

FALLEN GIANTS

By Jesikah Sundin

Barnacles shredded the soles of my feet. Still, I crept on shaking limbs across a monolith that was crumbling into the Curon Sea. One more step, just one more step. The way hunger gnawed my hollow gut, I was ready to fall beside this long forgotten stone king and allow the sea to claim me.

But not yet. I had a message to deliver first.

A wave crashed from behind in a mighty roar and I bit back a cry. Agony pulsed hot as salt mixed with my blood. For days I had edged the coastline and scaled tidal rocks in search of someone. Anyone. Surely I was nearing civilization. The Interior was no longer safe.

My fingernails dug into the granite statue and gripped crusted sea life. Arms shaking, I hurled my body over a lip of stone to scope the vast white sands ahead. There, only a stone's throw away along the beach, stood a giant of a man in a ragged hide sarong. Gentle waves lapped at his feet while he dragged in a large hewn net weighted with red-scaled fish. Dark, flyaway strands—loosened from a knot atop his head—floated around in the breeze. His back and arms rippled with corded muscle. Spindrift splashed off nearby rocks and kissed his honey-toned skin.

A sob caught in my throat. Finally, I had found someone.

“Hello there!” I shouted.

He twisted my way, sharp and alert, surprise marking each angular line of his face. Then he was running toward me, sand kicking up at his heels. Even before he neared, I shrank back from his towering enormity. Scarred tattoos marked his chest, shoulders, and arms in dark blue swirls and geometric patterns. Tales still circulated of an extinct Indigo Tribe who traded in woad ink dust. Rumors on the wind told by exotic travelers wishing to earn a coin or two.

His run slowed to a stop before me. He let his glowing violet eyes roam over my small body, his head tilted to the side. I swallowed back my rising fear while following the trail of his scarred tattoos. If myths were true, each mark told of where Sybils had carved into flesh and traded organs for parts linked to The Machine. He would know. He would have sensed the change.

“The magnetic shields are down,” I somehow wobbled out. “War has come.”

He scooped me up effortlessly as though he held a mere yearling in his palms, careful to not touch my tattered left wing, now dangling by remnants of mutilated sinew and muscle. Pain blazed through me anew. I shuddered violently with each spasm. Dezialean Herders deep in the Oakling Kingdom had plucked my iridescent feathers for their ornamental cloaks.

“What is your name, girl?” His voice was a soft breeze, and as deep as the Curon Sea.

“Helenea, sir.” I dared to peer up into his glowing eyes. My teeth clattered with each revolting wave of misery as I added, “I ... I am the last of my tribe.”

“Brave Helenea girl,” he soothed. “War is not what we should fear.” Blood dripped from my feet and pooled in his hand as he traced a light finger down the feathers of my right wing. “Far greater nightmares await us.”

“Are you a nightmare?”

“We are all nightmares in a world that dreams of domination.”

Gently, he pressed me to his chest, to the blue-stained scars. He smelled of salt and fish, and my stomach clenched. “Little Helenea girl, come. You did good to warn us.”

He carried me across white sands, past the net filled with red-scaled fish, and into the bordering forest until we reached homes suspended in the trees. My head swam, dizzy with pain. Black dotted my vision. I nevertheless sighed with relief. I had come so far and delivered my message to someone in the Exterior. Had more magnetic shields dropped?

Each jostled step tempted the black. While fading, I peered over my shoulder to watch the rocks and ocean, but instead found myself staring into the eyes of a giant stone king.

Now fallen.



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