather here and find courage. You can see that the gods from the top of The Great Tree are watching over us."

Dalbora took a small, decorative vessel. With a confident movement, she poured liquid from it, which caused the fire to flare up strongly. The flame then stabilized, but noticeably increased in size. A handful of believers quietly sighed.

- It's time to answer the nagging question," the priestess looked around again.

- Will we survive the next few days, or will the followers of foreign gods prevail? We can find out now.

The doe pointed to the women who were dressed similarly to her. When she gestured, they walked closer to the fire. Two colorful birds tied the cloth around the white mare. The women then led their hooved friend, holding her hands.

Sulmir began to watch the whole process carefully. He knew what was about to happen. Although he had his own opinion about these rituals, ceremonies and things related to the spiritual realm, he did not say it too often, as he had respect for other people's faith.

The mare took her first step with her right foot. And then more, with the help of other priestesses. They led her around the poles, which were embedded in the ground at different angles. All of them could be walked around without any problems, allowing for doing laps.

The whole thing was repeated two more times. For all the time, the bat was paying attention to the movements the mare was making, especially those starting next laps. Everything went off without a hitch, so the priestesses could return to their seats.

"The gods have decided", Dalbora said loudly. "Don't worry, brothers and sisters. The better times will come for us. Times of peace. Praise the gods! Praise Vyrai!"

"Slava!", the crowd shouted.

This was the sign that the ceremony has ended. The faithful began to disperse and the doe began to extinguish the bonfire. Bat approached the other priestesses out of curiosity to see how they were feeling, but he was quickly joined by his friend.

"Thank you, my dear", Dalbora bowed.

"What did you give to this mare?", Sulmir asked curiously.

"Nothing strong. Just the usual specifics for such occasions."

"Of course...", the bat turned his head.

"She will be fine. Right, Rana?"

"Don't worry about me", the mare said with a sleepy voice.

"See?"

"Eh...", the bat sighed heavily, then heard strange sounds. "I'll go and see what's going on nearby."

"I don't... right... I don't have as sensitive hearing as you."

Sulmir left the priestesses and started heading in front of his friend's shelter. He was curious about what was happening, but he was predicting that it wasn't great.