

*A relic lost to the darkness of a forgotten age . . .*

"What does it say?" Zenobia demanded anxiously after a moment. Elhanan shot her a threatening glance in response, but nonetheless proceeded to read aloud.

"Hakupha's great treasure, those very bones of mighty Nasterias, he had secreted in Nagis Ethar, and which, it is said, lie there still, though that city was abandoned by men when the desert reclaimed it."

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"What does the tablet say as to where in the city Hakupha hid Nasterias's hand?"

The Thald grunted in amusement.

"You cannot have read it all," she asserted, "it must say where the hand lies."

"You expect me to tell you? We shall both of us retrieve it, you and I."

"Both?" she echoed with evident surprise.

"Aye. And by Edanir's Eye, woman, if you do not hold to your word once we return, then I shall cut your head from your shoulders no matter the cost."

*Always waiting to be seized . . .*

Thrusting an arm recklessly inside the hole, Zenobia felt about, stretching and straining this way and that to maximize her reach. After a span of minutes thus, she slumped back, exhausted, her features wrought in confusion and despair.

"It is not here! The hollow is empty! You . . . you lied!" she screamed. "The hand is not here! Where is it? What did the tablet truly say of its hiding place?!"

"It is said that it was taken by the demoness Shali-Moloth, who had herself bestowed it upon the fool Hakupha. She reclaimed it."