

THE FOES BETWEEN US

The Last Wizard, Book One



Chapter One

Zadicayn

30 October 1518, England

I drop my armful of wood into the closet next to the kitchen. I should have done so more quietly because the clatter alerts Mother to my presence and before I can scurry away, she hollers, “Zadicayn? Would ye go down to the larder and bring up the cheese wheel?”

My shoulders ache from chopping wood for the past two hours. I almost pawn off the chore on my sister who’s sitting at the kitchen table, except Mother keeps the cheeses on the top shelf where my sister can’t reach. Most things are on the top shelf. I think on purpose.

I smother my grumble. “Yea, Mother. I shall.”

I flex my shoulders back as I walk down the corridor, passing the scullery maid who isn’t shy about eyeing me with fluttering eyelashes. I don’t return her hopeful stare. I aspire higher than to marry a servant in Father’s castle, so I’m not about to entertain her fantasies by even so much as nodding a greeting in her direction.

The temperature drops as I descend the curving stone staircase into the larder. The remains of the last hunt hang from hooks driven through its hind legs, the blood congealed in the pan beneath. With how little meat is left on its bones, I foresee tomorrow’s chore.

Two hooks driven into the stone directly above the half cheese wheel make it look like a monstrous grin. I flex my fingers back and forth. I could use magic to relocate that cheese into my hands. Father would never know.

Ye must never use magic to replace manual labor. His past lectures surface. For ye will become weak in the arms because ye no longer chop wood.

I debate long enough that I could've already pushed the ladder under the shelf, grabbed the cheese, and been on my way upstairs. I kick the floor with a grumble and grab the ladder.

A flurry of echoing steps on stone reaches me from the stairwell descending down from the larder. I set the ladder in place and wait.

Philowynd flies around the corner, red-faced and puffing, cloak thrown off his head and shoulders so the clasp presses into his throat, his red amulet swinging side to side wildly across his chest. He rolls his eyes back like a spooked horse.

"Philowynd?"

He sprints into the larder, but stops as I call his name as if he just now noticed me. "Where is thy father?" His voice is raspy, as if he'd been screaming.

His panic-laced question spikes fear through me. "In the village. He should have been back before sundown. I do not know what is keeping him. Mother was going to send me after dinner—"

"Where is thy mother?"

"In the kitchen."

Philowynd shoots for the stairs faster than a bolt out of a crossbow. I abandon the cheese and follow him.

"Philowynd," I say, "what is the matter?"

He doesn't respond. I don't think he's sparing any breath for himself. He cuts corners as closely as he can without smashing into them. He darts into the kitchen.

Mother's head rises in alarm, hand paused in mid-stir over the cauldron.

"Philowynd?"

Awdrie pauses her game of knucklebones with Wybir. Wybir turns around. Wood pops in the hearth.

Philowynd inhales a massive breath. "Makrick has not returned from Valemorren?"

Her gaze shifts from him to me. "Zadicayn told ye correct. I was going to send him after dinner to look for him."

"They took me son, Havannah."

Mother releases her hold on the ladle and covers her mouth.

"If thy husband has not returned, then I fear they have him, too," Philowynd says.

Mother's habit used to be signing herself with the cross at the declaration of bad news, but her devotion soured when the church started hunting wizards.

I swallow the bile rising in my throat.

“I shall take Zadicayn with me and make sure the worst has not happened.” Philowynd’s cloak catches the door frame as he turns and sprints down the corridor. I follow. He’s faster, but he waits for me at the double doors on the other side of the Grand Hall, beckoning.

I reach him, panting, and he grabs my arm, stares across the bridge, and relocates us instantly to the other side. The October night buzzes with chilled anxiety, the half-moon spreading a white sheen across the frosted stones of the bridge. Even the night larks warble in distressed tones. I’m panting. Our breath fogs around our heads. I’m so stressed, I don’t feel the chill through my thin tunic.

He looks up the trail, focusing along with me on the white circle glowing in the half-moonlight, pressed against the side of the mountain. We use magic to instantaneously relocate across the distance to the Fae Gate, which responds to the presence of our amulets and dissolves, revealing a tunnel beyond. He lets go of me, and I sprint into the tunnel behind his whirling cloak.

Panic thunders in my chest, making it harder to breathe while I run. Wizard killings started a year ago, just after Martin Luther tacked his Theses to the Wittenberg church door. The killings were only rumors from farther up north, so far north they were almost myth. If the church took Philowynd’s son in Nottingham, that myth has dived south into my reality.

We emerge on the other side of the tunnel into the canyon. He latches onto my arm again and uses magic to instantly relocate us farther down the road. It takes six relocations before we arrive in the Village Center. We walk behind the blacksmith, crouching behind his wagon, looking across to the parish.

Philowynd covers his mouth.

I stop breathing.

Father’s neck and both wrists stick out of a pillory. His knees sag with standing for some time already. A fat iron lock secures one side of the wooden contraption, a small wooden cross resting on the top beam directly above his head. The church must have learned a thing or two about the capabilities of our magic, because one of his ankles is tied by a length of rope to a tree behind him.

He doesn’t have his amulet. The dead Faewraith next to him bears testament that someone other than him touched it with bare skin.

Six soldiers stand guard. One leans against the wall of the parish, stabbing his sword into a gopher hole. One rests his rump on a headstone, chomping on an apple. The other four cluster nearby in animated conversation, laughing. Crosses hang from their necks.

“Caught ye father off-guard,” Philowynd breathes. “Just like me son. The church’s ransom has made quick betrayers out of friends.”

My palms sweat. I wipe them on my thighs. “If they have Father’s amulet, he

shall die most certainly.” My growing new reality creeps like a white-hot thread into my skull. *This was not supposed to happen to me family.* Tears threaten, but I press them into resolve. My eyes glisten with vengeance.

“First step is to rescue thy father,” Philowynd whispers. “We shall find his amulet next.”

I want to call out to Father, to let him know help is on the way. But that help will be short-lived. The church has his amulet. Once they break it, Father will drop dead on the spot. But I have to make an attempt. Maybe there’s a chance.

“How good are ye with transformation spells?”

I open my mouth to reply, but it’s dry, and my stomach swells in my throat. “I am better at illusion.” My focus is hazy with dread, watching Father whom I would believe is dead except he remains standing.

Philowynd leans across my view. “Zadicayn. I know ye worry about thy Father. Focus, and we shall free him. Say that. *We shall free him.*”

“We shall free him,” I mumble with a heavy heart. Philowynd raced down from Nottingham following the death of his son, yet he’s keeping his emotions together better than I am.

He slaps my arm twice, nearly knocking me over. “There is the spirit. I shall disable their weapons. Since ye art better at illusion, put on a show for the soldiers to distract them while I sneak over to break the lock on the pillory.”

“They might think Father is doing the illusions and kill him.”

“Nay, that is why they dragged that pillory onto holy ground and set a cross above his head. If they art so devoted to the idea that we wizards commune with demons, they shall hold to that belief that no demon can be commanded by thy father while he remains bound. They shall believe it is another wizard.”

I open my mouth to ask Philowynd why they hadn’t broken his amulet yet, why he’s bound in plain sight and guarded by six soldiers, but I don’t, because this might be a trap to lure other wizards to him. But I still have to make an attempt to save Father despite it.

“I have never used magic against another human before,” Philowynd admits, his gaze roving around the parish grounds. “I never had to use my magic to save a life, neither.” Brown eyes turn to me. “Ready?”

I clench my jaw and nod. The chill finally cuts through me, and I shiver. From beneath the wagon, I focus across the square and create an illusion of a unicorn walking around the bell tower toward the cluster of four soldiers. One of them points.

“Looky there!”

This declaration draws the attention of everyone, even Father. The soldier leaning against the wall of the parish – the closest to Father – lifts his head, but doesn’t move.

One of the crossbow soldiers lifts his bow and fires. The bolt shoots through the unicorn's belly without resistance, the arrow skidding across the cobblestones.

"There's another wizard here, men. Search the area. You three stay...uuugh!"

He drops his crossbow to the grass. Branches shoot out of the wood, sprouting leaves as the branches twist and bend and grow. The soldiers back away. The other two crossbow soldiers drop their weapons, for the same reason.

Father grins, searching the dark for us. But we remain down, or he'll give us away, his sharp green eyes so vibrant and wet, they're like emeralds reflecting torchlight through the dark.

"More illusions." Philowynd sounds like he's been running. "Confuse the living hell out o' them."

I fabricate illusion after illusion. They emerge in the square, on the parish roof, in the cemetery. A Pegasus, a troll, King Henry. (That one caused them all to flinch. I'm not good enough to create sound out of the illusions yet. Otherwise, I would've had King Henry make demeaning comments about their codpieces and length of their swords.)

The soldiers look at each other, not sure whether to group the king with the other illusions or treat him with respect. I laugh. I cause King Henry to draw his eyebrows into an angry expression and point at each of them, moving his lips, but with no words coming out. One soldier is distracted by a giant bat illusion with a face I made to look like his own. He swings up at it with his sword.

Philowynd disappears next to me and reappears next to Father. Heat rushes through me with fear. I create dark clouds all around Father and Philowynd to block them from the soldiers' view.

The illusions are substance-less – if distracting – and the soldiers have not yet decided whether to give them any heed. But all swords are drawn. I cause the ground to unearth over every grave and create an illusion of half-rotted corpses climbing out. One soldier squeals like a stuck pig and he darts as if to run away, but his companion kicks his breastplate before he makes it far. He falls onto his back in a clatter of armor.

"They cannot harm ye!" the chest-kicker roars. He strides over to King Henry, whose arms are flying all around him as if terribly upset. "Not even this bastard." He swings a gauntleted fist at King Henry's face. It punches through, though I make the illusion fall backward with a silent shout. The soldier looks briefly concerned. King Henry rises to his feet, dusts off his robes, and fire bursts out of his mouth and eyes.

The soldier holds his ground, looking behind him. He points toward the black cloud surrounding Father and Philowynd. I fashioned the cloud to resemble a massive bear to discourage them. "Check on the wizard!"

The closest soldier disengages from his relentless slashing at the bat and rushes

toward the cloud. I magically relocate that soldier beyond the cloud to the other end of the cemetery. He looks confused, then runs back.

But now the other five soldiers run into the black cloud. I can only relocate one at a time. They're too fast and too close to the cloud.

I stand up. "Philowynd! Ruuun!"

Philowynd does not appear. Neither does Father.

The jig up now, I drop the cloud illusion surrounding Father and watch as Philowynd lifts open the pillory so Father can stand. Three soldiers slam into them. The other three run at me.

Panic drives through the top of my skull.

My amulet hangs outside my tunic. Yesterday, the heavy, blood-filled gem was a prestigious mark considered enviable by some. At this moment, it's the mark of sin the church wants to purge.

They're closing in fast. Not enough time to think of an effective spell. I run.

"Ye art abominations unto God!" screams a voice from the parish's cemetery.

"The end of days shall bring thee..." His voice fades as I cut around a corner.

I'll find a shadow to hide in. Then I'll circle back—

My forehead meets a length of wood, and I'm thrown flat on my back onto the cobblestones with a blistering pain behind my eyes. Someone yanks a sack over my head and through the delirium, I fight to regain coherency. I feel my body being dragged. A door slams.

"He ran that way!" shouts a familiar voice outside of the building I've been pulled into.

Clanking armor and iron-shod feet crack against stone as they run by, fading into the distance.

A door opens and closes. "Did ye get it?" the familiar voice asks. The fuzz in my head clears, and I recognize Gandorlain's long held E's in his words.

Gandorlain...friend of the family who makes his living as a carpenter. I don't understand what he's doing. My head hurts too badly to think.

"Yea," says another familiar, breathless voice.

"Gandorlain..." I mumble, eyes suddenly sensitive to light, fluttering against the torchlight seeping through the sack. "What are...ye doing?"

"Keeping ye alive, wizard."

"Take the bag...off me head. I need to find...Father..."

"Sorry about thy Father. No help for him at this moment. We shall keep the bag on thy head while we take ye home. Otherwise, they shall recognize ye."

Something is very wrong with all of this. The knock on my head is the clue. I'm lying on the floor. I try to rise, but my hands are tied behind my back.

"They art gone." The door creaks open. "Get 'em up."

I'm hauled to my feet and dragged forward. Aside from Gandorlain, two other men hold me, one on each arm.

Dendaryl. One of them is Dendaryl.

The night chill runs down the open front of my tunic. I've stopped shivering, my body concentrating on the shock to my brain.

I'm lifted up and guided onto a saddle. Someone jumps behind me and holds me in place. A sharp kick to the flanks startles the horse into a run. I can't see where we're going, but the left and right turns and a long stretch through an echoing canyon says we are heading to Father's castle.

The horse draws up short, and we dismount. I'm handled like a sack of potatoes, barely allowed to touch the ground.

"Mmmph. Why did ye hit me head?"

"To *convince* them."

That makes no sense.

The Fae Gate opens in close proximity to my amulet. Through the sack, I can barely discern the white wood of the gate dissolving to allow entry. The firm grips on my arms walk me forward.

We exit the tunnel. I know because hard-packed dirt crumbles into loose shale. We walk the wide curve toward the bridge leading to my home. Someone grunts at the heavy wood doors, and we enter. Our footsteps echo in the vast space of the Grand Hall.

"Where is thy mother?" Gandorlain asks.

All the wrongness I feel is clicking into place, though I can't name what the problem is yet. "I thank ye for thy rescue. Me safety is assured here. Remove the bag and untie me hands."

A lengthy pause. "Where is thy mother, Zadicayn?"

My shoulders tense. "Take this bag off me head." Thunder in my heart says they won't, because in order for me to use any useful spells, I have to see what I'm looking at.

"Saulfur," Gandorlain says to another man who had followed us in. We've invited Saulfur every year to our parties. He is part owner to the masonry. He's involved? Why? "Go fetch Havannah and Awdrie."

I thrash my shoulders violently, but the two men hold on. "Let me go!"

They hold. Hurried, departing footsteps echo across the Grand Hall.

The blood rushing through my veins intensifies my headache. Anger drives my growing terror, and I kick at the captors holding my arms. They twist me around, and I'm dumped on the floor.

"Havannah," Gandorlain calls out as if he's come for a visit, "ye art lovely this evening."

“Why have ye bound me son?” Mother’s voice cuts clear and dark through the open space, warning everyone she is the matron of the castle until the patriarch returns. I hear it in her voice, the sack over my head preventing me from seeing what must be her regal posture. “Release him.”

“Take the sack off his head,” Gandorlain says quietly to my captors. “Stand him upright, but keep his hands bound.”

I’m jerked to my feet, and the sack is yanked off. Mother stands across the Grand Hall, on the stairs, Awdrie hiding behind her. Between her and me dangles my amulet from Gandorlain’s gloved hand.

Breath freezes in my chest. They must have taken it right after they knocked me out.

“Hear this.” Gandorlain strides across the Grand Hall to give his pomp more space as the castle staff slowly emerges from behind Mother. “Everyone must vacate this castle. Permanently. Pack up thy belongings and leave.”

“I am not to be commanded.” Mother’s voice rises to a sharp pitch. “What gives ye the boldness to march in here and make demands?”

“The church is not going to stop killing. I am trying to keep thy son among the living. And in payment for me services, I feel his amulet tis a fair price.”

Cold rage congeals in my throat. I can’t make a sound. I nearly feel the great gust of air Mother inhales to shout, “We shan’t need thy assistance to keep him safe. Hand over his amulet and be gone.”

Gandorlain removes a glove, cupping his hand beneath my amulet, almost touching it. “Tell them to vacate the castle, Zadicayn.”

“Ye shall summon a Faewraith and kill us all if ye touch it,” I growl.

“That will only move along the inevitability if the church kills the rest of the wizards. Either do as I say, or I shall march ye back out the Fae Gate and deliver ye to the church.”

“Gandorlain...our families art friends.” I’m weak and breathless with betrayal. I reach for friendship since rage failed me. “Me Father loves thy wood craft. Ye are ambitious and devoted to thy work. Many of thy personal pieces decorate our halls.” “If ye and thy Father had not been so tightfisted over using thy magic to help us peasants, I would not be forced to take it from ye to harvest the magic out o’ it meself.”

“Gandor—”

“Tell thy mother, sister, and staff to vacate this castle immediately.” He wiggles his fingers beneath my amulet. Summoning a Faewraith is only a breath away, and no one here has any weapons to kill it before it kills us. But a weapon closet next to the kitchen is only twenty feet around the corner. A stable boy standing with the rest of the staff turns to run in that direction.

“Ye move and I shall touch it!” Gandorlain barks.

The boy stops.

I try one last time. “Gandorlain, hear me out—”

“If the next words out of ye prick mouth be anything other than commanding thy mother, sister, and castle staff to vacate, I shall touch thy amulet.”

I have my doubts he’ll touch my amulet and put himself in harm’s way. But he’s already knocked my head, stolen my amulet, and made threats. I can’t trust he won’t do more than that.

I lock eyes with Mother. I try communicating in that glance, *Trust me, I shall find a way out of this*. She meets my gaze but doesn’t understand my plea. “Do what he says.” My teeth hurt with the force of grinding my rage into smaller pieces I can swallow. It doesn’t help my fortitude when Awdrie starts crying, muffling the sounds in Mother’s skirt.

Mother’s eyes rove over me and over my amulet suspended above Gandorlain’s naked hand. She connects her gaze with mine and nods. She touches her daughter’s head. “Come, Awdrie.” She turns to the staff clustered around her.

“Collect your belongings and get thee out of this castle, post-haste. I shall await You all at the Fae Gate to make sure everyone has left.”

Bunching the skirt of her dress in one hand, she strides forward with head high. The castle staff part for her, whispering in low tones before following, casting uncertain glances behind them.

* * *

I lead the two horses into the Grand Hall, dragging a litter behind them bearing the weight of a heavy iron grate. Hooves on stone echo loudly in the empty space of the Grand Hall. Dendaryl and Sulfur follow close behind.

Gandorlain stands nearby, my amulet around his neck. “Take the grate to the undercroft.”

“Tis too big and heavy,” I retort. “I need me amulet.”

He analyzes the truth of my words. He removes my amulet and wraps the chain several times around his wrist and hand. “If ye try anything...”

This is my eighth warning. They are all the same: if I act too suspiciously, if I move too quickly and it looks like I’m going to wrest my amulet out of his grip, if I prevent any or all of these men from walking out of that Fae Gate an hour after sundown, then the men guarding my mother and sister in Valemorren will kill them.

“Do ye understand?”

“Yea.”

His gloved hand presses my amulet to my chest. If I were stronger and quicker, I’d break his arm off his body, take my amulet and relocate them all to the moon. But I’m only eighteen, with as much muscle as a wizard who doesn’t have to lift anything

heavy. I'm not as strong as these three manual laborers who lift everything from heavy wood, to stone, to earth. Any attempts I'd make would only upset them, and they'd sit around until an hour after sundown had passed and my mother and sister would die.

I communicate the spell. The iron grate lifts off the litter.

* * *

I'm pounding holes into the stone roof of the undercroft when Saulfur thumps down the ladder.

"Gandorlain," he says, "Langley says the town crier came three days ago and reported all twenty wizard amulets have been accounted for and destroyed. The church says the world 'tis now purged of the wizards' evil. The replica of Zadicayn's amulet I made worked!"

Gandorlain's gaze shifts to me, tucking the wheat chafe he's been chewing on to the side of his mouth. "Did ye hear that, Zadicayn?"

I swing the sledge hammer upward, driving the fat nail deeper into the stone. "I just saved ye miserable life. The church thinks all the wizards art dead. They shan't be looking for ye anymore. Well, art ye going to thank me?"

I remove my tunic and throw it on the floor. My next hammer strike comes harder. Faster. Stone chips spray across my face.

"Ungrateful bastard." Gandorlain spits his wheat chafe on the floor.

* * *

Mother and Awdrie arrive. Under guard. I made a threat to Gandorlain that I believed he had killed them already and so there was no longer a point in obeying his orders. I never believed he killed them. But it forced his hand so I could see them one last time.

Awdrie runs faster than Mother. I drop to a knee and embrace her. She cries into my neck.

"Make them let ye go!" she wails.

"Shhhhh, Awdrie. I have to do this. They make threats to kill ye if I refuse to obey."

"What art they going to do to ye?"

"They shall lock me in the undercroft. I shall have to think up a spell to keep me alive for a very long time, because Gandorlain wants to harvest the magic out of me amulet and pass it down to his children's children."

"Tis impossible to harvest the magic!"

"I have told them."

Mother steps beside us and lays a hand on Awdrie's head.

"Ye *must* escape!" Awdrie's last word stretches into a long sob. It takes all my force of will not to cry with her.

“I shall try.” I pat her back.

I loosen Awdrie’s grip and stand so I can face Mother. Her eyes flit all around me, refusing to focus, and I know in an instant it’s because I look like Father.

“Father is dead,” I say as a fact with no room for denial.

Her eyes sweep down to Awdrie, then back up to meet my gaze. “Yea.”

I step forward and embrace her. She embraces back. I expect her to cry because I want to cry, but she doesn’t, so I don’t.

“Tell me,” I whisper.

Still embracing me, she explains how they bound Father and broke his amulet to see if the devil would fly out of it. Father died instantly.

“How can ye remain so calm?” I back out of her embrace, furious her eyes aren’t even red. But that’s harsh judgment because she watched the death of her husband. There’s no telling how long her tears lasted prior to today.

“All shall be well in the end.”

Her calm reason infuriates me. “Father’s life did not end well.”

“Death is not the end, Zadicayn.”

Rage flares up my neck in a hot flash. How dare she say such a thing, as if Father’s death has not affected her?

She rests a cool hand on my cheek. “I can hate God and his church, but that hate shall only corrupt me own soul.”

Vengeance strengthens the heat in my blood. But Mother can’t possibly handle the same roar as is in my chest. What’s she to do with it? Jump on a horse, gather soldiers with a war cry like Joan of Arc to slaughter those who killed the man she loved? She’s not a warrior. She’s my Mother. The vengeance is all mine.

“Time is up,” Gandorlain barks.

I kneel to embrace Awdrie one last time.

She presses her lips into my ear. “If ye cannot escape, I shall find a way to free ye. I promise. I will *never* give up.”

I hear Gandorlain’s boots behind me. I slap a kiss on Awdrie’s cheek and stand, backing away with my hands up so Gandorlain can verify they didn’t pass me anything.

“I love ye,” I say.

Their captors usher them out.

* * *

I wait for them to lower their guard, so I can run the instant Gandorlain declares my prison cell complete.

But they aren’t lowering their guard. Not even when I acted obediently – eager, even – to create for them the key that will confine me prisoner, or when I hammered the last nail into the roof of the undercroft to secure the iron grate that will close off

my only exit. I even stooped low enough to thank Gandorlain for this brilliant idea of his to keep me alive.

Gandorlain declares my prison cell complete.

I run.

I fly up the stone stairs, feet pounding behind me. I break into a sprint across the Great Hall, ram my shoulder against the door, and escape outside.

They catch me on the bridge.

A fist clenches the back of my tunic and hauls me down, smacking my elbow on the stone, which forces a howl out of me before they yank a sack over my head.

I fight like a hellion as they drag me into the castle's chapel. They force my chest against the wall. The familiar *snick* of crossbow strings pulling back and locking into place resound too loudly in the stone chamber. A cold press against my chest. My amulet. Someone crams my face into the wall.

"I hope ye have thought about the spell to give ye long life," Gandorlain growls from behind. "Ye mother and ye sister shall live as long as thy amulet works."

"I told ye." The muscles in my shoulders bunch as I strain them against the hands holding me. "Tis impossible to harvest magic out of it."

The man holding my head to the wall shakes me.

"Thy next breath shall be the spell, Zadicayn, or ye mother and ye sister shall not witness the next sunrise."

If I could see where the men were positioned in the room, I could use a spell against them. But the sack shrouds everything. Hands sliding across crossbow wood reminds me that spell would be short lived.

I force myself to find hope in the last words Awdrie said to me. I pray they will be true one day.

I begin the spell.

Relocate hunger, relocate thirst, relocate physical pain... I whisper under my breath in the language of the Fae, forcing my body into hibernation so I might live a week, a month, a year... forever in stalemate without the necessities of life until my sister can free me from the undercroft.

Forever. Fear slides thick and cold down the back of my skull.

I finish my incomprehensible whispering of the Fae language and fall silent.

"Ye done, wizard?" Dendaryl drawls.

They shake me. I don't respond.

"Now the codpiece is just playing games."

"He's done."

They remove my amulet. Someone knifes my tunic open in the back. It drops off my shoulders. The three blood-sucking diamonds of the key I made slam into my back, sinking under the skin, pulling a shriek out of my compressed lungs.

They haul me backward, the muscles in my back throbbing hot blood over cold skin. The crash of wood against stone shoots bolts of panic through me as the trapdoor to the undercroft flings open.

I thrash with every moving part of my body, but too many hands hold me fast. The sack around my head tightens, controlling me, angling my body as someone else grabs my legs and lowers my boots to the floor. I buck, but arms and hands clamp down tight.

“Grab the ladder or be dropped!” Sulfur barks.

I thrash. The hands release me, and I’m falling.

The spell activates as I fall out of the light. I hit the dusty floor of the undercroft with a painful crunch, air punched out of my chest. I roll to my knees and tear the sack off, looking up as the metal grid clanks above me, closing off my access to the only opening in the undercroft.

The trapdoor slams shut.

PURCHASE

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