

It only took a bit over a week for routine to occur, and for the mines to transform into a hive of activity. Viv had expected more violence. She thought that the claustrophobic environment and adverse conditions would lead to a poor morale, but she had been wrong. The Kazarans had a goal. That goal was to take back their city and make the invaders pay. It was fueled in equal part by justice and spite, love for their kin and blind hatred for those who had come to hurt them. It was a clear, achievable purpose. Equally important, they had a deadline.

The term had never been so accurate.

The mines had two months of food, perhaps a bit more, and no way to get more locally. Their previous homes had acres upon acres of ripening cereals and plants of all kinds, beans and stalks almost ready to be harvested. That treasure trove had to be taken back, or they would perish. It was sink or swim.

This led to an unprecedented level of unity the likes of which Viv had simply never seen before. Perhaps the educated, modern population of her home country had grown jaded. The study of history and politics had led to a massive disenchantment, Viv thought, further developed by the failure of politicians to make good on their promises. Kazar's population was different. They were fresh and helpless against even the cheesiest tricks of eloquence. It did not mean that they were stupid, just that Viv talked to them one evening out of two and they actually listened, and believed.

That was another of Farren's ideas. They had organized an agora to let the citizens discuss ideas and express themselves. Orkan the apprentice inquisitor had also come up with a small arena for people to punch each other silly in order to close the more heated arguments.

"You'd be amazed how people become more receptive to judgement after they've worked out their frustration," the Hallurian had wisely said, tattoos pulsing merrily in the darkness. The locals had already decided to call it the 'Hallurian discussion'. Even women had taken to it with gusto. Sometimes, all out brawls or slapping contests took place as well.

And so day after day, the Kazarans discussed and prepared. Men and women dug along the surface and cracked holes in the mountainside to make troglodyte dwellings. An entire section of the tunnels had been turned into rows of basic habitation with the Yries generously providing a pair of generators for room-sized red barriers to seal the access. The bakery and smithie were hot and busy repairing equipment used during training, while those who had decided to take arms worked out day-in day-out to hone their skills. There was even a competition going on between Solfis' recruits, the guards, and Neriad's followers.

There was a lot of fucking as well.

What pleased Viv's modern mind the most was probably how she had successfully disarmed racism, at least for a while. Nobody batted an eye when Yries came with shipments of metal they traded against necessities, nor when Irao's Hadals came to deliver wood or a trussed up monster for the day's Mechoui dish. Nobody gave a shit anymore. There was the Kazarans on one side and the Enorians who were definitely going to get it on the other.

Such was the desire to make their independence a reality that they had started to work on a constitution. We, the People, it said, in order to establish a better city, establish justice, guarantee freedom, promote the general welfare and guarantee the independence of Kazar, do ordain and establish our constitution. Then it went on about the town council and who was a citizen and so on.

The beginning might have been stolen from the United States' own preamble because she had read it long ago as part as a group project. But hey, it was public domain and the locals loved it.

All in all, things were going surprisingly well. So well, in fact, that Viv was expecting some sort of catastrophe. It did not happen. Instead, they received visitors.

It happened in the middle of the day as Viv was practicing setting up her artillery spell faster through the use of constructs. A sentry whistled to announce newcomers. Viv was not aware of the sign codes but since no one was running around screaming, it was probably okay. The visitors turned out to be mountain tribe walkers. The small group stumbled forward, obviously tired. Their thin forms were hidden behind tattered black mana repelling clothes. Viv remembered that walkers had insane stamina so these guys had obviously been pushing it. She abandoned her training for now and decided to follow them. Someone would probably ask for her anyway.

Their new guests were given fresh water and finally settled in the command room, or rather, most of them fell asleep while the leader stayed awake. The council was gathered in a matter of minutes.

"We need help," the man said without preamble. Viv realized that she knew him. He was the tall and gangly guy who had hit on her once. He was well-respected among the tribes.

"Raiders have come from Kazar. They're going from village to village, killing everyone. There's a hundred of them or so."

"A hundred soldiers?" Viv asked, sensing an opportunity.

"No, not the regular soldiers we saw. Bandits. People without uniforms. We would stop them but many of our hunters are trapped near the summits to clear out a nest of feathered locusts."

Viv remembered them from the bestiary. Those were pests that could clear out an entire harvest in a couple of days. Once in flight, there was no stopping them without losing the harvest as well.

"Our caster did tell you to expect that much," Farren noted with a cold voice.

"I know!" the man spat, "but unless you've forgotten we'll be short on food this year even if things go well. If that swarm had taken off, my people would have starved. And besides, the border villages were evacuated. The bandits went after the hidden villages."

“Hidden villages?” Viv asked.

“We have villages far above the fields to retreat to in case of danger. They cannot be seen from the road, but those bandits found us anyway. It’s like they knew where we were all along.”

“Perhaps a skill.”

“It doesn’t matter. Can you help us?”

“Orkan and I are going,” Denerim said. As an inquisitor, he would always be front and center in these cases.

“How many horses do we have?” Viv asked. They had captured a few of them from the dead riders and had some to begin with. They ate a lot of cereals but could ultimately be turned to meat so they were still around.

“Twenty-seven, I think,” Brenna said.

“Well, I’m going,” Viv said. It was obvious. She was their main power multiplier. It was also obvious that they would help the mountain tribes. Those folks were not entirely trustworthy, but they were also buffer, allies and potential food providers so of course she would not antagonize them.

There was also a serious chance to kill off some of Lancer’s forces before the final confrontation.

“We have fighters as well, around fifty brave combatants in armor. Not enough to carry the fight by themselves, sadly,” the walker said.

“We should get the Temple Guards backed by archers and Viv. Solfis as well. All our elites,” Lorn declared.

In the end, they decided to go with that plan while still leaving Koro behind in case of a monster attack. The wild woman was their best pure hunter, after all. The expedition group packed quickly and Viv realized at the last moment that they had been joined by three Hadal, including a woman with long black hair she had shaved on the sides.

[Hadal strain infiltrator, very dangerous: a Hadal strain human specialized in covert operations. She has a limited control over black mana. Assassination expert.]

Nice. Viv had no objection, and the messy group soon rode out, Solfis having given clear instructions on how to keep training.

//A necessary investment of my time, Your Grace.

//If we lose you, it is all over.

Viv felt a measure of exhilaration when they heroically rode out in two columns, dust rising under the hooves of their mounts. It felt suitably cool. The novelty lasted exactly one hour, then her ass began to hurt.

“How do those horse girls even do it,” she grumbled, “I have high stats and I’m still sore.”

//With all due respect, Your Grace, you do not have high physical stats.

Viv glared at the compact golem mounted on Marruk’s back by her side. It was lost on him. She might as well scold a stone.

//You do have high willpower.

//I suggest you used it.

“Yeah okay okay.”

Asshole. Viv shut up and focused on staying on her saddle. Again, she was surprised at how docile and resilient the local horses were, a proof that they, too, were affected by magic. Perhaps there was even a horse breeder path, who knew? In any case, they rode hard along the path with the mountains to their left and the deadlands extending to the horizon. There were no obstructions on the trail since the convoy had passed through only a couple of weeks before. Sometimes, they found discarded items and pieces of fabric around. If Lancer had wanted to follow them, he would have.

They moved for the rest of the day and only stopped as the sun set. The walker guided them to a village where they were offered cots and a warm meal in the communal house. Viv appreciated the fact that the mines now had a steady supply of fresh water, else the enclosed space would have been suffocating with so many bodies in there. She did not react when the Hadal disappeared off somewhere to sleep. Everyone was off again at dawn, relatively well-rested. Viv felt like having a magical body was a bit like doping, except that everyone was doing it and the men didn’t grow tits.

They entered the terrasse farming part of the mountain and the mood turned dark as soon as they passed the first village. People were both harvesting what they could and loading carts, fear obvious on their sun-tanned faces. Children cried. More than a few people started praying as they passed by, yelling words of encouragement. It was a very real threat to them, while to Viv it had been nothing but a side task on her way to vengeance. Up till now. She only had to think for a second to realize what ‘bandit attack’ meant in this world. Those attackers were not there to rob people and push them on the ground while laughing maniacally. This was not some PG-13 movie featuring a sexy barbarian. It was war before the rules of war were invented.

Viv calmed down and focused on the now. Mountain laborers were waiting at crossroads, redirecting the cavalry flow as it approached. Viv was amazed by how united the tribes were in their cooperation. The sun climbed overhead and they stopped at the ‘capital’ to refill their flasks. Marredyn, the official leader, approached them. He still had that massive turban on his head that looked like a ball. He nodded at Viv, just once, but she saw a hint of tears in his eyes.

“Go. Save my people.”

It was probably a skill, but Viv felt buoyed by his prayer. It had been genuine. Everyone rested then the expedition cut through the mountain flank like a knife. The thunder of hooves heralded their arrival and when they passed, people made way and cheered. They slowed down as the sun set for the second time. It had taken less than a day and a half to cross the entire mountain territory. A record, she thought.

Before them, the land opened in the distance towards the distant dot of Kazar. Green plains extended in a band to another mountain far into the distance while, to her left, the Deadshield Woods spread to the horizon in an ocean as deep and threatening as the real thing. Viv refocused. There was smoke climbing in the air half a kilometre in the distance. They could not see the village from where they stood as it was beyond the incline. A soldier in an ancient chainmail and a red gambeson hailed them quietly.

“Are you the reinforcements?” he asked in Enorian.

“Yes,” Lorn replied, “we came as quickly as we could.”

“You are not many but... perhaps speed is for the best. Come. Follow me.”

Everyone dismounted and followed the mountain fighter through a winding path between two grass-covered mounds, then to a camp in a hollow.

Viv was impressed. Anyone down the slope would look up and see only uninterrupted mountain slope. That depression allowed fifty soldiers to hide from view. They huddled in clumps around men adorned with slightly more elaborate gear and red cloth around their helmets. Between the red cloth and ratty armors, they looked like Roman legionaries after three campaigns in the Teutoburg forest. Their weapons were clean and well-maintained though, and the mood was serious. Denerim deferred to Lorn who walked to the obvious leader. The gruff, lean old warrior was standing aside next to three prisoners. As soon as Viv got closer, she recognized them. They were two men and a woman from the guard, the very same who had left with Corel. They appeared to be healthy, if genuinely depressed. Everyone was so focused that they barely gawped at the sight of Solfis.

“Welcome, welcome,” the mountain commander greeted, “I’m Goredyn, I command this lot. You guys came fast.”

“We rode as fast as we could,” Lorn said. “What’s the situation?”

“The situation is that the Enorians have sent their thugs to rape, pillage and kill. That’s the situation,” the man fumed.

Goredyn took a deep, calming breath and closed his eyes. When he opened them again, anger had been replaced by grief and frustration.

“Look, I don’t know how but they found the village. It’s too late for our folks, but I won’t let the invaders leave and take their loot with them. They die on the mountain or we do. I’ll let the... the double turncoats tell you more.”

With those words, he walked out and signaled his men to assemble. They did so in silence.

Meanwhile, Viv was left with the guards.

“You gave up and fled with Corel,” Lorn said. “Now look at you. Wearing the Prince’s colors.”

“We know we fucked up or we wouldn’t have defected,” one of the men answered in a weary voice.

“Explain.”

“Corel led us back. We arrived at the city with no food. The Enorians accepted us in exchange for information. They know everything, by the way, your location, your numbers, your abilities, they even know about the golem.”

“Then they know little. Continue.”

“Yeah well, Prince Lancer settled down with the bridgers and they started to evict locals. it went about as well as you would expect. The tree of Kazar bears nooses this year, with plenty of fruits.”

The man’s tone was particularly bitter.

“That was just the beginning though. The witch forgot an important detail when she reported the number of settlers. Two thirds of them are men, men who paid not just for land to seed, if you catch my meaning.”

Viv was stunned into silence, but the others were not. Even Afghanistan had not managed to jade her completely yet. The locals were made of different stuff. There were no rules of war on Param.

Nevertheless, Lorn socked the man hard and he spat blood and a tooth. The old knight’s face had not changed.

“Continue.”

“Right. Pfft. Since the settlers were starting to get restless, Lancer got an idea. They would find the women where they were.”

“The mountain tribes...”

“And Corel volunteered.”

“You can’t be serious,” Lorn said, finally dismayed.

“Does it look like I’m fucking lying? We were already horrified by the evictions but we couldn’t do shit. The bridgers didn’t trust us. But acting as bandits? That was the last straw. We fucked off as soon as we could.”

“They’ve captured the village’s girls, anyone who can bear a child,” the female guard said, “we need to save them before they’re brought back or we might as well slit their throats.”

“How many and what do they have? Any casters?”

“Corel leads the raid. No caster, not even those hybrid siege specialists. Careful though, the prince has one with him. I think it’s a red mage but I’m not sure.”

“A pyromancer?”

“We never saw her but the bridgers mentioned a lass. She and Lancer are an item, apparently.”

“Wonderful, but I don’t give a fuck who shags whom. The numbers.”

“One twenty, easy, but they’re mostly on the second step and many of them just abandoned their path to become marauders. Good and bad, I guess.”

Viv did not get it and it showed, because the third guard addressed her.

“Marauders have skills that suppress pain, fear, hunger. Everything. They always fight at their best. Course, they don’t fight very long, or don’t live very long for that matter. Errel, I think you should tell her about the name.”

The first guard lowered his eyes for the single second it took for Lorn to make his gauntlet creak.

“Right, so Prince Lancer is good at talking. He’s good at making it all seem your fault,” the guard told Viv.

“My fault?”

“Yeah. He had people gather near the tree and talked to us. He said that the Kazarans had fled rather than face the consequences of their actions because they were weak and lured by evil. That’s you by the way. He said that the Kazarans were lazy but that they could be redeemed if your influence was removed. I almost believed it.”

“Yeah,” the woman said, “he speaks and it all makes so much sense. Everything becomes so clear. It’s only if you pay attention that cracks begin to show. The soldiers and settlers live in a world where Kazarans are scum and deserve everything that’s happening to them. We’re lazy people who dodged both wars and grew fat on the back of the hard-working people of Enoria. That’s how they see it, because of him. Oh, uh, also, you are the Great Black Slut.”

There was a lull in the conversation as almost everyone threw a furtive glance at Viv to gauge her reaction.

“I think I preferred Goodmother after all.”

//I will be sure to claw this moniker on his corpse.

//After all is done.

“Squee!”

Even Arthur was offended and she didn’t even speak.

“You are taking this pretty well for someone who cuts stone in two,” Marruk observed.

“Wow, the scion of a conservative regime uses promiscuity to degrade and discredit me, painting me as someone to be feared and looked down upon. I also happen to be someone who poisons minds so I shouldn’t be listened to. I am shocked. Appalled. Scandalized. Totally did not expect that from him.”

“Please stop rolling your eyes or you’ll see your own brain. We get it. Can we use this in battle?”

In truth, Viv was pissed. It was just that being called a slur did not even remotely compare to the rest of what he had done. She had already reached the top of scale. He could not add to it.

“We could use me as bait.”

//I object.

“Smartly, of course. Do you think that they will engage us or flee?”

“They will attack us if they think they can win. They hate us.”

“And they think we are weak,” Gorredyn said as he returned. “What did you have in mind?”

“We create a compact formation with Temple Guards and mountain infantry in front and Viv visible. Guard three deep at the front, infantry two-deep in two wings. Archers behind. We rotate around the witch and form a circle if they try to flank us,” Lorn proposed.

“My folks can do that, but no promises.”

“I will stay out and attack targets of opportunities,” the Hadal woman said. It was the first time in two days that she had spoken.

“What?” she asked when everyone looked at her.

“Nevermind, ok we do it like this. We come from uphill, unless they have archers?”

“They don’t have trained archers,” the first guard says, “let us come with you, we have to atone for our mistakes.”

“Out of the question. You’ll atone the way we tell you to atone, and that won’t be in the next fight. Alright, form up. Archers, shoot the sentries first. Lady Bob, sorry, Vivviane, keep the pressure off us. Let’s go.”

Goredyn agreed to let the Temple Guard take the center since they had the best warriors. He took the right flank and named a squad leader for the left. The archers spread themselves behind. It took a few minutes to set up and make sure that everyone understood their role, and Marruk used this opportunity to lean in for a question.

“I know how humans treat Kark. But how can humans treat humans like that? I thought you had laws?”

“Laws and empathy apply to people, that’s why the first step for rulers is always to dehumanize the population they want to persecute. But, you know, I’m doing it as well. I’m going to throw spells at people and just focus on protecting my side. They have to be horrible, less than human things to me or I’ll hesitate.”

“Have you considered making them human and solving things?” Marruk asked, but it was more a cry of the heart than a proposal.

“Have you?” Viv retorted. She could not help it.

Marruk kept quiet as the formation closed around them.

“Your race is not kind.”

It was both an explanation and a remark. Maybe the Kark were kinder. Maybe that’s why they were losing.

They went over the ridge.

Viv felt a distinct feeling of distance from the enfolding scene as nearly sixty soldiers in packed formation walked down a slope to a mass of murderers and rapists twice their numbers. Red capes and dull armors shone strangely in the dying light. Their expressions were grim and their eyes focused forward. It was strangely quiet for such a grand event, the calm before the storm. Viv had already experienced a local battle but it had been rushed and Varska had taken the lead. Now, Viv was front and center and as the battle line advanced, a terrible disconnect harried her neurons. Here they were, walking down a slope in a straight line behind a shield wall. Viv was a fucking combat medic for fuck sake. How had this happened?

Then a flicker in the sky made her raise her eyes for an instant. It was Arthur circling the village like some great bird of prey. The sight jolted her and she became hyper aware.

The scent of sweat.

Boots stomping on the ground.

The low earth domes of the mountain folks' dwelling gathered in two concentric circles.

The sentries on top as they turned, as they died choking on three fingers of steel. Their death rattles sent the camp into an uproar.

A particularly stupid man with no pants jumped out from cover and saw them, then shook his fist in their direction while bellowing curses. Two arrows hit him in the sternum. Blood leaked and leaked. He fell down. Thirty more meters.

No one came to meet them.

"Hold!"

'No plan survives first contact with the enemy', or so the saying went. On the other side of the walls, people were rushing around.

"Should we go in?"

"Hold," Lorn replied.

Someone was screaming orders.

"Hey," Viv asked an archer, "can you locate the enemy commander?"

"The one talking on the other side of the wall, yeah?" another replied, "I can."

"Then come next to me and throw an arrow his way."

"Into the wall?"

"Yeah."

The man obeyed and a shaft buried itself in a thick layer of terracota.

There were civilians in the village. Back on earth, that could have been a court martial. This was not earth.

"Arty."

The relatively thin spear of black mana punched through the mud with disdainful ease. Corel screamed. Viv recognized the disgraced captain's pitch. Served him well. Fuck terracota, and fuck him.

With this, the mob yelled and their clamor reached a crescendo. One moment, Viv could not see a single person. The next, fighters surged like ants from behind every building. The largest opening had the highest number of combatants. And women. The marauders advanced in a vague line, pushing their captives in front to act as meat shields. Viv saw bruises, wounds, denuded flesh. She shut it down.

On their side, the mountain warriors brandished their blades with resignation clear in their face. Time was short and so Viv's mind went into overdrive.

Draw a circle under her feet to help with the wide purge net. Inscribe the glyph for direction, to help.

Draw colorless mana.

Draw more of it.

Quickly.

Outliers hit their flank. There were marauders climbing on top of walls to throw stones. Some had slings. Solfis placed a hand on Viv's shoulder.

//I will cover you, Your Grace.

//Give them hell.

One of the slingers fell with an arrow through the skull. Another got a facefull of screeching dragonling. A third disappeared, dragged backwards by a pale arm. She had enough colorless mana now. She manifested the runes Varska had taught her. Sound had been the mage's favorite domain.

The mountain tribes spoke Old Imperial while the invaders spoke Enorians. The two languages were close but not that close. It was the ancient language she picked for her next words.

“DOWN. DOWN ON THE GROUND. NOW.”

Leadership: Beginner 6

She did not wait to see. Black mana flooded from her core into the circle and then back into her. Black tendrils grew around like Medusa's hair. She was ready, so ready. Just had to wait...

The mountain women threw themselves forward. A portly old girl jumped on a teen and covered her head. Another unlucky one was stabbed as she fell, her hesitation fatal. There was still one standing. It would be enough. It would have to be enough.

“Purge net.”

Tendrils of absolute darkness whipped through the tight ranks of the marauders with a furious hiss. Some tried to get down. Some hid behind shields. It made no difference. Viv's spells had become fast enough that she would be hard-pressed to dodge them and there were dozens of tendrils. The first ranks were shredded. Blood pooled under their mangled bodies.

"FORWARD!"

Viv suddenly felt danger and was suddenly grabbed back, her nope shield fizzling in the air. Something clanged, and she found herself looking at Solfis' yellow glare. There was a small impact on his shoulder's armor. The runes glowed in the twilight.

"Wha?"

//Archer.

//Marruk, no exposure until I am back.

"Understood."

Viv was grabbed and pushed back under Marruk's door-shield. For a few seconds, there was nothing to see except that one plank of wood. It was quite grainy. She felt a bit off.

Pretty sure someone had tried to decapitate her with an arrow.

Women started to be pulled into the formation as the soldiers let them through. Most of them collapsed. A few were crying. Solfis landed back in the formation.

"Any chance you could help?"

//There could be another archer.

//Why don't you stand up and help?

Viv did so. Their flanks were already buckling under the pressure of the bandits.

[marauder, dangerous: one who follows a path dedicated to raiding, violence, and fighting beyond one's limit.]

As she watched, a man with his throat slit managed to grab a shield and pull a mountain soldier forward where his allies stabbed him.

"Werfer."

Another furious hiss. The mass of bodies smashing against their lines evaporated. Some bandits dodged back or ran with smooth speed. Others fell to the ground and were melted anyway. As for the rest, they found themselves between a death cloud and vengeful blades. They died in droves.

“Got anymore like that?” Lorn yelled.

“One or two,” Viv replied. All the spells she had cast had been high consumption. She was already getting tired.

“Then do the other side!”

At the front, the Temple Guard had managed to recover most of the captives by virtue of stabbing any foes that approached. All of their fighters were far into the third path at the minimum and they made short work of attackers, particularly the pair of inquisitors who were virtually unstoppable. Viv trotted while Marruk left her spot in the formation. This side had collapsed more so the spell wouldn't be as useful. She cast it anyway. Men fell and died. The spell ate through them, not in the way of acid but as if whatever part of their body was touched just went missing. A few used spells, goutts of light and fire to try and protect themselves but their attunement was pathetic. The werfer ate them too.

With the lines buckling, the battle turned into a more general melee. Some of the soldiers on the edge broke formation to rescue wounded allies or fleeing girls. Arrows and stones flew through the air. By Viv's side, Marruk crumpled skulls and spines, one overhead strike at a time. As for Viv, she could feel her conduits struggling to draw mana from her core and that meant that she was close to empty. She decided to pace herself by throwing the occasion purge spell, focusing on the most beleaguered soldiers. It was more important to protect her allies than to kill now.

Despite her best efforts, soldiers fell under the marauders' relentless assault. More than a few fighters got caught off-guard after inflicting fatal wounds, only for their foes to strike at them with renewed vigor. Without the chain mails there would have been a lot more fatalities.

The battle devolved into a grind. All the slingers had been taken out at this point so savagery fought against cold anger and lost. At one point, Viv's side was reduced to less than thirty fighters covering the wounded but Viv's surgical strikes and the quality of their own soldiers carried the day.

The marauders never broke. They fought to the last man. Viv cast until her conduits were empty and drawing mana raked her soul. Solfis never left her side, though he sometimes lunged at a passing foe like a moray out of its hole. She stopped counting the times when someone she hit would stumble and fall because she had removed an important part of their nervous system. No flesh wounds for Viv.

The mop up began.

For Viv, it meant standing around looking like she was not about to faint. For the others, it meant finishing off stragglers. The mountain soldiers in particular executed the wounded with the slow but brutal manner of those whose exhaustion warred with an undying hatred. All the women who had failed to join their circle had died. Viv counted six of them dotting the field, unarmed forms obvious in the background of marauders in thick cloth dyed white and blue. It stank of shit and blood.

Viv saw a temple guard calmly walk to a mewling bandit and stab him in the chest. She turned to Lorn who had stayed near the large group of wounded they had been covering. He had used all the life mana he had and was now standing guard.

“Don’t take this as a challenge,” Viv said, “but doesn’t righteous war imply taking those who cannot defend themselves prisoners?”

He took it as a challenge.

“Oh, sure. Let me do the accelerated version of the events.”

The knight took out his sword and walked to a wounded bandit on the side. He was beyond help, eyes closed, breath short.

“I’d like to imagine that I took this man, healed him, dragged him back to the mines, put him in a prison that we do not have and gave him food that we cannot spare. The day of the trial has come. You stand accused of murder, rape, banditry. The sentence is death.”

Lorn killed him. It was probably a mercy.

“Neriad asks for it, but He lets us define what is righteous. Right now, finishing our foes cleanly is more than they deserve but I’ll do it anyway. By the way, you may want to check the village. Won’t be long before Corel breathes his last if he hasn’t already. Black mana wounds are extremely hard to heal after all.”

Viv decided that leaving would be for the best. She could not even help with the wounded without keeling over anyway. Arthur landed nearby, maw dyed red, and they walked into the village.