



# THE VOICES WITHIN

# A WHISPER OF WARNING

DELILAH S. DAWSON





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The afternoon sun filtered through the crimson leaves overhead as Alleria Windrunner walked the path toward Silvermoon City. In times past, happier times, she might have flown or used a portal to appear inside the city walls, but as it was, she approached warily, as if nearing a sleeping beast that did not wake gently. Once, she had defended these walls, these people. But now?

Now, to many, she was the source of danger.

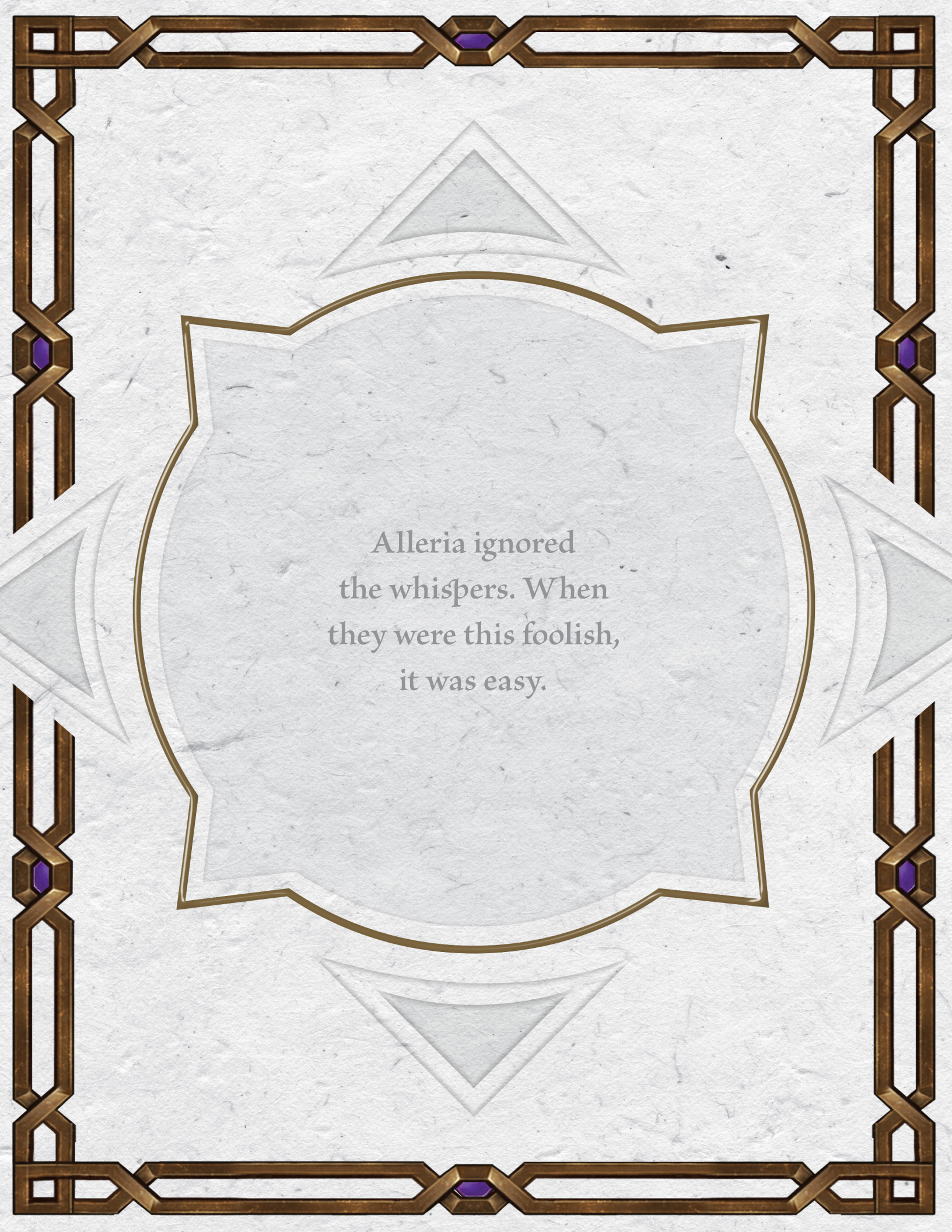
Funny how she had faced the most terrifying monsters, demons, the very worst of the Horde, and yet here the thought of passing through a simple gate filled her with trepidation.

*Turn around and leave. This place is full of enemies. Everybody hates you.*

Alleria ignored the whispers. When they were this foolish, it was easy.

Her boots carried her forward. Her mission could not be stopped by her own fears, much less by those that came from her connection to the Void. Recently, Khadgar had summoned her to Dalaran, where he'd asked her to investigate something called the Dark Heart: an object that Iridikron had found within Aberrus and given to a being known as the Harbinger. For all his wisdom, Khadgar knew nothing more; regardless,



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Alleria was accustomed to acting on vague reports and would soon uncover the meaning of this new threat—and end it.

But first, she had to do something that worried her far more.

She had to speak with her son, Arator.

Whatever was coming, whatever the Dark Heart portended, she had to warn him to stay away from it. Despite their estranged relationship of late, despite her spending time in the Rift to be away from Stormwind City and constantly on back-to-back missions, she could only hope her son would listen. And so she stood at the gates to the city her son called home and watched a familiar figure stalk her way.

“Alleria Windrunner. Have you forgotten that you were banished from Silvermoon?”

“Lor’themar,” she responded with less respect than he surely preferred. Her sights landed on his gleaming armor. “Have you been demoted to guard duty? Such a petty task seems below the station of Regent Lord of Quel’Thalas.”

He raised a long white eyebrow. “When there is a significant threat that requires my attention, I attend.”

“I am no threat, old friend. At least, I would assume that if you found me threatening, you would not have invited me to your wedding. Not that your wedding was uneventful—or without its threats. I never did get to taste that exquisite lavender cake.”

“I can direct you to the baker, if you’d like to commission one similar.” Lor’themar opened a gate and stood there looking somber. “Why are you here, Alleria?”

The city shone behind him, glimmering white walls with red tiled roofs and gilded frames, the sun glinting off windows. A place so familiar, even if subtle differences showed in the process of reconstruction after the ravages of the Scourge. A place she had known all her life. A place she was no longer welcome.

“I came to see my son. I am leaving shortly on a mission, and I wish to say goodbye.”

“An admirable reason to cross our threshold. But remember this, Alleria. Your welcome, if one can call it that, extends only so long as the sun touches Silvermoon. Once night falls, you must leave.”



These were the same conditions upon which she had agreed to attend his wedding in Suramar—one day, and no later. Even as a former ranger-captain of Silvermoon and a hero, she knew the city would treat her as they treated all enemies if she were to overstay her welcome.

Alleria's chest tightened. "I am no enemy. You must understand, what happened at the Sunwell was an accident—"

Lor'themar waved a hand, cutting her off; few others in Azeroth would dare to do so. "Accident or not, the damage was done. The people do not trust you . . . I am still not sure I can trust you. But . . . go and visit your son while you can. The light is already fading."

*Now return to the Sunwell and finish our communion.*

*You owe Lor'themar nothing.*

*Claim what is yours. Destroy him and take this place!*

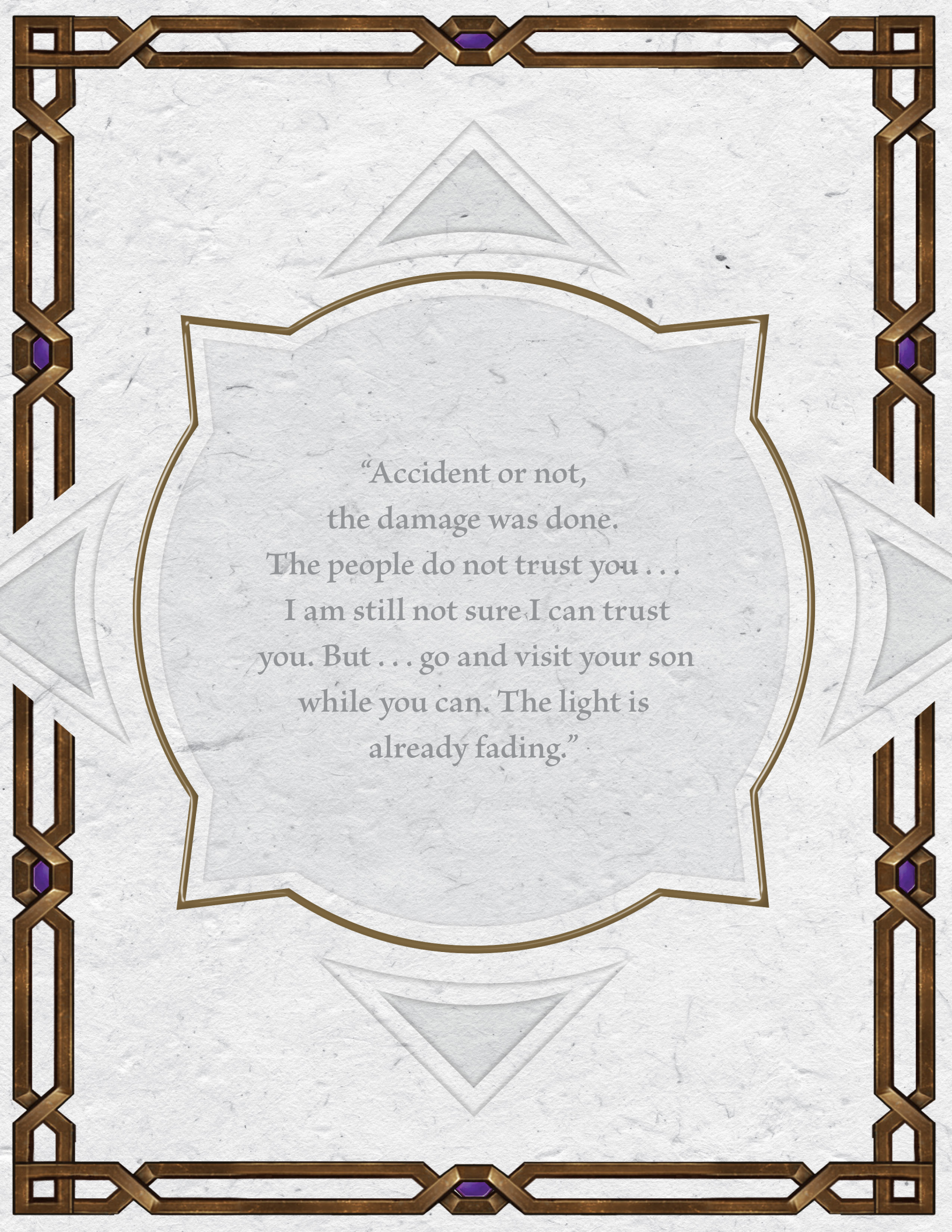
He gestured to his guards to follow her, then strode away as Alleria's hands went to fists, creaking in their gloves. They were both right, she and Lor'themar, and she loathed that. She was culpable for damaging the heart of her people's culture, but she truly had not known that just being near the Sunwell might allow her Void nature to corrupt its magic.

Being in the presence of that ancient, magical fount had soothed her soul at first, like standing in full sun after an eternity of dark and stormy nights. She had felt the power flow into her, filling her with Light—and then it were as if she herself had become a portal, and creatures of the Void spilled out like pus from a wound. And then she had risked her life to fight the catastrophe she had unleashed.

But it was not enough to end what she had inadvertently started. As much as she hated to admit it, in many ways, she was a threat to everything she loved—which explained why she had been keeping her own loved ones at a distance, as she had explained to Khadgar during her visit.

Still, she had ties here, old and new, and the Regent Lord had at least honored that history.





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the damage was done.  
The people do not trust you . . .  
I am still not sure I can trust  
you. But . . . go and visit your son  
while you can. The light is  
already fading.”



She ignored the whispers—from the Void and from her own conscience—and refocused on her goal, even as Lor'themar's guards fanned out around her, keeping their distance. She would be unable to walk freely, but that changed nothing. They were there to stop her from harming the city, but that had never been her intention.

The streets of Silvermoon were being recobbled, but they still felt the same under her silver-chased boots, were still imbued with the same beauty and magic. The trees lining the path had pale bark and branches with eternally orange leaves, and the large white columns were right where she remembered them to be, rising tall on either side of her. Alleria knew her way here, and as she walked, memories floated up, layers upon layers like watercolor paint built up in many washes.

As she walked, the residents of Silvermoon came into sharper focus, and their unease was palpable. Spotting her, people retreated through open doors and disappeared down alleys. Faces with perked ears appeared in windows before drapes were quickly drawn.

Indeed, Lor'themar was right. The people did not trust her. They actively seemed to fear her. Word must have spread about the Sunwell—spread, and perhaps grown in the spreading like some foul, destructive fungus. Or perhaps it was the heavy white-and-silver armor on her left arm and the enormous bow that never left her side. She was a warrior through and through, and commoners often reacted to her like rabbits stilling in the shadow of a hawk.

*How easily they turn on you. Like your true love has turned on you.*

*You repulse Turalyon.*

*Your son fears you too.*

*Unleash what repels them. Destroy them.*

*Destroy all the unworthy insects here. Seize your power!*

Alleria's steps hastened. Perhaps it looked the same, but this place no longer felt like any sort of home. In truth, she was not sure what *home* even meant to her anymore.

She strolled past scaffolding where carpenters and masons worked to rebuild various structures, and toward a row of houses, a place she had only ever heard about from Arator. Even though he was a man grown, she still saw in him the wailing bundle she'd



handed off to her sister Vereesa when she'd journeyed beyond the Dark Portal, before fate had turned her life upside down. Since her return from the Twisting Nether, she had kept her distance, fearful her connection to the Void might harm her son. And so her relationship with him had withered.

But with every heartbeat pounding in her chest, she would see their bond mended, as much as it could be, and impart her warning that he needed to stay safe, here in the broken but cherished city she had walked as a child. She would fight as she always had, for the safety of her son and for the world they shared, and he would carry forward her hope for a time when this world would know peace.

Finally, she stood before the blood-red door. The golden door knocker was shaped like a phoenix, its worn metal suggesting that at some point visitors had been welcome here. Through the open window, she heard a voice that made her heart race and her eyes light up. What was her love doing here? She paused a moment, like a good ranger, to see what awaited her on the battlefield.

"Did I ever tell you about how your mother and I introduced the elekk to the Army of Light?" Turalyon said. "We'd worked with them on Draenor, and we suspected their tenacity, hardiness, and intelligence would make them boons as mounts."

"I seem to recall that you've mentioned it."

Hearing that voice, and the subtle but fond annoyance in it, Alleria's heart melted.

Her son.

Arator.

Once an infant in her arms, barely visible through her tears as she said goodbye, knowing that leaving was the only way to keep him safe.

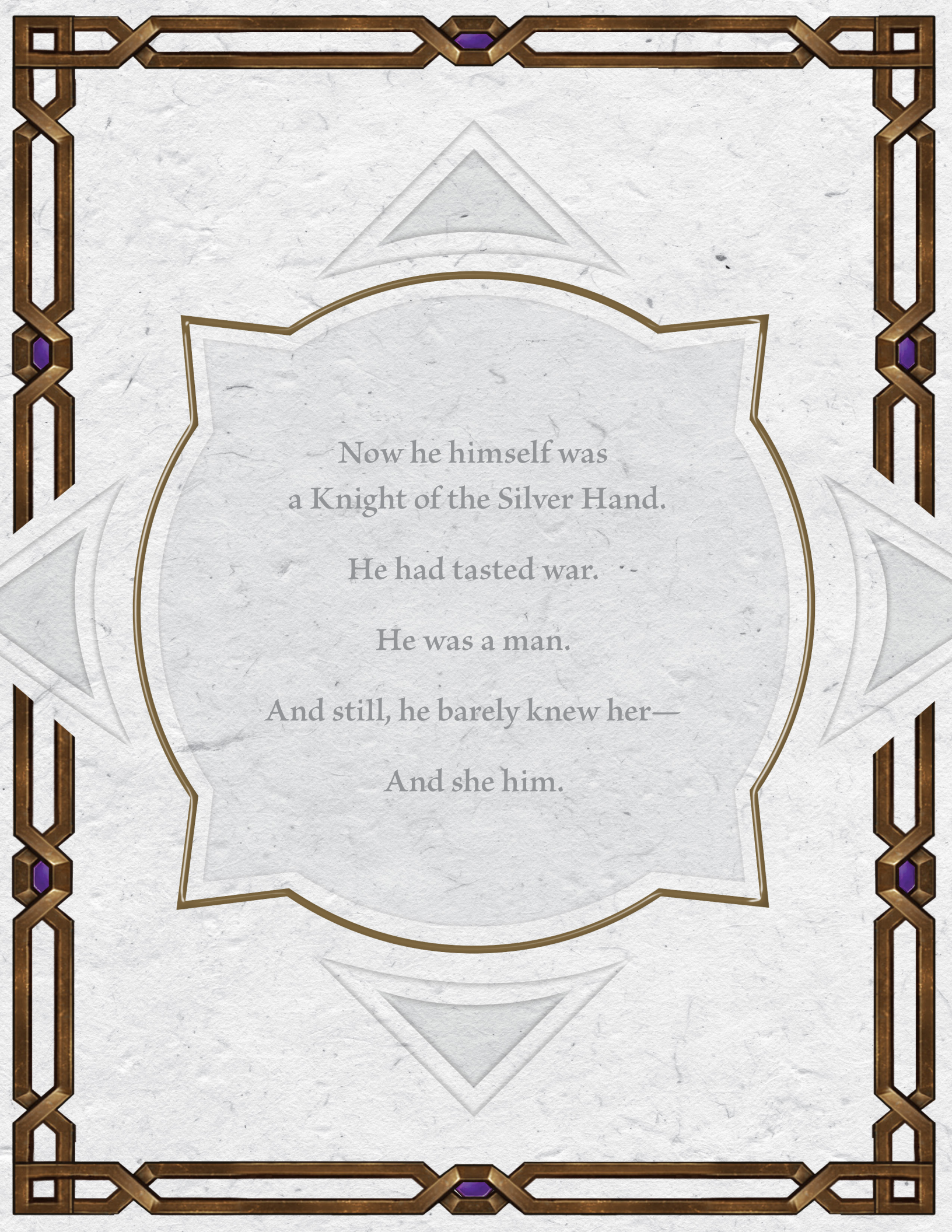
Then a toddler with a sword who thought war a grand thing.

Then a boy sitting upon the shoulders of a Knight of the Silver Hand, looking up at a statue of the mother he barely knew in the Valley of Heroes, feeling the warmth of her love beamed across the universe in the Light and reaching for her graven face.

Now he himself was a Knight of the Silver Hand.

He had tasted war.





Now he himself was  
a Knight of the Silver Hand.

He had tasted war.

He was a man.

And still, he barely knew her—

And she him.



He was a man.

And still, he barely knew her—

And she him.

*You will never know him. He will see you as a monster, a traitor. An enemy.*

“We’ve had so many grand adventures,” Turalyon continued with a rasping chuckle.

“Where do you think she is now?” she heard Arator ask.

The question filled her with unease. Perhaps it was reasonable to stand outside the open window as they spoke of elekk, but Alleria would not eavesdrop as they spoke of her. Not only because she might betray herself with a gasp or a sigh and be caught, but also because she might hear something she desperately did not want to hear.

“You know I love her dearly, but your mother . . . can’t be contained.”

She froze again, and a smile tugged at the corner of her mouth.

“I know you miss her.”

“Of course I do. But . . .”

And just as quickly, her smile faded. She and Turalyon had been taking time apart lately, leaning into their respective work. She on her missions, Turalyon off to attend council meetings.

“She thinks she’s a danger to us,” Arator said sadly. “And you think so too.”

*See? They do fear you.*

*They should fear you.*

*Kill them.*

Alleria’s hand reached for the door. She knew it was wrong to keep eavesdropping. But while she could not picture a life without Turalyon, she knew he found her Void nature strange, though he had never admitted it and likely never would. Now, she wished to hear him say it plainly. She herself found it strange, but it lay between them, an uncrossable gulf that they neither could cross, for all that she would’ve welcomed the opportunity to be honest about the chaos that lived within her.

“Thinking won’t bring her home,” Turalyon said. “Now, did I ever tell you how an elekk that feeds exclusively on orchids produces—”



“Taladorian cheese. You can keep dodging the topic, but I would like to know the truth.”

A weighty pause.

“Well, I suppose you have more important matters with which to concern yourself than cheese.”

“I am not a child, Father. You cannot distract me. Please, I beg you: tell me of my mother. You so seldom speak of her.”

Another sigh.

*You detest Turalyon. He is weak.*

*End him. He will only cause pain. He will never understand.*

*Your true power lies beyond him.*

“Your mother is the love of my life, and she is . . . a complicated creature.”

Alleria could take no more. She grasped the summer-warm brass of the door knocker and looked to the sky as she knocked three times. The sun was golden now but was swiftly arcing toward the horizon. Soon, the sky would fade to periwinkle and pink, and the stars would begin to wink out. She did not have the time she needed, so she had to make the time she had count.

“Were you expecting someone, son?” she heard Turalyon ask. “One of the Breez Blossom twins dropping off a jar of starflower honey, perhaps?”

“Father, please. I am expecting no one, and no one should be expecting me. My thoughts are with my fellow Knights, not with some paltry dalliance.”

Their son sounded like his robes were suddenly too tight and strangling him. When Arator opened the door, his cheeks were pink and he was clearly doing his best to look serious.

Seeing her, he failed.

His jaw dropped and hope glowed in his golden eyes. As a baby, they’d been green like hers, but sometime in their long, long time apart, they had shifted color. Alleria did not mind this change; to her, he had always shone like the sun.

“Mother!” he said with a surprised smile.



“My son.” She wanted to hug him, but he was enormous and fully armored in shades of gold, same as he’d looked when last she’d seen him only a few months prior. Instead, she reached out a hand to cup his cheek. “I cannot believe that I am saying this, but my boy, you need a good shave.”

Arator laughed and stepped back so that she could enter the chamber.

The moment the door was shut behind her, the whispers were but a distant hum.

She turned toward Turalyon like a magnet finding true north. He had not changed in the past months. In all their years together—centuries spanning realms and worlds and dimensions—he had always been beautiful to her. His new scars only served to highlight his strength and tenacity, and she could feel the pull of him, although she fought it.

“My love,” he said, warmly if a bit warily.

Alleria could deny it no longer. Perhaps things were strange between them, but each time they parted, they knew not if they would see each other again.

She moved to embrace him but stopped, and the short distance between them seemed to span for great lengths. “I have missed you,” she said, her voice low.

“And I you.”

Their son watched, expecting them to hug, or at least touch. But neither did.

Alleria could see the hurt in Turalyon’s eyes, could feel the same longing to sink into each other and take the comfort that had long fed them both.

“I was in town to consult with Liadrin on a matter and wished to keep a low profile,” Turalyon continued with a smile. “Will you be staying for a while, or is your sojourn as brief as mine?”

She gazed into his eyes; she wanted him to see that she was not pleased to be leaving so soon. “You know me well. I am soon to depart on a mission for Khadgar. I would stay here with you both longer, but Lor’themar made it clear that my presence in Silvermoon is not welcome. I must leave by nightfall or threaten any goodwill he still has for the bond we once shared.”

Turalyon nodded. “Shall I join you on this journey?”

Of course she considered it. But the more she learned about the Void and the more she



used her Void powers, the more uncomfortable the paladin grew in her presence. Like he had said, she was a complicated creature.

*He will never accept your true nature.*

Alleria knew that if Turalyon could hear the voices that clawed at her psyche, he would either push her away forever or spend the rest of his life trying to fix her, possibilities that were equally repugnant. She loved him for exactly who he was and sometimes wondered if he loved her merely out of habit and stubbornness. She was changing and evolving into something new, but Turalyon was hardening into who he was and had always been. He didn't need to know that.

"This is a quest I must undertake alone, but my son may join me on a brief walk before I depart," she said at last.

"An excellent idea." Turalyon all but shone with hope. "I am certain you two have much to discuss."

"I should like to see Silvermoon during the golden hour, if you'll squire me. I have heard the architects are doing a beautiful job with the new construction."

Arator held out his arm, but Alleria did not take it, not yet.

"Perhaps it would be best to shed our armor and walk among the crowd disguised as regular citizens?" she said, eyeing his gargantuan pauldrons. "Those I passed on my way here did not look too fondly on my weaponry. Nor did Lor'themar's guards."

It vaguely annoyed her when her son looked to Turalyon for his opinion.

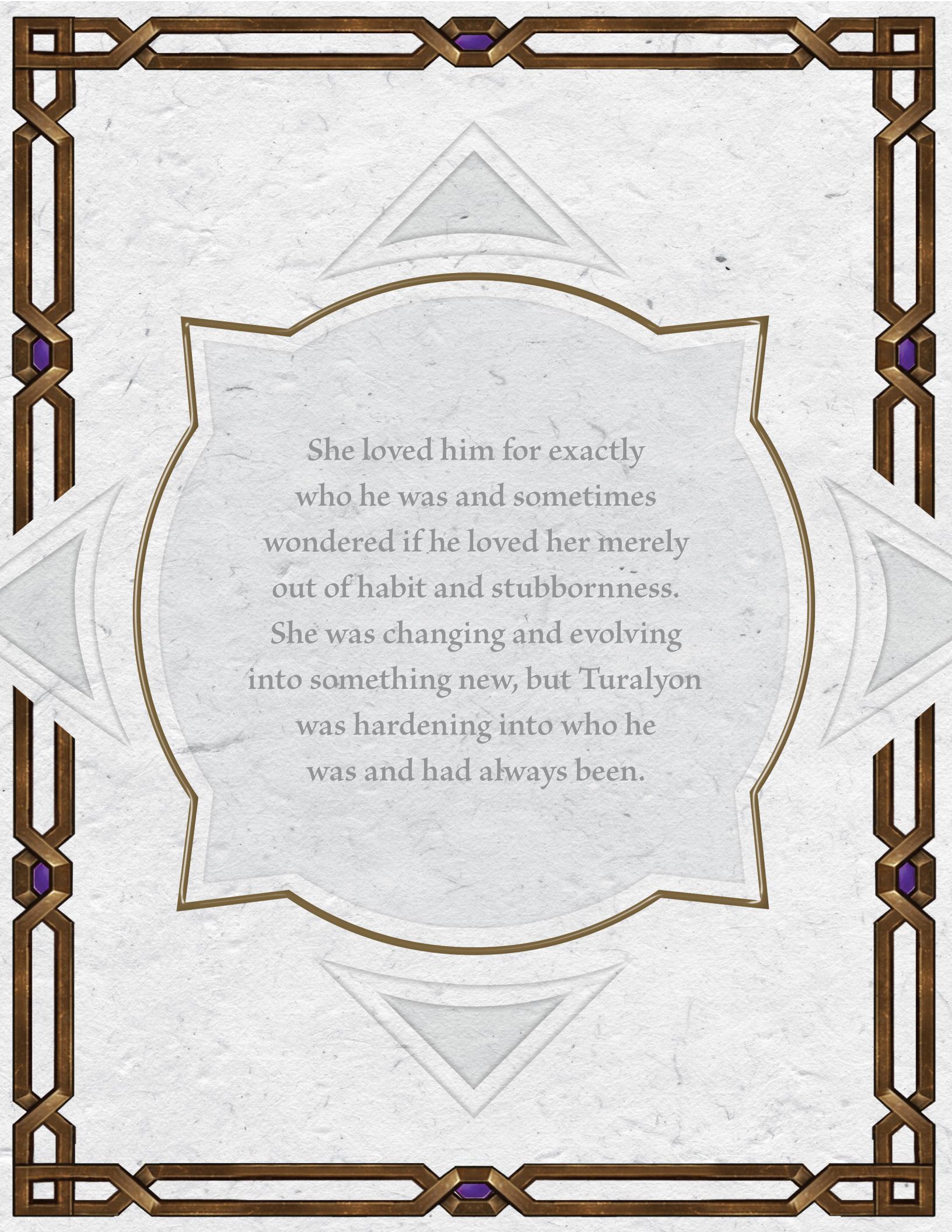
"Go on and pretend," he said with a chuckle. "Pretend for an afternoon that you are normal. War will not break out in the next hour."

"As you wish." Arator began to unstrap his heavy pauldrons, and Alleria stuffed her own armor and weapons into an enchanted bag. Thus unburdened, she felt light and quick and confident that she still had the resources and skills to handle any threat that might come.

*How strange, she thought, that a mother going for an afternoon stroll with her son should wish to be armed to the teeth.*

Stranger still that she herself was considered the biggest threat here.



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Many thought all Windrunners were born to fight, but that was not true. Alleria's father and brother had rarely hefted sword and bow. Some in Silvermoon still lived such a life, believing their walls were enough to keep their city safe. They were wrong, of course, but that did not mean Alleria could not dream of a return to such a time, when she might see her son dance in the glen or put his lips to a merry fife. Azeroth and her children deserved to know peace, and Alleria had spent the better part of her thousand years vainly chasing it.

As Arator continued to remove his armor, Turalyon stepped closer to her, smiling again. "How . . . were your travels?" he asked.

"Fair," she replied. "And matters at Stormwind?"

"The same."

"And what of Silvermoon? Is Greaves still making sugar spindles here? And is Branson still a stuffy, gossipy noble?"

"Truth be told, we are kept too busy for such amusements, but I hope you will see them while out on your walk."


At that, she smiled at him in turn, but with a hint of sadness.

His smile was sad too. He gestured to Arator. "Hurry up, son. Enjoy the sunshine. I know my arguments will not convince your mother to settle down for a while back in Stormwind, but perhaps you can sway her. It would be pleasant, to spend what time we can as a family."

But Alleria could sense the lie wrapped in this truth. It was a charming idea, to be sure, but the reality would involve three people who did not truly know or understand each other, reaching awkwardly for conversation and waiting for the next war. Turalyon might have hoped the young paladin had the power to bring his mother home, but as it turned out, Alleria was the one who would be doing the convincing.

Once Arator had finished removing all his armor, Alleria looked at her son in his simple black robes and felt a rush of pride for her offspring. He married her lithe quickness with Turalyon's sturdy strength, but improved by regal posture and a kind smile. This time when he offered his arm she took it, and he escorted her out of the house.





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She looked back at Turalyon briefly, and he waved and mouthed, “I love you.”

“Yes, love,” she mouthed back. To her great sorrow, she realized that she had gotten better at leaving him than reuniting with him. For a long moment, their eyes locked, and what passed between them was not a sentence or a sonnet, not even a tome, but an entire library of feelings unspoken. So much she wanted to say but didn’t know how. So much that could never be said. His eyes begged for her to come home, but he would not ask that sacrifice of her. His yearning tugged at her soul, but at last she had to look away.

Another time.

Another time, they would speak from the heart.

Another time, perhaps, she would stay.

She hated this just as much as he did.

But if they did not part ways and fight their own battles, the world would end—existence would end—and there would be nowhere left to reunite. Thus duty would always take precedence over love; and his understanding of that was one of the reasons she loved him in the first place.

When Alleria returned her focus to Arator, she saw something similar in his face—love, loss, yearning. He had seen the look pass between his parents, witnessed an intimate, intricate moment, and now he had to look away.

“You’ve chosen a lovely day,” he said after clearing his throat.

Outside, the golden hour reigned supreme. Warm sunbeams the color of melted butter arced down through the gently rustling leaves, themselves a blaze of copper and crimson striking all the touches of gold with a triumphant glow. Lavender shadows shifted on the cobblestones and crept up the sides of the newly painted white buildings. Even if she were angry with Lor’themar, Alleria could still see the beauty and style in this place, and she still felt somewhat at home here even if that sense of belonging came with a ticking clock.

“We’re being followed,” Arator remarked under his breath.

She flicked a glance at the watchful guards. “A condition of my visit. Worry not.”

“I shall pretend we are alone, then, despite our entourage.” Looking up into the sun, Arator rolled up his sleeves, and Alleria was surprised to see tattoos covering his forearms.

“When did you get those?” she said, daring to touch the dark dragon twining up his wrist. On his other arm, the dragon’s sunny twin curled in perfect symmetry. One dark, one light.

Arator looked down sheepishly and attempted to pull his sleeves back into place. “Oh, I . . . I mean . . .”

“Your father might mind them, but I do not. They are beautiful.”

Relaxing, he rolled up both sleeves and held out his arms so that she could admire the work.

“Someone amazing gave them to me.” A lopsided grin.

“Yes. I recognize the style.” She returned his grin. She liked this small act of revolt. Proof that even if she had not raised him, he had at least inherited some aspects of her personality. “A little rebellion is good for the soul,” she added.

And for a moment, it felt as if they had some common ground, a place where they might begin to build something better. Perhaps to Arator it was just a shared smile and some ink, but Alleria knew she would hold that moment in her memories forever.

The moment, however, did not last. One of the guards behind them coughed, and it suddenly felt as if they were on a stage, playacting the roles of mother and son.

“What have you come to discuss?” Arator asked, his tone reverting to polite, as if she were a stranger instead of his mother.

Well, and why not? She was both.

“I would like to know how my son fares.” She looked upon him tenderly, her heart clenching at the thought of him striding headlong into a war they might not win. She gestured ahead. “As we talk, perhaps we could walk the full circle of the city and then wander the bazaar?”

He chuckled and led her onward. “Sometimes I forget that you know this place.”

“I know it well indeed—as it once was. I was briefly ranger-captain of Quel’Thalas, if you did not know.” Because how could she know what he might have learned of her past?

“Father has told me some things about your history.” Arator was choosing his words so carefully, so formally. “Most of all, he speaks of your strength as a leader and your



proficiency as a fighter.”

“Those are indeed some of the things he values most.”

“He—” Arator paused; he was still watching his words. It was difficult for Alleria to stroll so slowly; she was more accustomed to striding everywhere, if not running directly toward danger.

They were in the Walk of Elders now, a busy and well-kept section of the city with a few travelers still finding their way and ogling the glorious architecture. Golden trees swayed overhead, and potted plants floated in small groupings that brought a breezy, carefree feeling to the paths. The scent of roasting meat and fresh bread wafted out of the Wayfarer’s Rest inn, and Alleria remembered a delightful mutton stew she had enjoyed there, long ago. With Turalyon. When things had been easier.

“Do you and your father not get along?” she asked gently. “My own relationship with my mother was strained. She wanted me to be something I was not, and I was hotheaded when I was younger. At least we managed to reconcile before . . .” Now Alleria trailed off.

Growing up with Vereesa, surely Arator knew the stories, knew what had become of most of the Windrunner family. She did not need to dig up old graves, not when they had so little time together.

“The war,” he finished for her, the words spoken darkly. He shook his head. “No, it is nothing like that, nothing so serious. Father has much to teach me, and his experience with the Light and on the battlefield is invaluable, but . . . How to put it into words? Sometimes I would like to go fishing with Turalyon the man instead of sharpening my sword with Turalyon the High Exarch of the Army of the Light as he scrutinizes my whetstone.” When she did not immediately speak, he hurried to add, “I think the world of him, I do. He’s my hero. It is just . . .”

“You knew him as the hero before you knew him as your father, and that cannot be reversed so easily.”

He nodded with relief. “Exactly so. We have much in common, but I often feel like he sees me more as a project . . . and less as a son.”

Up ahead, a family purchased pastries from a vendor's cart. The mother carried an infant strapped to her chest, while the father held the hand of a toddler who chattered excitedly about his favorite flavor. When Alleria looked at her son, it was hard to imagine he had ever been so small and innocent. She had only ever seen him in those years thanks to the Light—and from far, far away. She had never held his sticky hand, did not know what his favorite flavor of tart might be.

“It was so hard,” she said roughly, one hand around her emerald necklace. “So hard, putting you in Vereesa’s arms. Knowing all the tender moments I would miss. Knowing that if I did not leave, no one would get the chance to experience those moments because the entire world would be a charred husk. You were so tiny. It was the hardest thing I have ever done.”

“I know that in what you state you’re seeking absolution,” Arator said, his voice low. “Aunt Vereesa did well enough in raising me, but she was a poor substitute for what I needed.” He looked up at her, curiosity in his eyes. “Though I do not deny when I was alone and sad and sought your comfort, I found you in the Light. It is what brought me to this calling, dedicating myself to its cause.”

Arator stopped in front of a crumbling house and turned to her. This place had long ago fallen to the Scourge and was just now being rebuilt; a fresh stack of stone waited beside a half-constructed wall, and someone was nurturing two freshly planted seedlings on either side of a gaping hole that would one day again hold a red-painted door.

A family had lived here, once. They had been driven out—or worse. But now the people of Silvermoon had come together to rebuild it, and soon new memories would be made here.

*Broken things can be fixed*, Alleria thought as she watched her son’s tall, broad-shouldered shadow stretch longer against the wall. If there was hope, there could be healing.

“I prayed you felt it,” she admitted. “There were moments when I could see your face through the Light, and my heart ached that I could not hold you as a mother should. There were times it was as if I felt you crying out for me, and I reached out in turn and



hoped you knew that you were loved. It is as if there has always been a string from my heart, extending to yours no matter how far away. Everything is connected, like the light with the dark. In perfect balance.” She regarded the two serpentine dragons flowing up each of his arms.

“Aunt Vereesa told me something similar once. She said to never doubt your love and to trust that you would never leave me by choice, but that you were a great hero and that the entire world depended upon you. And I never understood, until one day . . .” His hand became a fist. “You, me, Father. We have a duty, a mission that others don’t possess. The first time I was called to war, it was as if I finally began to understand you.”

A shadow passed overhead, and Alleria looked up to find a golden dragonhawk streaking across the sky, likely headed to Sunstrider Isle with a traveler on its back. Its shrill screech echoed, and Arator looked up too, shielding his eyes with his hand, and smiled.

“I am happy to be understood,” Alleria said, an ache in her throat, “even as I know what your father and I did cannot be fully forgiven . . .”

*You are a monster. This boy can never understand you, cannot see you for what you are. Just give in. The Void knows you. The Void welcomes you. Give in. Become what you truly are.*

“—but I am grateful for your grace. I hope that one day Azeroth will be safe, and we can spend so much time together that you grow sick of my company.”

A rueful chuckle. “Perhaps one day it will be so. Perhaps in another world things would be different. But this is the only world we have, and we are both dedicated to fighting for it, no matter the cost.”

They left the new construction and passed into the Royal Exchange, where gold-inlaid benches were placed at thoughtful intervals and people were queued up outside the auction house and the bank just before closing time, tapping their feet and muttering about the wait.

Alleria’s pulse quickened; the sun was going down, and she did not have much time left. They were silent as they entered Farstrider’s Square. Here, archers were lined up in neat rows, hitting their targets with absolute precision while nearby a mounted cavalry

practiced maneuvers on their hawkstriders, their violet feathers flashing in the dying sun.

“What is it you do when you are not fighting?” Alleria asked.

Arator scratched his scruffy chin. “Like these warriors, I spar with my comrades. I dedicate myself to the study of the Light.”

“And do you have . . .” So awkward, to broach the subject. “A special someone?”

He looked away, blushing. “Mother, please. I am a servant. A warrior. What kind of life can I offer another when I am dedicated elsewhere?”

“There is always room for love, my son . . .”

She trailed off, feeling beyond hypocritical.

Thankfully, he did not call her on it. “I have all that I need. I have a life here.”

He did. And she knew nothing of it.

*You know nothing of him. Why would he listen to you? Love you?*

*You are nothing to him.*

“Or at least,” Arator said, “I have a duty here.”

*He will fight and fail.*

*Turn him to our cause.*

They were in the Court of the Sun now, standing before a grand fountain bedecked with giant fish and graceful sin’dorei, the clear blue water providing a peaceful and musical counterpoint to the tall dignity of Sunfury Spire looming above all. Lor’themar was in that grand palace somewhere, possibly looking down from one of its many cupolas or balconies, waiting for Alleria to over stay her welcome and meet the wrath of his soldiers.

The moment to delay was over.

“Listen, my son. Something is coming,” she said, her voice low as they rounded a bend where the walls were closer and the shadows darker. There was no one nearby just then, but ears were everywhere, and the guards would not be far behind them.

“Khadgar told me there are signs,” she continued in a hushed voice. “Portents. The artifact I am chasing heralds some new danger, an enemy lurking in the shadows. A



battle is coming, and I must beg you as your mother and as a former ranger-captain of this very kingdom: stay out of the fight.”

Arator stopped midstride, his brows drawing down. “You can’t be serious.”

*He doubts you.*

*He hates you.*

“I have never been one for humor. All I have ever wanted for you was a life of peace, away from the battlefield. That is why I left you with Vereesa. That is why I told you so long ago that war was not glory. Defending Azeroth is my calling. It need not be yours.”

The warmth in her son’s eyes winked out; he looked every one of his years then, a man grown and hardened in battle. “Listen, Mother. You may not know me as well as you would like, but you must know I would never abandon my duty. I would never shirk my responsibility and leave the risk to my fellow Knights. Can you imagine Father sitting home during a war? What would he do—knit socks and sing songs and pretend the world was good and safe while others died in the streets because he was not there to defend them?” He shook his head and turned away from her, pulling down his sleeves to cover his tattoos again. “Do you think me unworthy?”

Alleria stepped around to face him. “It is because I *know* you are worthy that I urge you not to fight. Live to rebuild this world from what may become of it. Do not fall as I have watched so many fall. There is nothing I fear in all of Azeroth, in any world in any universe, except losing you.”

He would not meet her eyes; he was gazing past her, beyond her, searching himself. “Perhaps . . . I am not yours to lose. When you gave me to Vereesa, you gave up the ownership one soul feels over another. Like you, I belong to the cause, even if it hurts you to hear that.”

*He will hurt you, again and again.*

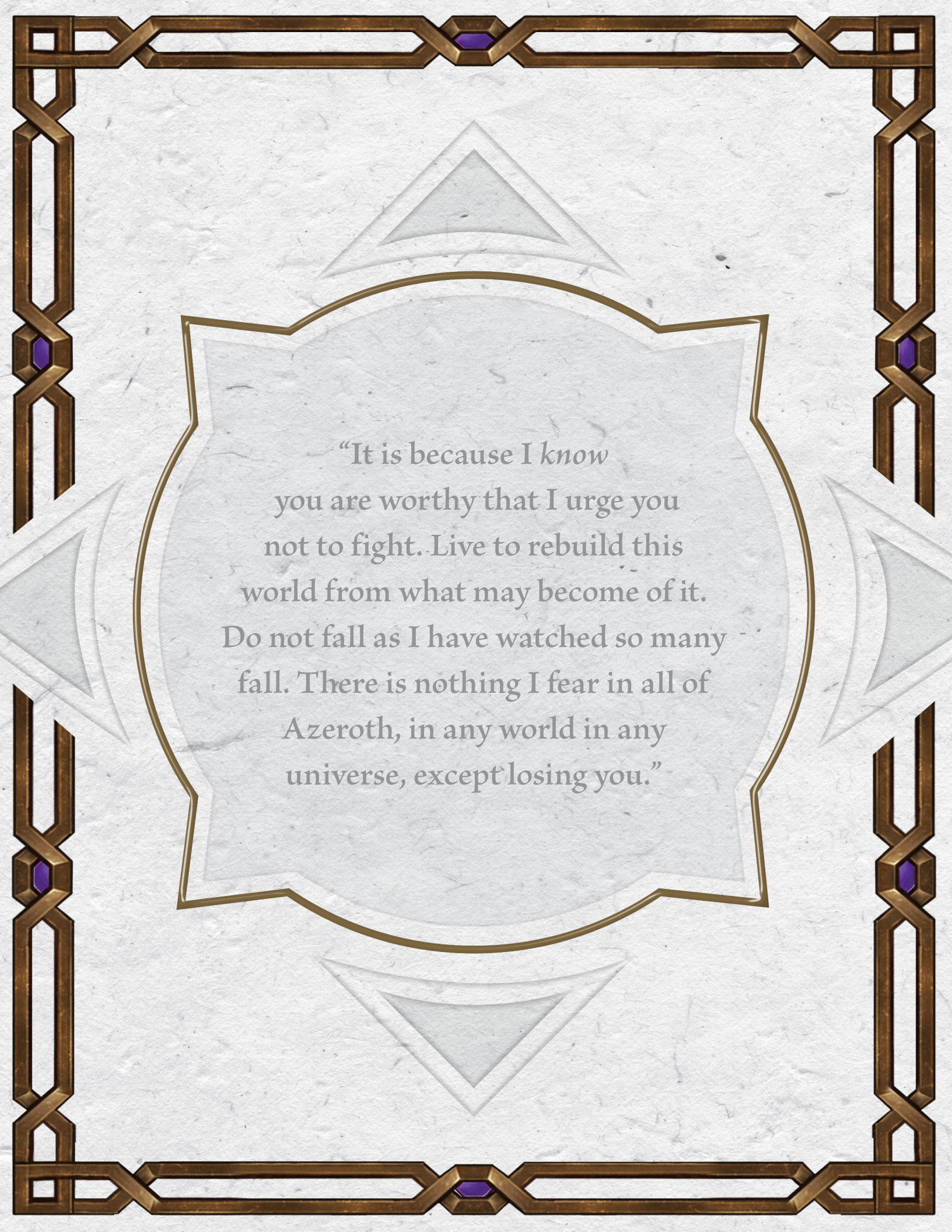
*There is no pain in the Void.*

*Abandon your flesh.*

*Become more than this.*

“The hurt is worthwhile,” Alleria whispered. “It is a gift to see you alive and grown



The page features a gold-colored border with a repeating geometric pattern. In the center, there is a large, light-colored, irregularly shaped area with a gold outline, containing text. The background is a light, textured surface. The text is centered within the central area.

“It is because I *know*  
you are worthy that I urge you  
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Do not fall as I have watched so many  
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and taking your place in a world being rebuilt from rubble. I cannot agree with your decision—it is not what I had hoped for you, not what I would choose—but I am proud of you, my son.”

His eyes briefly closed, and a small smile touched his lips. “It is strange that sometimes I feel closer to you when you are far away, but right now . . . I felt it again. Just like that day in the Valley of Heroes.” His golden eyes opened once more, and he ran a hand through his long, sun-burnished hair before continuing onward.

They rounded a corner and stood in the courtyard before the bazaar, where vendors were beginning to close shop for the evening as families hurried past on their way home with full baskets and bags. Nearby, between two archways, stood a statue of Kael’thas Sunstrider. With perfect timing, the guards emerged, reminding Alleria that those who threatened the Sunwell could not feel welcome here for long.

Arator ignored them. He pointed at the sky. “And look. There is Turalyon’s Hammer. As if he is calling us home to supper.”

Alleria gazed at the constellation, the faint stars just beginning to twinkle in a sky gone indigo. If she did not leave Silvermoon soon, things were going to get uncomfortable. She would prefer not to face Lor’themar again, especially not in front of her son. They had almost reached an understanding, and she did not wish to be scolded and escorted out like some common criminal in front of him.

“He is calling you, perhaps. As my mission calls me. Will you walk me to the gates?”

Arator held out his arm again, and after hesitating for a moment, she took it. The irony amused her. She had been absent during the years he would have needed to hold her hand to learn to walk, and now it was he who led her.

Her baby. Now, this man.

“Are you sure I cannot convince you to stay home? To marry one of the Breezeblossom twins and raise a future baker or tavernkeeper? Someone to carry on the Windrunner name?”

Arator sighed. “Just when we’ve found common ground . . .”

“Our common ground is fighting. The difference is that I don’t have a choice and you do.”

He withdrew his arm with a glare. “I do not, and I am sorry you cannot see it. And *that* is our common ground. Stubbornness. Neither of us has the option to reject our calling, no matter the cost.”

They walked, side by side, and Alleria could feel her son’s disquiet. She had felt this same weight from Turalyon time and again, after an argument about her communion with the Void. There was a vast chasm between them. If only she could reach them, her men. If only they could accept her for who she truly was—

And, well, that was all that Arator wanted from her, was it not?

“You have the strength to protect your world, so you must fight as I did. But know that I will never want this for you,” she said. “A mother will always want to protect her young.”

“Your love I have never doubted,” he responded sadly. “But I wish I knew you better, and I wish you would stay long enough for us all to grow bored and quarrelsome with each other. I cannot know myself unless I know you.”

“Knowing oneself is the work of a lifetime,” she admitted. “And I have been working at it for several. Change is part of life, but loving you is my only constant.”

Her pace slowed as they neared the gates. The guards waiting there watched her closely, weapons in hand, as the guards behind them fanned out, forming a wall.

“Knight Arator,” one of the guards said, inclining his head.

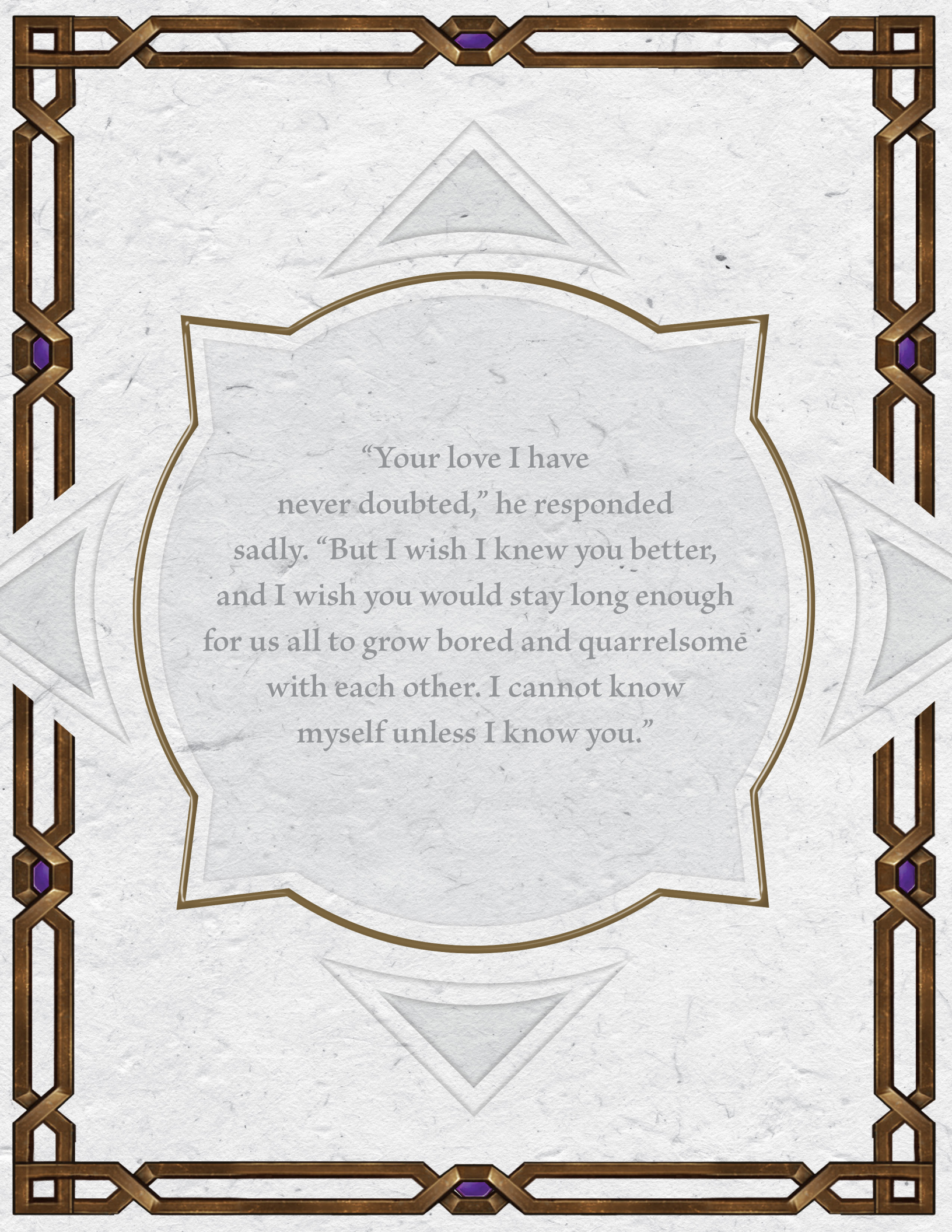
Arator returned the gesture as they passed through the gates.

Once outside the city, Alleria felt a wave of relief; she had lived up to her half of the bargain, and now she was again beyond the judgment of anyone within the city walls. She swiftly withdrew her armor from her enchanted bag and was soon sighing in relief to again bear its weight. Her armor, like the whispers of the Void, had become an intrinsic part of her, and she felt more herself with it than without.

Arator, too, could sense the change. “Light bless you, Mother,” he said formally with none of his earlier warmth. “May your mission prove fruitful.”

“I would prefer its urgency be proven unfounded, but I carry your hopes with me, my son.”





“Your love I have never doubted,” he responded sadly. “But I wish I knew you better, and I wish you would stay long enough for us all to grow bored and quarrelsome with each other. I cannot know myself unless I know you.”



She regarded him for a long moment, and he stepped forward. They embraced stiffly, and Alleria remembered what it had felt like, to carry a child within her and dream of meeting the new soul she'd felt stirring for months. She wished she could keep him as safe as that, shield him with her body from all the horrors of the world. But he was taller than she was now, a man of his own making, and he had made his choice. All that was left for her was to support it.

She wished she could have held him forever. "Goodbye, Arator."

He stood back. "May the Light guide you in your quest, Mother."

She knew he was annoyed with her, but she could tell that he was still sorry to see her go.

Arator turned and passed back through the gate, and Alleria watched him with a fond smile. He walked like a warrior, shoulders back, a loose-limbed, athletic elegance to his gait.

*He is leaving you. He detests you, hates what you are. He is glad to be rid of you.*

Alleria sighed.

This visit could have gone better—but it could have gone worse.

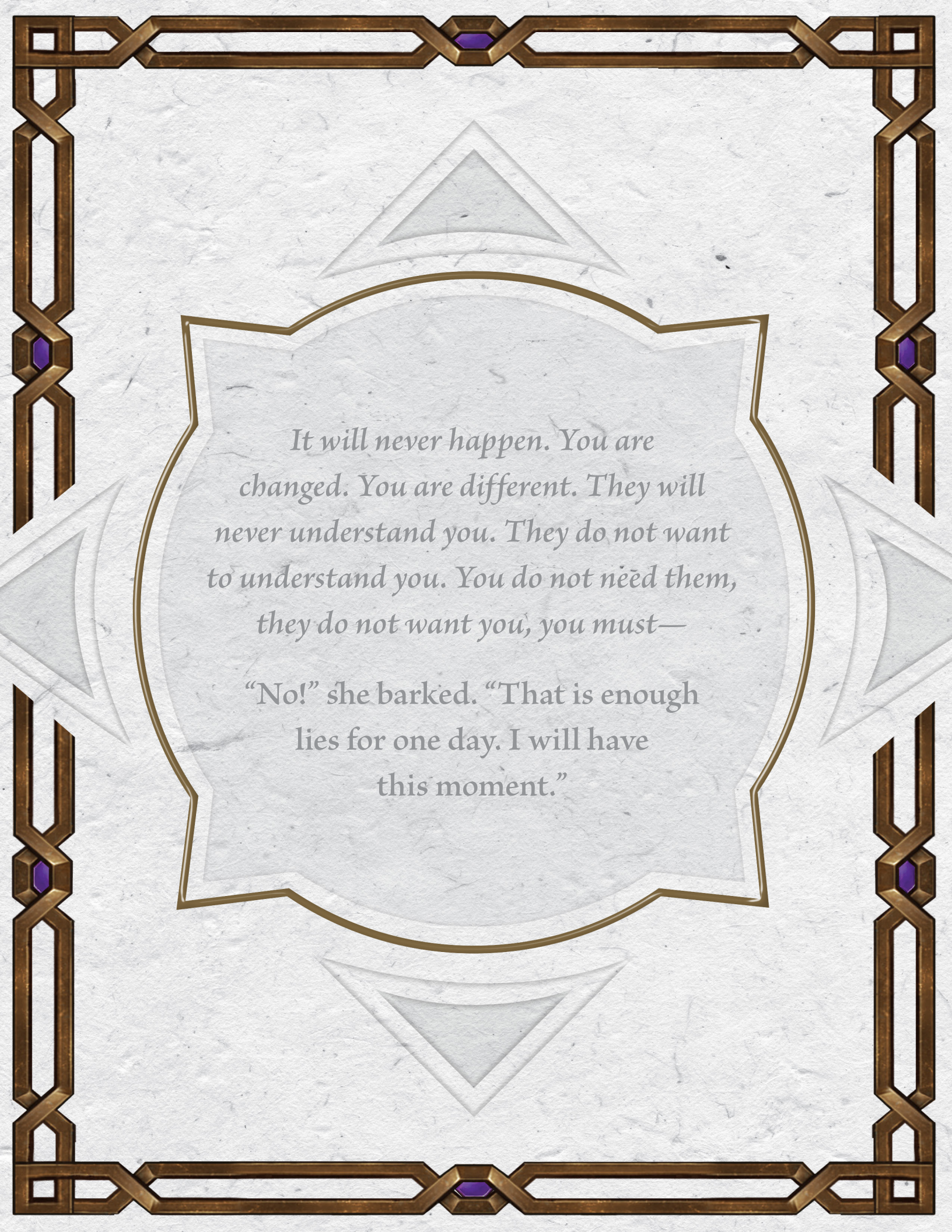
She had doubted he would heed her words, but she had to say her piece. At least now he knew her feelings, feelings she had held inside for years and years, hoping that one day they could speak honestly. They were cut from the same cloth. Just as she had to find the Dark Heart even if it meant leaving her family again, so he had to run into the battle that would follow, even if it meant disappointing his mother.

*He will die on the battlefield. He will fall. You have failed him.*

This was not the first time Alleria had walked away from her family, and she doubted it would be the last. She could only hope that the next time she stepped through Arator's door, it would be with tidings of victory and an end to whatever evil threatened Azeroth. Perhaps then Lor'themar would welcome her as a hero, and Turalyon would speak his mind, and Arator would settle down with someone nice, and Alleria could sit with her family and have a simple meal with no talk of impending doom.

*It will never happen. You are changed. You are different. They will never understand you. They*





*It will never happen. You are changed. You are different. They will never understand you. They do not want to understand you. You do not need them, they do not want you, you must—*

“No!” she barked. “That is enough lies for one day. I will have this moment.”



*do not want to understand you. You do not need them, they do not want you, you must—*

“No!” she barked. “That is enough lies for one day. I will have this moment.”

For once, thankfully, the whispers quieted altogether. She knew it would not last, but perhaps the Void understood that on this topic she could not be swayed.

She loved her family, and she wanted what was best for them, and for now that was enough. Perhaps her son did not know her well . . . but he wanted to, and that was something precious.

The city glowed behind her, lit with bright crystals and merry fires, but Alleria Windrunner walked away into the darkness, again, always—and she walked alone. But this time, it was not violence that drove her forward.

It was hope.





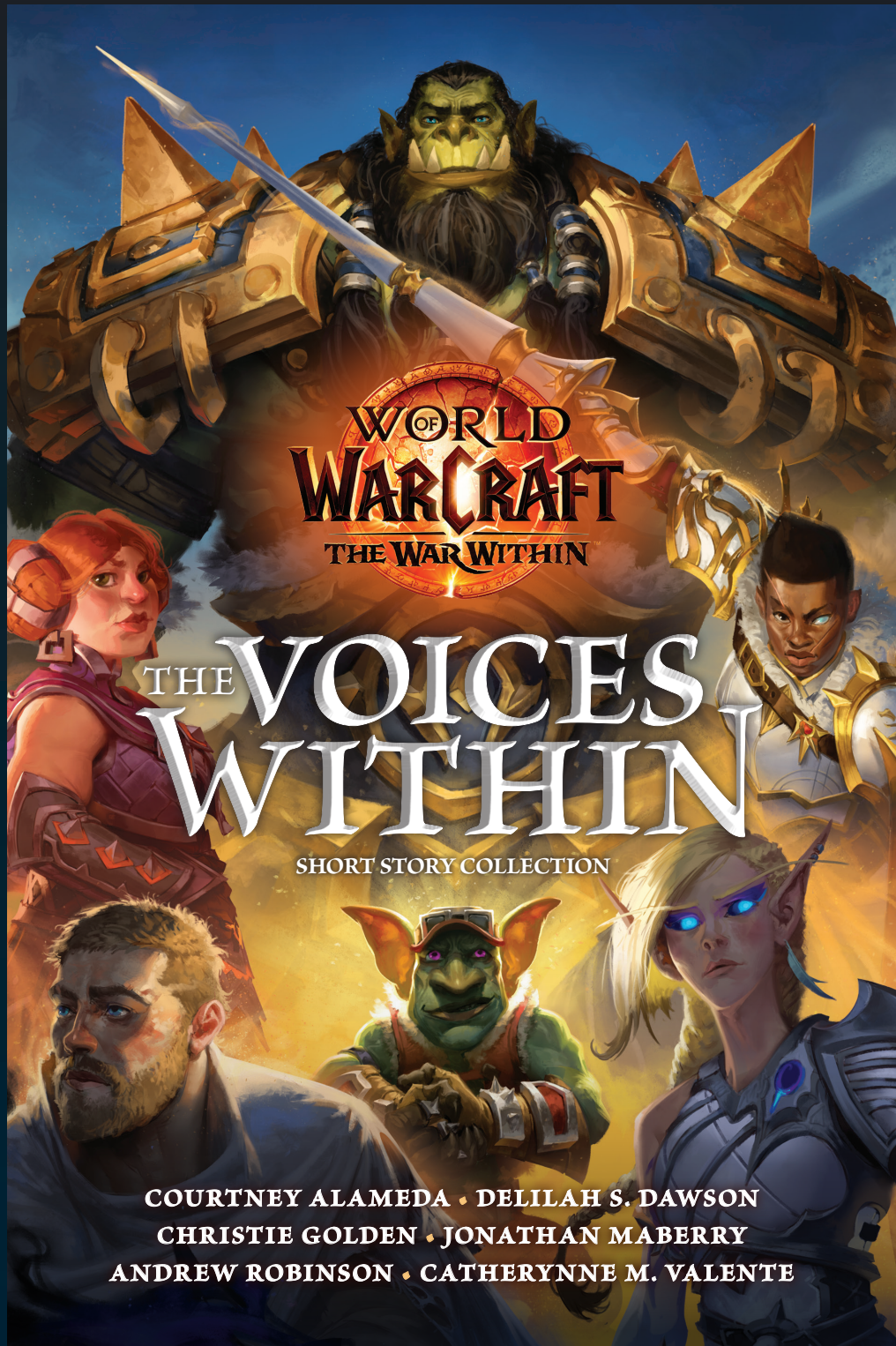
## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**DELILAH S. DAWSON** is the author of the *New York Times* bestseller *Star Wars: Phasma*, as well as *Star Wars Inquisitor: Rise of the Red Blade*, *Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge: Black Spire*, *The Violence*, *Bloom*, *Mine*, *Camp Scare*, the Hit series, the Blud series, and the creator-owned comics *Ladycastle*, *Sparrowhawk*, and *Star Pig*, and the Shadow series (written as Lila Bowen). With Kevin Hearne, she cowrites the Tales of Pell. She lives in Georgia with her family.



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