

## Braenn

Braenn took a deep breath and knocked to the wooden doors. The door was nicely carved with the pattern of big oak and was leading to the main chamber of Elviet, The Highest Priestess of Ilvadir, Goddess of Nature and Mother of Life. "Come inside my child", she heard old but warm voice from the other side. She opened slowly the heavy door and carefully went inside. In big chamber behind massive wooden desk Elviet was sitting on a high chair. The big furniture made the impression that small Priestess is even tinier. *"She reminds me of you, Granny. With her grey hair, paper skin and old face with unfitting young eyes. And the smile is also like yours. How can I tell her?"* she asked in her thoughts spirit of Theo.

"What do you want to tell me? That you are leaving us soon?" Elviet said calmly and smiled nicely, but with a hidden shade of sadness. Braenn was aware about Priestess special gift that lets her to sense other people thoughts. But it is something different to know about something like this, than to get used to it. "Yes, Mother Elviet, I am very sorry, but I feel I have to leave. I met today in the market square one of my friends from Hommlet. She told me, that our friend is assembling our old fellowship, because he needs help to return stolen item to his master. I cannot explain it, but since I saw her I knew, I have to join them and live the Shrine. Forgive me Mother Elviet". Old Priestess looked at young cleric with infinite love and with great wisdom. *"She looks at me like you did, Granny". "I know Braenn"* responded voice in her head. Braenn could swear that spirit of her Grandmother enjoys this situation. "Now need to be sorry child. I knew, since you came to Ildavir's Shrine first time, that this place will be only short stop in great journey that is ahead of you".

Braenn felt even worse, than she felt in front of the door. And she started to feel deep sadness. She also had her special gift, since she was seven, but still many people from her village couldn't fully accept her dissimilarity. Back then in Hommlet being "special" and becoming shaman apprentice had its down sides. Although she had colleges and few friends, she felt always a bit of a side. Sometimes she heard people telling that she is "crazy as goat". When she told it to Thrall, her teacher and village shaman, he responded: "People like you, coz you are friendly and always smiles. But because of your profession and gift, they will fear you as much as they will respect you. They will be kind and friendly to you, but only to some extent. Beyond this line is awaiting for you "loneliness" in mortal measures. But the spirits and gods are with their beloved once on both sides. Do not forget about it." When she was seventeen her Granny died, her parents were also long gone. She lived alone in the village of Hommet for some time, but when she visited the Shrine of Ildavir in city of Cillamar, she felt she is at home. Braenn was fitting here like lost sheep to its herd. She finally wasn't crazy goat but one of the sheep. She stayed here, among others who praised the Mother of Nature, many of them also blessed by her with special abilities.

"I know this place is for you like home" said Elviet, "and you will be always welcome here as is child welcome in their parents' house. But each kid has to leave the nest and start the journey of adult life. Your time has come, do not be sad, be excited. So go now, do not look back. And there is no need to say goodbyes, I am sure we will meet one way or another" she smiled this time without any trace of sadness. Braenn didn't know what to say, she just smiled shyly back, whispered "Thank you, Mother Elviet" and went back to the carved door. When she was stepping out the room, she heard one last sentence from the Highest Priestess "Ildavir, Mother of Nature, bless and protect my child in her journey."

Braenn went to her room in the Shrine. It was small, narrow chamber with simple furniture: bed, small table and wardrobe. On the wall by the door was hanging small piece of mirror. She looked in the mirror and she saw the storm of brown hair full of small braids, beads and feathers, bright green eyes and the most striking feature: her disfigured face. *"Token of remembrance from the trip to Chieftain's Tomb..."* *"You shouldn't complain my dear"* again Granny Theo could be heard in her head *"so many of you did not come back, so many barely survived..."* *"That is truth... Marigold, my beauty Marigold, Magellan the elf... we thought with Thrall that we will not save Ambrose..."* She could remember as it would be yesterday, when she was spending days and nights in Thrall's tent by the bed of injured Ambrose. He was like cursed, in some wired trance, talking wired things... once she thought she could hear her friend Marigold, but it had to be only a dream. All the bad events that started with the fire in the village barn were standing in front of her eyes. All acquisitions, death brought upon so many she knew, the raid to the Tomb. Hommlet was not the happiest place in her memories.

*"It wasn't always so bad"* told Theo. *"Sure, Granny"* Braenn responded and smiled to her older memories. She had to admit that she had a good life in her village till her Grandma was alive. Although her mother died giving birth to her and her dad, the lumberjack, had a nasty accident in woods four years later that he did not survive, she had good childhood. Grandma Theo took care of her. She was the most loving and wise woman that Braenn ever knew. *"Just next to Elviet"* said voice in Braenn's head and she could hear also laugh. Granny Theo was the one who first discovered Braenn's special gift: direct connection with the spirits of nature", as Thrall used to say. Theo said that day to small Braenn: "Nature hates imbalance. It took away your parents from you, but gave you great gift instead. Do not think about your parents' death as of prize for the gift, rather think of your gift as apology from Nature. Pressure this gift and do not waste it, as you wouldn't like to waste your parents' life". Afterwards they went together to shaman Thrall and since then Braenn became shaman apprentice. She really liked the work in his tents and in the woods. She was very keen on learning new herbs, their properties and ways to use them. Thrall practised with her also "talking to the spirits". Although she was naturally talented in this direction, something else in the pathway of shaman was drawing her biggest attention. Healing people, taking care of them, spending hours next to the bed of ill ones, easing their pain with herbs and prayers was her true vocation. Beside this she had her friends in Hommlet. Marigold, the pretty blond, that always knew what to say to get what she wanted and how to persuade people to do what she wanted. She was born leader, intelligent but sometimes not the nicest in treating people that she did not fancy. Braenn felt always bad about how Marigold was treating her cousin Clio. Clomenica was the one that she met today at the market square. She was the one who brought together all the "weirdoes" in the village: Alric, Macario Drugo, Gildorel, Magellan and 'Firecracker' Nils. Braenn spent many nice hours hanging out with this group. She was curious if her other friend, Milva, will join the Ambrose's party. Milva was closest friend of Marigold, but so much different from blond beauty. She dressed like a guy, cut her red hair short, behaved like a boy climbing all the trees, jumping over the fences. Always serious, uncommunicative, silent, stealthy and very straight forward in her opinions. *"To be straight forward, as for my taste"* commented Theo. *"You know Granny, sometimes I wonder if it was really an honour granted me by Mother Nature that you became one of the spirits. Or is she just teasing with me as you are?"* Braenn was just joking and the spirit of Theo knew how much it means to her granddaughter could still talk to her and that in a way Braenn haven't lost her guardian.

Braenn shook her head, as she would like to clean her head from all the thoughts and memories. *"Time to focus and live finally the Shrine. Fellowship won't wait for me forever."* She put few things that she owned into the small bag, took her bag, turned in to direction of door and looked once again in the piece of mirror on the wall. Still the same scarfed face, father-beads-braids mess in her hair, but this time the bright sparkle in her green eyes was telling her that the real adventure is about to begin.