

## Chapter ix, Exile, a leavetaking with both honour and hope

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The salt breeze did

hold a clean scent to it that soothed Ae'thenal's spirits within her as she did make her way across the deck to the rail. Leaning her weight upon the smooth wood she did set her eyes on the distant indistinct shape upon the horizon that was Ulthuan. For all her resolve that she would not come on deck while the land of her birth was still within sight she had done so, even if Ulthuan was now so faint in the distance that within this hour it would fade away in the joining of sea and sky. Sighing she did drop her eyes to watch the white wake at play against their vessel's sleekly fashioned hull, the winds favourable and serving to carry them away swiftly into exile. And while the deck did quiver beneath her feet and with the sound of the rigging creaking in her ears Ae'thenal did weep, her tears spilling to lose themselves one after the other in the waters of the wide ocean.

They had quit the forest of Avelorn on the afternoon following the battle with the Beastmen. And arrayed before them on a expanse of open ground beyond the forest had been a great warhost with their Everqueen's champion, the Prince Tyrion at its head. Even from where she had been sitting in misery among the baggage she had not failed to see the many proud banners held aloft; - ancient war standards with a weight of honour that had accused her with silent tongues. As the baggage wagon had halted she had forced herself to climb down, the act awkward in her long lady's gown of Autumn gold. And the more awkward still because she did have her sword belt and sword girded at her waist, despite her fostermother's protests this dawntime.

"Ward my Lady Si'anelle Elanise," she did say to the former member of the Maiden Guard well aware of the question held in Elanise's eyes as she did raise her eyebrows at her.

Pregnancy had not dimmed Elanise's fierce spirit in any measure for at once she did ask, "And who shall ward you Lady Ae'thenal? You can bare keep your feet with the weight of that sword at your hip unless you keep a hand to this wagon. Tell me how you do intend to act the part of our Lady's champion when you cannot stand unaided?"

"I shall lend Ae'thenal my support E'lanise," Nimine had said then as she did come to her rescue in company with four of her female guard. The four did plainly have their orders for they did at once climb up upon the wagon with purpose in their every movement. One did immediately claim a folding chair of dark carved wood from the mound of baggage, while her companions did at once set about easing up Si'anelle's limp form from where she did lie on a make shift bed among the bundles and boxes. More she did not have the chance to observe for now Nimine was firmly guiding her towards the place where Cedwyn did wait with Arhaindir Moonhand's standard held in his grip. The banner of his own archers and the banner of Nimine's female guard flanking him at either side in the hands of those who were the next senior in Si'anelle's household. Cedwyn's archers and the balance of Nimine's guard were drawn up in their ranks behind Cedwyn and if the the host before them did consider them to be the less for holding to Si'anelle, the set of their faces and their straight backs did prove their disagreement.

"Do they give any sign that they do intend to speak with us

Cedwyn?" she had asked when Nimine had brought her to the archer champion's side. For her weakness had abated a little as now the Banepearl did shift itself to make a small gift to her. Though Nimine's more firm grip on her arm did also serve to warn her that her fostermother had not lost her powers of observation in any measure.

"I think they will come to us soon enough Lady Ae'thenal," was Cedwyn's reply. As he did now face her she did not fail in seeing his expression of disapproval at the sight of her sword.

"My oath to Si'anelle did not fade away with the rising of the sun this dawntime Cedwyn Brighteye," she did tell him.

"Nor our oaths Lady Ae'thenal," said Cedwyn in his turn. "Though I shall give this warning to you Lady, no blade shall be raised against Elf-kind this day or else the owner of that blade shall give an accounting to me." The gaze he did now lay upon her was severe and more than a match for her fostermother's present expression. In answer she did incline her head in formal grace, though Nimine did still hiss a rebuke into her ear at the cold hardness of her own expression.

"The day I do slay Elf-kind I will turn my blade's sharp edge upon myself fostermother," she did tell her sharply. "I do carry a sword as a token of my oath to Si'anelle; - will you both ever be so openly suspicious of my every act?"

"You we may trust Ae'thenal; - the Banepearl we do not," Nimine did sigh in her ear then. "And the Banepearl now does stir a little within you foster daughter does it not?" Which did cause her to hide her face in her hands while she did wonder for how long this remnant of Arhaindir Moonhand's people would continue to be the patient guardians of Si'anelle and herself before their patience was at an end and they would be abandoned. Though Nimine's next soft word in her ear did serve to drive away her doubts and cause her to smile.

"I do find myself attempting to remember the last occasion I did see you attired in a gown and with your hair dressed and not in a wild tangle Ae'thenal." The smile her fostermother did give her then was a small gift to treasure. A comfort to hold in this moment when Prince Tyrion and his retinue were now beginning to cross the open expanse of ground that did separate his warhost from them.

As if they had been waiting for this moment the three she-Elves now did bring Si'anelle forward carrying her between them. The fourth setting the finely worked folding chair down before her father's standard and assisting her companions to settle Si'anelle into it. At a silent sign from Nimine the four did quickly rejoin the ranks of their fellow female guards and now Nimine did guide her to stand at Si'anelle's right hand, placing her left hand upon the back of the chair so that she might have a measure of support in her weakness. Her friend did wear a simple gown of green silk banded with white and her hair was elegantly dressed, though for all the care that had been taken with Si'anelle's grooming she did wear no gems or jewellery. Shapeless

in its covering of sky blue silk the Baneppearl did lie in her lap and now that she was no longer being carried Si'anelle's hands had abandoned it.

"Remain beside me sweet Ae'thenal," her friend did whisper softly to her as her hand sought her right hand.

"You do know I shall Si'anelle," was her quiet reply as her friend's hand closed over her own. For all that Si'anelle's formerly unremarkable beauty had been transformed by the Baneppearl her face was now so marked by her sadness and despair that to look upon her face was to know a chill abandonment of all hope. Ae'thenal did know her own despair within her was a deep weariness, but it was a mere shadow of her friend's. Then she was but a companion to the Baneppearl's mistress who did ever only taste of the shadow and not the full measure.

In her former life her heart may have fluttered a little at the sight of Prince Tyrion arrayed as he was now in his ancient mage wrought armour, his burnished winged helm upon his head and with his fine cloak upon his shoulders. But this was another life and another time. Six other captains from the warhost did walk with him, and Ae'thenal did recognise them to be the commanders of regiments who did hold a depth of honour about them that had been hard earned on Finuval Plain. And if their eyes were cold as they did look upon them all, her eyes were also cold as she did match their hard eyed expressions. As Prince Tyrion did come up to them he took up a stance before Si'anelle where she did sit before her father's war standard and said in a loud voice without preamble. "And does the rune 'Arhain' set above the full moon upon your banner signify treachery? Do I find myself confronted with the enemies of Elf-kind this day?"

On hearing these harsh words a hot rage did at once ignite within Ae'thenal's breast, but while her left hand did clench tight upon the carved wood at Si'anelle's back Ae'thenal did also note the tight lines of anger now worn openly on both Cedwyn's and her fostermother's faces. And Lanan and I'ssina both did also not give shift to hide their offense as they did grip the standards they did hold the more tightly. Though before any depth of passion could give rise to any retort from any of these four it was Si'anelle who did break the angry silence.

"My Lord Tyrion," she did say softly in a sad voice that did carry for all its measured quietness, "You do demean my father's banner; - the banner that was carried aloft on Finuval Plain. And the banner beneath which more than a full score of Arhaindir Moonhand's people did end their lives that cruel day." Drawing in a breath as if the very act was an effort Si'anelle did raise her left hand, making a gesture that did encompass all who were of her household. "No fell enchantments do bind these my people to me as I do journey into exile; - I did release them all from their oaths my Lord Tyrion, - and not a one of them did go from me for all my entreaties that they should do so."

If Prince Tyrion did intend to speak then the sharp movement Si'anelle did make with her hand did serve to still his tongue. Si'anelle may have been but a high born Lady of a minor noble house,

but in this moment it was as if she was a queen to command power. Even though her appearance may have been that of an invalid imprisoned within her weakened body, and her expression may have been deeply marked with her despair, the tone of voice Si'anelle now did use was that with which she had made her demand of the Beastmen.

"You do look upon me with distaste my Lord Tyrion as if I was in truth Chaos's creature," she did say. "And you do hold it in your heart to further seek to demean me and my house before the sun does set upon this day. I shall tell you this then my Lord Prince, I am still my people's Lady and my father's daughter. Harm but a single one of these my people and I shall rise to their defense."

"You do threaten me?" was Prince Tyrion's reply as he did near laugh in Si'anelle's face in his disbelief that any a one so eroded by illness and despair could oppose him and his warhost. And beside him his captains did also laugh aloud, even though they had stood on Finuval Plain with each a one of this remnant of Arhaindir Moonhand's people on that dark day.

"Yes my Lord Tyrion," Si'anelle did say in her soft sad voice, "I do threaten you." With a painful slowness she did ease herself the more upright in her chair, her right hand tight upon her friend's hand as she did fight against the fatigue that did grip her. Now she did once more turn her drawn face towards Prince Tyrion as her left hand did fall to cover the Banepearl. "In time both Cedwyn Brighteye and Nimine Starbrow shall tell you how we did defeat the Beastmen but yesterday, and also how the Lady Ae'thenal did fight Dechala servant of Slaanesh and make her flee from her; - but before this is done I do know you do hold another purpose my Lord Tyrion."

Ae'thenal did know Si'anelle did speak with knowledge gifted to her by the Banepearl, and she herself could see the shadow of Prince Tyrion's intent which did lay a chill hand on her heart; - but on hearing Si'anelle's words their Everqueen's champion did now respond by staring openly at her friend with both surprise and disbelief in equal measure upon his handsome features. For a single moment Prince Tyrion's eyes did shift to look directly at her before dismissing her out of hand as having the measure of Dechala in combat. But Nimine was quick to touch her arm in warning before her anger turned to rashness. First taking a pause to scan the faces of the six captains with him and seeing that they also were of the same mind as himself Prince Tyrion did then draw himself up to his full height.

"You do have two male children of tender years and also a she-Elf with child among your household," he did say, and Ae'thenal did note with her anger rising that Tyrion did refuse to speak her friend's name or acknowledge her noble born rank. "These you may not take from Ulthuan into exile."

Elanise must have been close at hand and well within earshot, for now the former member of the Maiden Guard did thrust herself past I'ssina and the banner she did hold.

"And how shall you take me my Lord Tyrion," she did thrust at their Everqueen's champion her voice angry and carrying. "Shall you bear me away gripped in your arms by main force. For I shall not abandon my Lady while I do still draw breath." And here she did of a sudden surprise l'ssina and relieve her of her short sword, her movement quick and sure for all the ungainly bulk of her pregnancy. Facing down the expression of fury Prince Tyrion did now openly wear upon his face she did raise the weapon towards him and incline her head saying, "My Lord, you may try for me as you will." And when a one of the war captains did give voice to a harsh oath and took a step towards Elanise full in the intent to rush her; - Elanise did at once reverse the sword and hold its sharp tip in a steady two handed grip beneath her chin.

The moment did hold in a breathless silence until Nimine did quietly say, "And what will your death serve Elanise, save that you shall lay yet one more wound upon your Lady's heart."

In cold fury Elanise did reply, the sharp edge laid at her throat not shifting so much as a finger's breadth, "I shall not be made to be no more than a brood mare held in dishonourable hostage for my babe Nimine. It shall require far more than the one small life within my womb to save Elf-kind and Ulthuan; - I did freely chose exile and I shall have of it or I shall have death."

"What insanity is this?" Prince Tyrion did demand then as he did take a step towards to Elanise, his eyes studying the determined set of her jaw and the steady grip she did have upon l'ssina's sword. "What fell hold do you have upon these people that a she-Elf with child would destroy herself and her unborn babe before she would remain in Ulthuan?"

"The name of it is loyalty and love my Lord Tyrion," Si'anelle did quietly say as she did shift a little in her chair to face him. "Take Elanise daughter of Helandir if you dare Prince, only remember this. I do also serve Alarielle Everqueen of Avelorn. For when death does close your eyes at last, both the Lady Ae'thenal and I shall still be alive and undying, living out our days of weary despair as we do hold and ward the Baneppearl from other hands. The gift shall forever remain ungiven my Lord Prince; - and if for a span of years these my people shall adhere to our purpose and give what aid they may to us then it is no less than Isha's will."

Of a sudden pain did wrack Si'anelle's limbs and body as upon her lap the Baneppearl did spit flame, cold dark fire that licked and played beneath sky blue silk without consuming it. Falling to her knees Ae'thenal did hold her friend close while she did tremble in her agony without so much as crying out one single word. Then Si'anelle did become the more steady in her arms and now she did seek out Prince Tyrion, their Everqueen's champion expression cold as he did look upon her as if she was Chaos spawn. Unnoticed Nimine did now step past them and take the sword from Elanise's loosened grip, the she-Elf given over to weeping for her Lady, and lead her away to the care of her female guard.

"So you do think I fear to speak Isha's name my Lord Prince," said Si'anelle then and again agony did make her jerk in her friend's arms. "For Isha I do love and serve, and shall forever..." And the scream that was torn from her throat then was more than Ae'thenal could bear.

"For Isha's sake pity me Tyrion...", Si'anelle did gasp at last when she could again manage speech, her eyes large and bright with tears as she did turn her face towards him. "For Isha's sake..." And she did scream in agony a second time, her pain like knives in Ae'thenal's heart. "Isha,...Isha,...Isha..." Three times more before Si'anelle did faint slack limbed into her arms, the Banepearl rolling from her lap to lie near to Prince Tyrion's feet, dark cored flame flickering across its surface as it did continue to punish its mistress.

Prince Tyrion had not taken Elanise from amongst them. That was perhaps their one small victory that day upon that green meadow bordering the forest of Avelorn; - though despite this they had been given no choice save to surrender the fostered male children, Telisur and Findrion, to Prince Tyrion's care. Sighing Ae'thenal did sniff away her tears as she did continue to lean against the rail. In this perhaps Prince Tyrion had also been able to claim a victory of a kind; - at least the children had gone to him freely, their faces bright with awe and excitement at being in company with the great champion of their Everqueen. Whereas in their place Elanise would have delighted to mark his noble face with her nails and bruise him with her elbows and knees if he had attempted to lay a hand to take her unwilling.

Also and not least Prince Tyrion had unbent sufficiently to listen to the telling of the battle against the Beastmen. Gravely attentive as Cedwyn had told the tale of it, and listening also when Nimine had at last told of her hard fight against Dechala. In this she had been amazed as she had sat upon the ground with Si'anelle unmoving in her lap. For in the aftermath she did have no recollection, save for the flash and ring of steel, the rage and hatred in her heart and the black sword made of flame in her hand. When Nimine's voice had fallen into silence Prince Tyrion had come to her then, most cautiously skirting the Banepearl where it did lie dark and cold and wicked upon the ground, before raising up her right hand and drawing back the sleeve of her gown to reveal the bare knitted cut upon her arm. The flesh about the wound reddened but clean in spite of the poison on Dechala's blade.

"I did doubt you Lady Ae'thenal," he had said to her with a now honest respect in his voice.

"Not I my Lord Tyrion," she had answered her own tone cold, "but my Lady Si'anelle who is far the more braver than I." He had knelt then, putting out a hand to examine her friend as if uncertain that she did still live in her stillness.

"Oh my Lady will survive her punishment a right my Lord Prince," she had told him her tongue bitter. "For neither Si'anelle nor I shall know death, though we shall often enough desire it before the

World's ending." Then she had met and held his eye and said one word. "Isha." And paid for it with dear coin as her nerves took fire. Again she had spoken while Prince Tyrion had looked upon her with a fearful concern for her.

"Mother Isha we your children do call upon your...mercy...for we...are lost...and do wander...alone...in the World..." Until at last not even her will could stand against the Baneppearl's fury and she had been forced to abandon the words of the ancient prayer unable to do no more than moan aloud in her agony.

"Are you now satisfied my Lord Tyrion?" Nimine had said then as she had stepped past him on quiet feet to drop to one knee before taking her in her arms. Several of Nimine's female guard had accompanied her fostermother and now they did claim Si'anelle bearing her away in their arms without a word.

"I do think I am well satisfied Nimine Starbrow," had been his answer as he had risen to his feet. "For Alarielle our Everqueen did charge me to discover if the Baneppearl had yet begun to erode their wills and turn their hearts towards Chaos."

Nimine had laughed sharply at that and shook her head. "These two do hold a hatred for Chaos that did so shape their faces before yesterday's battle that the entire host of Ungor and Gor did retreat from them as they did advance on them alone. And each dawn as the sun does rise they do pray to Isha even though they do suffer agony for the act my Lord Tyrion." Here Nimine had gently stroked her hair as if she was still a child of tender years. "No my Lord, you may tell our Everqueen that she shall be forever safe from the Baneppearl's harm; - though I do think the allies of Chaos shall suffer much at the hands of these two before the World does end."

The warhost of Prince Tyrion had become their escort after this, warding them all in their journey across Ulthuan to take ship at last into exile. At their leavetaking gifts had been given to both Si'anelle and herself, armour forged by the smiths of Vaul, of ancient work and with mage craft alloyed in the silver Ithilmar. And Prince Tyrion himself had placed a mage wrought sword heavy with gems and smouldering runes of power into her hands to replace her own lesser sword. Si'anelle did already own her father's sword with its two mage wrought Elf runes, Elthrai and Ceyl, and did have no need for a replacement; - though Ae'thenal had known as she had held her newly given mage wrought sword in her hands that she of the two of them did now own the greater blade.

"Alarielle herself did charge me to give you this gift Lady Ae'thenal," Prince Tyrion had said to her while they had stood before their ship's gangplank but spare minutes away from a final leavetaking. "My Lady did instruct me to tell you that your oath to the Noble Lady Si'anelle will demand a good weapon in your hand as you do journey together."

So it had been a leavetaking undertaken in honour and not shame as she had thought it would be. Though for all that Si'anelle had still fled

to her cabin even as the gangplank had been drawn up and had not stirred beyond its door. Nor would she answer any knock upon its surface save her own as she did lie hunched in her despair upon her bed, the sheets sodden beneath her with her tears.

"Shall this be our fate then?" Ae'thenal did ask of the wide ocean as she did grip the rail.

"To weep in despair until such time as the Baneppearl hungers; - then to suffer being as goddesses of war until the thing is glutted." Sighing she did shake her head the urge on her to speak Isha's name. For if nothing else the act of defiance and the following punishment did serve to burn away her despair for a time.

"Child." The soft word did seem to whisper all about her as the moment did draw out as if time did no longer flow. The ship did now seem to stand motionless upon the sea even though its sails were full and it did heel to a wind that did no longer blow clean and strong from Ulthuan. And now a soft laugh before the sweet voice did speak again, "Oh child, do you not know that I do hear you each time you do speak my name."

"Isha," she did say quietly as if afraid the moment would break apart, and this one time she did not suffer punishment for saying the name of the Mother of all. In wonder Ae'thenal did look about herself, but she was alone on the deck. The steersman's place and the rest of the vessel shrouded in a glittering mist that did shield all other eyes from her.

"No, not alone child, for I am here." Lightly a hand she could not see did touch her shoulder guiding her to once more face the rail and look out over the ocean. Only when she did rest her hands upon the rail there was not the ocean, but a wide and green land bordered by a tall grey range of mountains. Mild of weather and fair to look upon. Soft to her ears she did hear then a jingle of harness and a woman's voice raised in song. That the singer was perhaps lacking in her craft was an obvious thing, but her ease of heart was evident enough as she gave the song full voice. As if out of the very air of that fair and green land Ae'thenal did see a tall and well built woman riding a chestnut horse take form. The woman wearing full plate armour of a kind that she had not seen before this, and that armour marked and dented and plainly having suffered ill useage in its time. As to the woman herself her head was shaven, save for the back of her head, where her hair as red as a flame was drawn back into a long thick plait that did reach to her waist. Now it did seem as if the woman had seen her, for she did now sit her horse her green eyes merry with amusement. Over the woman's right shoulder Ae'thenal could see standing up the hilts of a great two handed sword, the sheathed weapon reaching down in its length to past the woman's knee. In her right hand and propped upon that same shoulder she did also bear a long lance, and on her left arm she did carry a shield that was well notched about its edges from warding blows from edged weapons.

But it was that shield that did now steal her eye, for upon it



was painted with a careful hand the Elf rune  $\tilde{A}\tilde{Z}Quyl-Isha\tilde{A}\tilde{E}$  set upon a green background. Now she did look upon the woman anew, seeing that which she had missed before; - for the woman did possess ears that were a match for her own, and her face was shaped long tapering to a pointed chin. Though more softened in its shaping than a she-Elf's face would be.

Soft in her ear Isha did say to her (for it could be none save Isha who was with her now), "Her name is Bronwyn of Nuln, called the Half-Elven; daughter of Gertrude of Nuln, who did run away from her home in her youth to join a minstrel troupe. Gertrude did lead a merry enough life before she did lose her way and come to Athel Loren. Though when she did take leave of the Elf-kindred it was with a babe carried within her womb." And here Isha did softly laugh again as if delighted by a secret that she alone did know. "So you do see Child, there shall be friends of Elf-kind who shall cross your path in your exile; - and you shall not be alone in the wide world beyond Ulthuan."

It was upon Ae'thenal's tongue then to ask of Isha why it was that both Si'anelle and herself had been so cruelly fated as to become the Banepearl's servants, but the words were gently taken from her before she could say them aloud. As she did watch Bronwyn Half-Elven did now raise her lance in salute towards her, her eyes animated with her ease of spirit, and wheeling her chestnut horse about she did now ride away into that fair green landscape swiftly fading from her sight as if the very air itself had swallowed her up. Ae'thenal was saddened to see the half-Elven woman depart, for it did seem to her that if she and Si'anelle were fated to meet Bronwyn Half-Elven in their exile, they would find themselves a good and true friend. And in truth they would have a need for good friends in the days to come.

Though as Bronwyn did fade from sight the landscape did now shift and reform so that now she was looking upon a wide and grassy meadow bordering a forest that could rival the forest of Avelorn. Tall and mossy stones did stand upon that meadow as if they were ward stones set to mark a boundary and Ae'thenal was now certain she did look upon the Old World forest of Athel Loren.

"Ah, now another does arrive my Child." The lightest of touches upon her shoulder did give her the direction to where she should now shift her gaze and now Ae'thenal did see a fair maiden riding a white horse at an easy canter towards the mossy ward stones. The maid did wear a green gown and her hair the colour of wheat did flow out from beneath a wimple that was as green as her gown. Girded at her slim waist was a sheathed longsword and in her right hand she did carry a mage's staff of power. Though for all that the maid did carry both a longsword and a mage's staff, and that she did seem to be content enough to ride alone in this landscape without a sign of fear, Ae'thenal did think it strange that she should be here on the borders of Athel Loren.

"Her name is Jean-Marie d' Quenelles my Child, and she is well skilled in the magic arts," Isha did now tell her. "Do not allow her youthful appearance to deceive you for she does own a scorcere's craft in full measure and is a welcome friend to the Elf-kindreds of Athel Loren."

"Another Elf-friend that Si'anelle and I shall meet at a future time?" Ae'thenal did ask and again soft sweet laughter did surround her as if Isha did know of yet more secrets that were her's alone. Which did give Ae'thenal cause to wonder if even before Si'anelle and herself had set foot upon their ill fated quest they had already been well warded and provided for. Now the maid was dismounting from her horse and engaged in unpacking a flask of wine from her saddle bags. This she did place with care in the shadow of one of the great ward stones before she did lead her horse across the boundary and towards the trees of Athel Loren. In the moment before she did pass beneath the trees however, she did now turn and stand, her eyes as blue as cornflowers seeking her out across the meadow to where she was at the ship's rail. Of a sudden the maid did raise her hand in salute, her smile quick and warm, and then she was leading her horse beneath the tree's shadow and in a moment was gone from her sight.

With her own hand still raised in answer Ae'thenal did feel a rising sense of relief within her. They would not be alone and without friends in the strange lands of the Old World. For neither herself or Si'anelle had met with humankind before this day, and neither of them had given a thought before this to the strangeness of the races of humankind that they would all too soon find themselves amongst once this voyage was at an end. And if these two women were to be their companions, there could not be a greater contrast in their manner. Where Bronwyn did seem to view all with mirth and a lightness of spirit for all that her armour and shield did bear the marks of hard fought combat against capable foes; - Jean-Marie did seem to own a seriousness quality of manner as if her every act was well considered and not undertaken lightly.

"Others you shall also meet my Child," Isha did say to her then, her sweet soft voice all around her as if it was of the air itself. "But these two shall be your principal companions, and they shall go with you in all that you do in the lands of the Old World."

Quietly then Ae'thenal did say, "I have been so afraid, not for myself but for Si'anelle."

"Ah Child," Isha did say, "the Baneppearl is a wicked thing. Made by Chaos long ago to be an agent of destruction in these times; - and that it was made to seem fair and only able to be claimed by a one of good intent does doubly make it wicked. However its purpose is now thwarted, and for as long as it does remain ungiven it must give reluctant service to the one who does hold it. Until the World's ending you shall ever receive the aid you require at my hand my Child. And ever shall individuals of good heart join to your cause and give of their strength to fight against those servants of Chaos who will seek to reclaim the Baneppearl from you. So even though you and your Si'anelle shall taste of despair and shall at times think yourselves abandoned, - in truth you shall not be abandoned and shall ever be beneath my hand."

Dusk was already lengthening the shadows as Nimine did make her way up the companionway stair. She was not in truth a good sailor and her stomach did still rebel within her at the ceaseless motion under her feet as the ship did heel to the wind. That Ae'thenal did seem to

be physically untroubled by this sea voyage was at least a small ease to her spirits; - for Si'anelle did seem to have a greater need of her now that they had all quit Ulthuan. With an outflung hand Nimine did manage not to make her arrival on deck an undignified source of amusement for this vessel's crew; - for she had near lost her balance and fallen headlong on the well smoothed timbers. Bracing her feet she did now look about herself seeking Ae'thenal, and did find her.

As Nimine did hasten towards her fosterdaughter she was in truth afraid, for the sight of Ae'thenal lying motionless in her Autumn coloured gown beside the rail did give her cause to think the worst.

"She's asleep my Lady," one of the crew did call out to her then, the Elven crewman grinning at her concern as he did swarm up into the rigging with an ease that did set Nimine's stomach churning anew. "Came out on deck to watch the sea and settled herself down where she was." His following shrug of unconcern did serve to drive away Nimine's anxiety and now she did find herself smiling with some amusement at being addressed as, 'my Lady'. For dressed as she was in an unfamiliar and well crumpled gown, and pale with illness at the unceasing motion of this vessel she did not consider herself in truth to have the appearance of nobility about her.

Now she did bend to lightly touch her fosterdaughter's golden hair, eased in spirit by the sight of the peaceful expression on her face as she did sleep on the wooden deck as if it was her own bed. And did have cause to wonder as her trembling fingers did now lift up the perfect tearshaped pale gemstone on its silver chain that she had not ever seen about Ae'thenal's neck before this hour.