

Kek smelled the scent of figs before he saw the farm. Sweet, aromatic, the scent took him back to his childhood, running around and hiding in the trees with his friends. As he crested the next hill those trees came into view. A serene, quiet place. It hadn't changed a bit.

He looked back towards the others. Beaten and bloody, he was surprised they all made it this far. Kaden was helping to hold Thaldur upright, despite his broken arm and the large gash across his chest. Thaldur and his broken leg hobbled along thanks to Kaden's assistance, looking up at Kek with his one good eye, the other one just a bloody gaping socket. Fendryn walked behind the two of them, longbow at the ready. He stayed ready to provide cover for the group in case the cultists were still pursuing them. He was perhaps the most able of the group at the moment, having only lost three fingers and sustaining a broken collarbone.

Kek sighed in relief that they had all made it this far, miles from the Sunken Tomb, and finally at a safe place. He motioned to them all with his good arm, the other one having been severed below the shoulder during their retreat.

"We made it," he called out to them.

The other appeared relieved. After nearly a day of travel on foot, it seemed they could finally rest.

It was just past dawn, the farmhands just starting to set about their morning duties. The sky was crisp and clear, and illuminated the Grove in an almost ethereal light. Birds chirping, singing their morning songs. The grass shimmering as the light bounced off the dew drops. A beautiful sight, one that nearly made the weary travelers think they'd died and arrived at Elysium.

After a while, one of the younger farmhands looked across the clearing as she made her way to some of the nearby trees. Shocked she immediately dropped the basket she was carrying and began dashing to the group, calling out to her elders as she did so. Soon the farmhouse was buzzing with activity, men and women of all ages rushing around with various bundles in their arms.

The young woman approached Kek, her eyes wide and face flushed. She was breathing heavily from running over so quickly, looking over the four of them with a mixture of panic and concern.

"Are you all ok? Are you hurt?" she stopped as soon as she saw Kek's missing arm, then noticing the group's injuries one by one, "Follow me, we'll take care of you."

Kek nodded, and she ran back to the farmhouse, calling to the others as she approached. As the group were led inside they were brought to a grouping of four empty beds, fresh linens and clothing placed with care at the edge of each. A broad shouldered, middle aged man helped Kek remove his bloody chain mail, a hunched elderly woman began looking over Thaldur's leg.

Throughout the morning the farmhands helped the weary travelers shed their broken and bloody armor, wash up and get into the fresh clothing that was provided.

Some of the elders helped tend to the group's wounds. Broken bones were set and placed in splints, gaping wounds were cleaned and bandaged. Soon the broken bodies began their long road to recovery, and Kaden and Thaldur found themselves fast asleep. Fendryn stood in the doorway, keeping an eye on his sleeping comrades, while looking back the way they came, expecting the hills to be lined with armed fanatics bent on their demise.

Kek began to wander between the garden patches and fig trees. His hand gently caressed the bark of a tree he recognized, one that he often climbed as a child. He smiled as he remembered the taste of the sweet fig and berry jam that some of the elder workers would sneak him. Soon he found Lilith, the eldest of the lot and de facto leader. She smiled at him as he approached, looking at him as though he were still that mischievous child that would sneak into the Farmhouse all those years ago.

"Kek, look how you've grown." Her voice soft and welcoming. She walked up to him and hugged him around the waist, his powerful frame putting him nearly twice as tall as her.

"Lilith, I can't tell you how good it is to see you again... I'm... I'm sorry for not visiting as much as I should have, and that I showed up like this... We really-"

Lilith put her hand to his lips to cut him off, "Don't you dare apologize. You're here now. That's what matters."

She looked at him with her small, blue-grey eyes, wrinkled, calloused hands gently tracing his wounds.

"You're hurt... You and your friends. I could never turn away a soul in need. Stay as long as you need. Rest. Heal. And when you're able..." she turned and grabbed a basket full of figs from nearby and shoved it in his arm, "All we ask is that you lend your aid in return, help with some of the labor. Winter's approaching fast this year and we could use all the help we can get."

Kek looked down at Lilith, eyes holding back tears. She was always far too kind to him. Her and the other workers of the Grove.

"I think we can manage that... Thank you, again."

Lilith reached a hand up to the side of Kek's grizzled face, gently caressing it.

"If your mother were still here she'd be so proud... Now go, get some rest. We'll need all the able hands we can get..." Lilith said with a wry smile, eyeing the bandaged stump where Kek's arm used to be.

Kek grinned at that remark, "Always a smart-ass. I missed you all so much."

Kek made his way back to the bunks where his companions were sleeping, glad that they all had a safe place to recover.