

Zabashi, Twelve Hours Earlier

It was late. The sun set hours ago. The crescent moon and stars had illuminated through the night. Now the wind hollowed, and rain thrashed against the windows. In the cold, dark underground chamber lit only by a small center of burning fire, stood; Yaqin, Makai, Naeem, Jabril, and Zuko.

"Are we sure?" Makai asked, his brown eyes glinted with rage in the flame.

"Yes," said Zuko softly, un-nerved by Makai's anger. "We lack many choices here. Either we find your daughters with the help of Knights..."

"We've used Knights and Defenders for years!" Jabril cut in, his fist clenched. "Why didn't we see this coming? Between you two," he pointed to a quiet Naeem and Yaqin. "You should've known."

Naeem paced the chambers ignoring his brother as Yaqin eyed Jabril, "You know how our powers work. You understand the decree." Makai shook his head,

"The rules no longer apply. In the current world, we're living in, Virticus is defiantly not following the laws."

Zuko held up a hand, "You four need to choose. We only contain enough

bashikuto for one and time is running out. Do we find your daughters or hear the full prophecy?" The brothers stared at one another.

Yaqin broke the silence. "Zabashi must come first." Makai's voice filled with passion.

"How...How, do I tell my wife? I promised Anaya I would find our daughter."

"We cannot tell our wives, it will break them," said Naeem, in a somber voice. Jabril sighed.

"We must block ourselves from Jalila." Everyone's eyes snapped to Jabril.

"We vowed to our wives, that we'd never do that," Yaqin said, at once. "Our word is our bond. Jabril, what is going on with you tonight?"

Zuko stopped Jabril from answering. "In three minutes, we will lose the chance to do either. If we're to do this, I need an answer, your daughters or—"

"Zabashi," the Ba'kar brothers said in unison.

Zuko gave a sad nod and muttered, "Zabashi."

The brothers watched as Zuko pulled out a small vial filled with *bashikuto* powder and a long knife. Yaqin took the blade Zuko passed to him and pricked his finger. Blood dripped upon the open flame. Jabril took the blade and pricked his forefinger. After Makai and Naeem pierced their fingers, the energy in the room shifted.

Yaqin waved his right hand over the fire as Zuko chanted and sprinkled the red dust. The flames flared higher, and the ground began to crack below their feet. Makai turned his finger, and the flame spun, in a tight circle. "Now," said Zuko, between chanting. Yaqin poured a few drops of water as Jabril threw in hand full of earth. Heavy wind blew through the chamber, forcing the men to cover their eyes. Bright flashing lights, several whispers of unknown voices, and new energy filled the room.

A moment later a beautiful figure appeared in flames, and a puzzled voice asked. "Who are you? What's happening?"

"My name is Yaqin Ba'kar, and the future of Zabashi is in trouble. Please, we need your help."

"I should not be here. I must go." She turned to leave.

"No, wait!" Jabril approached her with urgency. "We sacrificed finding our daughters, who are the chosen *Guardians* of Zabashi, whom the *GruDir* prophecy spoke of, to contact you. Please." Her voice echoed with

uncertainty.

"The *Guardians* from the *GruDir* prophecy, are your children?" She narrowed her brown eyes. "How do you know of this, if you seek the words of the scripture?"

"Our great-grandparents passed on a piece of the prediction they were aware of, but it didn't contain much. My parents planned for years in the hope our offspring would be the ones to help bring the demons down. Now..." Jabril looked to the others. "We're not as...sure. Our daughters vanished into another world, once Virticus caught on to us. In the last two decades, we have not been able to track our girls. If they are indeed the chosen ones, they must receive their full powers before their next birthday, or—"

"Or, they lose their gifts of the elements," she finished.

"Yes, and their birthright as goddesses," said Naeem.

She nodded and said, "My name is Qayya, I may be able to help...I don't have much time."

Makai stepped forward, "Then let's begin." Her expression turned grave. "I must warn you. There is a traitor among you, and you will need his help."