

Karme expected to plunge into darkness, but the sewers were filled with a faint natural light, just enough to see by. Which could only mean one thing: they were almost to freedom.

Once she was sure they were safe, her emotions took over. Hot tears poured forth, putting the taste of salt on her lips.

“Nusha, I thought I’d never...”

“Shh,” was all Nusha said. “We’re almost out.”

Karme gulped and forced herself to be strong. After all, Nusha had come to rescue her, and it couldn’t have been easy for her. She had so many questions, not just about their capture, but about everything: about Nusha’s life, what she thought and felt.

The idea that haunted her the most, while she was held in that chamber, was that she would leave this life with Nusha hating her. It felt stupid, because after all, the Argonian had no reason to like or even trust her, but the thought that somehow she would make amends, become true friends with her when she got out, was what kept her from losing her mind.

And now she felt like she had been right, that her prayer had led Nusha to rescue her and led them both to freedom.

They followed the light through the sewer, with only the occasional skeever providing resistance. Nusha quickly dispatched of them, which relieved Karme, for the mere thought of trying to fight or use magic made her quiver.

When they reached the exit, emerging into a humid evening beside Lake Rumare, Karme collapsed to her feet. Nusha was instantly by her side.

“Are you okay?”

Karme could only mouth the word ‘water’. They had deprived her of food and drink in the prison, and the sight of so much water made her thirst even more apparent. She only needed to crawl to it...

“It’s not safe.”

Karme blinked, feeling as if Nusha had just slapped her in the face. Couldn’t she see the water? She needed it!

“The lake is filthy with pollution from the city. You’d get sick if you drank it.”

Karme made a dry groan, and lifted her arm up to Nusha. If she couldn't drink from the lake, she didn't know if she would make it. The stars looked so beautiful in the sky, she suddenly realised. They shone like a halo around Nusha's head, and the figure towering above her reminded her of Mephala.

Nusha's scaled arms wrapped around Karme, lifting her up. Karme tried to mumble "Thank you", but her throat was too dry. She was vaguely aware of being lowered into a boat by the side of the lake, and of Nusha paddling, before she passed out.

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Karme woke up with a start. She had been plagued by nightmares ever since she was captured, and it didn't seem like they were going to stop now that she was free. In her dream she was locked in the interrogation chamber, and the skeletons were left in the room with her. She screamed for Nusha to come help her, but nobody was there to prevent the creatures from tearing her apart.

She saw that it was still night. Her throat and stomach burned like hellfire, and she clenched her eyes shut again. Despite the horrors that awaited her in sleep, she would at least be free of physical pain there.

"No," Nusha commanded. "Sit up. Drink."

With the Argonian's help she did so, drinking straight from Nusha's palms, and the pain began to fade away ever so slowly. Nusha handed her a mushroom and she examined it to make sure it wasn't a poisonous species, her childhood instincts never failing. She took a bite, and it felt like she was eating pure ecstasy. As her strength returned, she gobbled the mushroom down, and then another.

"There'll be fish, too, soon."

Karme looked up and saw that Nusha was preparing a fire, a fish lying on some leaves beside it. They were sat by some trees, and Lake Rumare glittered not far away from them. The ugly eyesore of the White Gold Tower, the obelisk at the centre of the

Imperial City, pierced the sky beyond it, filling her with unease. Karme would never see it as beautiful again. She felt her stomach turn, and almost threw the mushrooms back up, but she managed to keep them down. She crawled to the stream that trickled a few feet away and drank more.

“Thank you,” she said, once she had her voice back.

“Don’t thank me yet. We’ve still got a hell of a journey to make. They’ll be searching for us already. We can’t stay here long.”

Karme’s mind was still in a blur. Them hiding in the city, the amulet, the necromancer—it all felt like a distant dream. But the amulet still burned against her chest, despite the many attempts of the palace authorities to remove it.

“Where will we go?” she asked.

“Where else? To Pale Pass.”

Pale Pass... That was right. They had to end this, once and for all. But like a terrible nightmare, it felt like they would never be rid of this burden. After all, even if they got rid of the amulet, they would still be on the run from the law.

Which begged the question of how Nusha escaped. The Argonian seemed to pre-empt this and, finally succeeding to light the fire, she turned to Karme and said, “Don’t worry about the past. Let’s focus on how to get to Bruma, and then we’ll talk about what happened.”

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Once they had eaten and rested, Karme found herself returning to what she might consider ‘normal’. But after what she’d been through, she wasn’t sure if she would ever feel normal again.

It would be sunrise in a few hours, and Nusha suggested they take advantage of the remaining night to get a head start on their journey. Whether by luck, or pure chance, within a few minutes of walking along the road, they bumped into some old friends.

“Hide,” Nusha said.

Karme no longer tried to figure out the purpose behind

Nusha's commands, she simply followed them, trusting them to keep her safe. She dove into some bushes beside the road with Nusha.

"Look," Nusha said.

It was hard to make out in the dark, but beside the ruins of a fort, Karme could just see the outline of tents. When she spotted one of the camp's inhabitants, her heart skipped a beat.

It was the moneylenders from Bruma. At first she felt a jolt of panic, thinking that they were still looking for her, but she told herself that they would've given up by now. There were more lucrative avenues to pursue, and they'd likely already heard about her capture.

"That one's supposed to be on watch, but I think he's asleep," Nusha whispered.

"So what, are we gonna sneak past them?"

"No. We're going to steal their horses."

Karme sat still and waited for Nusha to tell her the plan.

"Aren't you going to say anything?" Nusha said.

"Huh? You're the brains here. You've always been the one who knew what to do."

Nusha looked at her, her amber eyes flickering inquisitively. It was as if she was reappraising Karme. Usually Karme would've found it off-putting, but she was beyond caring about Nusha's perception of her. There was a new camaraderie between them, a deeper understanding.

Stealing the horses turned out to be fairly trivial. In her short time with Nusha, Karme had become adept at sneaking. Still nowhere near Nusha's level, but she understood the game now. They took it in turns, using the chameleon ring, to go and take one horse. Karme used a silencing spell, but the horses came surprisingly easily. They also nabbed a sack that was within easy reach, which contained some superior clothes to their prison rags and a few Septims.

The Orcs stayed asleep, and they were well on their way to Bruma by the time the sun came up. The rhythmic gallop of the horse gave Karme something to focus on, and she forced herself to

think through what they would do once they arrived in Bruma. She would've liked to head straight for the pass, but that would likely end up with them stranded in the Jerall Mountains, possibly surrounded by undead Akaviri soldiers. In the end, she knew that they would have to seek an audience with the countess. She had a diary written by somebody seeking the pass, outlining directions to it, and that was the only way they would get there before the law caught up with them.

Diplomacy was once Karme's strong suit, though she saw now that her attempts at charm came off as obsequious. She had changed so much in a week, and now the idea of facing the countess made her nauseous, whereas before she would have approached the situation with an air of calm superiority.

When they stopped at a stream to water the horses, Karme asked Nusha the question that had been haunting her ever since they crept into the basement of Avranu the necromancer.

"What was that letter you showed her? And why did she react like that?"

Nusha stared at the stream for a long time before answering. "I decided that Avranu must have a reason, an ulterior motive for wanting that child's skull. After all, if she simply needed a child's skull for her magic, she would have found a grave and dug one up already. No, what she sought was vengeance."

Revenge... In Morrowind, people were constantly seeking to avenge themselves and others. The bloody cycle of retribution was in large part the reason the Morag Tong was founded, in order to legitimise such disputes and curtail the damage. Karme had first thought Avranu, who practised a school of magic despised by most citizens of Morrowind, to be an *n'wah*, a Dunmer from outside of the land. But perhaps, like Karme, she had reason to flee her home.

"Fevari is the daughter of Thones and Sedrno Llenrvi, the couple we saw walking with her. I asked around the district, and found out that Avranu had been spurned by Thones, or at least that was how she spoke of it to others. She was madly in love with him, and when he chose Sedrno over her, she became obsessed. So she bided her time, and when they had Fevari, she knew how she

would exact her revenge. Except she didn't dare try herself, because the family had long been wary of her.

"I went to Thones, explained the situation. I don't know why he believed me, but that just shows how far Avranu had gone. I thought that if she saw, once and for all, that Thones didn't love her, that he hadn't been bewitched by Sedrno, she might relent. It was dumb luck that it worked in the end."

Karme wasn't sure she would call it 'dumb luck'. It had taken a lot of clever negotiation on Nusha's part.

Nusha bowed her head and closed her eyes. "I think Avranu realised I was a killer. And she was right. At first, I was going to kill the child. I wanted that information so bad that I—I just thought like I had been trained to be. Even though it was a child."

Karme sat down by the stream and dangled her fingers in it, enjoying the way the water caressed her skin.

"Thank you," she said.

"Why? I did nothing. If you hadn't—"

"You risked our lives by going out and asking for that information. What you wanted to do... would have been easier. We might've even been able to avoid being imprisoned. But you didn't chose the easy way out. What you did was brave."

Nusha looked away. "I've never been called brave before. And I've never considered myself to be it."

Karme stood up, placed her hand on Nusha's shoulder. They gazed into each other's eyes, and for the first time, Karme felt like she was truly seeing her. She looked at the whorled pattern of pigmentation on Nusha's face—obsidian backed by night—and committed it to memory. She wasn't sure how much time they still had left together, and she felt now that she would miss Nusha, whenever they inevitably had to part.

"You are brave," she said.

Nusha's mouth twitched, and for a brief moment, Karme thought she was crying, but before she could be sure, Nusha turned away and mounted her horse.