

Day 189 - Blue

I was a terrible person. After all this time I still hadn't *officially* married Shayma, and it took Giorn's comment to remind me. It was true that I hadn't known Shayma that long in absolute terms, but the Bargain meant we had a permanent bond already and Shayma had expressed interest *months* ago. In truth I should have married her before Taelah, but Shayma hadn't pushed too hard and there just seemed to be too much going on. Not that it was an excuse. I had to fix that immediately.

"So, *Shayma*," I said, trying not to give away the fact that I was a terrible person who had forgotten about things. "*Now that we've got some downtime, I think we ought to finally get actually married.*"

"Oh!" Shayma blinked, then smiled brilliantly. "Yeah! It almost seems silly at this point, but yes."

"*Did you have anything in mind in terms of ceremony or the like?*" I was sure there had been weddings at some point since I'd taken over Tarnil, but I really didn't pay much attention most of the time, so I didn't really know what the normal expectation was.

"When I was little I imagined a big adventurer wedding at Wildwood," Shayma confessed. "Now that I'm older, though, I think something private and small would be fine," Shayma assured me. "Something more like Taelah's wedding."

"*I'll get right on it,*" I told her, but I wasn't convinced something so utilitarian was quite right for her. I shifted my focus over to Taelah, who was taking her time off in her garden. "*Taelah, Shayma and I are going to go ahead and get married now before anything else comes up. Shayma said something private and small would be fine but I'm not so sure.*"

"Oh?" Taelah took a moment to think that over, her eyes glinting as she slowly smiled. "Oh. I think I know how to handle this. I bet Tessa still has her measurements, too. Oh, but could you have Annit and Keri come by without her soon? And will Ansaе still be officiating?"

"*I think I can swing that, and I'll ask her.*" I swapped my attention to Ansaе, who was sending the dragons on loops through the circle of complicated Climates I'd put around her tower. I wasn't sure what kind of training it was supposed to be, but even if it was just Ansaе amusing herself it really wasn't my business. It would become my business when they went to pick out lairs, since I needed to support them the way I supported the village, but until then they were in Ansaе's tender mercies.

"*Hey Ansaе, I decided I need to get married to Shayma before something new comes up and we don't have the time for it. Could I prevail upon you to perform the ceremony like you did with Taelah? I can't think of anyone else that really has the gravitas for the role.*"

"Gravitas, is it?" Ansaе laughed, grinning a toothy grin. "Certainly, I would enjoy it."

"*Great, Taelah is in charge so I'll let her know. I'm not sure what she's planning but I'll keep you informed.*" I was sure Ansaе could keep herself informed directly, but she was busy, and I wouldn't put it past her to bring the whole dragon tribe to the Village to ask a question if I left it up to her. I didn't think anyone was ready for that. Ansaе simply nodded and I flicked over to Iniri.

"*Hey, Iniri, I'm going to finally get married to Shayma properly if you can spare some time today.*" I knew that I wreaked havoc with her schedule, but I could almost swear she secretly enjoyed it.

“Fortunately, we’re still keeping quiet after the summit so I should be able to spare the time,” Iniri told me from her office. “Just give me some lead time.”

“*Fantastic*,” I told her, and returned my attention to Shayma. “*Okay, while we’re getting things ready for that, I think I have enough spare firmament for you to make Sienne’s weapon*,” I told her. “*I know dowries work the complete opposite way but I kind of feel we should have it ready beforehand*.” While some of that firmament was for [Contained Stars], I didn’t want to keep making them just because. I’d end up flooding all of Orn with stellar mana and that wouldn’t go well at all. So the firmament and [Star Hearts] were more or less strategic reserve.

“Oooh!” Shayma perked up immediately, glancing over at where her parents were cuddling. Heavily cuddling. “Right. I’ve been looking forward to trying out that new crafting knowledge and Skill and seeing how it all works. I’ll go work on that right now.” She paused a moment. “What’s a dowry?”

“*Oh. Uh, some people have the tradition where the bride’s family provides a bunch of money to the new couple*.” Apparently, that wasn’t a custom in Tarnil.

“That just seems weird,” Shayma said, shaking her head before turning to Annit and Keri, who were lounging on blankets on the sand and holding hands. “I’m going to go do some forging,” she told them. “I’ll be back in a while, or if you want to leave just ask Blue. I’m sure he’ll get you where you need to go.”

“Have fun!” Keri said, waving at Shayma before the fox-girl went into the beach house to change. I waited until Shayma had pulled on the teleport and put herself in the Smithery – well, the Crafting Hall now – before I told Taelah she could come pick up Annit and Keri. She appeared by the beach house and, at my direction, made her way down to where the pair of them were stretched out in the sun.

“Hello, you two,” Taelah said cheerfully.

“Oh, hello Elder Taelah,” Keri said.

“Elder Taelah,” Annit said more cautiously, looking a little uncomfortable to be caught out on the beach.

“I hope you two have some time,” Taelah told them. “We’ve got to get you new dresses for Shayma’s wedding!”

“Shayma’s what?” Keri blinked up at Taelah. “You mean she wasn’t already married to Blue?”

“Not officially. But she will be soon! I’m just putting a little thing together.” Taelah grinned. “I need to have Tessa make Shayma a dress for it, and you two are her closest friends so you get some too.”

“I’m not much for weddings at this point,” Keri confided. “I had to attend so many back home. But for Shayma I’ll make an exception!”

“I’ve actually never been to a wedding,” Annit said. “I’d love to go to Shayma’s, so long as I don’t have to wear a dress. I have a proper southern-style outfit, though, and I could even bring my flute.”

“Oh, definitely bring the flute,” Taelah said decisively. “Your southern outfit will be perfect, so long as I can convince Tessa to leave you be,” she added with a smile. “After all, it’s about getting dressed up, not about the exact outfit.”

"Honestly I should pay Tessa for her work. She may be part of the Village, but she probably can't afford to do that for free. In fact you'll need to figure out what would be good as a reward for doing such a good job with the summit. I'm a bit stymied on what would be appropriate."

"We could use more for our smiths to do, maybe? Perhaps get some different animals in," Taelah answered distractedly as Keri and Annit headed back to the house to change. "I don't think Tessa would accept anything, not after what you've done for Suna."

"Okay, that's fair enough." Plus it wasn't like Tessa had to pay rent to a landlord. Or rather, I was the landlord, and I wasn't about to kick her out. So long as she could get the raw cloth fiber, she could make everything without having to buy any additional supplies. *"For the metals, we do have ore veins now! I can show you. Or, I just had an idea. I should get one of the dragons to show people. They're supposed to be working on exploring the various Climates anyway."* I'd still have to make portals or something so people could get to the areas to mine, but there was no need for me to gift them raw metal. That felt more in the spirit of the Bargain anyway. *"For animals I'll probably eventually get the trait for it but until then, it may be something to get from Kinul when they come by."*

"We'll want to wait a little on the dragons until I'm sure everyone is prepared for them, but it will be good to have a mine, especially if it's soon." Taelah said, tapping her chin with a forefinger. "We may even want to make a little outpost. We'd need more people though, so that's not likely to happen anytime soon."

I wasn't sure about that. A mining outpost might be perfect for the Scalemind to populate. They'd still be underground, but it would give them regular contact with people. Plus they'd be in my Caldera which I considered my main living area. The caverns where they were didn't have any of the Climate benefits really, so it'd be good to put them somewhere that did. Which I could probably do once I had some way for them to get food aside from hunting around the Underneath.

That was woolgathering for another time, though. While Taelah dragged Annit and Keri off and Shayma started fiddling with the [Firmament], I made myself useful by expanding my array of [Mana Diamond Anvils]. Since I had to trigger them manually I didn't plan to run all of them all the time, but having a bunch I could kick into use in case of an emergency wasn't a bad idea.

I knew that Iniri's Artifact – or at least, her gift that I was going to make her – was next on my list after Shayma finished making the Firmament rapier for her mother, but what I was thinking of for that needed more supermaterials as well as everyone's input. It would be so much easier on me if I could figure out a way to automate or even partially automate the Anvils.

"So, Taelah," I said, deciding to ask an expert. I could have asked Shayma, but she was deep in her forging groove. *"I'm trying to figure out a better way to use these mana diamond anvils so I can provide more supermaterials. Any tricks that you use for parallel production or the like?"*

"Tricks?" Taelah frowned thoughtfully. "Not so much. Other than doing thing in big batches."

"Hmm."

"Don't you have that Field that superimposes things? Couldn't you just join your anvils together like that?"

“Oh my god I am an idiot.” Here I was trying to think of normal, mundane ways to speed up automation when instead I needed to be using my magical tools, however nonsensical they might be. Some Power I was.

I had enough free experience to boost [Spatial Overlay] to eight, meaning I could connect three areas of space together and effectively allowed me to merge three anvils into one. I set up a little row to test with, linking the three chambers with the Field and then trying to insert three milli-units of silver. There was a moment of confusion, though I wasn't sure if it was my confusion at what was going on or the Field-Anvil amalgam trying to sort out the inventory system, and then the three Anvils were filled. That meant I could trigger them all at once. Just like that, I made things three times easier on myself and it was something I could have done far, far earlier. Which wasn't surprising, really.

In a way it didn't really improve my throughput, but it did make things a *lot* easier on me, and if I eventually boosted Spatial overlay again, I could make it even more efficient. It seemed a shame I didn't get a new version of the [Mana Diamond Anvil] but considering how extreme it was to begin with, it wouldn't surprise me if it never got any upgrades. Actually, I was maybe a little surprised the mana ripple from the Anvil itself didn't break the Field, even if so far the ripple hadn't done anything but make people uncomfortable.

While I was poking around at the Anvils, Shayma was hammering away at the [Firmament] I'd supplied. I didn't know too much about magic smithing but I could see right away that her technique was different, her actions more deliberate and controlled. She was even using her [Abstract Mana Shaping] to form runes over the metal each time she hit it, though I didn't think it was quite the same technique as Wright used.

Either way, Sienne's new rapier was taking shape. Shayma seemed to be going for a long, thin, double-edged thing, which more or less was the definition of a rapier but even for that it seemed pretty flat. Obviously she was taking advantage of the indestructability of [Firmament] by making it somewhat thinner than a normal sword, though I couldn't imagine she'd want it too much thinner. Even though Skills did the bulk of the work I had to imagine Sienne would want a sword with at least *some* heft to it.

In the end though, Shayma knew her mom better than I did and probably had something specific in mind. It was unfortunate that the sword couldn't be made with anything other than Firmament, but since I was lacking any void mana there was only so much I could have done anyway. Considering what I knew about void, it was probably for the best I didn't have it, in the end.

On Taelah's end, she'd gotten Keri and Annit over to Tessa's clothier shop and was talking with Miss Burnhade. I was glad it was Taelah and not me from the glint the old woman got in her eye when Taelah mentioned *wedding cake*. I didn't think the Village would be up to more effort after the nearly week-long cooking and cleaning marathon for the summit, but it turned out Taelah wasn't intending to get everyone involved. Just Tessa, Miss Burnhade, and some carpenters.

The latter spent about thirty minutes putting together a little gazebo out on the Village square. I'd seen crafting Skills in action of course, but it was still odd seeing something like that come together so quickly with only muscle power. Being able to bend seasoned timber without breaking it and without needing to steam it was absolutely a useful magic. It also reminded me that despite the fact that I could theoretically make this sort of thing myself, I couldn't make it nearly as well. I just didn't quite have the

eye or the experience to make stuff that looked fine quality. The best I could do was well-polished stone.

“Oooh I almost forgot. Maybe One-Eye-Green ought to be invited to the wedding too?” I asked Taelah, though I was pretty sure she’d say yes. I hadn’t spotted anything that looked like marriage ceremonies or the like among the Scalemind, so maybe this would be a good influence. In truth, I didn’t know if it would even make sense for them. I still wasn’t entirely certain how their biology worked, what with the massive sexual dimorphism, though on a long enough timescale I’d find out, I supposed.

“Oh, absolutely. Give me a moment to wrap things up here and you can send me down there to fetch her.” By the set of her jaw I could tell she wasn’t completely comfortable with the idea. Taelah was perfectly fine with the Scalemind when they were in *her* village, but she was less enamored of heading down into their area.

I always kept a close eye on my people when they went down there. Cuts-Like-Cold and Dreams-Ahead had a firm grip on their people, but they were all telepathic monsters, and they were capable of damage even by accident. So far there hadn’t been any incidents, but I wasn’t fully comfortable with them just yet. My bias, if I had to admit it, was less about their monster status or even their looks as the fact that they were still a tribal society. Those tended to be hazy on concepts like privacy and personal rights.

One-Eye-Green had a simple wooden house near the teleport point, though I wasn’t sure if a one-room cabin was exactly a house, and she came out the moment Taelah appeared.

“Hello Missus Taelah!” One-Eye-Green said cheerfully.

“Hello, One-Eye-Green,” Taelah replied, though she looked a little strained. “I see that you’re working on getting roofs over your head.”

“Yes! I don’t quite understand why since the ceiling is not crumbly, but it is still nice!” That was actually something I hadn’t considered. There was probably a distinct architecture for the Underneath, one that actually made use of the fact that everything was underground, and maybe instead of the Village I should get the Stoneborn to meet up with the Scalemind. Though, as ambulatory geodes, they didn’t have much in common with the Scalemind anatomy-wise. I hadn’t taken a close look at them, but I might not even recognize their tools.

“I suppose you wouldn’t get much weather down here,” Taelah said agreeably. “But having your own space is worth it. I was just stopping by to see if you wanted to come to Shayma’s wedding.” One-Eye-Green opened her muzzle, then closed it, her tail wriggling, and I didn’t know what was going on.

“What’s a wedding?” She asked after a moment, and I realized that she had probably been trying to keep herself from plucking the information out of Taelah’s head. At some point I would love to get mind Affinity so I could have telepathy circlets made for everyone who was going to come in contact with the Scalemind. For the moment, One-Eye-Green wearing it was probably the best compromise.

I was glad that Taelah had experience explaining things to children, because I wouldn’t have known where to start with One-Eye-Green’s question. It was enough for her to go with Taelah back to the Village, at least, though I had a suspicion she was bored when she was at home. Though, if she was doing some sort of telepathic lecturing, it wouldn’t look much different from just sitting around, so I probably shouldn’t judge.

Shayma, of course, had no idea all this was going on and I wasn't about to spoil the surprise for her. Besides, she was fully concentrated on making Sienne's new sword. Obviously it was slower going for her than it was for Wright, but it was looking really damn impressive to me. What was really amazing was that as she worked on the length of the blade it went from a dark steel color to something that looked like enamel white.

"That looks awesome. How did you do that?" I asked, when she took a break.

"My [Domain of the Trickster] lets me use [Customization]," Shayma explained. "I really need to look over your Status again since I can use *your* Skills too. Anyway, it makes it a lot easier to change the [Firmament]. And yes, considering how void looks I thought I'd give mom's weapon the exact opposite image when she was using it normally."

"That is fantastic. I'm just not going to have any crafting to do now, not with you on the job." Shayma laughed.

"I can't make staves that can become a half-mile long, so I'm sure you'll still need to work," she told me, switching to a smaller hammer to work on the blade's edge. It was probably a good thing she had [Customization] available, because it wasn't like she could use a grinder. I wasn't sure how [Customization] compared to the actual crafting Skill in how well it got things done, but since Shayma was using them in conjunction with each other, it didn't much matter.

It did look pretty amazing as she finished with the blade and started working on the hilt. [Customization] definitely did a lot of heavy lifting there, as she pulled out the rough shape of a basket hilt with quillons by hand, but then she got smaller tools and started filling in details.

Each quillon got a little fox at the very end for decoration, and the dome of the guard was etched with a spiraling fractal in obvious homage, one end swooping downward to protect the grip. The grip itself was just textured metal, since any wrapping would burn off at the first use, and the pommel was a small sphere with a matching fractal design.

The whole thing was sheer, unrelieved white, looking not even quite like a metal with the flat luster that Shayma had given the thing. It was a bit stark, but it did look incredibly impressive, especially since it was made entirely out of a single piece of metal. Shayma stepped back to regard it, then frowned and exercised her [Customization] again. The grip turned pure, matte black, starting just after the basket and ending just before the pommel, setting off the rest of the sword.

"Done," Shayma said, picking up the sword and holding it out, giving it a few swipes. She'd tested it now and again throughout the forging process, but with the finishing touches it was far more impressive. After giving it that test she pulled up some identification runes, and I read over her shoulder since I was never sure whether my overlay was anywhere near accurate.

[The Imperishable Blade]

[Indestructible]

[Buffers user against void Skill use]

It was simple, but it was all that it needed to be. Without involving any Affinity mana or materials I was a little surprised that Shayma had managed to get any effects on the blade at all, but obviously the information from Wright had helped.

[The Imperishable Blade] wasn't an Artifact, that much was obvious, but there really wasn't any problem with that. It wasn't really necessary and in truth I wasn't sure a void Affinity Artifact would be a good idea. Especially an *indestructible* void Affinity Artifact. That wasn't something I wanted to be responsible for unleashing on the world.

"Well, that is all kinds of impressive," I told Shayma. *"I bet Sienne will love it."*

"I just hope it works like I think it does!" Shayma said, giving the sword a spin and then laying it down on her worktable. "Just need to put together a sheath for this and then I can go give it to mom." Shayma paused for a moment. "Assuming that mom and dad aren't, ah, busy."

"Not at the moment," I assured her, after risking a brief glance. *"I should probably see about making some place with more waves. I think they'd have fun."* My pseudo-ocean waves weren't terribly impressive, but Giorn had still managed to body-surf his way onto shore with Sienne standing on his back. Shayma's parents were silly and it was great.

For the sheath, Shayma used leather from their Wildwood hunts along with some tayantan wood and ordinary steel. It came out as white as the blade had and looked pretty swank despite not having any particular magical benefits. If I'd had any extra might have been tempting to make the sheath out of firmament too, as it wasn't like she could dull the blade with incidental friction against it, but that would have been overkill.

Shayma popped back to the beach house just as her parents were coming out of the shower, washing the salt water off so they could change back into normal clothes, as that section of Shore actually was salt water. I set up some stone and wood pillars nearby as they dressed, since Sienne would want to test her sword, then after some consideration made an iron one as well. It probably just wasn't satisfying to slice through normal material when using a void weapon.

"Hi, mom! Hi, dad!" Shayma greeted them as they stepped out onto the porch of the beach house. The sword wasn't visible yet, hidden in Shayma's [Pocket Space]. I had the sense she was anticipating a dramatic reveal.

"Hello again, stranger." Giorn grinned at her.

"Daaad," Shayma said with faux resentment, then laughed. "Actually! I have something for mom that Blue and I put together."

"That's honestly giving me more credit than I deserve. I just ran the Anvils."

"That Blue and I put together," she repeated, with a bit more emphasis and a roll of her eyes to show she was talking to me. Shayma held out her hands, the portal to her pocket space sweeping left to right with a deliberate slowness, revealing first the sheath of the sword lying across one palm and then the other, before the hilt appeared and the portal closed. Holding her hands out, she presented it to Sienne.

"Is this...?" Sienne didn't even finish the sentence, taking the sword gingerly and putting her hand on the grip, but not quite drawing it.

"[The Imperishable Blade]," Shayma told her. "Try it."

"*I set up a little target area for her off to the side,*" I told Shayma, though she probably had noticed that already. In reply, Shayma just stepped to one side and gestured toward the pillars with one hand.

Sienne slowly drew the pure white sword from the pure white sheath, handing the latter off to Giorn as she settled into a bladework stance, making a few cuts, jabs, and feints. Then she nodded and stepped forward to try the sword out on the pillars I'd made. They weren't quite mannequins but that didn't seem to matter. Sienne's [Anell Style Bladeplay] meant she could cut through the wood and the plain stone *without* having to resort to void Skills. Which was damn impressive.

She fairly danced around the pillars, slicing off chunks or whole tops, before turning to the iron. The sword went black as she invoked her void Skill, and whispered straight through the pillar once, twice, a dozen times before it crumbled into pieces. Then she tossed [The Imperishable Blade] to her left hand and stared at her right, which for once *wasn't* skinless and bleeding.

"This is not something I've ever even dreamed of," Sienne said after a moment, and closed her eyes, taking a deep, shuddering breath. I was pretty sure I knew what was going on, and paying attention to my overlay proved it.

Sienne had gone from a level 51 [Void Rapier Inheritor] to a level 51 [Imperishable Void Rapier]. The Class evolution was more like Keri's than any of Shayma's. Keri had been a few levels past the normal breakpoint of Class evolution too, though I was certain that the reason Sienne had been stuck was that she didn't know how to move forward without the void destroying too much. With [The Imperishable Blade], she suddenly had an entirely different future and her Class showed it.

"*Might want to break out the status runes,*" I told Shayma. "*Looks like your mom tiered up.*"

Shayma actually clapped her hands with glee but waited until Sienne stirred of her own accord and came back, sheathing her weapon. *Then* she launched herself at Sienne yet was still somehow beaten by Giorn who wrapped them both up in a spine-cracking bear hug. It was a good thing both of them were high-level Classers.

"Ha ha! I told you that you'd get it," he said.

"Only because Blue and Shayma are so generous," Sienne replied, muffled by the fact that her face was pressed against his chest. She reached up and slapped lightly against his shoulder. "Give me some breathing room, you big lug." Shayma just laughed into the crook of Giorn's elbow.

"*I really did owe Sienne a favor though,*" I said as Giorn set them down again. Nothing like void magic to make sure there were no remnants of dungeonbane weaponry hiding out in Tarnil's mountains. The very thought made me itch.

"Blue says he owed you," Shayma told her, this time actually getting a proper hug. "Not to mention that I wanted to make it."

"It is a kingly gift," Sienne said, resting her hand on the pommel. "Or a queenly one."

"I'm glad it worked as well as it did," Shayma said happily. I watched the Ells chat for a little bit, then Taelah called my name. I swapped my attention over to her while she was making her way back toward the teleport point in the town center.

"I'm not sure how much you want to surprise Shayma with it," she was saying, "but I can come get her any time."

"Let me alert Ansaë and Iniri and we'll go ahead with things." Obviously Taelah could talk to Shayma and Iniri through [Companion Concord] but for something like this I thought I ought to take charge at least a little. Both of them were fairly un-busy and needed five to ten minutes before they arrived, but when I relayed that to Taelah she turned around and started heading back toward the gazebo.

"I need to warn everyone about Ansaë," she said, even though I hadn't even asked a question. Apparently her mom-instincts had evolved to wife-instincts while I wasn't paying attention.

"Okay, fair enough." It was true that Ansaë hadn't actually been to the Village yet, in either form, and while they were at least academically aware of whose tower was in the middle of the Caldera it wasn't the same as actually encountering the reality of a giant dragon. Even if they were used to strange things, the people of the Village might still have issues with Ansaë herself.

Ansaë came winging in and landed near the fate tree, though I noticed she gave herself a little bit of distance from the thing. It was interesting to see that she had such respect for what was essentially an inanimate object, but it seemed everyone smart was careful about fate Affinity. I'd already planted the tree though, so done was done. With that taken care of, Taelah went back to get Shayma in person, teleporting over to the beach house and approaching the Ells where they were seated on the porch.

"Hello, the house," Taelah said, halting at the porch steps. "I've come to invite you all to join me. It's time for Shayma to finally marry Blue and everything is ready in the Village." Giorn looked instantly suspicious at that, glancing around as if he could locate me spying on him. Hopefully I wouldn't have to admit I really had been reminded of it by his comments.

"Oh, finally!" Sienne sprang up, hauling Shayma with her. "It'll make me feel better when it's official. You *are* going to give me grandchildren, aren't you?" She asked, poking Shayma's belly.

"Eventually, mom," Shayma groaned, then looked suspiciously at Taelah. "Everything is set up, hmm? Why does it sound like you got put in charge of the wedding?" Taelah just looked innocent, which she was exceptionally good at.

"Stop stalling and let's go," Sienne said, poking Shayma again.

"Alright, mom! We're going!" Shayma said, escorting her parents to the teleport point. When they got to the Village square Taelah hauled Shayma off to change. Iniri appeared while they were busy and made her way to the gazebo, grabbing a glass of punch and chatting with the Ells. Although technically I could have seen what Tessa had made for Shayma and her friends, I tried to be polite and focus on the venue, so I'd be properly surprised.

When Shayma emerged she was in a flowing blue dress and clutching a bouquet of chrystheniums very reminiscent of the first one I'd made her. I had no idea if Taelah knew about that or if it was

coincidence, but it was a nice touch. Keri had a white dress and Annit had a southern pseudo-tartan jacket and kilt thing, but in much more subdued colors than her other one.

Telah clapped her hands and directed people to line up in front of Ansaë, which was probably good because she was eyeing the gazebo and the big cake Miss Burnhade had made. Another few minutes and there might not have been a cake left. That, or Telah and Ansaë would have a showdown and I didn't want that either.

While Shayma approached Ansaë, Annit produced a flute from her pocket and started playing with a solemn air. It was completely unfamiliar to me, but as she played people straightened their backs and looked more attentive, watching Shayma arrive in her new dress. When Shayma stopped in front of Ansaë the tune wound down and silence fell.

"Attend, all," Ansaë said, turning serious and releasing maybe a little bit of her Presence, but not enough to flatten anyone in attendance. "We are here to witness the marriage of Shayma Ell and the Power Blue."

"Shayma Ell, you have already given yourself to Blue body and soul through a Bargain," Ansaë said, looking at Shayma with as stern a look as I'd seen. "Today, you rededicate yourself to him. Blue, you have made Shayma your Voice and your representative, but today you swear yourself to her as a partner. Do you have your vows?"

"I do," Shayma said, standing straight and speaking clearly. I was sure she'd had them for a while. "I vow to love and support Blue, to do what he can't and be where he must. I vow to stand with him and for him, always." Damn. That was one hell of a vow.

"Blue?" Ansaë asked. Fortunately I'd been thinking about *mine* on and off for a while too, and more closely since I realized this was going to happen imminently.

"I vow to love and protect Shayma, to stand behind her choices and desires, to uphold her independence and her freedom." A little bit different than most, but I needed to address the control that I had over her by virtue of the Bargain. *"I vow to honor and keep her, always."* The last was cribbing her lines but they were so good I couldn't resist.

"I pronounce you wed," Ansaë said formally, and at that precise moment a white blossom sprouted on the Tree of Eschaton. That was either a very good sign, or a very bad one.