



B. H-Müller's  
**A Path to Salvation**  
Love-Induced Insanity  
A Warcraft based story

©B. H. Müller aka Lynoa06 - 2010

All Rights Reserved

*This story is the hard work resulting of years of roleplay. For a long while, I have been tempted with writing. And though I agree my drafts were quite full of typos and various mistakes, I finally decided to cross the line and, after hours and hours of writing, I am rather proud of what I have achieved.*

*Maureen is a fascinating character, to me at least. The symbol of a life denied all humanity, forced to kill, to slay in the name of a heathen and unholy God, and who tries to find love and seek comfort. What she seeks, her ultimate goal, is to create a Haven. I wanted the story to set up slowly, for Jidaeo is her needed counterpart that keeps her both in love and sane. A strange paradox in our woman, whose feelings are often twisted and as wretched as her soul.*

*I would love to thank the kind souls at Conquest of the Horde who helped build my story and gave me hours of fun for a long, long while. I hope you will have as much pleasure reading it as I had writing it. It does need much nitpicking and fixing, but so far it holds. I dearly wish you..a good journey.*

*This book is dedicated first to J. Wille, the person who has enlightened my life for so long, and whom I will never regret. Secondly, this short story is also dedicated to my loving family, mother, and siblings, who have supported and keep supporting me as I move on in life.*

**-Lynoa06/Aveyond06**

## **Part One : The Skull of Shadow ~ The Legend of Shalla'drassil**

- [Chapter One : The Legend of Shalla'drassil \(Page 3\)](#)
- [Chapter Two : Into the Purple Yonder \(Page 5\)](#)
- [Chapter Three : A Journey to Eldre'Thalas \(Page 7\)](#)
- [Chapter Four : The Twin Keys \(Page 11\)](#)
- [Chapter Five : And Then There Were None \(Page 14\)](#)
- [Chapter Six : A Troublesome Journey \(Page 16\)](#)
- [Chapter Seven : Backwards in the Dragon's Lair \(Page 21\)](#)
- [Chapter Eight – Interlude : Long Loves Die Harder \(Page 24\)](#)
- [Chapter Nine : Over the Hills \(Page 26\)](#)

*To be released later :*

## **Part Two : To Northrend and Beyond ~ Maureen Marches On**

## **Part Three : The Light of Nova ~ Darkness to Starlust**

## Part One

### The Skull of Shadow ~ The Legend of Shalla'drassil

#### Chapter One

##### The Legend of Shalla'drassil

Jidaeo was, to be certain, a most noble man. Sir Novalight, raised in undeath, bound to the will of the Lich King, and later freed, was a Talah'dore. In Thalassian, this simply meant “Child of death”. In Darnassian, too. This is, however, much beyond the subject of this tale. For two hundred and fifty years now, he wandered the roads and later, the skies of the world aboard his Zeppelin. He was a shrewd businessman, and a most courageous elf. But also, he has been terribly broken in his life. Slain by a lich, ambushed by a betraying friend. Sir Novalight did not have the brightest of destinies. And yet he kept searching, in the shadows, freed after years of torture. The Light of Nova was his pride. His Guild, and most of all, his ways to keep to his former destiny. Yet, as adventurous as he seemed, little was he aware of what life – or rather, Scourge-tainted unlife, though he was by no means evil – would await him.

He was a Talah'dorei.

Maureen Sunrayne used to be a preppy high elf, a haughty and proud tavern-dweller with a huge ego and ambitions. Her past is genuinely shrouded in mystery. Let it just be said that she was almost fifty years younger than Jidaeo, which in Elvish lifespan means almost nothing; that her parents were emissaries for the Kingdom of Stratholme, that she also grew in nobility and wasting – and that she suffered the same fate as our unfortunate Lord. Slain and resurrected, enslaved by the Lich King, and re birthed after his fall as a freelance warrior. “Rebirthed”, of course, is not literary. Maureen had indeed well accepted her fate as a Talah'dore, and shunned both the High Elven race she was supposed to be representable, and the mana-licking Sin'dorei. Not much difference in both races, at least at this level.

In fact, she is the one who invented the term. Her goals were to create a haven for persecuted Death Knights, mainly of her own race, for ulterior rather dubious motives. Over time, she had come to believe such people were gifted, and no longer High Elves, or Blood Elves for some. No, they were death children – her children, her siblings. She was the one behind those ideas. She met Jidaeo in Booty Bay, and has been enthralled in him. For he was a like-minded Talah'dore. A most charming nobleman. And most of all... she would need him to satiate her twisted feelings.

She, too, was a Talah'dorei.

Maureen entered the Farstrider's Inn on a rainy day. It doesn't rain very often over Silvermoon, but when it does, it looks like the magic of the lands pulsates through every lamppost, every flowerpot, every little decoration the wondrous city has to offer. She wetted herself, passing her hand against her frosted skin as to remove the water. No, it was not freezing ice, contrary to popular belief. She advanced in the center of the tavern and looked about. It was just as richly embellished as the city proper, with purple carpets, gold-tripped silken weaving curtains, and just neatly chiseled arks that dominated the rooms and held the ceilings together. She walked behind an alley of such arches, and discovered by the marble counter, four Elves, sipping different drinks. She grinned very softly and curled up a stray braid. Jidaeo was sitting at the end of said counter, along on a blue cushion.

*“Greetings, honey.”*

Jidaeo turned up, and swiftly enough, nodded. Maureen grinned even more. Both elves stood and joined upstairs – much to the surprise of an undercover agent of the Light of Nova, sitting in a corner, alone and left out of all doubt. They entered a private alcove, and closed the curtains shut. Both leant towards each other, and Jidaeo held her a parchment. Their lips were so close. She was gazing in his blueish, glowing eyes. No doubt, she was in love – the crazy, manic kind, as much as a tortured, wretched warrior can. The parchment was about a mission. Maureen had enrolled Jidaeo in her idea of a Haven, but he, too, needed her for his own purposes. Or their shared one, rather, for Jidaeo spread quite a bunch of information to like-minded Sin'dorei, who would be willing to become, from their status as Death Knights, genuine Talah'dorei. The girl chuckled as she read the parchment.

*“The Skull of the Kal'dorei is known as nothing else than Shalla'drassil. Forged in a black matter, darker than ebony and sturdier than pure diamond, and shaped in the head of a fallen Night Elf. Shortly after the Sundering, it was lost in the sands of times.”*

Maureen kept on reading. A good half of the parchment described the various locations it was hinted, over the course of the years, to be. In red ink, or something looking like ink anyways, a few locations had been circled over. *“Azscara Crater, about 250 years ago.” “The Goblins of Winterspring pointed out in their excavations the presence of a strange, ebony statue buried in sand”, or “Eldre'Thalas ravels since millenia with special items of value to Kaldorei. It was there a caravan, about ten years back, placed an artifact of high value and unholy pride.”* Nonetheless, there was one mention, the last on the list, that caught her attention. Out of interest, she thought the text aloud.

*“It seems it has birthed long ago, when Kalimdor was but a single mainland, in a forlorn grove, now located in the Province of Duskwood. Legend has it, a powerful Highborne mage had tried to forge it with dark magics, off a lifelong foe.”* Maureen grinned. Those were Drowish legends, dating from well before the Kaldorei were known as such. She had planned, for her Haven, to base her Talah'dorei culture off those mystical people of strife and deception. At such, the expedition could prove rather interesting for herself as well. But as much as she sought refuge in her own realm, she loved Jidaeo, more than any mortal could conceive. Having ended so much lives, she was herself knowing of their both constitution, almost immortal – a life of endless loving and ruling. She smirked to herself as such thoughts came to her mind. She continued, nonetheless, the reading. *“...The Skull was placed there, in the Grove, resting for eternity. It is only after the Sundering its location was lost, perhaps stolen by Highborne, or vengeful Trolls, or bemused Human slaves who fled their owners in the aftermath of the disaster, and sought something to relieve their fears. What is sure, is that about a month ago, one of my agents discovered of a Kaldorei pilgrimage into the lands. Duskwood is certainly the first place to visit, at such.”*

Maureen glanced at Jidaeo. He was sweetly smiling, and glanced back in her eyes. She might have taken it as love. He was just offering her a deal. Which she accepted, right away. She would go by herself, she declared, and venture into the Duskwoods, unraveling whichever mystery shrouded the lands. She departed the following night on a purple Hawkstrider, and for about a week, rode almost tirelessly through the lands. Evading any hostile monsters, and dispatching the few foolish enough to hinder her progress. She arrived, on the eighth morning following her departure, in a daunted, cursed forest. Southern Elwynn, also known as Duskwood. She laid the bird and herself to rest, as she had already passed a few times in the area, and knew her way rather well. At least until the mouth of the grove, which was surrounded on three sides by great, dangerous, infested hills. She finally arrived in central Duskwood, in the Forlorn Grove. She would begin her quest for treasure, knowledge...and survival.

## Chapter Two

### Into the Purple Yonder

The Forlorn Grove. The name itself would give chills to many an adventurer. Its real name was the Twilight Grove. A center for druidism and home to many relics, including the infamous Scythe of Elune that caused so much hardships in those parts of the lands. Because of the ferocious creatures guarding the entry of the long-dead volcano crater, the locals, and later the explorers themselves, came to call the place forlorn. Maureen rather despised local lore, to be honest. She had arrived at the narrow pass entering into the far greater vale. She glanced upstairs and nodded, her blueish eyes examining the skies with renewed interest. The skies in Duskwood are often gray and charged with raining clouds, but around the Grove, everything teemed with life. An unlikely encounter. There was also nothing about the ferocious creatures – worgens, to be exact – guarding the alley.

The girl chuckled, and passed through the narrow opening. She did not care much about Duskwood proper, but she was ravished by the place. Majestic trees and wispy candles flied about her, tingling with each modification in their weaved direction. Under her feet, the ground cracked with each step, and seemed to carry her upwards, hiding some sort of holy secret deep underneath. Various wildlife beasts came to peer at the knight, then carelessly continued on their daily routines. The girl was surrounded in a purple haze, dense and mysterious, which gave an eerie scent to the whole landscape.

Maureen was rather confident, obviously. After all, she was an elite warrior, and she had more than just mere trust in her blade – her soul she felt engraved in it. And as she drew it, she chuckled with a craving tone. She took a good bunch of fun hunting a huge boar through the deep, think woods, and all happy, gave its remains as it died to her runeblade, to the Hawkstrider which was following from afar, wary of any potential danger.

Maureen had not only been having fun during that time, but was also seeking something. She supposed the skull would be held in an ancient temple, which she imagined as dating back from the times Kalimdor was one mainland, and as harboring the typical curved patterns, so cherished by Kaldorei. She searched for hours – nothing was marked on her map, but an endless sea of trees. Certainly, none had actually been mapping the crater, save for a few clearings here and there, and even more likely, the latest maps were drawn from zeppelins, and therefore nothing under the canopies could really been read. As the sun set down, though she would not have any idea, being rather enclosed under the dominating shades, she no longer ran through.

She was glancing down at the ground, walking forwards. Likely lost in thought – the absence of Jidaeo began to weigh her to intolerable levels. She was madly in love with him, and madly was no euphemism. Suddenly, the ground became stone, and she stopped, peering up and forwards. She let a gurgle of amazement. Before her, a dimly-lit Kaldorei house stood, proud and old, as the cracks and growing vines on the sturdy wood would proof. It seemed totally enclosed, with no windows, only a few blueish lampposts for all lighting – and a widely opened door. She approached. A wrought iron device existed in lieu of a door, and seemed to open and close by sliding on the sides. She fearlessly entered, her steps braving the silence that reigned in the building. Her narrow eyes frowned even more. It was totally empty and blank. Apart, in the back of the square room, from a simple chest. Quietly, she neared the strange piece of furniture, and examined it. It was a bronze chest, seemingly placed here since forever. There was a huge keyhole on its front, though it seemed unlocked. Her ears flinched, however, as she touched it – it opened. And revealed nothing. There was absolutely nothing in the chest. She sighed and closed it, obviously rather disappointed.

Her ears twirled once more, but this time, not out of interest. In her back, she had heard cracking footsteps, quite different from what a deer or a boar could make. She turned, and instinctively, drew her runeblade. She pointed it forwards, fiercely, yet just as quietly. Three figures entered the room. She backed off. From where they had come, she had no idea. Did they follow her? It would not have been difficult, for she had not bothered hiding her traces. Could they have been setting a trap? It seemed likely. The men themselves advanced. They were neatly dressed in weaving, white cloaks, not dirtied a single bit, neatly brought about the waist. The trims bore sky blue points, upwards; and around the best the same pointing threads could be seen. The middle man advanced and drew a sword. She could not spot their faces. Those were hooded in a white cap that hid their more descriptive features. Suddenly she remembered those people. Similar soldiers had sneaked into Jidaeo's zeppelin, about a month back, and attempted to hijack it. She had, then, crossed two men dead, with Jidaeo casting a freezing bolt in the third's heart. She decided to do the same this time.

No bother talking. Focus and keep concentrated. Confrontations are always silent. Nothing like those knightly books that could be found all around Silvermoon, all boring and cheap. She grinned, though. She had not killed for a while, and an unnatural hunger began to take hold of her. She leaped in front of the hooded swordsman, who fell to his death. However, the two others blinked forwards – behind her. Quickly, they each casted a Cone of Cold and Dragon's Breath spell. She turned and deflected them with her broad runeblade, then with the strength of two fully grown men, rushed to pierce through each's heart. Both fell side to side, without a noise. As she walked on the first warrior's corpse, as a final, fatal sign of defiance, she noticed something out of his left hand. A sort of scribbled paper. She took it, and narrowed her sight even further to try to decipher the handwriting on it.

*“Eldre'Thalas is the Key. Seek the Dire Maul, three hundred paces, two hundred back, one thousand astern. They say Wardens are waiting. Wait before engaging. They are neutral to us, yet.”*

She placed the paper in a pocket of her frozen armor, and glanced outside. It seemed quiet. There had been none following – at least none else. Or so she thought. Unable to further verify, and pressed by more important matters, she hopped on her strider. Carefully looking behind the shades again, she swayed her head in dismay, gazed up to the house once more, and having taken good note of its relative location, scurried away. Her frame vanished in the haze of the forest. In a tree, overlooking the roof, a shaded man, dressed in dark leather, smirked behind his mask before jumping from branch to branch, and soundlessly withering as well.

## Chapter Three

### A Journey to Eldre'Thalas

The hapless girl did not intend to be followed. She rode her hawkstrider as fast as it could run on its frail body. It breezed out of the narrow pass, and for two more days, she endlessly traced the muddy beaten tracks. Progressively, the damp, murky woods changed. The air became much warmer, fresh winds squalled through her clothes, and the trees themselves steadily became of a more exotic variety. In about a few hours, she had entered the subtropical zone of Stranglethorn. It used to be, in the times of Kalimdor, the heart of a great Troll kingdom. Nowadays, corrupted by the taunting and unholy magics of the deranged spirit of Gurubashi, it was but the shade of its former glories. Eaten up by the Goblins of Steamweedle, the Murlocs, horrible pesky small gurgling creatures, and some Orcs, it poorly stood the ravages of time. It was also the place of Maureen's latest defeat – the mage Blythe, a gnome mage, who had also participated, and in Maureen's mind just as naughty and reckless as a Murloc, had easily defeated her. She shrugged, the moment she whizzed before the Arena proper, halfway between the Grove and Booty Bay, to the south. It was but an easy lucky victory, and right then, she had much worse matters to care about than gnomes and tournaments. She suspected those mages to be aware of her every moves, and planned to bypass them before they would grab the skull for whatever purpose they had in mind.

Finally, she arrived through a tunnel, under a great hill, and finally on the higher story of the town, Booty Bay. She slowed down and overlooked the area. From the northern side, all she could see was enormous masses of huts and shaggy shacks, disposed in a half-circle around the larger bay. It was large enough to host five well-armed modern frigates. A few boats had docked on the alleyway serving as the lower story of the town, and various goblins were loading and unloading goods, crates, weapons, and many other nifty items fresh from the Western Kalimdor mainlands. She then glanced to her nearest surroundings. Facing the way, to her left a group of Sin'dorei scholarly discussed, amongst the scum and the drunk brawlers, and a coarse flavor of rotten fish emanating from a specific spot in the bay – gnomes were, predictably enough, diving in the dubious spot – they discussed how to properly channel magic and save mana.

*“...of course, there are various formulas about the most efficient way to cast a fireball. But then, it depends on many factors, as the angle of inclination according to the nearest ley line, the distance to a ley knot, and of course the skill of the caster.*

*-Oh!”, another mage declared, “Don't you worry for me. I'm the best magister in the world, I'm a Sin'dorei mage!*

*-Yes, Lilith dearie..let's not delve into your intolerable levels of self-blazing fire scrolls...”*

The knight snickered. Preppy, haughty Sin'dorei. She was much higher, she had been gifted. She was not a High Elf, nor a Blood one, no..she was a Talah'dore. A child of death. A keeper and judge of life. One following the lineage of the long-forsaken Dark Elves. Out of disgust, she glanced to her right. The planks making the upper alleyway split into two. One kept to its level and eventually led to a warehouse, where goblins were competing to decide who would be the cutest, richest, or most handsome. The other one, closer to the bay, led to the lower deck; a human paladin, accompanied with two priestly people, was climbing it down as she peered him with certain scorn.

The whole place was noisy, filled with the distant chants of hearty sailors and the constant babble of goblins and some of the less desirable classes. She walked down the latter plank, to the lower deck; she was now facing its end, where a passenger liner was just beginning check-up routines. She frowned. Immediately to her right was an office. The wooden sign above would read, *“Ratchet Express.”* She immediately drew a mischievous smirk. Indeed, she had thought about hijacking a boat, and found her Haven on some deserted colony. She abandoned the idea as she was

brought up the idea that, in the end, she would be just isolated, without any claim to any fame or victory. Maureen, this time, was not planning to sabotage the rubber chain. She simply entered the office, glanced at the simple furniture – a simple wooden table was standing in the middle of the room, and a chubby goblin was sitting before it, classifying various paperwork. She approached him and laconically, began to attempt a speech.

“-So, greetings”, she spoke. Her voice was distorted, dark, yet subtle. For, indeed, she had worked on coping with the odds and make herself as desirable as possible, however frozen she was. The old goblin glanced up, and with a raspy, high-pitched voice, exclaimed.

“-Myah, myah, welcome to..Ratchet Liners..Express. Myah, I can sell you bargain prices. Traveling alone? I could case you somewhere, myah, nice..you look..myah, gorgeous-  
-No more babble”, she darkly glared in his eyes. “A ticket to Ratchet, and now.”

The goblin shuddered. She growled, as her hands reached to her pouch, and about fifty silver coins flanged on the table. The old person's eyes sparkled at the sight of those shining pieces of minted metal. He grabbed an old, dusty book from under the chair – that's when one would discover he was sitting on that, to reach the shabby table – and opened it, ripping one of the pages. He signed it dirtily, and handed it to Maureen. She signed as well, grabbed the paper, and without any further word, headed for the ferry. Over there, she was halted by another Goblin. Grumpily, he let her in; the hawkstrider watched as it was left abandoned, and after trotting about, scouted away in the hopes its mistress would soon come back.

The boat finally left, as the sun was setting on the slums of Booty Bay, and Maureen placed herself in one of the cabins on the middle deck. She sighed very softly, fell asleep – and stayed so the entire length of the crossing.

Ratchet was a great city, but luckily enough to the ecologically or aesthetically minded, it only sprawled on the shoreline, and one could using the main road from the dock, and be gone from its noxious smog in a matter of minutes. Ratchet is a town not even worth describing; the same size as Booty Bay, it is ten times less prolific and twenty times less appealing; buildings of all kinds near each other in an incoherent mess. And even the people are messy. A melting pot of races – and there has been more than one unlucky adventurer finding foe in a tavern and death at their hands just miles away from the city's gate – what would serve as a gate, as it was poorly guarded, and it is said the Lich King himself once considered taking the city over, instead of sending plagued grain to Stormwind.

This was about the time Maureen rented an hawkstrider from a nearby Sin'dorei merchant; she gave ten silver for the bird, and she left off into the desert. The Barrens were, well, barren. She strode for another good week under the sun, stopping only to feed its bird – she did not need to feed herself. To her luck, for she was still pressing, and there was few time to waste. Luckily, the barrens were a giant wasteland with no curiosities or landmarks whatsoever. Up north, past the Mines and Durotar, there was a mountain pass to Feralas, which she crossed without meeting any opposition. It seemed to her she was going so fast, and that her arrival would certainly come unexpected. She did not bother stopping once in the former Highborne capital kingdom; the bird only cached its breath once she had entered Dire Maul. Eldre'Thalas. The Kaldorei and Dark Elvish capital -almost- until the Sundering, though by no means the royal capital, on the other side of the mainland.

An eerie silence reigned over the place. Huge skeletons were disposed, to her feet – they seemed to belong to ogre-kin, as could be deduced from their broadened hips, the weapons they still held, and the characteristic shape of the spine and skull. Maureen did not seek an Ogre skull. She stepped further, and her sight roved over the landscape. It was raining. The ground was red and



muddy. She shivered, and looked before her. An immense wall stretched into the mist, deep beyond the forest canopy. Rainforest birds were singing, and she advanced, frowning. There was a destroyed, long flight of stairs before her, and beyond, a giant closed door.

As she reached the marble plateau, she noticed two side doors and went through one, to enter Eldreth Row. She smiled. Most High Elvish and Night Elvish capitals and major cities had been built this way – with a row leading to tight streets, bordered by impressive buildings. Silvermoon was the prime example; but even the new capital of Darnassus had at first been planned this way. And she had read that Zul'Azchari, the political capital of the Empire and throne of the evil queen, was just like Eldre'thalas, only ten times more. She did analyze, in the end, for she had ideas for her Talah'dorei cult...which could include building such a city.

In the landscape, distant, misty mountains barren all further sight; but from her all around to the hills, there were nothing else than ruins. Houses, manors, streets, temples could be guessed and sketched; in the middle of the Broken Commons where she emerged, a shattered arena stood, proud, oblivious to the ravages of time and rain. Though obviously enough, all remnants of the former city life had vanished, in ten millenia. She noticed, in the distance, a temple that had not crumbled with the passing of time; it was two good miles away, amongst heavy ruins, beyond a thick wall which had itself begun to collapse. She rode slowly, crossing many ogre-kin cadavers on her way. Until she arrived in the temple itself. It was another Kaldorei styled house, with the arched roof and the purple haze; but it was not lit, had partially collapsed, and its inner was totally void. She unstrapped her runeblade and walked towards an urn, basically the only interesting feature, incrustated in the back-wall; it was sided by two different keyholes. The layout of the temple was not without reminding of that back in Duskwood.

*“-An' now 'dere's some punk that's standin' in MY lair!”*

Maureen turned. She was expecting ogres, big monsters, scary worgens, or elusive mages – but, entering the temple, she found... a short dwarf woman. Not even reaching to her own hips. A dwarfette. She hissed, but calmed down shortly after. The reason is unknown. Likely, she had noticed the said dwarf was armed with a shotgun. Those weapons were rare in use, both because of the sounds they produced, and because the explosives needed to trigger the bullet launch were, in Azeroth, extremely rare and expensive. A third, un-admitted reason could be the impressive rate of backfiring. It's not too handy wielding a gun that blows in your face. Nonetheless, a well aimed strike could shoot her in the head, and she would have been severed beyond reckoning.

*“Dun' tell me ya' found tha' key, lassie?”* she held her gun at point-blank. *“Aye, 'dere be a key here, an' another in Moonglade; but some punk found it fun to steal it! Now he's plannin' competitions all 'round Stormwin' wit' that key's a prize! Ya' know what's in there, lassie?”*

Maureen approached. She was not planning to attack; actually she submissively turned her palms to the gunner. She lowered her gun, letting the knight explain herself. It did not take long, maybe a few minutes. The dwarf smiled up.

*“Aye, ya' see. We're kinda' the same, ya' an' I, ya'! Outcasts..”* she heartily chuckled. *“Look, I dun' care 'bout the skull. Tis basically worthless outside of black markets. E'en the Explorer's Guild wouldn't wanna buy it, ya. So ya can keep it. We searchin' for the keys, and you takin' the skull, I lootin' the urn. I think 'tis fair, and most o'all, I think 'tis a pretty wise choose..Talah'dore?”*

Maureen had stayed silent. She scrutinized the dwarf with an exalted pondering. It seemed other races had their share of outcasts, and sought to create their own havens, of their own, in the world as hers, and with the same purposes. In her mind, she had already counted the dwarf part of her expedition, and of her quest.

*“Name's Frishe Hassan-Haggar, an' ya' betta' remember it. I'm a freelance rogue, ya'. Guns an' bows an' stings an' pickin' locks is my specialty. Got a story, like y'other, we all heard it, so let's not babble, ya'? An' now, if ya' well, let's get rockin' and findin' 'tis key!”*

Maureen presented herself summarily; both females exited the temple and looked about. Both would make a profit off this collaboration – but in this purpose, they had to find the first key. Somewhere in the city. But, how well could it have been buried? Both began seeking, as behind the temple, another black-leather Kaldorei was silently, quietly keeping watch...

## Chapter Four

### The Twin Keys

It had been a few days now since the dwarf and the Death Elf searched for the key that was, supposedly, hidden in Eldre'Thalas. Dire Maul, the dwarf's map claimed. It mattered few, for most ogres living inside had long been slaughtered, and the city in ruin was now a genuine ruin – none lived beneath the corners, none breathed softly. Indeed, everything was still, and the dusts of time could see accumulate on the marbles that made the stories of the past. Yes, the dwarf and the Talah'dore were alone in the whole city. Or so they delusively thought.

“Yo, where ya' comin' from?” The dwarf had relatively politely asked, as both came across the remains of an old jar shop. They stopped, and gazed at the forsaken building. An old wooden table stood, proud, amongst broken jugs and pieces of sundered clay. A lighter square on the dark table seemed to denote the location of, likely, an old accountant parchment, which vanished with the flow of ten thousand years. Maureen was contemplating the jars, wondering if the key could be hidden in one of the tiny urns and holes that dotted the city. Before she spoke, Frishe was thinking whether the jugs would be worth a lot, and if bothering to hassle with the loot would be profitable.

*“Silvermoon.*

*-And ya' got a 'human name? 'Tis funny. Ya' not like 'tose preppy Sin'dorei.*

*-Why dwarf, thank you.*

*-Where ya' been travelin'? I been in Northrend. 'Tis fun there!”*

Maureen turned her sight and fixed Frishe. Her glare was chilly and seemed to check directly in the adventurer's soul. For a few seconds of silence, only broken by the occasional birds, she gazed so in the dwarf's eyes. And Frishe, curiously, peered back, as if trying to break the secret of the Quel'dore's blue orbs.

*“Yeah. This is fun, there.”* she deeply answered.

Maureen coldly turned her back, and focused her attention on a rather odd building. Its roof was still on place, its walls were gilded – at least traces could be blatantly seen. She calmly approached the place. It was just like any other house, with a major difference upon opening the door – it was warm, rich furniture abounded, and it seemed more like people had been living very recently. But the mahogany tables and the marble steps did not interest her, though Frishe was already filling her bags with whatever she could find. On the table, there was a broken pot. And inside, a golden key, certainly as big as her hand, with a ring on its base and dots a bit everywhere, was laid to rest. Maureen grabbed it, examined it above her head. Frishe came upon noticing the gleaming object behind Maureen's back and whistled. The girl stood a few seconds still, holding the item high. A devious smile birthed on her face.

*“Victory...”*

While the first key was in their grasp, they had little to no idea of the location of the second one. They packed up, leaped on the hawkstrider, and both rode away from the city in a desperate attempt to find the second half of a promised success. But they would not have to wait long. As soon as they set foot outside the city, three other Hooded Men barred their path. Frishe drew her gun quickly, while Maureen, silent and motionless, decided of a dark course of action. It seemed to be a similar squad to that which had been attacking her earlier; but with a twist – they seemed much more powerful. Elites, so to speak.

Both women jumped off the hawkstrider and approached. At this moment, Frishe shivered and, a thrill of certain fright in her blood, delivered a shot at the one on her left. The three blinked instantly past them, and the middle one threw an Arcane Blast at Maureen. She scornfully laughed as it hit her chest, and she leaped high in her fighting stance, before striking the right one down. The blade hit from above the shoulder, and under the crushing strength of the knight, sliced its way down to the ribs, cutting a breast, a lamb, and a kidney in the process. As well as countless bone fragments. She removed her blade by thrusting it, then sliding it backwards – in two seconds, the mage had fallen, lifeless.

She turned to the two other, as the left mage prepared a vicious fireball – Frishe halted him shut, for she shot with her Blunderbuss, and this time the bullet echoed in his head, turning his hooded brains into melting emmentaler. The central mage remained, and he blinked to evade another of Maureen's crushing strikes. She struck the ground, indeed, allowing him to shoot another fireball that went reflecting on her saronite armor. She freed her blade, and in a raging cry, brought her hands to her head. A blue aura took form about ten years around her body; the ground became iced, and the water in the air turned into blocks. Very quickly, the mage was encased in a shallow block of frost, as everything within him was purged of heat. He fell at the end of the spell, lifeless – a terrified expression on his face. Maureen smiled at Frishe, who stood there astonished, and went checking the bodies for anything of value. She found a small frozen parchment on her last victim, and began reading it.

*“The Quel'dorei is an ally of your enemy, but understand she is also our foe now. You cannot let the Skull in their hands for your reasons, and we, the Wardens, cannot allow her to place her dirty High Elven fingers on the relic. We are separate entities, but in this fight we are one. Understand they have likely recovered the first key. It is hidden, but it is a matter of time before they succeed. If they grab the Second Key, then victory is virtually theirs.*

*You will not fail, and slay the heretic as soon as possible. But do not kill her. Bring her to us, and we will torture her, and imbue magic that would shatter the emotions of even a Forsaken...you get our drift. Then you can slay her.*

*If you happened to fall, I have asked your leader to send another squad to Winterspring. Upon submitting the Quel'dorei, you will meet us there, for we have faith in your skills.*

*Consider the Quel'dorei your captive, and most of all, make haste. Time is of the essence.”*

She chuckled. Yes, it was pretty naive to assume she could be made captive, and tortured, and killed. First she needed to be defeated, and she only knew one person who made her bent to knee. Blythe... she dearly hoped she was not part of the association. She also wondered what it could mean. Warden? Separate entities? Not only the Nova's enemies were now on her trail, but another unknown group sought to stop her? She sighed. Likely, she assumed, some locals from ages past who sought to dispatch her for meddling in some ancestral crypt, or chest, or whatever. Maureen had few care – besides, they were Kaldorei. It seemed obvious another group, as well as the so-called Wardens, were waiting in Winterspring.

And so the dwarf and she climbed back on the strider, and rode north, rounding the protective mountains of Mulgore, entering Ashenvale and finally Azchara. They passed a ruined tower, aside a pass to the goblin city of Everlook. The Aula Arcanum. There were bodies laying around, and one in particular stroke Maureen's mind, so much she stopped to examine it. A human magister, a sword in his hand, was laying. He seemed asleep. What stroke her is that, in his free hand, he held a medallion. She carefully snatched it from his broken fist, and glanced at it. There was a picture in it; a sort of painting. One could see the mage, cuddling a very pretty human, both gazing at each other. The letters H and A were printed on the shell of the bronze trinket. She placed it back in the man's hand and sighed. Would Jidaeo do this for her, should she fall in battle, or should he? She left the dead mage and resumed her journey, slightly more thoughtful.

Over the course of days, as they took altitude on the sharp cliff-road, snow began to replace rain, a purple hue took hold of them, and suddenly, they were enclosed in snowfall, the purple haze had grown white in the distance, blinding them as the road reached a plateau. They had arrived in Winterspring, and were heading towards the local Kaldorei capital, Starfall, passing a few faraway villages, as well as a small enclave belonging to the goblin Steamweedle cartel.

On their way however, Frishe noticed a strangely gleaming fire, above the cliff overlooking the path, behind a few trees aside the way. They had not met any travelers, and the closest village was not exactly around here. That's when they decided to part – Frishe was seeking loot, while Maureen grew tired of the dwarf. She walked a bit on the road, when suddenly, she stumbled upon two persons, draped in armor and winter clothing, lumbering in the cold, icy gusts. A Kaldorei and a Human were walking.

*“I am no enemy.”* Maureen presented herself. That's when Frishe came from behind, having found nothing but a few will o-the-wisps playing with each other. She hugged herself in the cold, and frowned. The two travelers were naught but shades in the mist surrounding and dominating the landscape.

*“Then what do you do here, Sin'dorei?”*

*“I am no Sin'dorei. I come in search of an ancient place where my family has been.”*

*“Oh, you're looters, too?”* The Night Elf chuckled. It was a rather tall female, a Kaldorei warrior. *“An old Goblin's sent us retrieving a relic, and you're not stealing it from me.”*

*“Who said they were stealing?”* the human grunted. Apparently he was not used to the cold weather, jumping in quick successions in the snow in order to keep at least his legs warm. *“Let's just get over with it!”*

*“Shut up.”* the Kaldorei turned to Maureen. *“If you've got anything to do with those weirdos over there”,* she pointed backwards to a point hidden in squalls of deadly ice, *“You better hurry before they steal your prize off you.”*

*“It won't happen.”* Frishe grumpily stated. *“We've been fightin' the bitches.”*

Laconically, the Kaldorei laughed. She nodded at Maureen. *“Now, be gone. If you were just a normal traveler, I'd have got to slay you. You're lucky you're with a dwarf. Oh, and I'm Ylvandre, for future reference.”*

Very quickly, the two odd travelers departed, and soon enough, were engulfed in the purple haze, before vanishing in the white, elusive wall surrounding them. Frishe hugged herself. *“Not as friendly's in Northrend, an' not as warm, but lets' get o'er with it.”* She was welcomed with a tilt of a pensive Maureen's head. *“Let's get going. I'm sure those weirdos are ours.”* she grabbed the reins of the strider, and the two moved on opposite to Ylvandre and her human friend, slowly, until they reached a Kaldorei temple of some age and value, in essence, a temple like all other temples. A few wisps were playing, the roaring of a yeti could be heard amongst the fierce howlings of the winds, and in the house, a fire was kept warm by four people dressed in dark, ebony-like leather. Maureen smirked, for the fourth one – the one that was directly seen facing the open door – was holding a shining, golden object in his hands.

A key.

## Chapter Five

### And Then There Was None

Maureen approached the house, stealthing the best she could, until she reached a dimly lit, frosted window. She did not scratch the frost on it, but kept an ear to listen to the four speak. It seemed the subject of discussion was, indeed, her and the dwarf.

*“...do you think they have succeeded? As much as they are Sin'dorei, they can help us greatly, but I don't know if they're that skilled...”*

*-They better be. We have a squad of them here, and I'm pretty sure they'll arrive with their new slave...dirty Highbornes. Now at least Sin'dorei have understood what it means to crave for mana. They might even take our way, who knows.*

*-Who cares. I don't know what this skull is worth to them, but we'll defend it from anyone, in time.*

*-For now they are allied with us, and we must therefore not doubt them.*

*-I'm sure the skull has tremendous power! And much worth to us Kaldorei! That's two reasons to ally with them!*

*-Yes, but I am really not sure...”*

The Talah'dore advanced towards the opening in the house. She drew her runeblade, silently. Frishe however, had spotted no less than seven specters in the background. She waved at Maureen, and both quietly ran away, hiding in a hill opposite to the road. The seven persons – hooded mages, two carrying swords, five with staves, and one barehanded – walked in a strange procession, but did not seem as stoic as during their encounters. They did not speak, but the cold, lingering winds took their toll. They dawdled and hugged themselves in line. Frishe suddenly appeared on the highway, right in front of the strange, hooded people.

*“Hold it 'dere” she pointed her gun. “Or I'm changin' you into orc food!”*

The two sword wielders placed themselves in line before Frishe, protecting the six other mages who stood behind. For Maureen, who had kept aside, this was just a blissful tactical advantage. So much she had to scornfully snicker at the mages for being so stupid. She would be the one ambushing them, and on their own grounds! This was fantastic. Luckily enough, the noise of the gusts covered her voice, and she remained unnoticed, while she was now nearing the small army from behind.

In the same eerie silence, the two swordsmen engaged the dwarf, who parried two hits from each with the hilt of her gun. Right at this time, Maureen just as silently leaped from a hazed point behind the caster line, and struck at one in the back, on the left; before anyone could understand anything, she had removed her sword and swung it in the nearest target – the barehanded one's neck. Frishe had shot one of the swordsmen, but the other managed to destroy her weapon, and casted Arcane Missiles. The magic bolts lightened the roof, as five salvos of three whizzed through the gusts and struck the dwarf's chest, striking it open. This is about when Maureen, who had just underwent three Frostfire Bolts which began to fragilize her plated armor, slowly moved to the right, letting one of the mage blast his fellow with arcane.

Frishe and Maureen grouped together to face the broken group – the dwarf staying besides, wounded and weaponless. She pestered and rudely gestured at the remainder, one swordsman, and three staff-wielding casters. Said swordsman blinked behind Maureen and tried to hit her; but the hit simply cut lightly through the skin, and the girl summoned a Death Cowl. The unholy ball, hurled by the winds high in the skies, loudly fell and absorbed the fighter who fell, dead. The three casters were now in triangle, channeling together a single spell – a massive Arcane Barrage. Maureen

barely had time to cover Frishe, than twenty arcane balls crossed them – three lodged themselves in her armor, five in her arms, the remainder was either deflected or missed her. She backed off, twirled her runeblade and moved on again. This time, she tried her favorite – the Unholy Strike, which landed in a scared caster's shoulder. He fell on his knees, coughing and apparently in a second-state phase. To Maureen's pleasure, for the other casters removed their hoods and moved as far as him as possible, trying to surround her.

She closed her eyes, harnessing the energies around one of the two; the man was casted towards her, and she impaled him, the sword hacking through the crotch into the stomach. She removed the bloody blade and panted. She had been wounded, and did not manage to focus the runes anymore. Likely they were exhausted. She checked on the last mage, who was preparing a fireball; she ran towards him, and the fireball that would have halted her, long enough for the mage to cut her head, or immobilize her and make her his, went destabilized in a novice's hands, and instead flew on a tree, that began to catch fire – not long, it was way too cold for it to continue. Maureen took it to her opportunity and in a final stand, slashed him in the chest, three times. She glanced around the road. Eight bodies were now laying, and soon the snow would cover them, or travelers would find them, and one would say the local Goblin brigands have struck again. People would babble about political ways to raise funds for a safer Kaldorei transit, and none would ask what were eight skilled mages doing in the middle of nowhere, nor why they were so easily slaughtered.

Maureen headed towards the house. It had been left empty, save for one Warden, who was holding the key. *"You will never..have this!"* he suddenly drew a dagger, and in utter speed, slashed Maureen above the right breast. She bellowed curses, and froze the man in a hungering cold. She grabbed the key off him and walked out, leaving him in his coffin of ice.

*"Yo, Maureen.."* the dwarf spoke. *"I-I can't take it...shall we go to Everlook..or Starfall..or 'nywhere? I'm destroyed, yo!"*

*-Then go yourself. I have to hurry back to Eldre'Thalas now.*

*-So..'Tis how it ends, heh?"*

Frishe looked at Maureen with consternation. She had hoped she had befriended the Talah'dore, and that they would keep looting together, but it was much different. Maureen only had one person in mind, and none would ever steal his place. No matter how much Frishe looked alike. *"Oh, well. See ya' 'round!"* she shrugged, and moved along with her crippled shotgun towards Everlook, vanishing in time in the white haze.

Maureen arrived a few days later in Eldre'Thalas. She had spotted the old building where she had first found the urn, and managed her way there rather easily. The two keys perfectly fitted in the openings. There was, in the silence of the dead city, a click, then another. The urn opened thanks to a strange mechanism. Inside, there was no skull, no loot – a simple letter.

*"Apprentice Warden. You have done the first of two tasks, recovering the keys. Keep them and head to the World Dragon's Nest. The Wardens will await."*

She understood the meaning of the ordeal. What she had done, was learning about the keys, finding them, and opening the urn. Just like an apprentice Warden would have. A rather failed test of skill, she thought. The skull was in a shrine, locked away from the world, which was named so. This sounded trivial.. She thought about the Aula Arcanum, this tower they passed on their way, and which she spotted again upon coming back. She decided to pay a visit to the fallen academy. On her way, a lullaby crossed her mind. One her mother would sing when she was but a child.

*First was the Keeper, but then a Knight lone chose to dig deeper in a heartless tone  
They fought her their best, in the end she won; she fulfilled the quest and then there was none...*

## Chapter Six

### A Troublesome Journey

Duskwood. This was it. After reading some time in the ruins that was the Arcanum, she finally understood the location of the skull. The very shrine that could be found deep within the Forlorn Grove. She rode back to Ratchet, where she gave the strider up. The journey would prove troublesome, but by then she had no idea. The first week of the crossing proved rather enchanting, actually.

It is only the seventh day things turned haywire. Maureen had just finished feeding – a totally recreational activity to her, as she needed no food, being undead – on the breakfast, served by a hearty goblin. She walked outside, on the main deck. It was a beautiful day. The sails were high, sun was shining on the armed floor, even the rocking of the boat could hardly be felt. Two goblins were discussing. Likely deckhands. She walked to a rather remote corner, right behind the mast. Two gnomes were chitchatting – one was named Babben, and had sailed on the Frostbrand along with Frishe in times long gone, the other Marie, and she was a techno freak – and accompanied by an obnoxious robot. Maureen sat, next to a chubby dwarf, Wytharig, who seemed to rather...moderately enjoy her presence. Not that she cared. He was too busy admiring the water below, anyways. From the door that led to the lower decks, two Sin'dorei emerged. Theon was one. A Ranger, clad in dark clothes, with a genuinely haughty way to walk. Behind was Askaner, a much quieter elf. *“All those Alliance people are making me feel uncomfortable...”* he muttered. Much to Maureen's amusement. Then came Elvania, a woman of beauty and shallow pride; Mouma, a Tauren who even smiled to Maureen on her way, Certus, Kincaid the opportunist Kaldorei, and a few others. They were enjoying the breakfast they had just ingurgitated, and also the last day of good weather. The sails rustled, and the ship was heading in a depression, which would mean a lock-down from the washed out outdoor deck.

Maureen was caught by the captain. Along with two officers, the hearty goblin was at the steer, enjoying a good breeze and laughing at sailors' jokes. She wondered how unprofessional he seemed, but then, most goblins were like that. She therefore shrugged and went back to her meditation, staring at the seas and the dawning skies. Birds were flying above the boat, and in the distant landscape, a few isles could be seen. One of those birds suddenly felt, struck by a lucky arrow.

*“If it's not a sturdy catch!”* Theon had spoken. She snickered at his skills, but all pensive and believing, decided to spare his honor. She was caught up by a discussion between the gnomes and the tauren Mouma.

*“-Elves seem to have much business between those towns of the Cartel.  
-Who knows? I am Marie Bowrench, traveler extraordinaire!  
-It's nice to meet a fellow traveler. I'm Mouma Wildmane.”*

The gnome had such a squirmy voice, Maureen was forced to draw a scornful smile. She held her tiny hand to the Tauren, who shook it very gently, afraid of breaking it. Theon pestered at being out of ammos, and crossed her light of sight as he went fetching more arrows. Suddenly, away from the cares of everyone on the ship, the captain felt sick, and a second later, fell to the floor. His aids were so befallen. The breeze grew suddenly in intensity, and a dark chill took hold of most of the occupants. In his place, amongst the sudden chaos, an old mage-looking man was glancing at the scene. Wytharig, Marie and Mouma, Babben and a few others were now noticing the strange



newcomer, and had stopped their activities. In the lower decks, feasting and sleeping were still going well, save for Theon, all busy searching for wood to prepare. The man smiled, and in a very posed voice, began his speech. He was on the highest deck, now in sight of everyone outdoors.

*“First of all, hello...and welcome.”*

Silence was made on the boat – much people, like Elvania, Albus, Kincaid, or our terrible Fletcher Theon had gathered up. Maureen, out of sheer boredom, decided to follow, and she, too, got to glance at the strange man. Pretty much like everyone. Theon had grabbed a few spare arrows, Albus placed himself protectively before Elvania. Babble, Marie and Mouma were still sitting behind, their round eyes focused on the stranger.

*“You are going to be part of...a test, let's call it like that.”*

Maureen frowned. Could it be a trick of the Wardens, or of the shadow enemies that followed her endlessly? She thought, they would not involve innocents, or reveal themselves to a whole bulk of people. Nonetheless, she was a strong fighter. If they appeared, she could take them. But by the time she blinked, the man had vanished. Only an eerie feeling of doom and fright now ruled over the crew and passengers. Blankly, they stared at themselves.

*“What was that?”*

*“That's why I hate taking boats!”*

*“Move up! There's something amiss!”*

Before Maureen – and a few others – the air began to fade and warp. And suddenly, black and white versions of themselves appeared. A few Elves fainted. A human female was heard crying; Theon drew his bow right away, the gnomes bemusedly glanced at themselves. Maureen kept quiet and examined her clone. Suddenly, and all together, they drew their weapon and charged. The Death Knight barely had time to parry two strikes, so strong they sent her staggering back. Another Sin'dorei fled for his life. The dwarves and gnomes had attacked, and so had Theon and Mouma. After a few strikes however, the copies vanished as swiftly as they had come.

*“Everyone, gather together! We're under attack! Form a melee and casting line!”*

She did not know who had talked, but deemed the idea worthy of at least a try. And she put herself in the melee line. Suddenly, the skies turned bright purple. Everything went to a still stand. Arcane sounds of all kinds were overflowing the sundering boat.

*“-It's an Arcane Barrage!”* Elvania, who had just finished casting bursts of flames at her clone, yelled in surprise. For indeed, from where the sun used to stand, a good twenty missiles were slowly, but surely arriving. Slowly – yet fast enough to tear the ship asunder. Some lodged themselves in the hull and cabins, and others on the deck. Certus yelled, and was knocked down on the side of the boat. Marcus, a human, was hit as soon as he left the cabins in utter shock and fell.

All around, missiles were now hitting the water, shaking the boat down, and she quietly gazed, as a rain of arcane spells fell over the hapless ship. A scene of chaos and death – Marie fell, Mouma deflected three with her bare hands, Gwydd the Dwarf was yelping about “The feck?!”. Theon was even playing hide and seek with the spells, dodging each skillfully. Maureen stood completely still, facing the surreal occurrence. The clones had, for some, reappeared and struck at their respective copies. Kincaid calmly crossed blades with his specter, hilt to hilt, rendering strike for strike. Askaner dodged every of the stabs of his image, as well as the rain of arcane, and finally landed a critical hit.

The Kaldorei yelled, *“This is a TEST! This man must still be about!”* before receiving a launched Babben in the face, and an angry shade-Babben right afterwards. He didn't receive his own clone's hit – he landed a good strike in its groin, vanishing it instantly, before being struck down by an arcane missile that went breaking the floor of the two decks below. And came a point where the clones were all but gone, the rain was keeping fiercely on going, and pretty much everyone was falling. She resisted. She was seeing everyone eventually fall, smashed by a wave or a crushing arcane blow – until suddenly, she felt ripped off. A missile had landed in her back. She was hurled forwards, striking her head in Theon's armored boots, then in her movement in the side of the ship. She blinked a few times, as everything blacked out – alone, amongst the bodies, the mage was supervising everything...

When she rose up, Maureen was still with everyone. But not in the same place. She tittered a few steps, and glanced all around. Certus was rising, and looking at the mess. Then Kincaid, Elvania, Theon, and eventually everyone silently stared at each other. It soon became evident that they had been teleported – they were standing in a blue circle, certainly at the intersection of two ley lines. The boat had vanished. There was no trace of her, or her captain, or her crew. Or anything. They were encircled by a barrier of arcane magic. Theon trusted himself through, but miserably failed, reflected back towards the center of the circle with uncanny strength. Suddenly, at the heart of the arena looking area, the man appeared again.

*“So...how was your journey?”*

Gwydd's sullen blue eyes widened as he came to his senses. He set up and bellowed a string of curses towards the man. Maureen kept quieter, satisfied with a *“He's so gonna die.”* Wytharig replied *“I'm a simple dwarf, so what does he want?”* Elvania went up to Albus' hand, and held it tight, in an attempt to feel better. Everyone was curiously peering at the man.

*“I would prepare myself if I were in your shoes...something is about to come.”*

*“-Wait! Who are you!”* Wytharig yelled. To no avail. The man disappeared; and in its spite, hideous zombies appeared and surrounded the circle. Everyone drew their weapons; the match was set so that there was exactly half more zombies than people. Theon, being all brash, shot an arrow at the vanished mage. Obviously it missed. He coughed up.

*“Oh, so, err. I'll be our new leader!”*

*“-Shut up, bitch.”* Just lovable. What was more lovable when when the zombies began to advance. They seemed confused, as if teleported from somewhere else; but one thing was sure, their dinner was standing right before them, in the circle! Albus and Elvania, the two Sin'dorei, cuddled and braced each other. Kincaid's not so calm calls to composure did nothing; and as Gwydd, Wytharig and Maureen drew their respective weapons, everyone behind came fully armed. The fight was rather quick and painless – as much as a zombie can feel pain, anyways.

*“Stupid zombies!”* The dwarf, Wytharig, glanced around with apprehension. The first hits, however, were indeed failed. The Tauren, Mouma, missed the zombie who dodged with a cunning speed, and fell on her furry belly with a loud noise. Elvania face-palmed, but her spell also ended in a fizzle of sparkles that went landing right at her feet. Maureen stayed backwards, silent, casting a runic spell – the energy flowed through her sword and casted a Frost Strike, before attacking the zombie. It fell, dead. Around her, others had managed to down a zombie of theirs; Wytharig slew one by repelling it, the very introspective Therrion (a Sin'dorei who hadn't really been noticed before) landed his warhammer right in two zombies, killing both with ease. In the end, pretty much anyone had killed the zombie. An easy fight.

At this moment, a silence fell after the cheers of victory. In front of everyone, six Necromancers of Acherus appeared. They looked at each other, then at the heroes. Obviously, they had no idea what was going on.

*“Who are you? You dared to summon us?”* Maureen went to clumsily explain them what happened. After all, she was, too, an Ebon Blade member. The Necromancer gave no care. Instead, the six bellowed, *“You’ll all die!”* - which was welcomed by Theon's terrible aim. The six Necromancers, however, did not cast any spell. Instead, they mumbled words of dark magics.

This did not frighten our adventurers. Apart from Maureen – along with the Kaldorei, Kincaid, whom she had a few harsh words with a bit before – who backed off, she protecting him in genuine Talah'dore fashion, all others prepared for combat. Maureen simply disagreed with fighting members of her own clan - members who gave her her "gift". The gnome, Marie, drew a rictus as she glanced at the death knight. It is Theon, yet again, who drew the first shot – a perfectly aimed strike in the middle necromancer's chest. It fell loudly, but the others carelessly continued their spell. It's when Mouma revealed she was a druid – after an incantation, she changed into a magnificent hawk, and peeked at the necromancer, before charging them. Marie and Babble were not thrown away, despite their small size – they kept hobbling the enemies, trying to make them lose their balance. Wytharig was charging, along with Therrion, Algus, Askaner, and together they tore another Necromancer asunder. Elvania's spell, for once, connected, and a fire ball went blasting a mage's face. There remained three Necromancers. This is when Theon, yet again, shot an arcane bolt at two necromancers in a row – and both failed the spell as they died. The last necromancer snorted, and hurled darkness balls at the first persons before him, before vanishing.

Calm came back, and Marie took Maureen apart. But before she had time to blame her for oathing with the enemy, the earth was shocking asunder. A giant serpent, the size of twenty grown men, had appeared. Everyone was kicked off, but was quick enough to rise. Most were tired, weary – some were wounded, Certus was downed, Wytharig was afraid – but overall, everyone kept fighting. It was Therrion, the quiet warrior, who charged yet again, planting his warhammer in what looked like the beast's guts. And for two minutes, the serpent kept staggering. Blasted by a runeblade, fireballs, Holy Light, claws, hammers, swords, vicious cleaves – and arrows. Finally, its tough skin having been weakened, it begun to retaliate. Its head swung down on the ground, and hit a few of the fighters. From the angered crowd, it only led to more aggression. Maureen was leaping high in the skies, weakening the skin with each strike. Marie had finished ripping the tough hide away, and planted her claws right in the beast's flesh. It seemed to cause it lots of pain – and it spitted acid all over. Maureen was swift enough to dodge, but Marie took everything over her, and it took all of a Paladin's might and willpower to heal her enough so the marks were almost nonexistent. She struggled to battle, nonetheless, all proud and vaillant. Algus breathed heavily, and went to bravely stab the beast in the oozing wound, opening it further. Afterwards, it became so much easier – the beast was struck so many times the wound had grown the size of two full swords, frosted and charred by magic. It cried desperately – but Babben and Maureen leapt, almost at the same time, though they landed the final blows. The beast fell, Mouma running wildly to avoid being crushed by the dead body.

Everyone glanced at the serpent, which magically vanished. The mage came right after.

*“Greetings again.*

*-You again?*

*-Free us already!*

*-You're so dead!*

*-I did not expect such violence, now...you've all passed.*

*-What do you mean?”*

The mage backed off. *“My name is Draknir, and we constantly seek for new people to train up. This was an ordeal...and you are strong and brave. You needn't be trained.”*

Everyone kept silent – not sure about the mage's course of action. Only Maureen was bold enough to try to assault him – and was stuck in place. She pestered.

*“I will bring you to Booty Bay..as expected. Farewells, young warriors.”*

The mage blinked and vanished. The unfortunate wanderers glanced at each other, in silence. The hazes and purple shield around them began to darken. And soon enough, everyone fell, as if drowsed. The mage was surely powerful, to teleport all of them at once.

As they arrived in Booty Bay, most had already befriended, though all were greatly distraught by the latest hours they just lived.

*“Here at last...that was more than I bargained for.”* Mouma had spoken, and whilst doing so, rolled her impressive shoulders.

*“My trade partnership is ruined! At least that old man could have compensated!”* Wytharig complained. Albus and Elvania cuddled up to each other. *“Well...how about a drink?”* a dwarf asked. Most acknowledged.

*“Who's up for those drinks!”* Theon bellowed.

*“I sure am!”*

*“Lead the way!”*

Most noisily talked as they wearily advanced on the crackling planks, past talking goblins and unloading dockers, until they were only tiny points at the other side of the bay. Maureen remained behind, not eager to follow them. She stared once more at the dirty city, then towards the stables where her hawkstrider had landed. Only Theon had stayed with her.

*“You're not coming? We haven't introduced ourselves, amidst the confusion. I am Theon..our goals are rather similar.”*

*“-I am Maureen Sunrayne, a drow, a Talah'dore.”*

Both nodded and parted. Unwilling to continue further the conversation. Maureen glanced at the setting sun, as she had retrieved her strider. She took a last gaze at the bay.

*“This was sure more than I could expect in one day...certainly the Wardens were up to something. I must make haste...”*

On that night, while Booty Bay was celebrating the safe return of our wanderers, and bards already wrote songs about their exploits, there was one girl, lone on her strider, riding through woods and jungles back to Duskwood. Oh, her time for celebration had not arrived yet...but at the end of the journey, there was Jidaeo, and solely seeing him would be worth thrice the biggest tavern parties and feasts Booty Bay would ever encounter.

## Chapter Seven

### Backwards in the Dragon's Lair

It had been another week of endless riding. Through the rains, the canopies of the rainforests and the haunted woods. Maureen had grown weary of the travel. Every day she felt closer to Quel'thalas; and with it, closer to the man she now was sure was loving. Oh, it was no casual love; her heart would genuinely rip off sorrow and she would run into a true frenzy to protect the only man worth something in her new life. A Talah'dorei, of nobility and pride, of ambition and manners. The one perfect male she had sought before the war, and which she had finally found. To him she would go anywhere, do anything – and this led her on the tracks to the Skull of Shadow.

Finally, Maureen reached the elvish grove, once more. She glanced about. The trees were still as fresh and vigorous; the purple haze seemed misty as never before; wildlife had come silent. She stepped further into the woods. Something was wrong, to be sure. They seemed much darker. The sparkles of the wisps had calmed; the whispers of morning pixies, those illusive creatures that populated the Darnassian woods, had also stopped their playful routine and were hiding in the trees. Maureen determinedly rose through the trail she had made upon first coming. Her heart was pounding. For hours she searched the shrine that contained the chest. But the forest seemed on the defensive, as if enchanted by some spell. She could not help but feel the dooming breeze fly past, as the shades flickered, and think about the encounter with Draknar just before. What if he had come to test her, specifically? She had no idea. Finally, she reached up to the little quaint house. As her foot touched the ground, a snicker could be heard from behind.

*“You really did not believe you would make it alone without being watched?”*

Maureen turned, and drew her blade. Before her, three dark-leather clad people grinned. Three Kaldorei. The remaining Wardens.

*“We have been awaiting you for a while now, Sin'dorei.*

*-I am a Talah'dore.*

*-Do not insult our drowish ancestors! You are but a delusive elf. Do you know the meaning of the Skull? It is a great heritage, and to our newfound allies, a precious artifact of power!*

*-I will claim it mine with more pride.*

*-You might have bested our youngest, but we three are standing ground to wild orcs and even the most troublesome Trolls have problems with us. Even the Twilight's Hammer is worthless compared to us.*

*-I don't know what you're blabbing about. If it's a fight you want, it's a fight you shall have.”*

Having said so, Maureen wickedly grinned, and approached the grouped men. It would be yet another battle. The Wardens backed off, and together, channeled a nature spell. It seemed as the green flow would try to take hold of Maureen's limbs. They did not begin petty, and almost got the Elf to kneel. She resisted the best she could.

*“We are the Wardens of the Skull, and you will die for breaching the oath!”*

*“Die along!”*

Suddenly, kneeling, broken Maureen burst a frosted spell all around her; the freezing shock-wave broke the spell. She leaped off in full shape, tossing more of those ice shards at her enemies. They all dodged, and one charged with a vicious cleaving move. Maureen parried him easily, before touching him with the might of Blood. He was struck under the jaw, and began coughing up the life-

streaming red liquid. It was boiling hot. He screamed, falling to his death a short moment later. She did not wait for the two confused others to engage her – she leaped, her blade above her, atop another Warden, delivering him a halfly-parried strike in the left arm. The man managed to lodge his sword in her right hip. She snickered.

*“Why don't you fall and bleed to death!”*

Maureen took hold of the foe's hilt, before beginning to whirl the hanging warden along. She tossed him after a few good turns, and he crashed his back in a tree, grunted, and fell. One remained. He suddenly shape-shifted, much to Maureen's bemusement, into a wild boar, and uncontrollably charged at her. She could not deflect or dodge in time, and she was crushed by its tusks into the woods, and her legs were ripped twice by the low strikes. She yelled enough to send a Death Cowl at the beast, which yelped and died right away. She glanced at the battlescene, her sinister hunger fed – a meager compensation for the trouble of battling the battle-hardened Kaldorei.

She approached the chest, and grabbed one of the keys hanging onto her neck. It seemed to glow, in the darkness of the bare room. She laughed, and turned the golden key slowly in the chest. A lock sound could be heard. She smirked, and grabbed the second key. And just as carefully, she actioned the second mechanism. She backed off, and faced the chest. Inside, old springs had been triggered. The box opened, gleaming with a strange blue-white glow. She approached, her face further paled by the intense light. She extended her right hand towards the Skull, nested on velvet and silks. She took it, and brought it to her face, examining it. It was a black skull, crafted from pure ebony. Glistening under the lights that sparkled in the room, and seemingly as tough as diamond. Maureen nonetheless took precautions, so that her relic would not fall, and be forever lost.

*“My beloved Jidaeo..in our Haven you shall be king.”* she whispered, before furrowing the relic in a sidebag, carefully placing it so it would not shatter. She never felt so happy – so happy she could slaughter ten grown men. But it was no ten grown men she would meet...but worse.

She exited the building, and glanced at the skies. They were now blue, the purple haze having vanished. For a while she thought herself back in Quel'thalas, and the memories brought her soothsaying streams. She looked right before her, and the formerly hostile forest seemed to blossom and rustle as high winds passed through the leaves. Wildlife had taken its former toll. The wardens were dead, and the skull was hers. Lifted like a curse maybe as notorious as the legends of the Scythe of Elune. She breathed almost uncontrollably. As she pondered her next move, the winds turned very slowly, and became more chilling. Little did she care – she would find her beloved Jidaeo, and soon enough, open up her Haven, build her village, and carve her name in the greatest Sin'dorei to have ever existed. Nothing stood between her and destiny, she thought. She had been gifted, and would use it to great purposes. Nothing would dare to stop her. Apart from one ..unexpected enemy.

*“You are matinal, Maureen...”*

Another hooded man had blinked behind her; he was not hooded. He was a male Sin'dorei, with blond hair and a gleeful smirk drawing to the ears. He held a orange-sparkling staff. Maureen did not hesitate. She struck at him. And he repelled her strike, sending her fly off. *“Do you believe you can stop me?!”* he casted a salve of arcane missiles, a few pierced her armor. She yelled, and jumped back, hitting the man with a unholy strike. He dropped a few blood, and right afterwards, pushed his hands forwards. A massive fireball came upon Maureen and terraced her. She grunted, stood up, and gripped the man hither. As he was jerked above she managed to place her sword right in the kidney. But he did not fall.

*“Love blindly, and die painfully!”* he cried out, a blast of arcane immediately leaving the tip of his staff towards Maureen. This time, she repelled it with the breadth of her Runeblade, before she cut through the man's face. Three times. The fourth one, he blinked behind, and replicated with a strong Dragon's Breath attack. Maureen was trapped in a blazing cylinder; but she quickly stopped the flames with Icy Touch, before sending a few more ice shards. She suddenly, in her distorted voice, muttered a sort of incantation.

*“The ultimate high, as all beautiful dies...”* unholy crows were now flying all around her. She held her arms above her head, palms facing the caster, her eyes closed. Whirlwinds turned around her. The mage roared, and began charging a scorching spell. Too late – ten angry frosted unholy balls of raw energy were now flying, and before he could think of anything, he was struck in the chest. Ten times. He fell to his death, and she ran towards him, examining him. She found a last letter.

*“The Sin'dorei is much stronger than expected. You are our elite fighter in the zone. You will go, and slay her. She must not see the Light of day, and the Skull must remain in its cove. Replace the wardens if they are killed – they will die. You are our last hope, for if this skull is taken, others will also be stolen, and our quest will have failed. We count on you. Do not fail us... Daalnas Sunrayne.”*

She looked at the dead body. Sunrayne? She knew about a long lost sibling, Daalnas the Ranger, given up at birth, and believed slain. She knelt and rolled the dirty body on the side. It was pretty much damaged, blood oozing off everywhere. She sighed, and glanced in her lifeless brother's face. She stood like that for a good hour. She had not believed his existence, but it seemed he put himself in her way. As cold as she was, she had to feel something. One could believe a tear fell her eye. But her task was not done. She took the letter, and looked to the skies, before riding her hawkstrider.

*“At least the Skull is mine. Is ours. The Wardens are nomore. But who are those hooded men...and most of all...”*

She began riding away, now onwards to her final destination. Her final speech would be, to her fallen brother, a whisper.

*“Why did I never learn of his might and existence...why am I doomed to keep walking my path, with none to cling onto...”*

## Chapter Eight - Interlude

### Long loves die harder

The encounter between Maureen and her brother left her in a contemplative state. And indeed! She just learnt one of the arch enemies of Jidaeo and herself was her blood relative, and she slew him, when forever she thought him dead. She kept riding, carefully avoiding Darkshire, moving at night to not draw unwanted attention. She finally reached a stream of water, and deemed it a right place to stop. It was much more enlightened, with oaks and weeping willows dropping their leaves, which formed a bed on the waterside. She gazed at the fish, freely swimming, then at the sleeping frogs. Birds were singing all around, accompanying the calm flow of the water hither. From time to time one cried louder. Maureen led the strider to drink from the pure, crystalline river, before she sat on the bank and grabbed some pen and paper. Her dragonhawk, a small message carrying bird, had not come along; but she had few care. In black ink she began to write.

*My dear Jidaeo.*

*How long has it been since I have last seen you! It seems a good two months to me. So much time, without hearing your calm and soft voice, or feeling your breath. I long for your embrace, and hope I am proving myself worthy. For surely you have feelings, which drive you, which flow within you. The way you ponder, or walk, or smile; this makes me exastic, and each of our encounters threatens to rip my frozen heart. Who said people like me or you could not love? The Haven is a fair idea, for sure; but since I first met you I felt my blood flowing, yes flowing, just for you.*

*Your very evocation reminds me of my childhood, my blissful years laughing; I remember of the times I finished in taverns, or slaying monsters, or having simple fun. I am nostalgic, for sure – but those memories you perfectly embody. Everything I sought, even after my fall, you are. A kindred, open, and caring spirit. You take me to the skies, and my blue haze is nothing compared to when I fall in your arms. My hungering curse seems lifted when you sweep me away, when our bodies intertwine, or simply when we plot or do business. For you I would go to the end of the world, I would brave a thousand demons and Scourge necromancers, I would slay whomever you want me to.*

*My dearest Jidaeo. Let me be yours. I beg of you, weakly, meekly, like the inner girl that craves for care and comfort. Let us keep together; let us taste the joys of a purified, gifted love. Together we can go where none has ever been, undertake tasks none has ever dared to consider, and reign over a whole empire that would otherwise be dotted with small pumpkin patches. I know you are chased, and I am so proud to share your burden – no matter the consequences.*

*On my journeys I have seen a fallen mage. Hebry, I think that was the name. He bore in his hand a medallion with a picture of his pregnant lover. While I cannot get pregnant – or can I actually spread the Gift? None has ever reported anything in either case – I sure will crate two medallions, and we could put pictures of us inside. And keep it around us, to keep us warmth in the cold, to guide our blows when cursed, never to be ripped apart, never to be forlorn, never to die.*

*Jidaeo. You are the person who meant the most to me. You brought me back to life, and took good care of me after I was free off the King and the Blade. I am sure we both can last forevermore, and so I secretly dream of a life together, I following, you leading. Until now.*

*This is everything. I hope I have proven myself worthy, and I hope I can make sure, this Talah'dorei is the right one for you – never shall she betray, never shall she forsake. And so I pray to the evening sun every setting, and so I wish us to keep, as we should have been, as we likely will.*

*We are Talah'dorei, and we might as well reign over our kindred. May our blades always strike true, and may our love last an endless harmony.*

*Let me be yours.*

*Maureen Sunrayne*



Maureen was rereading her letter, when the sun fully rose over the lands. She stood, her hair flowing in the wind. She gathered it and tied it in her back, before leaping to her well-fed strider and continue the journey. Beforehand, she carefully placed the parchment in her sidebag, nested along the Skull of Shalla'drassil, and looked about. Elwynn Forest was a quiet place, with few villages really breaking the woods. And so she headed towards Redridge, slowly, safely. The last thing she wanted was a group of Alliance grunts hunting her – she looked like a Quel'dorei, and physically speaking she had always been, or almost, but she would be arrested the same. Silvermoon was but a few days away – at least not as long as her tavern visits around the world. She grinned – but in her heart, an unmissable apprehension grew. It had nothing to do with Alliance guards. Rather, what if Jidaeo rejected her? What if he kept calm and reserved? She shuddered wildly, and rode faster, though the twist in her heart only grew more stressing and oppressing. Moreover, she feared her own reaction to a possible decline of her romantic request. She rode through woods and plains with such a heavy heart.

## Chapter Nine

### Over the Hills

It had been two weeks Maureen had been riding. She passed through the treacherous Redridge Mountains, most of which were torn with lava and strange beasts. She rode around Loch Modan, scaring a few villagers in the process. The Wetlands passed like a breeze, and she was outrun by guards on the bridge linking the old kingdom of Stratholme to those swampy places. She passed with relative ease Thoradin's Wall, Southshore, Hillsbrad, Lordaeron, until she arrived in the Plaguelands.

She wandered for a good while through the forlorn woods. Plague exulted its unholy harmony all around her. Trees were mostly dead, or struggled against the illness that befell the lands. As she fought her way deeper, the very vegetation came to be much less healthy – giant mushrooms, rotting plants, and the constant undead or plague-bat nests began to dot the landscape, until finally, they began the dominant species.

As she fought her way through giant slimes, turning on the forsaken road towards Quel'thalas, she noticed an old man in the distance. Likely, another Death Knight. She approached him and frowned. He was human. Clad in black saronite armor.

*“Hair..I want your HAIR...”*

Maureen frowned. The death knight seemed rather confused, as if headless. Likely one of the weakest of her kind. She drew her runeblade. The ground seemed to ice up as both focused intense amounts of runic energy. In the poisonous fog of the Plaguelands, Maureen kept on backing off, awaiting for the proper moment to strike. A Death Knight, however dense, remains a dangerous weapon, and she was fully aware of it. In a moment, she found herself on a small hillside, overlooking on three sides a poisoned plagued scar. She hissed.

*“No CHANCE to even SURVIVE...”*

The girl finally leaped, having spotted a flaw in his defense. She trusted the broad edge of her blade at his shoulder, with the wild hopes to unlink some of his joints. At this point, he repulsed her with a magical aura. She fell on her feet, but was for a moment startled. She snarled. *“You dare stand against ME, the finest Talah'dore in existence?!”* After weighting the odds, she casted a Death Grip, bringing the warrior much closer to her. After which, she wildly swung her blade on all sides, swirling along. All of her strikes were parried. She eventually stopped, and defensively stanced herself, pointing her weapon at the man. Ready to strike back at the shortest moment of notice. Her eyes did not leave him. At this moment, the man struck his sword to the ground. His runes channeled more unholy energies, that finally casted something – Maureen did not await, and casted an Icy Touch over the knight. The planted sword burst another aura, pushing Maureen back. He hastily drew his blade back up, and Maureen struck, hers horizontal. It slid all the way to the Saronite armor. She very quickly removed herself, as the other's sword was dangerously close to her own throat. He did thrust it forwards, but ended up in nothing, and she passed behind him, hitting twice in the back. He turned and parried the third strike, sending her to stagger. Finally, he struck her, and she fell to his feet, snarling and groaning. Yet, undefeated, she rolled to the side, rose and defied him to attack once more.

*“He may be Human..but he is our Brother in Undeath.”*

A voice had spoken in Maureen's back. That is, from the only reachable side. Out of desperation, she sent another frostball to the man, who was blasted away, if only for a short while. She turned and pointed the blade...At Jidaeo. She dropped it in awe, startled, as soon as she reckoned him.

*"Jidaeo...Is that you?"*

He nodded. To the human, who had stopped fighting and now awkwardly stood still, he continued. *"You have two options, Human. One..you step away from my Sister, and apologize- DEATH is the only SOLUTION to all PROBLEMS."*

He dismissed him, and rushed to Maureen. In Thalassian, he asked softly whether she was hurt. With a smile she answered – negatively, of course. She was, to be entirely certain, completely bemused by his presence right by her side, and kept startled, examining him slowly. Sir Novalight grinned widely, and removed his hood. Maureen was bursting with happiness and joy – it would rip her off. She fell to her knees, glancing up at Jidaeo.

*"-Red HAIR..means DEATH!"* Jidaeo turned to the human. *"I am not finished with you. In Silvermoon, red is the color of power, redemption, rebirth, versatility, and enlightenment. And this fine elf wears it upon her head...yes...like a crown."* Not leaving his sight off the human, he muttered to the kneeling girl in Thalassian.

*"-What news do you bring of your endeavors?"*

*"-I..I better not speak about it here"*, she pointed to the human knight. Jidaeo smirked.

*"-Then say no more."* he stopped her with his hand.

At this time, the Knight rose again. *"To ETERNITY!"*, he madly swung his runeblade at Maureen. Strike which was swiftly parried by Jidaeo. Maureen leaped to her feet, grabbed her own sword, and went to strike the knight. Overpowered by the two, he was forced to surrender, harmed but not hurt. He fell like a stone, off the cliff. Jidaeo and Maureen rushed to the edge to eye, in the deadly mist, remains of their foe. Both looked at each other. The human death knight..was gone.

*"-I have..I have the Skull of Shalla'drassil."*

*"-...Truly so?"* his eyes grew wider, the blue halo in those orbs glowing dimmer. Without any command, she grabbed her sidebag, and took carefully hold of the skull. She presented him to the elf, who unwrapped it and smiled. A smile few people could ever boast having seen. He took it off the proud female elf. *"It caused me a bit of challenge, for sure"*, she chuckled. He glanced at the skull, then closely he peered at Maureen herself. She looked down, her heart seeming to beat – with a wild strength furthermore. Amazed as she pulled out the skull, he nodded mindlessly as she began narrating her tiresome journey. *"I'm sure"*, he finally responds, holding the skull almost like a small toddler. After examining the glossed surface, he held it back to Maureen. He blinked at her, even.

*"Do not think you have won SO easily, Nova!"*

The elves turned. In the plagued grass, a hooded mage was standing. Alone. He held a cleaving blade in his right hand, and a sort of glowing orb in the left one. His blue and white robes, stripped and trimmed, contrasted with the brownish atmosphere all around. He spoke with an old, grave voice.

*"She is a real jewel. But taunting us will only lead to...sufferings. You are, in the end, but corpses."*

*"-Don't you DARE!"* Maureen yelled out. She had lost her composure. Likely, Jidaeo had swept her beyond her usual stillness. She was uncontrollably shaking, her shimmering voice echoing in the lands like the dooming cries of the crows that lurked in the shadows, all around. Jidaeo rushed before her, and pointed at her. *"Do protect the skull...because I'll protect YOU!"*, he turned back. The mage lowered his hood, revealing an old human face, with brown hair, beard, and slightly glowing eyes.

*"This is our last encounter, Nova!"* the mage immediately blinked, and struck at Jidaeo. He parried the hit with great ease, but was repelled by a well-placed frostfire bolt. Maureen cried, and upon raging, charged the mage, wounding his left arm. Blood spilled, but he had no care. He summoned an ice lance, which went sending Maureen backwards. Suddenly, he muttered an incantation. Above both elves, an aura of frost formed.

*"EMPTINESS only brings about DEATH!"*

The knight, believed dead earlier, was wildly rushing in the mage's back. His own blade hit and pierced his chest, right by the heart. The mage placed his hands on the bleeding wound, grabbed the blade – and without a whimper, fell to the ground. The knight dislodged his sword, glanced a last time at the elves. Suddenly he walked away, as the dense lurker he likely was, not to be seen again.

Jidaeo looked up to Maureen – and she ran in his arms. He seemed much more distant, for sure. To her, it did not matter. *"Thank you..for saving me."* she could mutter. To which he answered, *"So long we can work together, we will reach our goals – and nothing will stop us."* she smiled, without a hint of hunger – for a few seconds perhaps, she had become the lovely lass she had once been, so very long ago. She cuddled up to him as both began walking away.

*"I am going to Dalaran, Maureen.*

*-May I tag along?*

*-Why, of course!"* he chuckled. She clamb on her hawkstrider, he on his plague-horse; and both rode away. Until they were mere specters in the dark haze that surrounded the forlorn, sickened area. One could hear Jidaeo call his men, and prepare for leaving; a few minutes later, strong gusts of winds swept through the area, and a massive shrouded shadow appeared in the skies, before evaporating, along with all winds and noises...

The skull of Shalla'drassil had been recovered. For Jidaeo, this was one more step to his true destiny. Yet, by his side, meekly knelt and facing the same direction, there was a woman. Maimed in life and undeath, and yet, with dreams and hopes stronger than most living Quel'dorei and Sin'dorei would ever imagine. And as they flew away to Northrend, the ruthless death bringer was seemingly shedding frosty tears. For, in her not so dead body, a small heart was nonetheless beating – and the unbearable joys of love were spilled, just like a craving hunger, in her frosted veins. For a while, Maureen had been granted the right to feel the one she used to actually be. A glimpse in the shades of the past..up to this obnoxious lullaby, whispered in her head, this obnoxious, sane-breaking melody.

*First was the Keeper, but then a Knight lone chose to dig deeper in a heartless tone  
They fought her their best, in the end she won; she fulfilled the quest and then there was none...*

*And there there was none...*