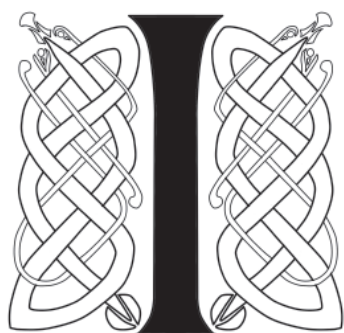




Preface

The Scientist



was always relieved when I was sent out with the Commander's favourite scientist to look for the Fabers. Not that I liked the work itself. I hated myself for every moment I spent hunting the creatures who we were supposed to believe were abominations. Somehow, I felt more and more every day that we were the abominations. I had no choice though, I had to carry on.

The scientist, Carlyle, was a true genius, so it was always a privilege to work with him on anything, but mostly I just enjoyed the safety I felt in his presence. He was a good man as well as a clever one. I had enough freedom with him to show how much I hated what we were doing. I was allowed to look miserable or angry and he liked to hear about my family, who I hadn't seen in six years.

The Commander knew I'd be a risk if he let them go. He knew I'd happily risk my life to end the madness he'd dragged us all into, but I'd never risk my wife or my little girl. Lana would be seven now, and I knew I'd missed so much. I was occasionally allowed photos and videos of her with her beautiful mother, but I was never allowed to

see them in person. All I could do was watch as she aged in the pictures. I knew one day I'd receive one of her as a young woman and I'd have missed everything. I'd never have been able to teach her to read, teach her how to ride a bike, play with her, ask what she had learned at school or intimidate her first boyfriend. She'd never even remember me. My baby wouldn't know who I was. A solitary tear fell from my eye and rolled over my cheek and I quickly wiped it away.

"Are you alright?" Carlyle asked calmly with a hint of concern. I'd been so lost in thought that I hadn't realised he'd stopped working. "Thinking about Lana again?"

"He's never going to let me see them again is he?" I asked freely.

"No," he answered with gentle honesty, "but he won't be around forever. His son is reasonable. I'm sure he'll let you see them when he takes over," he smiled kindly.

Carlyle was a quite tall man with very little muscle tone. Rather, he was slender with scruffy blonde hair and kind features. I didn't think I'd ever seen him angry. I wasn't sure he was even capable of anger. He was generally considered to be beautiful. Everybody knew the Commander's wife used to enjoy having him around, and not because of his incredible mind. Nobody had seen her for a long time, and nobody dared to ask why. Sometimes it was just easier to live in blissful ignorance.

"The Commander could live for another forty years," I pointed out calmly, trying to hide the feeling that I was dying inside.

"You never know. His other son might murder him soon. He's been eyeing him up," Carlyle joked cheekily.

"You can't say that! You'll be killed!"

"Not from here I won't," he laughed and I let out a smile.

"So do you reckon they've been here?" I changed the subject before we took it too far, noticing he had a hand full of samples.

"I think so, but I can't be sure until I get back to the lab. Let's just hope they're clever enough to stay ahead of us," the scientist added to

himself and we shared a comforting smile. We both knew we had to try to find and kill them, we just hoped that we failed.

The silence was broken by Carlyle's phone, making us both jump a little, but we'd known it was only a matter of time. They never left us to it. They all seemed to think we could do it in minutes. They just didn't understand. Some of them wondered why we even had a science department. Many just didn't see why we should be interested in medicine or chemical weapon advancement, and thought our forensic methods only slowed them down. I could point out that without us and the surveillance department, the soldiers wouldn't even know where to shoot, but it wasn't worth my life to call them idiots.

“What is it John?”

I could only hear the noise of yelling down the phone as Carlyle moved the phone away from his ear and rolled his eyes.

“Look we've told you before, this is delicate work, we can't just shovel it into bags with a trowel and throw it in the back of the car...Because then they'd be ruined and you wouldn't get the information you need...I don't know, we need to collect more to see which direction they're travelling in...Fine, I promise I'll only be as slow as I need to be. Hung up on me,” Carlyle said to himself, putting the phone back in his pocket, the epitome of calm.

I knew a few of those whose loved ones were held to ransom were very jealous of him. As far as anyone knew, he had no family and so nobody to threaten. Many thought he was hiding something somewhere, but nobody could figure out what. Either way I knew he didn't have it easy. He was safe from the Commander but it wasn't an enjoyable thing to be his personal pet. In fact it was probably humiliating, and beyond that, he was very alone. Those of us under threat stuck together, but their jealousy of the scientist made him an outcast. He'd become comfortable with a couple of people, myself included, but he couldn't spend much time with us because of the hatred the others felt. The only person he could really confide in was the priest. I knew they were very close. He went to the chapel every day to speak with his good friend, the priest, and to be with God.

Praying seemed to help him a great deal. I myself had lost my faith. I couldn't believe in any God who would allow these monsters to hold such power, but Carlyle's faith had always remained strong. He never doubted the Lord for a moment.