

Violet Dreams
by Felora
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"Ah, Felora, you're awake. I have something to discuss with you," Faquarl said, looking up as she entered the main room of the hideout from one of the hallways, his face calm but serious. Dawn was just beginning to peek through the rotting remains of the inn above them. Had he been awake all night?

"Aye, sir?" she asked, brushing a few strands of hair out of her eyes with one hand as she stepped over to the corner where he stood. She'd slept fitfully, evident by the tousled condition of her hair and the dull, throbbing ache at the base of her spine.

"You remember the events of last night, I expect?"

Remember them? How could she forget them? The visage of that spectral green dragon, his booming voice echoing through her skull for hours after she had gone. She'd stood quietly next to Faquarl, flanked by a small contingent of the Blacktooth Grin and watched in awe as the great dragon Taerar shattered the peace of that quiet grove with his anger and his zeal. So lost in watching him she had been that she had missed the dragon's words altogether.

"Did you hear that, Felora?" Faquarl had asked.

She had looked at him and shaken her head.

"It spoke of the Nightmare!" The subtle shift in his posture told her that he was a bit frustrated with her, though his voice betrayed nothing. Only when the dragon came closer did she realize that it did indeed speak, with a volume and magnitude that caused her ears to ring.

"Peace is but a fleeting dream. Let the Nightmare reign!"

Taerar's words had sent a shudder through her, and she had suddenly felt the urge to flee the grove, to escape from the dragon's terrible wrath and sadness. And as he unleashed his fury on those members of the Grin foolish enough to venture too close, Felora had felt a wave of pity for the great creature.

"We should go," Faquarl had said, leading her and the others back the way they had come. She had looked back only once to see the green dragon Taerar vanishing into the mists of the grove.

She nodded. "You mean the dragon, sir. The one that spoke of the Nightmare."

"Indeed," Faquarl replied. "It disturbed me greatly."

Felora paused, watching him. "Yes, sir. I felt badly for him."

"The green dragons do not need your pity, Felora." Faquarl's voice was hard. "They are simply a further example of the corruption that has tainted the Emerald Dream. The dragons do nothing to preserve its nature; they remain here, in Azeroth, while the Dream runs rampant with terrors and the Unwaking."

"Sir, is the Emerald Dream not the place where we retreat to in hibernation?"

He nodded. "Yes, as druids we are intimately connected to the Dream. Although of late I would not wish to be so, considering the odious taint that has consumed it."

Felora blushed, feeling suddenly ignorant and awkward as she so often did in front of her mentor. "I'm afraid that I know very little about it, truly. The Emerald Dream, I mean. I had always imagined it to be a place that corruption could not touch, as the dragons would not allow that to happen."

Faquarl stood from his chair, gesturing toward a small wooden bookshelf which stood in a dusty corner of the room. "Then I suggest that you make use of our meager library to learn about the Dream's past and present state."

Felora nodded, stepping over to pull a large tome from the laden shelves entitled *The Emerald Dream*. She settled herself onto the floor and opened the book, but her attention wasn't on the pages. Out of the corner of her eye she watched Faquarl, standing several feet away lost in his own thoughts. Regardless of how little she knew about him, this was important to him; she could hear it in his voice, see it in the way he tirelessly pursued the work of his fallen comrades. She would never know what it was like to be a druid in that way. Felora bit her lip, frustrated with her inability to understand the world through his eyes. Despite his bravado and his tendency to open his mouth and immediately insert his foot, he was kind and as a fellow druid Felora had quickly found herself admiring him. He had agreed to teach and advise her, and she was beginning to feel as though she was failing him.

"Felora."

She looked up, surprised to see him standing over her with an unreadable expression on his face. She carefully closed the book and squeezed it back onto the shelf before standing slowly.

"...sir?"

"Come with me, I've changed my mind. Bring your alchemy supplies; I have something to show you." And with that, Faquarl turned and made his way out of the hideout, leaving Felora to follow in his wake.

The Spirit Rise of Thunder Bluff loomed before her as Felora descended the rope bridge just steps behind Faquarl, who was unusually quiet. To the right of the bridge, carved deep into the rock of the mesa, was a limestone tunnel known as the Pools of Vision. An uneasy feeling had crept into the pit of Felora's stomach and now lay there, growing stronger as they approached their destination.

"Are you sure about this, sir?" she asked Faquarl, who continued to stride forward eagerly, clutching two vials of dark red liquid which he had instructed Felora to brew and give to him just moments prior. Faquarl nodded.

"Yes, I think that you need this experience," he said, stepping down off of the path and toward the tunnel entrance. "It will be an important step in your training."

Felora followed him into the dark seclusion of the watery cave, empty but for the soft lapping of the pools against the stone and the gentle shudder of mushrooms releasing their spores into the air. She remembered this as a peaceful place, where she could come to think or when she needed solace. It seemed unnatural for her to feel nervous or frightened here - or around Faquarl, for that matter. It's only a new experience, she told herself, taking a slow breath. Faquarl led her to a shallow pool at the very back of the cave, high above the entrance. He turned to face her, a soft haze curling about him at the water's edge, and Felora swallowed thickly.

"You'll need to sit in the water," he said as she stepped to the edge of the pool and took off her cloak, folding it neatly and setting it to one side on the ground.

"...aye, sir." Her hesitation was clear but she did as instructed, settling herself up to her waist in the lukewarm water and resting her hands on her knees. She looked up at Faquarl with a question on her lips but said nothing. He knelt down beside her at the edge of the pool, tilting his head.

"Do you trust me?" he asked, and Felora felt something inside of her do somersaults. She nodded, breathing in and out.

Faquarl uncorked one of the vials and held it out to her. She took it from him with a shaking hand. "What will happen, sir?"

"You'll see. Just relax. Drink it slowly."

Felora nodded and lifted the vial to her mouth, briefly tasting a bittersweet liquid before it all slid down her throat. She twisted around to hand the empty vial to Faquarl, who had taken a seated position behind her. Trying to relax, she shifted her position and waited pensively. Nothing was happening and the knot in her stomach was getting tighter.

"Alright, Fel. Take some deep breaths, relax. Let yourself float in the water as much as you can." Faquarl sat watching her, waiting for a reaction.

She was suddenly exhausted, her head beginning to swim. Felora reclined herself backwards, her head coming to rest on the edge of the pool. She could hear her heartbeat starting to slow, her body sinking, becoming one with the water around her. Her lips parted, her breathing becoming shallow. She was seized with an irrational fear that she might be dying, just before her eyes closed and rolled back into her head.

She was no longer in the pool. A light had engulfed her, soft and pale. It flickered briefly, then dimmed into blackness.

"Felora..."

A bass voice echoed through her mind, familiar and yet she could not remember to whom it belonged. She tried to move her lips, but felt distant from her body, as though she was numb. The words choked in her throat as a name finally surfaced in her mind.

"Faquarl?"

A soft, green glow had appeared at the periphery of her vision, and as she turned it became brighter and clearer. She gasped in awe as an ethereal landscape unfolded before her eyes, threaded with a celadon haze. Faquarl's voice resounded again in her mind.

"Tell me what you're seeing, Felora."

The great forms of trees - their branches twisted in thick, organic spirals - towered over her, wrapped with slender vines and draped with lacy webs of gray-green moss. Soft ferns and feathery plants brushed her feet as she took a step forward into the eternal forest, into the eerie silence. The pale sky above her was peppered with softly glowing stars. She struggled to find her voice, and it felt as though she were tugging it up from the bottom of a deep well.

"The Dream, sir. It is so beautiful," she whispered, more to herself than to him.

The safety of her clothing was gone, leaving nothing but the effervescent haze to cloak her dreamform. No movement or sound came from anywhere around her. She sighed, feeling at peace with herself inside the Dream.

Felora's skin suddenly started to tingle at the base of her skull and she froze, overwhelmed with the feeling that she was not alone. Something was wrong, something was angry. Fear seized her.

"Who are you?" she whispered, the words hissing through her teeth as her heart began to pound. "Who's there?"

She turned sharply, her eyes scanning the horizon for the presence that she now felt as surely as the blood flowing through her veins. The forest was silent, holding onto all of its secrets. A low rumble sounded in the distance, coming from a direction that Felora couldn't see. The sky began to darken to a ruddy brown, penetrating the haze with bolts of dark lightning which came closer to Felora with each sickening thud of her heartbeat in her ears. The metallic scent of blood filled her nose and she reeled, gasping for breath.

As the sky continued to darken, tears sprang to Felora's eyes as the forest around her began to die. The ground blossomed with a reddish-brown stain and the trees withered into twisted stalks, devoid of color or life. Her limbs were suddenly very heavy.

"You were right," she said, unable to tear her eyes away as decay consumed the landscape, destroying the tranquility before her. "The corruption is here."

She realized that this was the Nightmare that the dragon spoke of, that Faquarl had been telling her about for so long. Her mind began to race, echoing vividly the thoughts and fears that made up the Nightmare, sparking a throbbing pain in her head as the malevolent force opened those fears to her in a flood.

Felora stood on the edge of a mesa as the world below lay in ruin, with the corrupt lieutenants of Ysera bellowing their triumph. The forests of Azeroth were burning, the waters murky with blood and silt. She stood on the edge of a vast battlefield, the fallen warriors of the Grin silent after

their last stand. Pierced through the chest on one of Taerar's great claws was Faquarl, bleeding out amidst the madness that he had tried so hard to prevent. Somehow his eyes met hers across the distance and his last breath carried one word to her ears on the wind.

"...run..."

A sob escaped her as the vision broke its hold, and she lurched forward into the Dream, trying to run. Her legs were stiff and heavy, as though her feet were shackled in iron. In a panic, she twisted her body to evade a tendril of darkened haze and fell, one outstretched hand landing onto a patch of tainted ground. The darkness stung her, lashing sharply into the flesh of her palm before she stumbled upright. Faquarl's voice cut through her panic, repeating her name over and over.

"Felora!"

She couldn't find the breath to answer him, and was suddenly jerked awake with a gasp, her violet eyes snapping open to lock with Faquarl's golden ones. He had pulled her out of the pool and was kneeling in front of her, holding her wrists to the stone beneath them. She struggled against him.

"Be still!" Faquarl nearly roared, and Felora lay back, blinking at him. Her clothes were drenched from her submersion in the pool, and after a moment Faquarl released her hands. She brought her right hand up to inspect the burn that nearly covered her palm from top to bottom. The skin was stained a dark, reddish-brown. Faquarl waited, frowning at the sight of her hand but saying nothing. Felora looked up at him with huge eyes.

"Felora." Her own name was loud inside her ears.

"...aye, sir?"

Faquarl paused before continuing. "What happened, Fel? What did you see?"

She was quiet for a long moment, her gaze falling into her lap. "Please don't make me go back there, sir. It's -"

Felora's voice broke as she curled her injured hand into her lap and sat there, watching him quietly. Faquarl's ears drooped as a wave of remorse hit him. He had only wanted to share the Dream with her, to help her understand exactly why it was that he was so passionate about finding the source of the corruption and healing it. He had never wanted his pupil to be hurt. Felora's voice came softly to his ears.

"Has She forsaken me, sir?"

Faquarl looked at her, frowning. "Has who forsaken you?"

"The Earthmother, sir. Therazane..." she nearly whimpered, her voice cracking.

Faquarl ran one hand through his hair, brushing the edge of his broken horn. Felora was nearly brimming with emotion, and he didn't quite know how to deal with that. He sensed that the experience had done more than simply marred her; something about her had changed but he would need to wait until it surfaced.

"No, Felora, I'm certain that she has not. Therazane would not abandon one of her own," Faquarl said after a long pause, glancing down quickly to watch Felora's expression at his words. "Remember that it was only your mind experiencing the Dream. Your body was safe here with me. Although it appears that the Nightmare can circumvent even Therazane's influence..."

His voice faded as he again retreated into his mind, trying to think of a way to console her. Felora's sudden attachment to him had been discomfiting, even awkward, but that did nothing to change the fact that she was asking for help and that he had no answers to give her.

"Felora," he began, as she pushed herself up from her seated position beside the pool and accepted his proffered hand in aid.

"Yes, sir?"

"You must not attempt this again. The corruption of the Nightmare is far worse than I had anticipated. I fear that even now it encroaches upon the Moonglade." Faquarl paused for a moment. "We are the only ones who can stop this, Felora. And you are younger than myself. If something were to happen to me, you would be the only one that could carry on the research I've started. You are not to enter the Dream any more, do you understand?"

Felora was silent, her head bowed. Faquarl reached out to place his hand beneath her chin, tilting her head until her gaze found his in the dim light. "...do you understand?"

She nodded. "Yes, sir. But..."

"Good." He reached for her hand, which she held protectively against her body. She shied away from him. "Give me your hand, Fel."

His voice was steady and reassuring. She slowly complied, the backs of her fingers coming to rest against his palm.

"This may sting," he warned. "*Reth ignon!*"

The invocation in Kalimag caused a blinding light to surround her hand and begin to burn the gash on her hand into a smooth, dark scar. Her eyes clenched in pain, but she made no sound. Faquarl released her hand, turning to stare into the pool of water at their feet. Felora stood beside him, muted.

"I do not know if the Nightmare can yet spread into our world," Faquarl said. "Or if its taint still lies within you. You need to rest. Go and return to the hideout. I will continue here."

A sudden fear gripped her. "You aren't going into the Dream...are you, sir?"

"No, not tonight. It's clear that it is no longer safe to do so for any length of time." He looked at her. "Never forget what you have seen, Felora. We must not give the Nightmare any other chance at a foothold in our world."

Felora nodded, brushing past him as she moved toward the entrance to the cave. After a few steps she stopped. "Sir?" she asked, not turning to face him.

"Yes?"

"Thank you."

"After what you have experienced, you have no reason to thank me."

"But I do, sir - you have shown me the truth."

With those words, she began walking up and out of the depths of the Pools of Vision and into the waking world once again.

Faquarl watched as Felora disappeared, stepping out of the darkness and into the light of day. He shifted his weight, musing, and a light clinking sound caused him to look down at his belt, where the second vial of elixir hung against his hip. Lifting the vial to eye level, he watched the liquid tremble within as he contemplated going into the Dream and fighting the Nightmare himself. Felora was very lucky that she hadn't been trapped within the Dream for eternity, as Naralex had been. The scar that it had left on her was a small foothold that the Nightmare now had in their world - a foothold within his pupil, and it was his fault. He had attempted to seal it within her, but deep down he had no idea if even the powers of the Firelord would contain a force like the Nightmare. A greater fear welled within him. How would it affect Felora's thoughts? Her personality? Her parting words came to echo in his head.

It was then that Faquarl knew. It had jaded her, had turned her once-innocent worldview into something harder - something with an edge and a cruelty. The Dream had touched her, and she had changed. Perhaps it's for the better, he thought. Maybe now she will survive.

A heavy blanket of guilt and regret settled over his shoulders as a damp haze filtered up from the pool beside him, surrounding Faquarl with vapor. He looked down once more at the vial in his hand.