

## Deleted Scene – The Team

*Dragons are powerful: Few can best them in their mountains and lairs...  
... but even dragons know it is not safe to dwell alone.  
- Faemerellian proverb of unknown origin.*

‘Senior students!’ They’d chorused in disbelief.

The gym tutor had nodded in sober reply.

It did not go well. They were soundly defeated in seconds. Posk was terribly intimidated, and some archer with darts was so quick and accurate Piex and Allastassia didn’t even get a spell off. Kia was downed trying to cross a rope at the same time as a senior student, even with the help of her tail. Finally, Darrix was knocked unconscious by some burly wrestler. The other group didn’t even go on to win.

It was humiliating.

But the Gedzerai gym tutor was smiling. ‘You disappoint me, young ones. You will try again next week. And this time, you will do much better.’

Kialessa didn’t sleep well that next Fourthday night. Or if she did, she didn’t remember. She couldn’t even concentrate the next day. Darrix too was noticeably paler.

‘This isn’t fun.’ He’d said, and left early, skipping lunch to pray.

Allastassia was quiet and withdrawn, preferring to sit by Piex and Kialessa then to socialise. Her friends even asked if she was feeling ill. So by about lunch time, Kialessa was done feeling sorry for herself.

‘Well, if we have to do it, we might as well make the most of it.’ Kialessa reasoned, and went off to run around with Posk a bit.

Yet the time came all too soon and the five of them were standing on a narrow platform awaiting their second contest against the senior students. Out in the artificial darkness of the gym six other teams of almost-adults planned and plotted their attacks against the other teams. Of Kialessa’s team Darrix was the oldest, older than Kialessa by two years, but the senior students went from fourteen all the way up to eighteen years old.

Kialessa could see the other students on their platforms far away in the hall, staring into the darkness.

*Well, she thought, if we’re going to lose to these older students once more, at least we might learn something.*

‘It’ll be worth it.’ She whispered encouragement to her team.

‘What do you mean?’ Allastassia hissed.

‘Go!’ The tutor shouted.

Each team formed a source of light using a torch or a magic spell. Kialessa saw right away that this tactic would only give away where they were.

'Allastassia, stop!' She whispered. The young part dryad enchantress huffed as her wand fizzled out. Creating light was an illusion she was quite good at, and failing to cast it mid spell would still drain her.

'Wait...'

They watched as the other students sent one or two of their numbers out to attack a nearby tower. There was melee and chaos in the almost complete darkness all around.

'One team's out.' Kialessa reported.

'How can you see?' Piex asked.

'How can you not? Wait, here comes someone.'

She took a padded arrow, and loaded it. She waited till the young man was quite close, trying to work his way around to another platform of students.

She was trembling, she couldn't help reminding herself that she was so much younger than they! She could not find the moment, but he was getting closer, and would see them soon! Summoning all her courage, she let loose her first arrow.

Her shot was so wide he didn't even hear it. Breathing out the tension she waited till he got closer – if he saw them and called out to this friends... but just as he was coming close enough to see them all crouching on the ground he turned around – it was the moment she'd been waiting for and so she shot him right in the back of the head. Keeping to the rules he dropped to the ground right away, out of the game.

'Did you get him?' Allastassia whispered.

'Bullseye.'

They waited in silence for almost half an hour till only they and one other team stood standing. They were the elite of the senior students, and had tactics that were almost professional, and terrifying.

'Why hasn't the game ended?' One of them asked out loud as they floored their most recent adversaries.

'There's one more team.' Their wizard announced.

'Must be the juniors!' He mocked 'They're hiding!'

'Time to come out?' Kia asked.

'Time.' Darrix announced, then shouted, 'by the Eternal!'

His sword lit up with golden energy, revealing their hiding place as much as any shouting had.

'Did you see that?!' Darrix marvelled.

'Never seen it do that.' Kia wondered.

'Oh look, there they are!' Their wizard laughed.

'I can't believe he just honoured my prayer!' Darrix whispered. 'I suppose the Eternal does support practice as well as true battle...!'

In a moment Darrix was running down the gang plank, sword in hand, Posk sported a wide grin as he scurried behind him into the fray. Posk liked these games a lot.

'Stay close!' Kialessa shouted at him. To Kialessa's surprise, her voice was so loud she had to stop to see if it had really come from her. To be honest, she wasn't sure it had, it had shrieked through the air like a banshee.

Darrix stopped short.

'Was that you?' he asked. 'That was *loud*.'

She shrugged without explanation.

But then the older students laughed again.

'Bit new at this aren't they?' One of the older students mentioned.

Their team circled in fanning out to give them each room to attack.

'Let's get to work.' Allastassia announced. She and Piex began casting their spells. But Piex was too nervous and again he lost his concentration. Allastassia got hers off perfectly, and to everyone's amazement, one of the senior students fell over, asleep.

'Bravo!' Piex encouraged.

'Oh, go wake Englos up!' Their wizard demanded.

'Charge!' Kialessa shouted to Darrix and Posk, not wanting to lose their tiny advantage. The older students left their sleeping comrade, and laughing, charged back.

Kialessa saw with gratitude that due to Allastassia's spell it was two against two in the front line, Posk and Darrix versus their warriors. In the back line it was three against two; Piex, Allastassia and Kialessa against their wizard and an archer.

It was lucky Posk understood this was just practice or he might have done some real damage to the young human soldier he faced. The priests were on hand to prevent serious injury, and the swords were wood not sharpened steel. Even so, the senior students were permitted to strike at each other with all their strength, just to make the battle as authentic as possible.

Kialessa watched as Darrix tried to focus his attacks on Posk's foe in order to drop him sooner. Allastassia tried to form another spell, but an arrow suddenly wacked her on the hip and she lost concentration. It was a glancing blow, and she was allowed to keep in the competition. Piex finally formed his spell too, and touching Kialessa on the arm a strange field of energy enveloped her skin a few centimetres out.

'It's called 'mage's bodily inertial dampening field armour.' He explained in too many words. 'I think they'll need you in the front line.'

In the next moment one of the older students wacked Posk on the head, and knocked him out cold. Darrix was surrounded, but managed to dodge a stabbing blow from behind and brought his wooden sword down with such force on the older students' hand it would have severed it were it made of sharpened steel. The older student was out, cursing.

Then another arrow flew, hitting Piex right in the chest. He sat down with a sad moan half way through another spell. Then there was the sound of students approaching from their right.

'It's an illusion.' Allastassia shouted.

But Kialessa ran off into the darkness. She knew it was an illusion, but she needed to get around to that archer! For the time being, she left Allastassia facing the wizard and archer alone.

They played rock, scissors, paper to decide who was to take her out.

The wizard won. He raised a glowing finger, and Allastassia simply shut her eyes.

Then, WACK. Shooting from the darkness Kialessa hit the wizard from behind with her padded arrows.

'Take them out!' were his last words before retiring from the game.

The junior students were doing much better this time.

Darrix was much younger than his opponent, but the older boy still seemed to be struggling against the agile and skilled foe. It was set to be a long battle, but Allastassia did not have very long. She sent off another spell and the older student collapsed in sleep.

'Help me!' She wailed, a second before a padded arrow walloped her in the stomach. Now she was out too.

Their archer was still out there, now also hiding in the darkness.

Kialessa watched him. He was being very careful, the last remaining member of his team. She shouted out to Darrix to hide and in the next instant the archer spun around and his arrow just skirted past her cheek. Warning Darrix had almost cost her the game. She pressed herself nearer the floor and froze.

Darrix hid himself too.

With almost no sound the archer moved in the darkness in her direction. He was looking to wake at least one of his two sleeping companions. He was walking right up to her, and it was amazing that even in this darkness he did not see her. But he seemed to be quite unable to notice her lying down right in front of him. It puzzled her.

Darrix, however, was completely blind and completely unable to keep silent. He walked right into a board with a confident sounding *thump*. And the archer, well-practiced in this battle scene, loosed an arrow that hit him right in the chest.

Now there was just the two of them.

Kialessa waited while the archer walked towards her. Did he know she was there? He didn't look down, but seemed to be stalking towards the platform behind her.

He stopped when he reached her, looking around.

Did he see her? Was he playing? It was as bright as a full moon to her... but he walked on, and as soon as he did, she stood without a sound to her feet, turned around, found the moment, and shot him right between the shoulder blades with an arrow.

The lights came on.

Kialessa's team had won.

The senior students were greatly embarrassed, and the gym tutor chastened them with pride that a collection of junior students had just humiliated them all. There were a mixture of polite congratulations and snide insults.

Kialessa and her friends didn't win much in the coming weeks, but they did win. Soon, they were afforded a measure of begrudging respect.

*At least the senior students are a challenge, Kialessa thought.*