



WORLD
WARCRAFT
LEGION

BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT

A Thousand Years of War

by Robert Brooks

Part One – Two Bright Lights

Turalyon stood alone, unmoving, silently witnessing the death of a world.

It had been only hours since the sealing of the Dark Portal. The land of Draenor crumbled. Continents cracked open. The oceans heaved and boiled. Huge chunks of earth were thrown into the sky, and there they stayed, aloft, spinning slowly, refusing to fall back to the ground. Reality itself was unraveling.

Turalyon was calm. He was not afraid. The Light was with him. Even here, in this strange place.

This was not Draenor.

It looked like Draenor, yes, but he was not truly there. The cracked red plains of Hellfire Peninsula stretched out beneath his feet, yes, but he was not truly there. In the distance he could see the hastily wrought Alliance staging ground—Honor Hold—stubbornly withstanding the quakes and tremors.

And yet he was not truly there.

Turalyon had *been* there, of course. Only a few hours ago, he had been fighting for his life there. Hellfire Peninsula had been filled with orcs, Alliance soldiers, broken war machines, the corpses of the fallen, discarded weapons, and all the other detritus of battle.

He saw none of that now. There was no sign a battle had ever taken place. Only empty, dead ground surrounded him. He was offered a view of Draenor's destruction... but, no, *he was not truly there*.

He was in another realm, one he did not know. The skies were dark, twisting, filled with strange, conflicting powers. He could see entire worlds hanging in the distance, seemingly close enough to touch and yet unimaginably far away. He felt the Light intermingling with the Shadow. He felt the primal, uncontrolled forces of chaos and order, life and death, clashing here.

He didn't know this place. Nor did he know how to escape it. He kept watch for any familiar faces. Khadgar. Danath. Kurdran. Alleria. He wondered if they had survived.

He remained still, staying out in the open, letting the Light flow through him. He would be patient. He would be a beacon for anyone else in this place.

Time passed. Nothing appeared before him.

But that did not mean nothing was there. Turalyon felt eyes upon him from the east. Malevolent eyes. As the hours drifted onward, the sense of that predatory gaze did not fade. Whatever it was, it hungered for blood.

Turalyon spoke aloud, just to break the silence. "Let it come. Let it know the Light's strength."

Behind him, from the west, a voice called out. A familiar voice. One he had prayed to hear again.

"Turalyon!"

He turned, smiling. She had found him. "Alleria? Thank the Light—"

His breath caught. Her bow was raised, arrow nocked. Aiming true at his heart.

She released. Above the snap of her bow's string, she called a single word:

"*Left!*"

Turalyon didn't hesitate. He ducked to his left. The arrow flew past. He felt its breeze on his neck as it sailed on. It arced to the ground hundreds of paces away. Turalyon could see it sticking upright in the red dirt, feathers quivering.

Alleria Windrunner approached him slowly, drawing another arrow. Her bow remained low, aimed at the ground. Her head turned, eyes darting, looking for a target. "Apologies. I meant *my* left, not yours."

Turalyon glanced at the arrow in the distance. "Testing my reflexes, or did you see something?"

"I saw something."

"A shame. I would have been happy to test your reflexes, too. Say the word and I'll throw my shield at you."

A smile crossed Alleria's lips, just for a moment. "Perhaps later." She stood where Turalyon had, looking at the ground. "Tracks." She gestured downward.

Turalyon could see the impressions of his boots in the dry earth. But there, faintly, was a third mark, perhaps a pace away. Something had been standing behind him—no, he had turned at the last moment, so it had been in *front* of him and he had not seen it. "What was it?"

Alleria kept her eyes up, scanning the landscape in front of her. "I saw something shimmering. When you turned, it took shape. I do not know what it was. It fled before my arrow could strike."

"An orc, perhaps? Ner'zhul's warlocks may have come here."

"Not an orc," Alleria said firmly.

"Should we retrieve your arrow?"

Alleria looked at him. "This place is not Draenor. Do you know how to leave it?"

"It isn't, and I don't," he said.

"Then we need to conserve our resources."

Her arrow had landed perhaps two hundred paces away. They walked to it together. The distance passed in silence.

Turalyon had his hammer in hand, but he felt quiet jubilation—she had *found* him. It had been a brutal battle at the Dark Portal, unlike anything he had ever experienced. He had fought the Horde across two worlds, but he had never seen them *desperate*. At the Black Temple, their warchief, Ner'zhul, had used instruments of power from Azeroth to create bridges to new lands. But his spells had spun out of control. Rifts had begun snapping open and closed all over Draenor, shredding the fabric of existence. The only escape had been Azeroth.

But the uncontrolled destruction had bled through the Dark Portal, putting Azeroth itself in danger.

The Alliance expedition had rushed to protect it. Alleria and Turalyon had fought back to back, holding the line against waves of terrified orcs, buying time for Khadgar to seal the rift between the two lands, knowing that they, too, would be trapped on a dying world. In the chaos, another rift had opened near them. They had dived through, believing that *anywhere* in the cosmos had to be safer than staying put. But they had become separated from each other.

There was no telling where the rest of the Alliance expedition were. Maybe they were still on Draenor. Maybe they were here, in this place. Maybe they had escaped to some far corner of the universe. Turalyon didn't know.

But at least the Light had delivered him back to her.

Alleria retrieved her arrow and returned it to her quiver. "I believe we are being watched." She grimaced. "I might be wrong. My instincts do not mean much here."

"They mean plenty to me." Turalyon had hunted for sport in Lordaeron, but Alleria was ranger-captain of Silvermoon. It had become her nature to think like a predator. "I

should have sensed it when it drew close. There's so much errant power here... I need to be more cautious."

"This is its territory. It hunts here. Strange that it hasn't tried to finish us off. I would have." Alleria let her bow rest at her side. "I do not understand this place at all."

"I don't, either," Turalyon said. "But you found me. That's enough for now."

Alleria looked at him. Smiled.

And then she embraced him. He held her tightly against his chest. "We will see our son again," she whispered.

"Light willing."

"Damn the Light. The Alliance expedition was a one-way journey. We all knew it. And yet I felt, in my heart, that we would see Arator again."

Her love burned brightly, heating her words and warming Turalyon's soul. But he did not share her confidence. "It might be a long journey back to Azeroth," he said.

"We have time."

"*You* do."

That brought her head up. Turalyon met her gaze steadily. He knew she understood him: human lives were short. The elves of Silvermoon had the Sunwell and, thus, something akin to immortality.

"If the Light lets you die of old age here, I will be very, very angry with it," she said.

Turalyon fought back a smile. "I'll let it know."

"Good. That is settled." She stepped back, surveying the shadowy realm around her. "Others might be trapped here. We should find them."

Turalyon gestured to the east, toward the Dark Portal. "The fighting was fiercest there."

They set off. Draenor—or at least this dark reflection of it—continued to break apart. The tremors that shook the world did not touch them here. The oceans had boiled away, leaving nothing but empty space. In the distance, mountain ranges floated in midair.

Neither Alleria nor Turalyon needed to say it: if they had not succeeded, this would have been Azeroth's fate, too.

But, as time passed, the cadence of destruction seemed to slow. The central continent of this world was holding together. How much of the Alliance expedition had survived? How much of the Horde?

They arrived at the eastern end of the peninsula. The Dark Portal hung above them. No other living creature was in sight. No Alliance. No Horde.

"We're on our own," Turalyon concluded.

Alleria sighed. "Any ideas?"

Turalyon sat down cross-legged, his back to the Dark Portal. His heavy armor clattered as he found a comfortable position. "No. There is nothing I can do to get us out of here. So I will trust in the Light." A bright circle began to radiate around him. He closed his eyes, letting holy power flow through him. "Fate has drawn us away from the others. I am ready to learn why."

"Very well. Have a good nap, Turalyon. I will stand watch."

He opened his eyes slightly. "Is our new friend still following us?"

"It is."

"Yow saw it again?"

Alleria hesitated. "I sense it now, watching us from the north. Do you not?"

"Perhaps. Near the Dark Portal?"

"That is right."

Turalyon did indeed feel a ripple of menace pulsing from that direction. It was keeping its distance, so he closed his eyes again. "Well, start a campfire and invite our guest in. Maybe it's just lonely and—"

A harmonic tone thundered across them. Turalyon leapt to his feet, drawing his hammer from its sling. Alleria spun, bow raised, arrow already nocked. Blinding Light shone from a circle in the air only a few paces away.

It was a rift. Identical to the one Turalyon had followed to get here.

All he could see through the glow was a hand beckoning them forward. A voice called out to them. "This way, quickly!"

Turalyon's shock faded. The rift and the voice behind it were both suffused with the Light. "We can trust him," he told Alleria.

She glanced at him, then lowered her bow. "Very well." She stepped through the rift. Turalyon followed.

They emerged into a clearing in a forest, surrounded by half-dead trees. The rift closed behind them. They were back on Draenor, a world still rumbling from its apocalypse. The skies... One look took Turalyon's breath away. The skies were rent asunder,

stripped into pieces. Between the lingering shreds of blue was that familiar sight of swirling, dark energy.

Draenor and that other realm were bleeding together.

"I have been looking for you two for a very long time."

The other being, the one who had drawn them here, was smiling broadly. He had fanged teeth and long black claws, but he exuded an aura of Holy Light. Alleria idly tapped the side of her bow, clearly considering nocking an arrow again.

"Who are you?" Turalyon asked.

"I am a commander. I am a warrior of the Light. And today, I am a messenger of fate itself. My name is Lothraxion. The Mother of Light has foreseen that you two will help ensure the salvation of all living creatures. She sent me to rescue you. Come. Sit down. We have much to discuss."

* * *

They spoke for three days. Before long, Lothraxion had become very uneasy, especially after learning that an unseen foe had been sniffing at Alleria and Turalyon's heels.

"I've fought the Legion for thousands of years—I was *part* of the Legion for thousands more—and I've never heard of a creature that can move through the Twisting Nether like that." Lothraxion had quickly understood the grim implications. "If you could not see it, Turalyon... that is troubling. Demons should not be able to evade the gaze of the Light."

After he had listened to their account of their time in that other realm—the *Twisting Nether*, Alleria would remember that—Lothraxion was convinced that the creature was one of the Legion's rarest assassins. Kil'jaeden had personally trained a select few to kill or capture important enemies. If it was continuing to follow them, it would not rest until it had finished them off.

That meant Alleria and Turalyon were still in danger, even here.

Oh yes, they'd had much to discuss over the past three days. About this world. About the Burning Legion, and how the demons had orchestrated the Horde's invasion of Azeroth. About the Twisting Nether, the chaotic realm where the universes sparked by the Light and the Shadow bled together. About how it could create strange reflections of real worlds like Draenor.

Most importantly, Lothraxion had told them about the Army of the Light and its impossible war against the Burning Legion. He had told them the Light needed Alleria and Turalyon's help.

But all of that would have to wait. "We cannot risk leading that creature back to our stronghold," Lothraxion said. "I will stay here with you until it is slain."

Turalyon was ready to accept his help. Alleria was not. "Lothraxion, you need to leave. We can protect ourselves."

"I am not sure you understand how dangerous this assassin is."

"What is a bigger prize to the Legion? Two recruits, or a commander?" Alleria looked directly into Turalyon's eyes for a moment. She carefully chose her words to Lothraxion. "When you leave, it will follow *you*. You must set a trap for it. Return to us when it is dead."

Lothraxion began to object, but Turalyon cut him off. "We understand the danger, Lothraxion. We understand *perfectly*." He gave Alleria a small nod. "We will wait here."

Lothraxion's eyes narrowed. He silently regarded both of them. "Very well. But I will not leave you defenseless."

Before he left, he offered Turalyon a few hours of instruction in the ways of the Light. Yes, Turalyon was a paladin, but humans had only recently begun to wield holy power on the battlefield. Lothraxion had done so for *millennia*. After Lothraxion left, Turalyon was glowing. Literally glowing.

For Alleria, that lost its charm after the sun went down.

"Can you stop, please? You are ruining my night vision," she said sweetly.

Turalyon was enjoying himself far too much. "Does my radiance bother you? Am I delving too deeply into the unbridled power of justice and hope?"

"Will your radiance stop someone from killing you while you sleep?"

"As a matter of fact, it might," he said. Still, he relented. The Light faded across his armor and hammer. "What did you think of our new friend? I know you couldn't feel his intentions through the Light."

Alleria began to sharpen her arrowheads with a flat stone. "He had a lot to say. None of it seemed like a lie."

Turalyon looked at the ground, his voice little more than a whisper. "And what did you think of his request?"

There was a long silence, only disturbed by the soft scrape of metal against stone. The stillness pressed in on them. Far in the distance, they could hear the nervous cries of Draenor's wildlife, unsettled from the ongoing tremors.

Alleria finally put her rock down. "The Mother of Light saved us from the Nether. If she wants us to wait here for a few days, fine. But... asking us to march off to another war..."

She didn't finish her thought. She didn't need to. Turalyon simply nodded. "If the Light can return us to Azeroth first, we can raise an army for it. That has to be far more useful than just the two of us."

"Exactly." They continued to talk through most of the night.

When the sky lightened, they took turns sleeping. By midday, they were well rested. Now all that was left was to wait for the demon to be killed. Alleria wasn't sure if Lothraxion had understood what they had asked him to do, but he had at least been willing to play along. There was no telling how long it would take. If they were to be waiting here for weeks or months, her advice to manage resources still rang true.

They were running low on food and water. Turalyon left to find a river. Alleria set some snares in the nearby forest. When he returned, Alleria was pacing around the edge of their campsite, carefully inspecting the ground. She looked up at him with a frown. "Where is the water?"

He shook his head. "It can wait. This has been on my mind since I woke. We spent all night talking about war, but not a word about our son."

"We can talk about Mathain later."

"If one of us goes to war, the other must stay behind with him." He stepped close to her. "It isn't right to risk making him an orphan. Not after we already took a chance coming here."

She met his gaze without blinking. "He will be safe. I promise." Her hand reached up to his chin.

Shik.

Her dagger slipped easily into his throat.

Turalyon's eyes widened with shock. He staggered backward, clutching at his throat, trying in vain to stem the river of blood. She had buried the blade to the hilt.

Alleria watched him without pity. "My son's name is *Arator*, demon."

The creature that looked like Turalyon roared with rage and took two stumbling steps toward her. Green fire leapt from one hand while the other produced a dagger. Alleria sidestepped the assassin, caught its elbow, and pivoted. The creature crashed into the ground, its arm bent at an unnatural angle, dagger falling uselessly at its side and evaporating. Gurgling shrieks of pain and anger echoed through the trees.

Alleria let it squall while she retrieved her bow and quiver. Branches crunched a few paces away, and Turalyon—the real Turalyon—stepped out of the forest, hammer in hand. Blazing Light trailed off of him like smoke. "Nicely done," he said grimly.

"It was impatient. I would have waited a few days. And I would not have left tracks everywhere." Alleria drew an arrow. "What is more valuable? A commander, or two new recruits? Apparently, the two recruits. Interesting. Let us talk about that."

The assassin snarled and tried to scramble to its feet. Turalyon's hammer put it back down. Hard. Turalyon gestured, and the remnants of the creature's disguise vanished in a flash, revealing its true form: a lanky demon, face twisted with agony. Lothraxion had been right. This was an eredar, an unusual one. Dark smoke leaked from its blackened, dead eyes.

Alleria stood over it, aiming her bow straight down. "You are a minion of the Burning Legion, yes?"

The demon smiled up at her. "I am but one of an infinite army. I am but a single spear of an endless—*GYAAAAH!*" Her arrow found its mark. She drew another and aimed it at a different yet equally painful point. She did not ask her question again. The demon spat and cursed. "Yes, I am of the Burning Legion, you worm, you flesh-cursed mortal fool! Arrogant scum, doomed to crawl in dirt and filth before the great lord of the—" The creature howled again as the second arrow hit home.

Alleria shook her head. "You tracked us for days. Tell me *why*."

The demon giggled. The pain had driven it half to madness. "Fate spins around you. I can feel it. I can *see* it. I saw it *all* around this world. And then it *all-l-l-l* blew up, so many little lights blinking out. But not you two. You two lived. And that means fate has plans..." It succumbed to a fit of manic laughter.

Turalyon hefted his shield. "Perhaps you're right. But you won't live to see it."

The demon's eyes were filled with searing-hot fury. "You think we won't meet again? I will find you. Both of you. I will have your souls as baubles around my neck, and you will suffer for all eternity. And then I will find your son, *Arator*, and I will make him kneel before Sargeras himself so you may watch him burn in the master's glory! You think you've won? Do you—"

Alleria released her bow's string. The arrow punched through the demon's skull.

Its mouth worked soundlessly for a moment. The creature twitched once, twice. Then it was still.

Alleria shrugged an apology to Turalyon. "Sorry. I should have asked if you were done with it."

"I didn't like hearing it say Arator's name, either."

The demon's body smoldered, decaying into dry dust, blowing away on the breeze, leaving nothing behind.

The Army of the Light must have been keeping an eye on them. Not an hour after they had killed the assassin, radiant Light silently fell upon both Alleria and Turalyon. They were enveloped in its glory, their minds elevated into another realm of existence.

Turalyon felt a presence among them, a being of such profound might that it seemed all Light might flow from it. He heard Alleria gasp in awe. She had never experienced the tranquil power of the Light before.

Neither had he, not with such intensity.

A voice spoke to them, elegant, graceful, and steadfast. This was the Mother of Light.

The two children of Azeroth. Alleria. Turalyon. I am Xe'ra. I am glad you are unharmed, yet I weep for what you have endured.

It was Alleria who responded. "Do not mourn for us. We went to war to save our world. Azeroth is safe."

That is why I mourn. I was there at the Beginning, when mortal life was but a distant dream. To think that creatures like you would be called to face such terrible dangers... It pains me. If others had not failed, if I had not failed, you would not carry this burden.

"And yet we carry it gladly, because we must," Turalyon said. "What is happening here? That demon said fate has its mark on us."

Within you two, there is hope for the universe.

Turalyon began to see Xe'ra's shape. It was as if she were carved from luminous living crystals, held together by nothing but holy power. She was unlike any being he had ever seen. And yet... it was as if he had always known her. Through the Light, he understood her nature, just as she understood his. "Lothraxion said there is a war among the stars. I don't understand how we can help fight it."

The war was lost long ago. The Burning Legion has altered the destiny of the universe. All lives now whirl toward oblivion. So... we looked for hope. We looked for bright lights in the Great Dark Beyond. Amid the desolation of a thousand thousand dead worlds, there are some lands that still live and thrive.

"Azeroth," whispered Alleria.

The brightest light of all. That is what brought the Legion to you ten thousand years ago. In your peoples' bravery, and in the demons' arrogance, the Legion tasted defeat for the first time. But they learn from their mistakes. The orcs of Draenor were pawns in a new

strategy. You fought them back, and the Legion will learn from that, too. I cannot say what the next attack on Azeroth will be; I can say only that it will come soon.

Alleria spoke firmly. "Then we must go back to Azeroth. We will rally every nation for war."

It will not be enough.

"It will have to be."

The being's voice was shot through with sorrow.

It will not. The Legion is ready for its Burning Crusade against your world. It only needs a path. The Horde almost gave it one.

A vision emerged. An orc warlock, bent and deformed, sailing away from the Horde. Turalyon recognized him: it was the one they called Gul'dan.

His hubris was his undoing. Had he succeeded, all would have been lost. But how long has it been since the Horde fled Azeroth? How many years upon your world?

"A little less than three," Turalyon said.

The Legion has had decades to prepare new avenues of war.

"I don't understand."

The currents of time flow ever forward, but the forces of the Twisting Nether are unpredictable. Look.

Another vision came to life. A giant ocean appeared, and Alleria and Turalyon gazed upon a massive vortex disturbing the waters. The whirlpool carried two pieces of driftwood, one at the edge, where the water was calm, and the other near the center. The one on the outside drifted slowly, lazily. The one in the center was violently tossed about, circling the vortex countless times. Storms roiled the waters, jarring the currents, injecting ever more chaos into the system.

Turalyon slowly began to understand. The same ocean, the same waters, yet affected differently by the same forces. Azeroth moved more slowly than the turbulent parts of the universe.

The Burning Legion has all the time it needs to prepare for war. Its victims never have any time at all. Yours is a world filled with bright lights, but it is not ready.

The vision changed. A barrow prison underground. There was an elf, alone in a cell. His face was cold. Turalyon could feel the hatred and determination in his soul.

The Light will one day cleanse this one's troubled heart, and he will become our greatest champion. He will destroy the Burning Legion.

Turalyon's mind whirled with questions. "Then... why does the Legion fear us?"

When you left your world, new possibilities rippled across the vast expanses of fate. The future held a glimmer of hope for the first time in ages. Your lights moved together through the cosmos. You journeyed until you reached... something else. Something new. Something I do not believe I was meant to see. An emerald star. It was there for a flash, and then it was gone.

"What was it?"

I do not know. Something the Legion has hidden from all prying eyes. Once you reach it, I believe we will finally learn how to defeat the Burning Legion. The demons know this, too. Thus they dispatched an assassin to kill you.

Alleria laughed softly. "It did not work out well for it. And now it is gone."

That demon is not dead.

"I beg to differ."

You destroyed but a vessel. The demon's soul returned to the Twisting Nether. In time, it will live again and resume the mission given to it by its masters: to snuff out the hope of two bright lights.

Alleria muttered a curse under her breath. That demon had threatened Arator, and it could return at any time. Alleria's voice was hard. "We have a son."

I know. I ask you for a terrible sacrifice.

"You do not understand. If we had both died here, Arator would have grown up an orphan. We left him anyway. Look within my heart. See the reason why."

I see love, pure and unblemished.

Turalyon's hand found hers and squeezed hard. Alleria squeezed back. "I would do anything to protect Arator, to protect my people and my world. If there are enemies bent on destroying it, then I will not rest. I will give my life if necessary. But I know I will see my son again. I have known it since the moment I decided to leave Azeroth."

I am glad. Though you do not yet know the Light, it has already begun to speak to you.

"We should find the rest of the Alliance expedition. If the Legion fears the two of us, it will tremble when we march together," Turalyon said.

They have their own fate. There will be a great many wars on your world—and on this one—while you are gone. Azeroth will need their help, in time.

The conversation continued for hours. In the end, Alleria and Turalyon made their choice. A terrible, impossible choice.

A necessary choice.

The visions faded away. Alleria and Turalyon were alone again in the midst of a forest on Draenor. A rift opened near them. Bright Light spilled out, illuminating the shattered world.

"We will see our son again," Alleria said.

"Light willing."

They stepped through.

Many were waiting on the other side to greet them. Lothraxion was there, a broad smile on his face. Xe'ra floated above them, her presence a beacon of hope in a universe that desperately needed it.

Welcome, Alleria and Turalyon. Welcome to the Army of the Light.

Welcome home.

Part Two – The Emerald Star

Step forward, Turalyon, son of Dorus. It is time.

Turalyon stepped into the column of Light. He was not alone. Alleria stayed with him.

The path of the Light is different for all of its children. Tell us how it led you here.

"I was born into the nobility of Lordaeron. I studied in the ways of the Light as a boy, and I became a priest, healing the sick and the wounded. I took up arms when my world was invaded, and with my brethren of the Silver Hand, I learned to wield the Light on the battlefield."

And what will you do now?

"I will serve the Light until my dying day. This I swear."

So the Light shall bless you. Take a moment to prepare.

Alleria gently grasped Turalyon's hands. His palms were down; hers, up. They stood face-to-face, the Light shining down on them both.

"Are you nervous?" she asked.

Turalyon smiled. "I am."

The gentle murmur of Xe'ra's presence surrounded them. *Your old life has passed. The Light will forge you a new one.*

"I am ready, Xe'ra."

The Light descended upon him. Alleria could feel Turalyon's pulse, thumping evenly but strongly. His hands began to grip hers tightly. His skin grew warmer to the touch.

"I will see you on the other side, my love," Alleria said.

The Light delved into him. He did not flinch. Xe'ra's words filled the silence.

The Light will grant you wisdom. The Light will heal your scars. The Light will show you your destiny.

He went unnaturally still, his hands dead weight. Alleria knew his mind was now being borne across an ocean of creation.

"What is he seeing?" she whispered.

When one is forged in the Light, one sees their past. Then they see glimpses of their future.

"I hope he brings back good news."

The Burning Legion has changed the fate of all things. But where fate has changed once, it can change again. It is through beings like you, Turalyon, and the rest of the Army of the Light that it will be so.

"Light willing."

Alleria knew it would be a long wait for Turalyon to return. She closed her eyes. She let her mind roam, seeking the same thing she always sought. Today, she was rewarded.

Images filled her mind. Not a vision—no, this was not a glimpse of what had happened or what might happen. This was happening right now. She was sure of it.

Alleria gazed upon a city, half-built, the rubble of wars past not entirely cleared away.

Stormwind. It had to be Stormwind. The humans had begun to rebuild it. It was a bright, sunny day, and the path to the city walls was filled with throngs of people, soldiers and civilians and nobility. Standing before them was a number of dignitaries. She saw banners from Stormwind, Lordaeron... and Quel'Thalas. In front of that banner was her sister Sylvanas.

Alleria's heart soared. Most of the Windrunner lineage had died when the Horde invaded. Sylvanas was one of the few who hadn't. She still bore the insignia of a leader. Ranger-General of Silvermoon. Pride beat in Alleria's soul like a drum.

Outside the walls of Stormwind, rows of statues had been erected. She recognized all of their likenesses. There was Kurdran Wildhammer. Danath Trollbane. Archmage Khadgar.

And there was Turalyon. Right next to him was a statue of Alleria.

The Alliance must have believed that all who had remained on Draenor were dead. Alleria knew many of the expedition's members had survived. She had seen it through the Light... but they must not have found a way back to Azeroth yet.

Alleria let her consciousness float over the crowd. They were all looking upward. Yes, she recognized some of the elves there. Warriors. Fellow hunters. Magi. Friends.

And there, right there, was a little boy, sitting on the shoulders of a paladin.

Arator.

Her son was still a child, so, so tiny. He had been a few months old when she had left for war. For him, only a couple of years had passed since. His eyes were wide; his head, tilted. He was looking at a face he didn't remember. Alleria felt tears welling beneath her eyelids.

Speak to him.

"I do not know what to say."

Through the Light, you can say more than words.

Alleria understood. She thought back on those precious few months when she had held him in her arms. She let herself float in those memories, embracing her pure, infinite love for her child.

Through the Light, she shared that emotion with him.

She saw him look around. She saw him smile. And then he looked back up at the statue of her, reaching with his hand. It was the same gesture he had made as a baby, trying to touch her chin. Joy filled her heart so intensely it hurt.

"He does not know my face."

He will return here again and again to see your face. And he will know you love him.

"Thank you, Xe'ra."

Turalyon's journey was coming to an end. The Light flashed from within him. He opened his eyes. They shone, just for a moment. He lifted his head and took a deep breath.

Alleria knew it was done. His pulse was stronger than ever, and each heartbeat thundered with the Light. "Welcome back. How do you feel, Turalyon?"

"Like I am awake for the first time in my life." His eyes were brimming with tears. "I saw Arator. He was grown, a paladin, standing beneath a crimson sky, looking down at me. I

could feel nothing, nothing but pride for him. You were right, Alleria. It is our fate to see him again."

He pulled her into an embrace. She twined her arms around his neck, and his tears fell upon her cheek.

He kept his hold on her as he spoke to Xe'ra. "I saw the emerald star. Our war against the Burning Legion will reveal it to us, in time. We must be patient."

Then we are walking the path of destiny. You have done well, Turalyon.

Xe'ra announced the good news to the rest of the Army of the Light.

Turalyon... a child of Azeroth... a human of Lordaeron... a paladin of the Silver Hand... has crossed the boundaries of mortality. He has been found worthy to become an eternal protector of creation.

He has been forged in the Light.

The others were there in an instant, offering congratulations and embraces of their own. They were already brothers and sisters in arms. They had fought battles together, spilled blood together, and mourned fallen comrades together. But now Turalyon was not simply a wielder of the Light; he had become one with it, like most of them.

Lothraxion stepped up to Turalyon and clasped his hand the way humans did. Alleria watched with a concealed grin. Lothraxion had insisted on practicing that with her days ago. He turned to her with an eager smile. "How did I do?"

"Marvelous. The courts of Lordaeron would think you very polite."

"Your ascension will come, Alleria. I know it."

"Light willing," she replied. But if it had taken Turalyon—a man who had studied the Light since childhood—so long to earn this honor, she knew hers was still some time away. That did not concern her. The Light had granted her peace today. She no longer feared that her son would live his entire life before she saw him again.

For Azeroth, it had been only a couple of years since they left. For Alleria and Turalyon, it had been more than forty.

* * *

When the Army of the Light welcomed Alleria and Turalyon into its ranks, it brought them to their new home: the *Xenedar*. It was a magnificent vessel, wrought from the Light's greatest minds, capable of traversing the Twisting Nether and sustaining its occupants for long voyages. It was also the Light's largest remaining refuge, and the only one capable of waging war against the Burning Legion.

Alleria and Turalyon soon joined the army on its raids of Legion strongholds. But first, they had to adjust to life in the Twisting Nether.

The erratic passage of time was an unexpected hurdle to overcome. While a week would pass on Azeroth, Alleria and Turalyon might experience a month passing. Or ten. Or more. The years seemed to blend together.

But they certainly were not idle, which helped them focus. Turalyon had joined the Council of Exarchs to learn their form of military strategy. After a few years, he had worked with the *Xenedar*'s smiths to forge a new weapon, a sword imbued with holy power. That meant he needed to train relentlessly to master it.

Alleria had her own training. She had begun to study the ways of holy warfare.

Within two years—from Alleria and Turalyon's perspective—her arrows were wreathed in the power of the Light. She could have forgone her bow and arrows altogether, but it pleased her to bring Thas'dorah, the legacy of her family, into battle against the forces of evil. Lothraxion encouraged it. "Every one of us carries our past into war, but not all of us can use it as a weapon," he said.

He was a nathrezim, whose race had been enslaved by the Legion long ago. Alleria soon considered him a close friend and a remarkable source of knowledge. He had spent millennia fighting on the side of demons before he had been purified by the Light, so he knew how they thought, how they acted, and what they feared.

"The Burning Legion does not fear the Light," he said.

Alleria shook her head. "Are they truly so arrogant?"

"Sargeras believes he has already *defeated* the Light." Lothraxion offered a humorless smile. "What he truly wants is to destroy the Shadow. That was my duty, long ago. I hunted down creatures of the Void for the Legion. Very dangerous work."

It wasn't long before Alleria learned what he meant firsthand. About fifty years after she had left Draenor, the Army of the Light raided a small Legion prison world. When they arrived, every demon there was already dead. *Permanently* dead. They had been dragged into the Twisting Nether and butchered. That was the only way to put an immortal demonic soul to rest forever. Even the prisoners had been slaughtered.

"This is the Shadow's work," Lothraxion announced. "Be cautious."

They carefully searched the place, looking for any survivors. As Alleria investigated a row of blood-spattered cells, a living avatar of shadow appeared out of thin air, wrapping its incorporeal hand around her throat and slamming dark magic into her mind, trying to kill her.

Only an instant passed before she called down the Light upon her attacker. But in that moment, when the touch of the Shadow had been upon her, her mind was transported elsewhere.

Blink.

She saw herself walking upon the surface of another world. One filled with demons. One she had only heard about. Argus.

Blink.

She stood in front of the emerald star and felt its terrible warmth on her face. It reached out to her, begging for help.

Blink.

She saw herself stepping off a cliff, falling into an infinite darkness, smiling all the way. She saw the peace in her own eyes.

The moment passed, and the Light crashed down upon her attacker, destroying it instantly. She fell to the ground, gasping. Turalyon rushed to her side. The Light flowed into her, healing the pain. "Alleria! What happened?"

Alleria forced a wry tone into her voice as she stood up. "I was warned to be careful. Perhaps next time I will listen."

She did not tell him what she had seen. How could she, when she did not understand it herself? It had felt as real as any foresight she had received from the Light, and yet it clearly had not been a holy vision. The Light and the Shadow had collided within her soul, and from that, Alleria had glimpsed something true. She could not explain how.

Over the next several weeks, Alleria asked Lothraxion to tell her more about the Shadow. When he told her about the creatures he had fought, he grew somber.

"I have known enslavement. But serving the Legion was a mercy compared to what the Void-spawn endure," he muttered. "And the *corrupted* creatures? The ones who once knew freedom? Light have mercy on their souls. Once you've invited the Shadow into your heart, it ends in madness."

It was about what she had expected. "That is a shame. Imagine if someone could withstand the Void's corruption. They would make a powerful ally against the Legion."

Lothraxion considered that. "I wouldn't talk about such things where Xe'ra might hear. And I doubt that you would find many creatures like that. Wielding the Void creates a hunger for more power. There's the trap. That drive for more... more... more... It brings you across the threshold. Once you start using the Shadow, you *will* belong to the Shadow. It was almost always a certainty."

"Almost?"

"There was one..." Lothraxion had to think back. "The Locus-Walker. That was what we called him. A powerful master of the Void, and yet completely free of its grasp, as far as we knew. The Burning Legion lost countless lives trying to capture him. I was nearly one of them."

"I am glad he did not kill you."

"He *did* kill me. But he pulled me out of the Nether to do it." Lothraxion laughed at the memory. "He said he saw a 'unique destiny' for me and wanted me to be reborn."

Locus-Walker. Alleria would remember the name. But she couldn't resist asking one more question. "How many times did you die for the Legion?"

"I lost count." He grinned at her. "It was pleasant, in a way, feeling your soul drift. And then Argus would drag you back, and you would be punished for your failures. That wasn't so pleasant."

Alleria meditated on what he had told her. Perhaps there was a new way to fight the Legion. She went to Xe'ra for guidance.

"I want to find the Locus-Walker and all other beings like him," Alleria said. "They wish to see the Burning Legion fall just as much as we do."

Alleria had expected resistance. She had not expected an ultimatum.

Understand this well, Alleria Windrunner. The Light does not treat with the Void. There is no alliance to be made with the Shadow. It seeks to destroy or enslave every soul in this universe. It wants to consume everything.

Alleria was taken aback at Xe'ra's cold disgust. "I understand the danger. But I am a hunter. I think as my prey does. We fight the Burning Legion now, but one day we shall face the Void. I would prefer learning how its creatures think before *that* war begins."

That war began before time itself. Make no mistake, Alleria: if you pursue contact with the Void, your destiny will fall into ruin. You will lose Turalyon. You will lose Arator. You will lose Silvermoon, Azeroth, and everything else you hold dear. The Light and the Shadow cannot exist together. You already know how to strike down the Void. That is all you need to know.

"I understand, Xe'ra."

The naaru's words were clear enough. But Alleria could not put what she had seen out of her mind. She would walk on Argus. She would see the emerald star. And then she would fall to darkness. Those sights had felt like glimpses of destiny, and they had been born of Shadow.

The other things she'd seen had not faded. She was still convinced she would see Arator again. She was still convinced the Burning Legion would be defeated.

She hoped the Light would grant her more clarity in the years to come.

But as century after century passed, none came. She fought, she raided, she killed, but there were no more answers.

And then, suddenly, the time for waiting had ended.

* * *

The Burning Legion had invaded the remains of Draenor—a world now called Outland. The forces of Azeroth were mounting a desperate defense at the edge of Hellfire Peninsula, holding the line only steps from the Dark Portal.

Alleria and Turalyon had lived through more than five hundred years in the Twisting Nether. For Azeroth, it had been about twenty since the end of the Second War, barely a single generation. Its champions were facing another critical war.

But for Alleria, this was an opportunity. She asked to speak with Turalyon and Xe'ra in private. It hurt her deeply to lie to them—particularly to *him*—but she knew the truth would have been rejected.

"I have had dreams over the years. Faint dreams. I see myself walking upon Argus. Then I see the emerald star." Alleria spread her hands, a gesture of uncertainty. "I assumed they had to be wrong. Argus is too well-defended. Or rather, it *was*."

Turalyon understood instantly. "The demons are invading Outland. We will never see Argus so vulnerable ever again."

Alleria expected Xe'ra to object. She didn't.

This is what I saw before you joined us: two bright lights from Azeroth finding the emerald star together.

Alleria flinched. That was *not* what she wanted. "I should go alone. One person can find a quiet entry point onto Argus more easily than two."

Turalyon just smiled at her. "You think I can't keep up with you. I'm hurt."

"I did not see anything with certainty, Turalyon. There is no reason to risk anyone else."

Do not resist your destiny, Alleria. I cannot see what happens after you arrive, but I know that you continue your war against the Legion. Go together. You will not die on Argus.

After a pronouncement like that, there was no more room for argument.

Alleria and Turalyon set off deep into the Twisting Nether. They left the *Xenedar* in a small cylindrical pod. The Light sustained them. The journey was quiet. Stealthy. And slow. It would take a long time to reach Argus, and the pod would be their only way to escape it.

As they traveled, Alleria told Turalyon the truth. Or at least part of it.

"The visions I saw were not from the Light. That was why I wanted to go alone," she said.

Turalyon wasn't too bothered. "Wherever they came from, Xe'ra believed them to be true. That's good enough for me," he said. "There are other forces in the universe. If they want to aid the Light in destroying the Legion, I have no objection."

"Xe'ra would."

A hint of a smile played on Turalyon's lips. "I trust her wisdom. But I trust your instincts, too."

They flew on through the Twisting Nether. Alleria prayed he would not suffer if she had made a mistake.

* * *

Long ago, the Army of the Light had learned the location of Argus. It was a world fully shrouded within the Nether, and thus, the army could have navigated to it at any time.

But though it was easy to find, it was not easy to infiltrate. The primary stronghold of the Burning Legion was extremely well-defended. It had to be, even while the Legion was invading Outland. Kil'jaeden would not be inclined to leave his seat of power defenseless. But now there were gaps. Not every inch of the world would be guarded.

When Alleria and Turalyon finally completed their journey, they hid in the chaos of the Twisting Nether and waited, watching for an opportunity. Some parts of Argus were filled with flickering lights. Others were dark and silent.

Turalyon steered their transport to an open plain, far from anything of value. They emerged into the stench of sulfur and charred rock. Nothing was alive here. When the Burning Legion had taken over this world, the demons must have stripped it down to bedrock.

Turalyon regarded it grimly. "I had not thought there was any world the Light had abandoned..."

"Welcome to Argus," Alleria said.

Turalyon gestured toward the horizon. The edge of a huge canyon was barely visible. There were many lights shining from its depths. "That looks promising."

Alleria pointed toward their transport. It had the means to open a rift back to the *Xenedar*. "And that is our way out. Remember the path. We may need to exit in a hurry."

They moved quickly but quietly. If the Legion learned they were here, it might not be possible to escape. The jagged terrain provided plenty of cover. There were subsurface caverns and crags that hid them from the eyes of the Legion's sparse patrols.

Alleria stayed a couple of steps ahead of Turalyon, looking for signs of traps or enemies. Halfway to the canyon, she paused, tilting her head. "Someone has been here recently."

Turalyon silently drew his sword. Alleria gave him a flat stare. "Not like that, dear. Not a patrol. Something else." She pointed at a nearby cliff face. Parts of the blackened rock had scrape marks on them. There was a thin film of fresh ash at their feet. She knelt down. It was still warm. "Cooking fire. Tool marks. Someone is living out here."

Turalyon shrugged. "Hard to believe, but maybe we'll find some allies on Argus."

Alleria wasn't hopeful. "Anyone living under the Legion's nose would have to be very good at hiding. And deeply paranoid. I do not believe they will let us find them. Although..." She carefully examined the cliff face. "Staying in the open would be suicide for them. Would they not need a way to...? Ah, there it is."

Click.

She found what she was looking for. A loose rock turned in her hand. A small section of the cliff swung open like a door, and a tiny, narrow passage was exposed. Alleria nodded with satisfaction. "There *are* people living out here. This is how they travel without the Legion knowing."

Turalyon led the way through the winding tunnels, using only the smallest touch of the Light for illumination. For hours, all they heard was their own heavy breathing. Whenever they came to a fork in the path, they took the tunnel that curved toward the canyon. After spending so much time in the Twisting Nether, they had learned how to keep their orientation without sun, stars, or landmarks to guide them.

As they approached the canyon, Alleria began to feel something strange. A fluttering in her mind. She looked at Turalyon. He nodded back. He felt it, too.

Eventually, flickering green light started to fill the path in front of them. A dull, maddening hum reverberated through the rock around them. And then, Turalyon saw an opening. The tunnel widened here. Not a natural formation, Alleria noticed. Whoever was living here must have carved a ragged window out of a cliff face to spy on the Legion. Maybe there *was* a spark of resistance on Argus. Turalyon crept forward, peering carefully around the edge.

Alleria wasn't far behind. "What is it?"

"I don't know, Alleria. Light knows I don't."

She raised her head. She was looking out over the canyon. A massive, hellish slash in the crust of Argus itself, choked with smoke and steam and yet bitterly cold. The rumble and clamor of hammers, dark magics, and footsteps overlapped one another.

They had seen fortresses on the world's surface, but those must have been outposts. *This* was where the Burning Legion made its armies strong. There were forges, stockpiles, demonic barracks, and countless other buildings, pits, and structures. They were not just on the canyon floor. The Legion had built them up the canyon walls.

The fluttering in her mind grew louder. Painfully so. Turalyon's gauntlets tightly gripped the edge of the cliff. "It's coming from over there." He pointed away from the machines of war, toward a darker portion of the canyon, where silent buildings loomed in the shadows. The architecture was different. It took Alleria's mind a moment to understand what she was seeing. Over the past centuries of war, she had seen dozens of Legion strongholds. This looked nothing like those. So why did it seem so familiar?

It reminded her of Azeroth, of the old ruins that predated even the earliest Highborne settlements. Those had been titan ruins.

Why was she seeing titan architecture on Argus?

And what was inside?

That thought seemed to attract attention. The presence in her mind was no longer fluttering. It went silent. It had noticed her. She felt a terrible warmth. She saw fire in her mind's eye. She saw a shimmering sphere of raw power, trapped, straining to escape a fel prison. An emerald prison.

Then it stopped. It looked; it listened. It saw her.

It screamed.

A mountain of panic and horror fell upon her mind. Fear filled her thoughts so suddenly that she collapsed.

"Alleria!" Turalyon pulled her back from the edge. "What is it?"

That fear. It was not hers. It did not belong to her. So she shoved it away ruthlessly. "It is alive, Turalyon. Light help us, it is alive."

He stared for a moment, not understanding. And then it must have turned its eye upon him. He flinched and went limp, groaning, fighting to regain lucidity.

Alleria forced her mind to see what had been reaching out to them. Deep down in the belly of Argus, there was a creature of astonishing power, imprisoned by the green, corrupting fires of fel.

"No," Alleria whispered. "This cannot be the emerald star."

"By the Light..." Turalyon breathed.

It screamed again. The force of it made them tremble. Alleria could hear noises down in the canyon. Movement. Marching. Demons were beginning to stir.

"The Legion knows something is wrong," she warned. It fought against its bonds, and tremors rippled across the world. Unable to escape, it screamed again.

But this time, it tried to communicate. Alleria felt as its raw emotion gave way to something else. Memories. It was sending her its entire lifetime in a single, uncontrolled burst. In that instant, while the corrupted fount of arcane might was upon her, her mind was transported elsewhere.

This being was so much more powerful than the minion of the Shadow had been. Then, she had witnessed flashes of destiny. Now, she lived a history that surpassed the existence of the universe.

Blink.

It was energy, spinning out into the cosmos.

Blink.

It found warmth near a sun, and a world formed around it to protect it as it grew.

Blink.

Generations of life lived and died upon it.

Blink.

It was betrayed. It was bound by something powerful.

Blink.

Pain. Pain. It hurt so much. Its only solace lay within its dream.

Blink.

They enslaved worlds. They burned worlds. They used its strength to revive their fallen souls. It hurt so much.

Blink.

They found another. It was much more powerful. They wanted to claim it, too. Then they would be unstoppable.

Blink.

It screamed into the cosmos for help. Two children answered the call. Two bright lights.

Blink.

Two bright lights... from Azeroth. A world that was like Argus.

Alleria ripped herself free. Now she was lying on her side. Turalyon was shaking her. "Wake up! Alleria! Wake up! We have to go!"

She reached up, grabbed his shoulder. "Did you see?" she whispered.

"See what?"

He hadn't. Why hadn't he seen it? Why had *she*? "Argus has a soul. This world has a *soul*. And so does Azeroth. That is why the Legion wants it."

The confusion in his face mirrored her own. He hesitated only a moment. "Xe'ra will know what to do." Turalyon closed his eyes and whispered, "We cannot free you alone, but we will return. We will end your torment. This I swear before the Light."

Alleria scrambled deeper into the tunnels. Demonic shrieks filled the air. The Legion knew intruders were here. It just did not know where. She tugged on Turalyon's armor. "If we do not escape now, we never will."

They ran back the way they had come. The Legion would scour Argus to find whatever had distressed the world-soul. If the demons found their transport before Alleria and Turalyon reached it, there would be no way off this world.

It took hours before Alleria and Turalyon emerged into the open air. No demons were around. A flash of hope came to life in her heart. Maybe it wasn't too late. Without a word, they both began running, sprinting as fast as they could.

They crested a hill. Their transport was down there, on the plain, only a few hundred paces farther.

It might as well have been worlds away.

The pod was the only way off of Argus. The Legion had found it and surrounded it with endless ranks of demons. There were too many. *Far* too many.

Without hesitation, Alleria and Turalyon charged. There was no choice. And no hope. The sheer audacity of their attack bought them time. They punched a hole straight through the demons' front lines. It wasn't enough.

Each arrow, each thrust of a sword, brought down another demon. It wasn't enough. Alleria swung her bow in an arc, obliterating a dozen with a scythe of holy power. It wasn't enough.

"They must not capture us," Turalyon growled. "They cannot take us alive."

"They will not. *Left!*" Turalyon ducked to his left, and she fired an arrow into the demon that was about to split his skull. Alleria shot two more arrows at once, killing four. It wasn't enough.

But it was settled. Better to die than be captured. If they died here, the Legion would not know where the *Xenedar* was hiding. Their allies would be safe.

But the Army of the Light would gain nothing from their deaths. Had fate truly led them here just to die?

You will not die on Argus.

Xe'ra had been so certain. And so wrong.

Their forward progress had slowed. The Legion's endless numbers were collapsing upon them. Alleria spotted a circle of *eredar* approaching, spirals of fel magic forming into chains in their hands. They were planning to capture the two before they died in combat.

Still she fought on. It wasn't enough.

I cannot see what happens after you arrive...

This fate had been shrouded from Xe'ra. Why? Why had she not seen this? Why hadn't Turalyon seen the vision from the world-soul?

Why?

All went quiet within Alleria's mind. The answer came not as a shout... but as a whisper, from a voice she had not heard before.

... because they are not free...

Turalyon was one with the Light. Alleria was not. Not yet.

And not ever, she knew now.

The fight was at a standstill. Alleria and Turalyon could move neither forward nor back. The end had come. The Light could not save them.

"I will see my son again," Alleria whispered. It felt as true now as it had always been. Even on the precipice of the unthinkable.

She knew where that voice had come from. She knew what it wanted. And she knew only it could save them. She lashed out with the Light one more time, clearing a swath of space in front of her. Then she let it go.

She reached out for the Void. Dark power flowed into her. She did not know how to control it, but that did not matter. Something else, far away, did the work for her.

Something else, far away, wanted her to survive. She could feel its maddening whispers flooding her thoughts.

A jagged portal opened from thin air, black as the darkest corner of the universe.

Turalyon turned with a jolt. He stared in shock at the portal. "Alleria...?"

The way he said her name broke her heart.

With a scream of despair, Alleria hooked her arm around Turalyon's throat and dragged him through the portal. She felt him shout in pain as he crossed its threshold. *The Light and the Shadow cannot exist together.*

She could still feel his pulse. Crossing through Void power hadn't killed him.

The portal snapped closed. Alleria collapsed on all fours, exhausted, gasping. She looked up into the swirling, shimmering mayhem of the Twisting Nether. She and Turalyon rested on a hunk of rock floating in the midst of nothing, barely big enough for the two of them. Alleria let the Shadow go. Pushed it away. The whispers of madness faded.

Turalyon was sprawled on his back, groaning. Alleria watched him. Pain squeezed her soul for what she had done and for what she was about to do.

"We are safe. Far from Argus," she said.

He slowly sat up. His eyes took in the chaos of the Nether. And then he could do nothing but stare at her. "What... what did you do?"

She didn't answer him. She wanted to lie to him, but she couldn't. Not again.

"Alleria." He reached for her. She pulled away. "Alleria, please! Why? *Why?*"

Her voice was calm. "That is what I asked. *Why?* Then I understood. We were not meant to die on Argus today. Even Xe'ra knew it. But she could not see how we escaped. She could not see that it was the Shadow that would save us."

"I would rather have *died* than have you fall to evil!"

"I know. And yet my fate has not changed. We will see our son again. We will defeat the Legion."

"Alleria..." Turalyon's voice was choked with horror. "This can be undone. Ask forgiveness. Forswear the Shadow. I'm sure Xe'ra will help you."

He did not understand. Alleria could not fault him; she only understood bits and pieces of what she had done. "I was destined to walk the path of the Light for a long time. Now I must learn how to survive a new path." She wished she knew what lay at the end of it.

He leaned forward, grabbing her hands. "This isn't the way—"

When they touched, pain shot through her. She flinched. So did he. *The Light and the Shadow cannot exist together.* He let go, looking at his hands in disbelief.

"Find your way back to the *Xenedar*. The Army of the Light still needs you." Another portal, jagged and black, opened up next to her. "Just know that we are not enemies. Not now, not ever. Believe it, Turalyon. Please believe it."

"Alleria, wait—"

"See you on the other side, my love."

She wanted to stay. She wanted nothing more than to embrace him, renounce the Shadow, and return to the Light. But that was not the path that would protect Azeroth. If it was her fate to fall to darkness, she needed to learn how to endure it.

And if she couldn't, she needed to be far away from the people she loved. For their sakes.

She pushed herself into the portal. Her last glimpse before it closed was of Turalyon. He was reaching out for her, tears staining his cheeks.

He looked as if he were watching her end her own life.

She was not so sure he was wrong.

Part Three – Shadow & Light

"I understand your bargain, Alleria Windrunner. But I must ask: do you?"

Alleria didn't blink. "Does it matter?"

"Not to me."

Alleria understood the *bargain* well enough. But its *consequences*... the price she might pay...

Well. That would come later. Before she could destroy the Burning Legion, she needed to escape it. Being captured had not *exactly* been part of her plan, but circumstances had required some improvisation. If nothing else, it had brought her close to her prize. Five hundred years of searching had passed. Now her goal was within reach. "We will need to act soon. I believe they have lost patience with me. Be ready, Locus-Walker."

Laughter came from the cage floating above her. "I have been here far longer than you, Windrunner. I am more than ready to leave."

"Good." Alleria had kept watch on the Legion's interrogators. Over the past few days, they had grown visibly frustrated that her will had not been broken. Time was short. "I expect this will be messy."

Violet light pulsed from the other creature's cage. "Then our first lesson begins now. It is a simple technique. And it is very messy indeed. Listen well."

Alleria closed her eyes and opened her mind. The warnings of Xe'ra echoed through her thoughts. She ignored them. She had long since committed to this path.

She only hoped she could endure it.

* * *

The fighting on Argus had ceased for a moment. That would not last.

High Exarch Turalyon strode through the hall, behind the skirmish line. "Be ready! Hold for the first wave, then fall back. We need to draw them *all* the way in!"

He passed Lothraxion. The nathrezim looked back at him. "Can we give them enough time?" Turalyon said nothing, and that was answer enough. Lothraxion grunted. "Well, we can sting the Legion's pride, at least."

A rumble filled the hallways. Heavy footfalls and clattering weapons. It grew louder. Turalyon gripped his sword. Light, how he wished Alleria were still here at his side. "Here they come!"

Snarling demons surged through the small doorway. They were led by three dreadlords. Lothraxion met them with a laugh, blade against blade. "Good to see you again, *brothers*!" Light and fel swirled together in spectacular fury.

They were fighting in a narrow corridor. A chokepoint. The Light could hold against superior numbers for the moment. A demon broke through the front line, but Turalyon's sword took care of it. He glanced behind him. His Artificers were still working furiously on the rift constructs in the main chamber. "Is it done?" he called out.

One of them yelled back, voice pinched with frustration. "Almost! We just need... just a little..."

"We're out of time. Fall back and open the rift!" Turalyon turned to his army and raised his voice. "Fall back! Fall back!"

His soldiers calmly obeyed, stepping backward in unison, handling the scattered fools that tried to charge in alone. They backed out of the hallway and into a wide, tall room, the chamber where the Burning Legion kept its rift barriers. After suffering centuries of raids, the Burning Legion had finally learned how to prevent the Army of the Light from opening rifts into Argus for hit-and-run attacks. These barriers had stopped them cold.

Launching this attack had been a desperate ploy. None in Turalyon's army knew how the barriers worked or how to destroy them. But it was a risk they all had been willing to take. Success would have given them access to Argus once again. They might have threatened to capture the world-soul and sown panic within the Burning Legion's ranks. They might even have forced the Legion to stop its invasion of Azeroth.

But they hadn't succeeded. And now every demon on Argus was closing in.

Lothraxion was right. All that was left was to sting the Legion's pride. But Argus was within the Twisting Nether. Every enemy the army felled would stay down forever.

The army made a show of retreating deep into the chamber. The demons surged out of the corridors, rushing into the open room, so intent on pursuing Turalyon's forces that they did not notice the two paladins waiting, one on either side of the door. When Turalyon could see nothing but demons packing the hallway, he gave his order.

"Now!"

The army stopped retreating. The two paladins at the door stepped back into the hallway, arms extended. Holy power erupted. The demons before them shrieked as the wrath of the Light consumed them all.

Those that had already made it into the chamber turned around in shock, only to have Turalyon and his strike team fall upon them. The battle was quick. Unfair. Just as Turalyon had planned.

One of the paladins, a commander named Rosallas, limped as he exited the hallway. The other never emerged at all. Turalyon muttered a prayer for him and then raised his voice to the others. "It's time to go," he said.

The paladins' transport was still active. It had needed to physically drop onto Argus, but now that it was here, it could briefly force open a rift to the *Xenedar*. The army ducked through the narrow opening, crossing a vast distance in an instant, back to safety. Turalyon was the last to step through. The transport's rift didn't close. Demons were racing toward it. "Shut it down," he told Rosallas.

"I can't. There's something..." A gust of wind blew into the *Xenedar*, and the rift finally snapped shut. The paladin blinked, then shrugged. "My apologies, High Exarch. Something was blocking it."

"Not a surprise. The Legion would love to invade this place," Turalyon said, his heart heavy.

It was the last time they would ever sneak onto Argus. There was no doubt. The Legion would *not* be taken unawares by *Xenedar* transports again.

For now, the Army of the Light was stuck here, hiding in the chaos of the Twisting Nether.

Lothraxion clapped his leader on his shoulders. "A good fight, Turalyon. You commanded us well today."

Turalyon clasped his hand. "You fought admirably. Everyone did. Tell them I said so."

"I will, High Exarch."

Turalyon watched him go. Yes, the army had lost only one of its own against overwhelming odds. But the Legion had won.

The thousand-year war on the Legion had accomplished much. It had freed prisoners from fates worse than death. It had delayed the demons' invasion of Azeroth by decades. And now it was over, ended not with a triumphant last stand but with a small skirmish and a wall the Army of the Light could not breach.

Turalyon wearily walked deep into the *Xenedar* to find Xe'ra. He would tell her of his failure. And he would hear nothing in return. She had foretold that the champions fighting on Azeroth were the only hope of defeating the Burning Legion. Her mind was utterly focused on helping them fend off the invasion.

That hurt Turalyon perhaps more than anything. She had known that he would fail, and she had not tried to help him overcome that fate.

Light, he hoped she would succeed. Until she did, he could do nothing.

* * *

The apprentice inquisitor floated above his dais, looming over Alleria as the bonds of fel magic sent needles of pain shooting through her mind. "Tell me how to find the *Xenedar* or you will suffer for all eternity."

The Burning Legion had shown such creativity in its torments when Alleria first arrived on Niskara. The demons were expert interrogators, capable of inventive ways of cracking open defiant wills. There had been moments when she had genuinely feared she might succumb to the agony... or at the very least, let slip that she had *wanted* to be brought to this prison.

But this? This was downright lazy. It was hard to conceal her contempt. The high inquisitor had talent for his craft. This apprentice had no imagination.

The inquisitor held out his hand. Long, taloned fingers unfurled to reveal a small, polished black crystal in his palm. Alleria had seen its like before. It was a soulstone. "This is a gift from Kil'jaeden. It will be a reward to someone you met a thousand years ago. Do you understand me, Windrunner? If you do not obey, your soul will belong to that demon forever."

"As a bauble around its neck," Alleria muttered.

"Ah, I see you understand perfectly. But maybe that's what you want. When it arrives, your soul and your lover's will be reunited, screaming together in agony until the stars are dust." He clasped his hands in mock adoration. "How romantic that will be."

Alleria did not respond.

The inquisitor sighed with disappointment. "Do you need more convincing first? Very well." He waved a hand, and the bonds of fel disappeared. She fell to the ground, feigning exhaustion. He slowly walked toward her, conjuring some new torment he would never get a chance to use.

She took a deep breath.

"Time to settle our bargain, Locus-Walker," she said.

Alleria shoved herself to her feet. She had no physical weapons. The inquisitors had blocked her from the Light. But the Legion, as cunning as it was, had not imagined that a warrior of the Army of the Light had embraced the Shadow.

Dark power surged through her veins. The voices of the Void returned to her, giddy and raving. She followed the Locus-Walker's lesson. One hand reached toward the inquisitor. The other, toward the Locus-Walker's cage. Both exploded into fragments. The demon did not even have time to scream.

Alleria waited, listening. There was no alarm. No cries of anger. The inquisitor had been so confident that he had not brought guards, nor had he summoned any guardian eyes. None had witnessed this.

The Locus-Walker emerged from the ruins of his cage. He was an ethereal, a creature of pure energy. When he was captured, his wrappings had been destroyed. His form was a mass of irregular power. "Well struck, Alleria. I have had worse students."

She looked around. Briefly, she considered searching for her bow, but she knew she did not have time. The inquisitor's absence would be noticed before long. "We need to go."

"Yes, we do." Shadow magic flowed from him. A portal ripped open the air in front of them. "I need to recover. You need to train. I know where we can do both."

Alleria hesitated. She knelt next to the inquisitor's remains. The ethereal shivered with impatience. "What are you waiting for?"

She held up the soulstone. "This one was meant for me. I fear there is another, meant for someone I care about very much."

The ethereal's words held no pity. "Our bargain does not require me to wait until you are ready. Decide which is more important. Now."

Alleria locked a furious stare on him, but there was no decision to make. "He is hiding in the Twisting Nether. I do not know how to find him."

"You will. If he's still alive when you're done."

"Then let us go."

She stepped through the portal. The twisting skies of Niskara vanished. In their place was... nothing. No sound. No wind. No ground. Nothing but an oppressive silence. Only the glow of the ethereal provided any light at all. Alleria floated freely.

"Until you learn how to survive here, it is best that you do not attract too much attention. Welcome to the Void, Alleria Windrunner."

"Where do we begin?"

"Shall we start with more killing? No. That comes naturally to you. Perhaps something more... fundamental." He pulsed, and Shadow began to writhe in front of him. "Let's talk about maintaining your sanity. The Void will do everything it can to shatter your will."

"That sounds like a problem."

"Quite."

* * *

"Wake up, Turalyon. Wake up."

Turalyon opened his eyes. There was a sharp pain in his chest. He ignored it and sat up. "What's wrong?"

Lothraxion was standing in the hallway. "I found a dead body."

"What?"

"Down at the bottom of the *Xenedar*. It's a woman, Turalyon. I'm sorry," he said.

Turalyon jumped to his feet. "Tell me it isn't her." Lothraxion said nothing, and that was answer enough. His expression was filled with sorrow. Turalyon's heart sank. "Take me there."

They set off immediately, heading deeper into the vessel. Turalyon tried to keep a firm grip on his emotions, but his thoughts were a maelstrom whirling in his head. It had been centuries since he had last seen Alleria. He had mourned her. He had believed her to be lost forever. But this new pain in his chest pulsed with each heartbeat. Light help him, maybe he had sensed her death. Maybe—

No. Turalyon drew himself up. Now was not the time for grief. Not until he knew for certain. How could her body be here, in the *Xenedar*?

They arrived in the vessel's hall of crystals, the place from where the *Xenedar*'s power flowed. None of the Artificers were at their stations. With the ship in hiding, there was no need for them to maintain a constant presence.

Lothraxion led Turalyon into the back corner. "Over there, High Exarch."

Behind the last crystal structure, obscured by shadows, Turalyon saw a body. "Light, no," he breathed. He rushed over and kneeled, reaching out to her.

His breath caught. It wasn't Alleria. It wasn't a woman. It wasn't even a corpse.

Lying on the floor was... Lothraxion. His chest was moving. His eyes were wide. Words hissed out between motionless lips.

"... *behind... you...*"

Turalyon rose to his feet, turning. He opened himself to the Light, inviting its thunderous power down as righteous judgment upon the impostor who—

"Aaah!"

The pain in his chest flared, stabbing deep into his soul. Turalyon couldn't move. The Light slipped from his grasp. He couldn't even say a word. He could barely think. He teetered, tilted, and then collapsed onto the floor, unable to twitch.

The creature who looked like Lothraxion sauntered over to him, grinning.

"I told you we would meet again, human," it said. With a simple gesture, the creature dispelled its disguise. The *eredar* assassin from Draenor leaned in close, showing Turalyon its dagger. There was a

small drop of red blood on it, mixed with vile poisons that smoked and sparked. "I could have ended this while you slept, *High Exarch*, but then I thought... preserving your soul will take time, and I will need a quiet place to finish the job." The eredar turned toward Lothraxion. "And then I realized how pleased Kil'jaeden will be to see you again, traitor."

Lothraxion was beginning to move. The poison must have been wearing off.

"... *Light... will burn you...*"

The assassin buried the dagger in Lothraxion's forearm, and the nathrezim went still. "Don't worry. You will live. You will witness your high exarch, one of the bright lights of Azeroth, becoming my prized trophy." The eredar held a small black soulstone between two fingers, showing it to both of them. Then it turned back to Turalyon. "I want you to know that Alleria Windrunner is alive. The Burning Legion has her in a cage. Once I have collected your soul, I will collect hers. You will be together forever, with me, just as I promised. In every moment, you will feel her suffering as keenly as your own."

The soulstone floated into the air above Turalyon. He summoned every ounce of his will to resist the poison that had rendered him helpless. He tried to fight. He tried to scream. He tried to wield the Light. He tried to call out to Xe'ra. Not a sound emerged. Not a finger moved.

The assassin began its work with a chuckle.

* * *

"The Shadow will heal your scars. The Shadow will show you your destiny."

Alleria was not amused. "Stay out of my memories."

Laughter filled the air around her. "I couldn't, even if I tried. I will know everything about you when this is done. Does that inspire second thoughts?"

"No."

"Then let us begin. You have been a remarkable student thus far, Alleria Windrunner. But you have barely touched the Shadow. To truly understand your destiny, you must become one with it." The ethereal's power pulsed softly. "And that is where the danger lies. You see the Void as an enemy. It sees you the same way. For now. Its very nature is hostile to what you know as *life* and *sanity*." The blackness around them seemed to shift. "But without the Shadow, you would have never been alive at all."

The darkness touched Alleria. The voices she had learned to ignore became loud. So, so loud. Alleria couldn't push them away. She couldn't resist them. But the Locus-Walker kept speaking, guiding her through the storm.

"You already understand one truth, Alleria. The Light is blind. It cannot see the whole of destiny, because it alone is not responsible for it. Your path was shrouded by Shadow, and thus it was hidden from the Light." The strength of his words gave her an anchor to cling to as the torrents of darkness tossed her about. "Now understand another truth. The Shadow is just as blind. It saw your fate

intertwining with its own, and it rejoiced. But it, too, sees only a fragment of destiny. But that fragment is unlike anything you've known before."

Alleria began to see visions. Terrible, terrible visions.

She saw the Light moving through the cosmos like a ravenous predator. She saw it touch the minds of Azeroth's mortals—a touch that corrupted them forever. She saw generations live and die in invisible chains, bound to a force that granted them fleeting moments of peace in exchange for absolute obedience.

She saw war. She saw the forces of the Light striking back against the Void. She saw darkened worlds burning in holy fire. She saw millions of creatures encased in luminous crystals the size of mountains, sustained by the Light and unable to die. Warriors of the Light were monsters, corrupting and consuming everything they touched.

On and on and on it went, until she could not even comprehend it all.

"Lies," she whispered. "These are all lies."

"Sear that into your heart," the Locus-Walker said. "Know that, and never forget it."

"I do not... What...?"

The Locus-Walker kept her firmly afloat. "You have known the Shadow as nothing but horrors. The Shadow sees the Light in the same way. Neither viewpoint is true. Neither is wrong." The roar of the Void nearly drowned him out. The masters of the Void were clawing at her mind. She barely fought them off. "The Light seeks one path and shuns all others as lies. The Shadow seeks every possible path and sees them all as truth."

More visions. Possible futures. She saw Xe'ra, the Mother of Light, declaring her a heretic and calling for her death. She saw her blood on Turalyon's sword. She saw Arator calling an army of paladins to hunt her down, only to fall with her arrows in his throat. She saw herself kneeling before the One Who Slumbers beneath Azeroth's waves. She saw herself killing it and taking its place, leading a throng of horrors to consume every nation.

As she swam in the Shadow, all these visions seemed true. At first.

Slowly she began to see the difference between the Shadow's memories... the Shadow's plans... and the Shadow's *desires*. And from that...

Destiny. She saw what the Light could not. She saw what even the *Shadow* could not, because, yes, it was just as blind.

She saw terrible choices. She saw noble betrayals. She saw... victory, in a way she could scarcely comprehend.

And among all of that, she saw countless events that would never happen. The lies of the Void were strong, intoxicating, but they quickly collapsed.

Perhaps one day she would fall to madness. Perhaps one day she would betray her allies. She was capable of it. But she would never, not in any possibility, not in any circumstance, harm her son. She would never lift a finger against Arator. Even if he killed her for what she had become, she would accept it gladly. The weight of *that* truth kept her afloat. And she could feel the Shadow's confusion. It did not understand the bonds between mortals. It did not understand that there were some things that could not be corrupted.

Another truth emerged. This was happening too soon. She was swimming in the Shadow before her destiny demanded it.

"You are ready, Alleria. Every ounce of power out there will be at your command. Dive deeply into it. Your mind will yet be your own."

She was indeed *ready*. But it was not yet *time*. She had witnessed herself jumping from a cliff, peacefully surrendering to the long fall. When the time came, there would be no choice and no alternative. Now, she could still escape. And her destiny demanded that she *must*.

Alleria tried to make sense of it all. She searched the Void's knowledge for answers. When none came, she instinctively reached out for the Light. The two forces collided in a blinding jolt of pain. But she glimpsed a truth: Turalyon screaming silently as his soul was ripped from his body.

That was neither the past nor the future. It was happening now. She knew it. "Let me out. Let me out!"

"We are not done, Alleria. No matter how terrifying it seems, you must—"

Alleria lashed out. All of the dark power filling her slammed into the Locus-Walker. With a roar of surprise, he let go of her mind.

Gasping, she flung the Shadow away. She was free again, floating in the darkness.

The Locus-Walker loomed in front of her, furious. "Coward. I should have expected no less from a mortal." He was gathering power, intending to strike back at her.

Alleria ignored him. She pulled out the soulstone she had taken from the inquisitor on Niskara. The black crystal was now glowing green. "I knew it. Light help me, I knew it was real."

The Locus-Walker paused. "What did you see?"

"Turalyon is about to die."

The ethereal snatched up the stone and studied it carefully. His power delved into it, and he laughed. "You have made a very determined enemy, Windrunner." She wasn't sure if he was talking about the assassin or himself. "The Void will use your love against you. You understand that, yes?"

"Turalyon may die one day, but he cannot die *this* day, or I am lost."

The ethereal shimmered. "Remember what I said about truth and lies."

"That truth did not come from the Void. That truth was *changing* the Void."

He stared into the soulstone again. "Interesting. You may have a unique destiny, Alleria Windrunner. Go to him. I've taught you how." He returned the soulstone to her.

Alleria hesitated. "I do not know where the *Xenedar* is."

"Yes, you do. You hold its location in your hand."

It took her a moment to understand. She could see the eredar's work in this stone because the two stones were *linked*. The assassin had intended to have them together around its neck.

She didn't need to know where the eredar was, because she knew where the other stone was.

She looked back at the Locus-Walker. "I suppose our bargain is ended, then."

"Oh... I believe we will meet again," he mused.

She reached through the soulstone, used what the Locus-Walker had taught her. The portal to the *Xenedar* opened instantly.

* * *

The Light could not save Turalyon. He had accepted that. But the Light could still offer him comfort. Without it, Turalyon would have been exposed to the full, raw agony of having his soul stripped away, piece by piece. He kept his eyes closed, not wanting to see his own spirit leaving his body.

Even so, the pain was nearly unbearable. "The Light shine upon us all," he tried to say. The sounds of the assassin's spells filled his ears; he did not know if the words escaped his mouth. He kept praying anyway. "Let evil flee before righteousness; let the innocent live in peace. Let the day come when none need fear. For that day, I give my life gladly."

His tormentor must have heard him. "I wonder how many years it will be before you beg me for mercy, knowing that I will not grant you even a moment of it."

Turalyon felt a breath of cold wind cross his face. It smelled of nothing, as though it had never before touched anything that lived.

And then he heard a scream. He thought it was his own voice, finally giving in to the pain. It wasn't. It was the assassin.

"*How?! How are you here?!*"

"You were right. We were destined to meet again."

Turalyon opened his eyes. It was her. Alleria. Wreathed in darkness. He did not feel the Light within her.

The assassin shrieked, brandishing a dagger. The demon leapt at her, slashing for her throat.

She did not even lift a hand. Inky black smoke coalesced in midair, forming a curved spike. It slammed into the assassin's chest. Turalyon saw the tip of the smoke appear out of the creature's back, spraying blood. The eredar fell to its knees, eyes wide, mouth moving soundlessly.

Alleria stepped forward. "Our souls as baubles around your neck. Is that the fate you saw? I have seen another." Now she lifted her hands. Dark magic gathered between them.

The assassin, bug-eyed and panting, simply vanished. Reality folded in upon the demon, and it was gone.

Alleria knelt next to Turalyon, staring at the soulstone hovering above his head. "I cannot fix this. Not on my own." She turned to Lothraxion. "I can sense the poison in your veins. I am sorry. This will hurt."

She curled her fingers. Lothraxion convulsed, screaming. Turalyon could see foul green smoke trailing beneath the nathrezim's claws. Blood and sizzling liquid dripped to the floor. She was ripping the poison out of his body, through his skin.

All at once, it was done, and Lothraxion could move again. He was on his feet in an instant, breath ragged. "Alleria... What happened to you...?"

"Save Turalyon. Please. I need to finish this. That demon threatened my son."

* * *

The creature ran. It ran and ran and ran. Sliding between realms. Dancing between the Twisting Nether and the Void. It ripped Alleria's spike free from its chest. The weapon dissolved into nothing. The eredar was gasping in pain. Each step came with a chant.

"Have to get away. Have to get away. Have to get away."

The demon had gone by many names in its life. Now it answered only to the task Kil'jaeden had given it: Eradication. Bred from birth to ascend above its brethren. Molded from age to age. Shaped. Tormented. The demon's skills had been enhanced. Even the other eredar feared it. And why wouldn't they? It could hide between dimensions. It could shift appearances on a whim. It could spot those whose fates threatened the Burning Legion.

Then it had been killed. On Draenor. By *her*.

Kil'jaeden had punished it. And then he had made the demon more powerful than ever. The process had taken centuries.

And now it had pleased Kil'jaeden for the eredar to kill *him*. And after *him*, it had been promised *her*. It had been given the means to preserve them and torment them forevermore.

But *she* had escaped. And she... she...

She had changed. She knew the ways of oblivion.

She knew how to command the final death.

"Have to get away. Have to get away. Have to—"

Dark matter wrapped around its neck. The demon screamed as it was yanked from its dance and pulled back onto the *Xenedar*. Back into the Twisting Nether.

The eredar was on its feet in a second, hissing through its fanged teeth. Its daggers whirled in both hands, and it sliced away the bonds of Shadow. With a desperate laugh, it hurled its poisoned blades at the woman. She had pulled it *here*, to the one place where it could *die*, and—

The blades stopped in midair. She stepped past them.

"Kil'jaeden! Save me-e-e-e!"

"Is he watching?" Alleria walked forward. Closing the distance. "Are you a favorite pet of his?"

The demon conjured more daggers, howling with fear. They all vanished before they could hit her. She kept walking toward it. Step. After step. After step. Another spike slammed into its left shoulder.

Its right arm continued to throw daggers. The eredar could think of nothing else to do. "Save me," it cried again.

Another spike. The demon's other arm went limp. "I know what you fear," she said. "I know what the Burning Legion fears. I know what drove your masters to their terrible crusade."

The eredar could feel Kil'jaeden's disappointment. He had heard its cries... and ignored them.

And then she was standing before it.

The demon fell to its knees. It couldn't even lift its arms to beg for mercy. All it could do was wheeze out its last prayer. "Please... please... please..."

She knelt in front of it, meeting its gaze. All hope died with her words. "You promised to kill my son."

Her dagger slipped easily into its throat. The demon made not a sound. It just stared at her with unblinking eyes as its life drained away.

"This is an easy end," she said softly. "I could have given you to the masters of the Void. But they might have turned you. And I would be *done* with this."

Behind her, on the other end of the hall, were Turalyon and Lothraxion. Watching. The demon saw astonishment in their eyes. It saw fear.

Then it all faded away. It was a relief.

* * *

Turalyon hurt. His entire body ached. It wasn't only physical pain. His thoughts, his very soul, pulsed with agony. But he had survived. The soulstone lay motionless on the ground, inert, nothing but a trophy now. Lothraxion helped him to his feet. Alleria was returning. It was a long walk across the crystal hall. He watched her every step, mind numb, barely able to think.

She stopped in front of him. She looked exhausted. "It is good to see you again," she said.

He wanted to tell her the same. He wanted to tell her that he loved her and that nothing would ever change that. It would have been true. But he couldn't find the words. Not yet. She seemed to understand.

"My destiny does not end with the Light. It ends in darkness. I have known that for a long, long time." She met his gaze without blinking. "And if I do not follow that path, I put you, Arator, and all of Azeroth at risk. Please believe me."

Lothraxion spoke up. "I have known darkness, Alleria. I have seen lost creatures. You are not one of them. You have not crossed the threshold."

"I will, one day," she said simply.

The nathrezim scoffed. "In the Legion's name, I did countless things that cannot be forgiven. I committed *genocide* over and over and over again. The Light redeemed me nonetheless. I will not give up on you, Alleria Windrunner. Not that easily."

Turalyon studied her face. He knew her too well. She appreciated what Lothraxion was saying... but she didn't believe it. "Alleria, go. Leave."

Pain flashed across her eyes. "No."

"I wish you could stay." Turalyon's words held no anger, only agonizing truth. "Xe'ra will not allow that. She will... You *have* to leave, Alleria. While you still can. You don't know what she will do."

"I know *precisely* what she will do. And I know what will come after that."

A great and terrible presence filled the hall. Turalyon felt holy wrath coalescing around Alleria. He stepped next to her. "Xe'ra, please, show mercy," he said.

I warned her what would happen if she tolerated the Shadow. And now she would defile this place.

Lothraxion knelt before the whirling power of the Mother of Light. "Hear my words. Lady Alleria Windrunner came back to save us, knowing that she would not be accepted here. Courage, honor, selflessness... these virtues still reside in her heart."

Virtues count for nothing if you stray from the path the Light has chosen for you.

And yet, despite her anger, Xe'ra hesitated.

Turalyon opened his mind to her, letting her see his doubts, anguish, and resolve. "I beg you, Xe'ra, do not harm her."

Xe'ra's merciless regard examined his soul, and then turned back to the woman he loved.

Alleria Windrunner. Will you renounce the Void and pledge obedience to the Light?

Alleria spoke without fear. "I will fight the Burning Legion until it is dust."

Answer my question.

"We walk different paths, but we are not enemies. I have seen it. I will join the Army of the Light in the final battle against the Legion, and together we will bring the demons down."

No, Alleria. You will not. You will remain here, imprisoned, until you accept the path of righteousness once again. I will not allow you to taint what I have foreseen.

"Do what you must."

Alleria did not resist, even as members of the Army of the Light led her away to be imprisoned elsewhere in the *Xenedar*. Turalyon watched her go. She looked back at him with a reassuring smile.

Lothraxion waited there with him. "She will come back. Do not lose faith."

"I still trust in the Light's purpose. But... I still trust Alleria. I trust her as much as I ever have." He looked at Lothraxion. "Does that make me a fool?"

"If so, then we're both fools, brother."

Turalyon sat down as healers came to tend to his wounds. He scarcely noticed them. His thoughts were aflame. His destiny was shrouded. He could not see what would happen.

But there was a refuge from his turmoil. A calm center.

No matter what happened, he would always trust her. He would always fight for her. And she would do the same for him. He was certain of it.

That gave him peace.