

The cave was dark, damp and eerily quiet. We walked in silence down the thoroughfare of the cavern. It seemed pretty empty for awhile, until we hit a four way split. Standing in the center was a stone statue with amber glowing eyes. It was staring directly at us.

“Oh dung,” Cygnet muttered quietly.

“You can say that again,” I agreed.

“Oh dung,” she repeated. She never took her eyes off the statue. I started to wonder if this girl ever blinked, as hard and serious as she stared the grey figure down. “Karma, on my signal you need to run,” she whispered, still watching the enemy.

“Run?” I asked in sheer horror and disbelief. This thing would tear her to shreds with just a single swipe, it looked like. It was massive and she was shrimpy.

“Yes, run.... On my signal,” she continued to monitor it, her face stoic and unwavering. As the statue’s eyes locked completely on Cygnet, she took out her whip. “Okay, you big earthy rock man, I’m ready. Come get me!!!” Her eyes darted to me for a split second as she gave me an upward nod. I took it as my signal to get out of there with my life, leaving her to fight. I bolted around the statue as fast as I could without turning back. It was one of those times that I would have had to have faith that she would be alright on her own.

A half an hour or so after being outside on the other side of those intimidating foothills, a very battered and dirty Cygnet emerged from the mouth of the cave. “That was interesting. Let’s not do that again. Hey, Karma, are you ready to go?” She looked like she was ready to pass out.

“Sit and eat something, Cygnet before your body gives out on you. I have some fruit or we can share one of my iron rations if you like.” I looked at her worriedly. Perhaps she would have been better off if I would have stayed and fought alongside her.

She dropped unceremoniously to her knees before sitting with the grace and nobility of someone with a high society upbringing. She wavered for a moment, a flicker of the pain she was in crossing her eyes for a mere instant. She took out a birdseed biscuit and nibbled on it. Slowly, her eyes began to brighten up a bit and she took a bite out of it. “Mmm...would you care terribly if I napped for a short bit?”

“I’ll watch over you, Cygnet. Rest and relax, my friend, you earned it.” I placed my back against a nearby tree. She curled up next to me, clutching her sack up against her chest, and lowered her head onto my left thigh. I smiled down at her, and stroked her matted hair a few moments. Then, keeping my awareness with me, I meditated, saying a silent prayer to Dorvahn.

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It was nearing evening when she finally came to. Wordlessly, she stood up, brushed whatever dirt and dust she could off of her dress, smiled up at me and nodded her readiness to me. She readjusted her gold headband with white feather flower as I got up. I looked at her inquisitively, and noticing it, she answered my unspoken question. “Swan feathers. I wear them for luck. I was named after a swan, Cygnet.”

“Oh.” Putting on my travel pack, I studied her carefully. “You really are weird.” Without awaiting a response, I started off towards the castle and the start of my true adventure.