



SAMPLE CHAPTER OF THE DREAMER'S WAY

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CHAPTER FOUR

Swane slumped over the yellowed pages of the record book and scratched idly at an itch in his leg. "I don't know what Vevine expects me to get out of these old things!" he grumbled. There were nothing but lists- names of all the priestesses and Tzeh Chers, records of how much ground the Protectorate lost or gained, mining records, crop records, all the way back in time, surely until the year one. "The Protectorate extended its border 1.6 kilometers to the east, but lost 0.5 kilometers in the south this month when the Priestess Serana passed on." On and on and on the records droned. A puff of dust flew up as Swane slammed the volume shut and took another one off the shelf. He sneezed and waved his hand at the dust in irritation.

"Tzeh Swane!" A Peacer entered the room. He was actually out of breath, as though he had been running.

Swane frowned at the use of his official title. It only served to remind him that he was not yet Tzeh Cher. "What is it?"

"Your presence is required. The Tzeh Cher is ill, and you are needed to hold the throne."

Swane sat up straight and closed the book thoughtfully. "What's wrong with her?" he asked, considering the possibilities. Not that he cared. He just wanted to ascertain how much power he had and for how long he would be likely to have it.

The Peacer shook his head. "The healers do not know. She fell and now cannot move."

Mera bustled into the room. "Swane, I just heard about Vevine. What can I do to help?"

Swane caught the look of concern in her eyes and scowled, knowing it was for Vevine and not for him. "What you always do, Mera," he said roughly. "Say your prayers."

"I'll say a special one for you," Mera promised.

Her words, simple as they were, encouraged Swane, and he took his leave with a sense of

anticipation. He was going to sit on the throne indefinitely, perhaps permanently. It was entirely possible that Vevine may not recover. Swane had to restrain himself to keep a wide smile off his face. It would not be seemly to appear happy when his grandmother was ill.

Mera bit her lip as Swane left. He was actually pleased that the Tzeh Cher was ill! Although she was fond of the man, she feared that Vevine was right when she said Swane was not suitable to be Tzeh Cher.

Swane hurried to Vevine's bedchamber where the ruler lay motionless on her bed. The healer faced Swane nervously. "I cannot say how long she will be this way, or if she will ever recover, Tzeh Swane. The blood was blocked from her head, and when that happens, the head cannot govern the body."

Swane eyed the man just long enough to make him squirm. Then he relaxed his gaze. "Very well. Do what you can for her." He turned and marched to the throne room.

Flita sat down for just a moment in the offering room. She had been working for hours, it seemed, carrying offerings and arranging them inside. The baskets of corn reminded her of her father's farm, and a smile played at her lips. Oh, how she missed Alric! Although she had been in the temple for almost two weeks, she had not yet sent him word of her whereabouts. She needed to do that so he would not worry.

Suddenly she was seized with a powerful longing to see her father. Out of respect for the gods, she had resolved to create no visions while she was within the temple, but she missed her father so much, surely one tiny little vision would not hurt anything. Mera was busy in another room, and there was no one else around to see.

She leaned back and concentrated, and her father appeared in front of her, laughing and winking as he sang an old folk ballad. Flita smiled and softly sang along.

"Flita!"

Flita jumped. "Oh Mera! You startled me!" She quailed at the look of horror on Mera's face. "You saw?"

"Yes, I did. I wish I hadn't." Mera sat suddenly on a nearby stool. There were tears in her eyes. "I had no idea. Oh Flita!"

Flita laid a hand on her friend's shoulder. "I'm sorry, Mera. I didn't mean for you to ever find out. I-I'll leave the temple immediately."

"No!"

A smile touched Flita's lips. She should have known Mera would not let this come between them.

Mera continued hoarsely. "I cannot allow you to leave."

Flita's eyes widened. "You aren't going to denounce me?"

"I have to. I, above all, must obey the laws." Mera turned her head away, unable to look at Flita.

"But I'm your friend! We grew up together." Flita fell to her knees and clutched Mera's long skirt with her hands. "Mera, please! You can't do this!"

Mera met and held her gaze for a long, pensive moment. "I have loyalty toward you, it is true," the priestess said slowly. "But I have greater loyalties. My duty is clear." She could not keep her anguish out of her voice.

"Mera, please, I beg of you. Don't do this to me! It is not my fault! I never asked to be a Dreamer!" She could see that her words were falling on deaf ears so she tried a different argument. "All right, so I'm a Dreamer. But I haven't hurt anyone. My visions are harmless!"

Mera shook her head. "I'm sorry, Flita. I have no choice." However, when the servant responded to her summons, Mera hesitated, not wanting to do what she knew she must. Then, hurriedly, without looking at Flita, she said, "Please summon a Peacer. I have discovered a Dreamer."

Mera remained in the room with Flita until the Peacers arrived. The two women were silent. Flita surreptitiously studied her friend, wondering what she could say or do to make Mera let her go before the Peacers came. Mera's eyes stared into some world of her own. Perhaps she was communing with the gods, or perhaps she was lost in her own memories of she and Flita as little girls. Flita marveled at the equanimity with which Mera was able to send her oldest friend to certain death. "Do our years of friendship mean nothing to you?" she asked once.

Mera drew her lips into a straight line. "My duty is clear."

At last, the Peacers marched into the room and waited for orders. Mera pointed at Flita. "This woman is a Dreamer," she said shakily. "I have witnessed her creating a vision." She took a deep breath to calm herself and continued. "I am the Priestess and I denounce her. You need no further evidence."

Flita felt all hope draining out of her as one of the Peacers roughly grabbed her hands and pulled them behind her back. Mera paled when she saw the chains the Peacers carried. "I don't think you need to bind her," she said. "She's not dangerous."

"You never can tell with a Dreamer, Priestess." The man chained Flita's hands and feet and roughly jerked her out of the temple. The last thing Flita saw was her friend looking after her with a look of intense sorrow and, yes, there it was, a trace of regret. Then the Peacers pulled on her chains and forced her to turn her back on the temple.

Flita shuffled after the Peacers, nearly tripping over the heavy shackles. There was a crowd on the street outside the temples and her face burned as she heard the catcalls and jeers directed at her. A few

people even started to throw rocks at her, but the Peacers put a stop to that. Not that they were protecting her, Flita quickly realized. They were just afraid that they, themselves, might get hurt.

Flita briefly considered creating a vision to cast terror into the hearts of the Peacers and people, but quickly discarded the notion. With her hands and feet chained, she would be unable to take advantage of the confusion. She would just have to throw herself upon the mercy of the Tzeh Cher.

It didn't take long to reach the palace. The Peacers led her directly to the audience room and unchained her hands. Her feet, however, remained shackled.

"When you hear the whistle, fall flat on the floor, your head toward the throne, with your arms above your head," one of the Peacers instructed her. "Remain in that position till the Tzeh Cher orders you to rise. Then you may stand, but you must keep your hands behind your back at all times. Otherwise the guards will kill you instantly."

Flita nodded blankly. The whistle sounded and she threw herself to the cool floor, hugging it close.

She heard long, confident footsteps, and then a voice said, "Rise."

Flita hesitated. Surely this couldn't be Vevine, the Tzeh Cher. The footsteps had sounded like those of a man, and it was definitely a man's voice that had spoken.

"Rise!" the voice repeated.

The Peacer behind her nudged her with his foot, and she slowly got to her feet. She looked at the throne expecting to see Vevine, but instead saw the sulky face of Swane.

"You're not the Tzeh Cher!" she blurted.

Swane's eyes blazed. "I am for now!" The words were like a lash, and she bowed her head submissively.

"I'm sorry, Tzeh Cher. I meant no disrespect."

His eyes glinted at her. He gave no sign that he recognized her, but curtly ordered the Peacer to state the charge.

"She is charged with being a Dreamer, Tzeh Cher."

Swane's mouth curled. "A Dreamer?" he said in a silky tone. "Who makes the charge?"

"The Priestess Mera."

"An honorable witness to be sure." Swane stood up and circled Flita, his hands clasped tightly behind his back. He thrust his face into hers and peered closely at her eyes. Flita returned his gaze evenly. She hoped she appeared brave, but in truth, she was too terrified to move a muscle.

Swane chuckled. "She looks so normal," he mused aloud. "She's even pretty. The monsters truly disguise themselves well." He snapped his fingers in front of her face. "How many atrocities have you committed!" he thundered suddenly.

Flita shook her head. "I have harmed no one!" she said evenly.

"Liar!" Swane slapped her across the face. "You insinuate yourself into the Temple under false pretenses. Even now the Tzeh Cher lies ill, dying. What did you do to her?"

"I did nothing! Nothing!"

Swane struck her again, and turned to the Peacers who kept guard at the door. "Let her spend the night in the dungeon!" he ordered. "Tomorrow at mid-morning, take her to the square. Let the people view this vermin who has dared to harm our Tzeh Cher. Then let her be burned in oil!"

Flita gasped. The Peacers grabbed her arms roughly and locked them in their chains. Then, with a jerk, they pulled her out of the throne room.

**To find out what happens to Flita, purchase The
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