

Benna sprints across the blood-soaked battlefield, long ears twitching at the cacophony of clashing Magence and Sar Ala roars. His chestnut fur shimmers with sweat as he dodges arcing energy blasts, agile footpaws finding purchase on scorched earth. Sharp yet gentle eyes lock onto two silver-skinned monstrosities breaking away from the melee.

They will not escape me, Benna vows silently. Not after what their kind has done.

Leaping over the crumpled forms of fallen comrades, Benna pursues the fleeing Sar Ala with single-minded determination. Debris shifts treacherously underfoot but he maintains his balance, scanning for threats even as the rest of the world fades away. There is only the hunt now.

His finely-tuned senses absorb details in frenzied flashes - the acrid stench of burned fur, the electric tang of expended Magence, wet gurgles of the dying. Carnage surrounds him but Benna presses on, refusing to let vengeance slip through his grasp.

They're fast, Benna notes grimly, watching the creatures' sinewy limbs eat up ground. But not fast enough.

Dread knives through him suddenly and he falters. Are they leading me into a trap? Trying to separate me from the others?

Benna shakes off the crippling thought. It matters not. Let them spring their trap - his Magence will make them regret it. The chase continues.

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As Benna nears the gardens behind the Tower, the cacophony of battle fades, replaced by the serene rustle of leaves and the distant hum of the Tower's Magence. The sudden shift in atmosphere is jarring, a momentary calm before the storm of grief.

Benna's elongated ears twitch, straining to catch any sound of his quarry. The Sar Ala have vanished into the foliage, but he knows they're close. He can feel their presence like a cold shadow on his fur.

"You cannot hide from me," Benna calls out, his voice steady despite the pounding of his heart. "Face me, cowards, and pay for your crimes!"

Silence greets his challenge, broken only by the gentle whisper of wind through the trees.

A scream shatters the tranquility, a sound so filled with anguish that it cuts through Benna like a blade. His breath catches in his throat, a choking gasp that borders on a sob.

No. Please, no.

He pushes forward, feet pounding against the soft earth as he bursts into the heart of the gardens. Magence crackles at his toetips, ready to be unleashed, but the sight that greets him stops Benna cold.

The world tilts, colors bleeding together in a sickening swirl. Benna staggers, his mind reeling as he takes in the scene before him. It rebels, desperately trying to reject the reality that his eyes are painting.

"Selar," he whispers, the name a broken prayer on his lips. "No..."

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Benna's mate, Selar, lies sprawled among the vibrant flowers, her purple robe stained a deeper hue by the blood pooling beneath her. Beside her, the tiny, still forms of their unborn leverets, torn from the safety of her womb. The cruel juxtaposition of life and death sears into Benna's mind, a twisted painting he knows will haunt him forever.

He stumbles forward, legs threatening to give way beneath the weight of his grief. Crouching, Benna reaches out with a trembling paw, brushing the soft fur of Selar's cheek. Her eyes, once so full of warmth and laughter, stare blankly at the sky, unseeing.

"My love," Benna chokes out, his voice raw and broken. "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

The words are inadequate, a pitiful offering in the face of such devastating loss. Benna's carefully measured tones shatter, giving way to a primal, anguished cry that rips from his throat. It echoes through the gardens, a sound of pure, unadulterated agony.

He leans against Selar's lifeless body, resting his head on her as if he could somehow protect her from the harshness of destiny. His paw strokes her fur with a tenderness that belies the storm raging within him, a tempest of grief and rage that threatens to consume him whole.

"I will find who did this," Benna vows, his whisper fierce and trembling. "I will hunt them to the ends of Denara and beyond. They will know the wrath of a Maginist, the fury of a father and a mate."

He gently licks Selar's forehead, a final goodbye to the love of his life. Tears slip from his eyes, dampening her fur as he leans in more, lost in the maelstrom of his own sorrow.

The world around him fades away, reduced to nothing more than a blur of colours and shapes. All that exists is the cooling body of his mate beneath him and the gaping void in his heart where his family once resided.

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Benna's eyes flutter closed, his lashes heavy with the weight of unshed tears. He draws in a shuddering breath, reaching deep within himself to find the strength to carry on. His Maginist training rises to the surface, a lifeline amidst the turbulent sea of his emotions.

With an effort that feels almost formidable, Benna forces his mind to focus, pushing aside the all-consuming grief that threatens to drown him. He visualises the crypt, its cool, silent halls a stark contrast to the vibrant life that once filled his world.

Slowly, deliberately, Benna begins to channel his Magence. It flows through him like a gentle stream, gathering around Selar and their unborn leverets in a soft, ethereal glow. The light pulses with a steady rhythm, echoing the beat of Benna's own heart.

As the Magence intensifies, the little ones return to the womb that they were cruelly torn from, and the wounds close. The robe is repaired, and all trace of blood removed. Selar's body begins to shimmer, her form growing translucent. Benna's grip tightens instinctively, a futile attempt to hold onto the physical remnants of his love. But even as he clings to her, he knows that this moment, this final embrace, is all he has left.

"Farewell, my love," Benna whispers, his voice cracking under the weight of his sorrow. "May the Magence guide you to a place of peace and rest."

With a final, gentle pulse, the Magence reaches its crescendo. In a burst of blinding light, Selar and the leverets vanish, teleported to their final resting place within the crypt's silent walls.

Benna's head, now unsupported, falls limply to the ground. The sudden absence of his mate is a physical ache, a void that mirrors the emptiness in his heart. He stares at the spot where his family once lay, his eyes unseeing, his mind numb with the finality of it all.

In that moment, Benna feels a part of himself slip away, vanishing along with his mate and children. The threads that once tied him to the world, to love and life and hope, have been severed, leaving him adrift in a sea of despair.

\*This act, though necessary, feels like a final goodbye, a severing of the last thread connecting him to his lost family.\*

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As the garden empties, Benna lies alone, the weight of his loss pressing down on him. He forces himself to rise and turns away, his movements mechanical as he stumbles towards the forest, seeking solace in its shadows. The once vibrant colours of the garden fade to grey in his peripheral vision, the beauty of life now tainted by the spectre of death.

Benna's feet carry him forward, each step a battle against the heaviness in his limbs and the numbness in his heart. The world around him blurs, the sharp lines of reality softening into a haze of muted greens and browns as he enters the forest.

The familiar scents of earth and foliage, usually a comfort to his keen senses, now barely register in his grief-stricken mind. The sounds of the forest, the rustling of leaves and the distant calls of creatures, are muffled, as if his ears are blocked.

Benna's training, the very foundation of his being, seems to crumble under the onslaught of emotion. The Maginist Code, with its tenets of control and balance, slips from his grasp, leaving him vulnerable and adrift in a sea of sorrow.

He stumbles, his foot catching on a gnarled root, and he falls. The impact sends a jolt through his body, but the physical pain is a welcome distraction from the agony in his heart. Benna's claws dig into the soft earth, anchoring him to the present even as his mind threatens to spiral into the abyss of loss.

"Why?" he whispers, his voice barely audible amidst the rustling leaves. "Why them? Why now?"

The questions fall from his lips, unanswered and echoing in the silence of the forest. Benna's shoulders heave with the weight of his sobs, his carefully maintained composure shattering like a crystal under pressure.

Time loses meaning as he lies there, the forest bearing witness to his grief. Minutes, hours, an eternity—it all blends together in a haze of pain and disbelief. The world continues to turn, the sun dappling the forest floor with shifting patterns of light, but for Benna, everything has come to a standstill.

In this moment, he is not the powerful Maginist, the protector of the innocent, the upholder of justice. He is simply a hare, broken and lost, desperately trying to find his way in a world that has been irrevocably altered by loss.

Benna's senses, usually so sharp and attuned to his surroundings, are dulled by the weight of his grief. The rustling of leaves, the chirping of birds, the distant hum of Magence—all of it fades into the background, drowned out by the roaring emptiness in his heart.

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As Benna's feet carry him deeper into the forest, the path winding and uncertain, the air grows thick with the scent of earth and moss. The rich, loamy aroma fills his nostrils, grounding him in the present even as his mind threatens to spiral into the abyss of loss.

Suddenly, a glint of light catches his eye, pulling him from the depths of his grief. Benna's gaze focuses on a peculiar sight nestled in the crook of a nearby tree—an egg sac, its surface glistening with an otherworldly sheen. The spherical shape pulses with a faint, rhythmic glow, as if beckoning him closer.

"What in the name of Magence...?" Benna murmurs, his voice hoarse from the strain of his emotions.

Curiosity momentarily overrides his sorrow as he approaches the egg sac, his hops cautious yet determined. The shimmering surface reflects the dappled sunlight filtering through the forest canopy, casting an ethereal glow upon the surrounding foliage.

Benna's mind races, trying to make sense of this unexpected discovery. The egg sac is unlike anything he has encountered before, its presence in the forest both intriguing and unsettling. As a Maginist, he knows the importance of caution when dealing with the unknown, yet something about this egg sac calls to him on a primal level.

He reaches out a trembling paw, his fingers hovering mere inches from the glistening surface. The air around the egg sac seems to hum with an energy that resonates deep within his core, a whisper of something ancient and powerful.

"Could this be...a Sar Arsam egg?" Benna wonders aloud, his voice tinged with a mix of awe and trepidation.

The legends of the Sar Arsam, the mysterious beings born from the stars, have long been woven into the fabric of Denaran lore. Benna has heard the tales since he was a leveret, whispered around the fire and etched into the pages of ancient tomes. Yet never in his wildest dreams did he imagine he would come face to face with one of their eggs.

As he stands there, transfixed by the otherworldly beauty of the egg sac, Benna's grief momentarily takes a backseat to the sense of wonder and possibility that fills his heart. In this moment of clarity, he realizes that perhaps fate has led him to this discovery for a reason—a glimmer of hope amidst the darkness of his loss.

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Benna approaches the Sar Arsam egg sac nestled in the crook of the tree, his elongated ears twitching as they catch the gentle hum emanating from within. The otherworldly sheen of the sac's surface glimmers in the dappled forest light, casting an ethereal glow that both entices and unsettles him. His chestnut fur bristles with a mix of foreboding and curiosity as his instincts war within him.

"What secrets do you hold, little one?" Benna whispers, his voice hoarse from the raw anguish that had torn through him mere moments ago. The egg sac pulses in response, as if sensing his presence and the turmoil raging in his heart.

Benna's paw hovers over the sac, trembling with uncertainty. The rational part of his mind, honed by years of Maginist training, urges caution in the face of this unexpected discovery. And yet, his shattered heart yearns for a distraction from the all-consuming grief that threatens to drown him.

"Perhaps you are a sign," he murmurs, his words carried away by the gentle rustle of leaves above. "A twist of fate to guide me from the depths of despair."

In a moment of surrender, Benna allows his paw to brush against the surface of the egg sac. The contact sends a jolt through his being, as if the very essence of life itself courses through his fur. He gasps, his eyes widening as a sudden clarity washes over him.

This is more than mere chance, Benna realizes. This encounter, charged with an energy he cannot fully comprehend, marks the beginning of a new chapter in his life. A path shaped by both the profound loss he has endured and the glimmer of hope that now stirs within him.

As Benna contemplates the life growing inside the egg sac, he feels a shift deep within his soul. The weight of his grief remains, an indelible scar etched upon his heart, but alongside it blooms a newfound sense of purpose. He knows not where this path may lead, but in this moment, amidst the tranquil whispers of the forest, Benna embraces the potential for healing and redemption.

The silvery egg sac twitches and bulges, its membranous surface stretching taut. With a sudden tear, a spindly leg ending in a hooked claw bursts through, followed by another, and another. Benna watches in horror as the creature slowly emerges, its segmented body unfolding from the ruins of the sac. Antennae wave and a triangular head turns to fix multifaceted eyes on the hare Maginist.

Benna's breath catches in his throat at the sight of the insectoid monstrosity. Rage swells in his chest, mingling with the raw anguish of loss that still bleeds from his heart. His mate, his unborn leverets - this abomination's kind stole them from him. One blast of Magence would reduce this creature to ash and avenge his family. It would be so easy.

The creature skitters down the tree, then towards Benna on too many legs, mouth agape, revealing sharp teeth and fangs. Benna raises his paw, which begins to glow with gathering power. The beast is almost upon him. He need only release the energy...

But he hesitates. The Maginist Code whispers through his mind. The teachings he has devoted his life to following war with his need for retribution. This creature, as vile as it may be, is newly hatched. It has yet to commit any crime beyond its mere existence. Can he really snuff out its life in cold blood? Is that justice or murder?

His foreleg trembles with the effort of holding back the strike. The energy flickers. Tears sting Benna's eyes. "Why?" he whispers brokenly. "Why did you have to take them from me?" There is no answer but the click-click-click of the nearing creature.

Benna squeezes his eyes shut. A mournful keen claws its way from his throat. With a convulsive jerk, he lowers his paw, allowing the energy to dissipate, and turns his face away, unable to look upon either the creature or the act of mercy that feels like a betrayal. His shoulders shake with silent sobs as the insectoid monster scrabbles closer across the forest floor.

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As the creature approaches, a sudden, blinding light engulfs its form. Benna's eyes snap open, his jaw dropping in astonishment as the harsh brilliance fades to reveal not a monstrous insectoid, but a newborn babe lying on the forest floor. Soft curls of silver hair frame the child's face, and when the infant's eyes flutter open, they shine with the same metallic hue.

"By the crystal core..." Benna breathes, his voice trembling with awe and disbelief. He takes a tentative hop closer, his heart hammering against his ribs. The baby gurgles, tiny hands reaching up towards him, and in that moment, something within the hare Maginist shifts irrevocably.

Compassion, pure and unbridled, surges through Benna's veins, washing away the bitter dregs of vengeance. This child, Sar Arsam though it may be, is an innocent. A helpless babe in need of protection and care. In that instant, he knows with unwavering certainty that he cannot abandon this fragile life to an uncertain fate.

With infinite gentleness, Benna nuzzles the baby's head. "Shh, little one," he murmurs softly as the baby fusses. "I have you now."

Calling upon his Magence, Benna conjures a soft, blue blanket, swaddling the infant with practised motions that speak of experience. His actions are deliberate and precise, each movement imbued with a protective instinct that has lain dormant since the loss of his own unborn leverets.

As he fashions a sling from the same azure fabric, placing the baby inside, Benna marvels at the sudden turn of events. Mere moments ago, he had been poised to end this life. Now, he holds it close, determined to shield it from harm. The weight of responsibility settles upon his shoulders, but it is a burden he accepts willingly.

"You need a name, little one," Benna whispers, his voice rough with emotion. He traces a toe down the baby's soft cheek, marvelling at the perfection of this tiny being. "Elias. You shall be Elias, and I will be your guardian. Your protector. Your..."

He swallows hard, scarcely daring to give voice to the word that whispers through his mind.

"Your father."

As if in understanding, Elias coos, snuggling deeper into Benna's embrace. A watery smile trembles on the Maginist's lips, and he tightens his hold ever so slightly. In this moment, he makes a silent vow. No matter the challenges ahead, no matter the obstacles they may face, he will love and protect this child with every fibre of his being.

For in Elias, Benna has found a glimmer of hope amidst the darkness of his grief. A chance for redemption. A reason to carry on.

And he will not let it slip away.

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Benna cradles Elias close to his chest, the newborn's weight a comforting presence against his heart. He considers his options, his mind racing with the implications of this unexpected charge. Teleportation, while efficient, seems too jarring for one so young and fragile. No, he decides, he will make the journey on foot, allowing Elias to adjust to this new world at a gentler pace.

With a whispered word of Magence, Benna secures the sling more snugly around his body, ensuring Elias is held safe and secure. He takes a deep breath, savouring the fresh air tinged with the scent of blooming flowers and damp earth. The serenity of the environment seems to welcome them, a soothing balm after the intensity of recent events.

Each hop is measured and deliberate as Benna navigates the winding path towards the Maginist Tower. The rhythmic tapping of his feet against the ground creates a soothing cadence, and he feels Elias relax further into slumber. The journey is unhurried, allowing Benna time to reflect on the profound shift his life has taken.

As the tower comes into view, its crystalline Howl form glinting in the sunlight, Benna feels a mix of trepidation and determination. He knows the path ahead will be filled with challenges, but he is ready to face them head-on. For Elias, he will move mountains.

Entering the Tower's rocky plinth, Benna makes his way down to the crypt, his hops echoing in the hushed silence. The air grows cooler as he descends, and he instinctively pulls Elias closer, shielding him from the chill.

"Selar, little ones," Benna whispers as he approaches the resting place of his beloved mate and unborn leverets. His voice trembles, heavy with grief and longing. "I bring someone for you to meet."

Benna presents Elias to the silent crystal. "This is Elias, our... our son. I know it's not what we planned, but life has a way of surprising us, doesn't it?"

A tear slides down Benna's cheek as he imagines the joy Selar would have felt, cradling Elias in a sling as he was. The pain of her absence is a physical ache, but as he gazes upon the sleeping child, he feels a flicker of something else. Hope, perhaps. A chance for a future he thought lost.

"I promise you," Benna vows, his voice gaining strength, "I will love him as my own. I will guide him, protect him, and raise him to be a force for good in this world. He will know your stories, your love, even if you cannot be here to share them with him."

In the hushed sanctity of the crypt, Benna feels a whisper of approval, a gentle caress of acceptance. Though his family is gone, their love lives on, a guiding light in the darkness.

Rising to his feet, Benna gently licks Elias' brow. "Welcome home, my son," he murmurs. "Welcome to your new beginning."

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The soft echo of mouse footsteps, barely audible but for Benna's large ears, announces Leera's presence as she enters the crypt, her white fur gleaming in the dim light. Benna turns to face her, instinctively drawing Elias closer to his chest. The Head of the Maginist Order, clad in her golden robe, exudes an aura of wisdom and authority, her piercing gaze taking in the scene before her, her mind reaching towards Benna's for immediate understanding.

"Benna," Leera begins, her voice measured and calm, "I understand your grief, but we must consider the implications of this child's existence." She steps closer, her braided golden strands catching the flickering candlelight. "A Sar Arsam newborn, raised within the Maginist Tower... he will make a fine servant one day."

Benna shakes his head, his resolve unwavering. "I will not let others dictate his future," he declares, his words ringing with conviction. "I will raise him as my son, guide him with love and wisdom, and allow him to choose his own way, whatever that may be."

Leera studies Benna for a long moment, the tension between them palpable. Finally, she nods, a small smile gracing her features. "I see your determination, Benna, my dear old



friend, and I respect it. Elias is fortunate to have you as his father. Will you at least allow his suppression?"

Relief washes over Benna, gratitude mingling with the fierce protectiveness in his heart. "Thank you, Leera, and yes," he says softly, inclining his head in deference. "I will not let you down. I will not let him down."

As Leera draws closer, Benna looks down at Elias, who has woken, his eyes brimming with love and purpose. "Your path is your own, little one," he whispers, brushing a gentle toe across the baby's cheek. "And I will walk beside you, every step of the way."

In the quiet of the crypt, surrounded by the memories of those he loved and lost, Benna makes a silent vow. No matter the challenges ahead, no matter the expectations or pressures, he will protect Elias' right to choose his own destiny. For in that choice lies the greatest gift a father can give his son: the freedom to be true to himself, in a world that would seek to define him.

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Leera's eyes shimmer with an ethereal glow as she extends her hands towards Elias, her whiskers twitching with focused intent. Tendrils of golden light, like gossamer threads, begin to weave around the infant, enveloping him in a cocoon of Magence. The air hums with ancient power, the very essence of the crystal core thrumming through the crypt.

Benna watches, transfixed, as the light intensifies, pulsing in rhythm with Elias' heartbeat. The baby's silver hair shimmers, each strand absorbing the Magence like thirsty roots drawing in water. Gradually, the metallic hue fades, replaced by a warm, earthy brown. His eyes, once a striking silver, deepen into a mesmerising blue, as clear and vibrant as the skies above Denara.

"The suppression is complete," Leera announces, her voice soft yet resonant. "Elias' Sar Arsam traits are now hidden, deep within his being. They may resurface in times of great need or emotion, but for now, he will blend seamlessly into our world."

Benna nods, a mixture of relief and awe washing over him. "He looks so different," he muses, "yet still every bit as perfect." Elias coos, his tiny hands reaching out to grasp at the fading tendrils of light, oblivious to the monumental change he has undergone.

As if on cue, a fluttering of wings announces the arrival of Parnax, the yellow butterfly Maginist. He alights gracefully beside Leera, his antennae twitching in greeting. "I came as soon as I heard," he says, his voice a melodic trill. "Is this the little one?"

Benna smiles, holding Elias closer. "Yes, this is Elias. My son."

Parnax's compound eyes shimmer with warmth. "A beautiful child, Benna. And I think I know just the person to help nourish him."

With a gentle flutter of his wings, Parnax teleports Lucy, a suppressed Sar Arsam and personal servant of Leera, as evidenced by her golden dress, to their location.

Parnax alights on Lucy's shoulder, his wings glowing with a soft yellow light. "Lucy, my dear," he murmurs, "would you be willing to allow me to cause you to produce milk to feed little Elias?"

Lucy's eyes widen, then soften with understanding. "Of course, Master Parnax," she says respectfully, her voice warm with empathy. "It would be an honour."

As Lucy settles beside Benna, Parnax weaves a delicate web of Magence around her, focusing on her breast. A soft glow suffuses the air, and Lucy sighs, a sense of fullness and abundance flowing through her.

With infinite care, Lucy takes Elias into her arms, guiding him to her breast. The baby latches on instinctively, his small hands kneading against her skin as he suckles contentedly. A hush falls over the crypt, the only sound the gentle rhythm of Elias' feeding and the soft rustling of Parnax's wings.

Benna feels a lump form in his throat, his heart swelling with gratitude. "In the midst of so much loss," he reflects, "there is still so much love. So much compassion." He catches Lucy's eye, a silent thank you passing between them, an acknowledgment of the bond they now share.

As Elias drinks his fill, nourished by the love and Magence that flows through Lucy, Benna knows that this is just the beginning. The beginning of a journey, a story yet unwritten. A story of a child born of two worlds, perhaps to bridge the gap between them.

And with every beat of his heart, every breath he takes, Benna vows to be there, to guide and protect, to love and nurture. For Elias is more than just a child, more than just a symbol.

He is hope, in its purest, most radiant form.

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Benna turns to Lucy and Parnax, his eyes glistening with unshed tears. "I can't express how much this means to me," he says softly, his voice thick with emotion. "Your kindness, your generosity... it's a testament to the spirit of the Maginist Order."

Parnax's antennae twitch as he smiles warmly. "We are all part of the same tapestry, Benna. Each thread, no matter its origin, contributes to the beauty of the whole."

Lucy nods, cradling Elias, now sated, close to her heart. "He is a child of Denara now, just as much as any other. It is our duty, and our privilege, to care for him."

Benna reaches out, gently stroking Elias' downy hair. The baby coos, his tiny hand grasping Benna's toe. In that moment, Benna feels a surge of love so powerful, it nearly takes his breath away.

"This is my son," he thinks fiercely. "My son, in all the ways that matter."

As if sensing his thoughts, Elias' eyes flutter open, locking onto Benna's. In their blue depths, Benna sees a flicker of something ancient, something wise beyond the comprehension of mere mortals.

"You are destined for great things, little one," Benna projects through Magence. "And I will be with you, every step of the way."

With a final thank you to Lucy and Parnax, Benna takes Elias back into the sling, marvelling at the perfect weight of him, the way he fits so naturally against his chest.

"Come, my son," Benna whispers. "Let's get you some proper clothes."

The journey to the seamstress' workshop is a short one, yet each hop feels momentous to Benna. He is acutely aware of the tiny life cradled against him, the soft puffs of Elias' breath against his neck.

As they enter the workshop, the seamstress, Nen, a heavily pregnant bipedal doe Maginist clad in a green robe, looks up from her work. Her eyes widen as she takes in the sight of Benna and Elias.

"Benna," she greets. "And who might this little one be?"

Benna smiles, pride and love suffusing his voice as he replies, "This is Elias, my son."

Nen nods, understanding dawning in her eyes. "A child of destiny," she murmurs, approaching them. "I can see it in the stars of his eyes."

With gentle hooves, Mirra takes Elias' measurements, her touch feather-light against his skin. She hums softly as she works, an ancient lullaby that seems to soothe Elias, his eyelids growing heavy.

"She has a mother's touch," Benna muses, watching as Nen selects bolts of soft, blue fabric.

With deft movements, Nen weaves her Magence. Slowly, a tiny tunic takes shape, followed by a pair of trousers. She embellishes each with delicate embroidery, stars and moons and swirling galaxies. She makes several sets, each with slightly different embroidery.

"Blue, for his father's colour," Nen explains, holding up the finished garments.

Benna feels tears prick his eyes once more, overwhelmed by the outpouring of love and acceptance. He dresses Elias in his new clothes, marvelling at how the blue brings out the depth of his eyes.

"Thank you, Nen," Benna says, his voice rough with emotion. "For everything."

Nen simply smiles, reaching out to touch Benna's paw with her hoof. "It is my honour, Benna. My honour, and my joy."

As Benna hops out into the corridor, Elias sleeping peacefully in his sling, he feels a sense of purpose settle over him. A sense of rightness, of destiny clicking into place.

“This is just the beginning,” he thinks, looking down at his son's serene face. “The beginning of a journey that will change the very fabric of our world.”

And with each step, each breath, Benna knows he is ready. Ready to face whatever challenges may come, ready to love and guide and protect.

For he is a father, in all the ways that matter. And there is no force in the universe more powerful than that.

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Benna makes his way to his chambers, his hops measured and deliberate as he cradles Elias close to his heart. The weight of the day's events settles upon his shoulders, a heavy mantle of responsibility and change. Yet, amidst the swirling emotions, a fierce determination takes root within him.

“I will protect you,” Benna silently vows, his gaze fixed on Elias' peaceful face. “I will nurture you, guide you, and love you with every fibre of my being. You are my son now, and nothing will ever change that.”

Benna enters his personal chambers, hopping slowly towards the chamber that was to be his and Selar's children's. He enters, once again feeling the loss, and gently lays Elias down in the large cradle, ensuring his comfort. He takes a moment to simply observe the sleeping child, marvelling at the incredible turn of fate that has brought them together.

“You have no idea how much you've already changed my life,” Benna whispers, his voice barely audible. “How much you've given me, just by being here.”

He thinks back on the day's events—the hatching, the transformation, the outpouring of support from his fellow Maginists, and from Lucy. It's almost too much to process, too much to comprehend. Yet, through it all, one thing remains crystal clear: Elias is his to protect, his to love, his to raise as his own.

Benna reaches out, gently brushing a stray curl from Elias' forehead. “I know the path ahead won't be easy,” he murmurs. “There will be challenges, obstacles, and those who may not understand. But I promise you this, my son: I will be there, every step of the way. You will never face anything alone.”

As if sensing his father's presence, Elias stirs slightly, his tiny hand curling around Benna's toe. The gesture, so small and yet so profound, sends a surge of love and protectiveness through Benna's very core.

“This is my purpose now,” he realizes, his heart swelling with a fierce, unwavering resolve. “To be the father Elias needs, to guide him, to help him grow into the extraordinary being I know he's meant to be.”

And with that thought, that unshakeable conviction, Benna settles beside the cradle, ready to face whatever the future may hold. Together, they will navigate the challenges ahead, bound by love, by destiny, and by the unbreakable bond of family.

For in this moment, in this precious, life-altering instant, Benna knows with absolute certainty that he has found his true calling. And he will stop at nothing to fulfill it.

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Lucy's soft footsteps whisper against the polished crystal floor as she crosses the threshold into Benna's chambers. The air shimmers before her, and suddenly, a warm weight settles into her arms. She gasps, her eyes widening as they meet the striking blue gaze of an infant nestled against her chest.

"Elias?" The name escapes her lips in a breathless whisper, disbelief and wonder intertwined in the single word.

Benna's ears twitch at the sound, his head snapping up from the ancient tome spread across his desk. In a heartbeat, he is on his feet, rushing towards Lucy with eyes wide and mouth agape. "Impossible," he murmurs, his voice trembling with a mixture of shock and awe. "He's... teleported."

Lucy nods, her own astonishment mirrored in Benna's expression. She cradles Elias closer, marvelling at the unexpected display of Magence from one so young, and not even a Maginist by birth. The baby gurgles, seemingly unaware of the magnitude of his achievement, his tiny fingers grasping at the fabric of Lucy's dress.

Benna reaches out, his paw hovering hesitantly over Elias' curly brown hair. Pride flickers in his eyes, a subtle warmth that softens the lines of grief etched into his features. "Remarkable," he breathes, his voice barely above a whisper. "To have such control at his age... He truly is a prodigy."

Lucy meets Benna's gaze, a silent understanding passing between them. In this moment, the weight of Elias' potential hangs in the air, a promise of greatness that both thrills and terrifies. She knows, with unwavering certainty, that this child will change the course of their world.

As if sensing their thoughts, Elias squirms in Lucy's arms, his cherubic face scrunching into a pout. A soft chuckle escapes Benna's lips, the sound foreign yet welcome in the solemn chamber. He utilises his Magence to transfer Elias to his sling.

"Well then, little one," he murmurs, his voice warm with affection, "it seems we have much to learn from each other." Elias coos in response, his tiny hand grasping Benna's toe with surprising strength.

In that instant, a stronger bond forms between the unlikely pair - a hare Maginist and a Sar Arsam child, their paths irrevocably entwined by fate and the extraordinary gift they both possess. As Benna holds Elias close, Lucy watches with a mixture of hope and trepidation, knowing that this moment marks the beginning of a journey that will test them all.

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The chamber is bathed in golden sunlight, casting a warm glow on the velvet cloth spread before Leera. Elias, cradled in his sling, watches with wide, curious eyes as the white mouse

Maginist presents six objects: a pebble, a feather, a candle, a seashell, a prism, and a shadow cast by a small figurine.

Leera's whiskers twitch with anticipation, her gaze fixed on the young Sar Arsam. "Elias," she says, her voice soft yet commanding, "I want you to choose the object that calls to you, the one that resonates with your Magence."

Benna lowers Elias to the floor, watching as the child crawls towards the velvet cloth. Chubby fingers hover over each item, greatly surprising Leera and Benna who understand the significance of that. Elias hesitates for a moment before settling on the smooth, grey pebble. He grasps it in his tiny hand, a smile spreading across his face as he holds it up for Leera to see.

A serene nod of approval graces Leera's features, her eyes sparkling with wisdom. "Earth," she murmurs, her voice tinged with reverence. "Your affinity for the grounding force of nature is strong, young one. It will serve you well in your journey. The items are yours to keep."

Benna's chest swells with pride, his heart racing as he witnesses the first glimpse of Elias' true potential. He knows, in this moment, that his decision to raise the child as his own was not only right, but necessary. Elias is destined for greatness, and Benna vows to guide him every step of the way.

As if sensing Benna's thoughts, Leera turns her piercing gaze to the hare Maginist. "He will need proper attire," she states, her words more command than suggestion. "A robe that reflects his affinity and status as a Maginist in training."

Benna nods, his mind already racing with possibilities. He pictures Elias clothed in a rich green robe, the colour of the grass and the life it sustains. Brown leggings and boots, sturdy and practical for the challenges that lie ahead. A symbol of his unique heritage, a bridge between two worlds.

"I will see to it at once," Benna assures Leera, his voice filled with determination. He teleports the items to his chambers, and gathers Elias in the sling once more, the pebble still clutched tightly in the child's hand. Together, they make their way to Nen's workshop.

Nen listens intently as Benna describes his vision for Elias' attire. She nods in understanding, her mind already measuring fabric and calculating patterns. "It will be an honour to create an outfit for such a special child," she says, her voice warm with sincerity.

As Nen sets to work, Benna watches with a mix of anticipation and apprehension. He knows that the path ahead will be filled with challenges, that Elias' unique heritage will draw both admiration and fear from those around him. But in this moment, as he sees the love and care being poured into every stitch of the child's new clothes, Benna allows himself to hope.

Hope for a future where Elias is accepted for who he is, where his gifts are celebrated rather than feared. Hope for a world where the lines between Maginist and Sar Arsam blur, where understanding and compassion reign supreme. And most of all, hope for the journey they will undertake together, father and son, bound by love and the power of Magence.

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The plush rugs of the playchamber cushion Benna's hops as he guides Elias inside, the air filled with the laughter and chatter of toddler Maginists. A kaleidoscope of species greets their eyes—a young sapling wearing a green robe stretching its branches, a bear cub wearing a blue robe tumbling with a velociraptor wearing a red robe, a dodo chick wearing a yellow robe hopping alongside a bipedal fawn wearing a green robe, and several others. Amidst the colorful array, Yem, the bipedal fox Maginist, stands out in her grey robe. She turns to welcome them, her smile warm and inviting.

"Benna, it's wonderful to see you," Yem says, her voice a melodic lilt. Her gaze shifts to Elias, and her eyes widen slightly, a flicker of recognition passing across her features. "And you must be Elias. We've been eagerly awaiting your arrival."

Elias clings to Benna's robe, his blue eyes taking in the unfamiliar surroundings. The other toddlers pause in their play, their gazes drawn to the newcomer. Whispers ripple through the room, a mix of curiosity and apprehension.

"Is that a Sar Arsam?" a young bipedal rabbit wearing a brown robe asks, her nose twitching nervously.

"He looks different," the bear cub remarks, tilting his head to the side.

Two children standing apart from the others coolly regard the situation. They are humanoid with black hair, black leopard ears, black leopard tails, sharp teeth, and clawed hands and feet. The female, Eela, wears a red robe, black undergarments, and black boots. Her older twin brother Karna wears a red robe, black leggings, and black boots.

Benna feels Elias' grip tighten, senses the child's unease. He meets Elias' gaze with a reassuring smile. "It's alright, Elias. They're just curious. Why don't you show them what you can do?"

Elias hesitates for a moment, then nods, his determination shining through. He spots a potted daisy on a nearby shelf and reaches out with his mind, feeling the familiar tingle of Magence flowing through him. The daisy responds to his call, its petals swaying as it begins to dance, twirling and bobbing in a mesmerising display.

The children gasp in delight, their initial wariness forgotten as they gather around the enchanted flower. Giggles fill the air, tiny hands clapping in excitement.

"How did you do that?" the fawn, Melin, son of Nen, asks, his eyes wide with wonder.

Elias smiles shyly, a hint of pride in his voice as he replies, "I just asked it to dance, and it did."

As the children marvel at Elias' abilities, Benna feels a swell of emotion in his chest. He sees the way Elias' shoulders relax, the way his eyes light up as he interacts with his peers. For a moment, the weight of the past seems to lift, replaced by the promise of a brighter future.

Yem places a gentle paw on Benna's shoulder, her voice low and understanding. "He's special, Benna. They all are, in their own ways. But Elias... he has a destiny that even I cannot fully comprehend."

Benna nods, his gaze never leaving Elias. "I know. And I'll be there to guide him, every step of the way."

As the playchamber fills with the sounds of laughter and the soft rustling of the dancing daisy, Benna allows himself to embrace the moment. He knows that challenges lie ahead, that Elias' path will be fraught with obstacles and adversaries. But for now, in the warmth and acceptance of this room, he sees a glimmer of the extraordinary individual his son will become.

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The toddlers sit in a circle, blank sheets of paper in front of them. Yem stands at the centre, her grey robe swishing gently as she moves her paw over her own paper. With a whisper of Magence, a vibrant butterfly takes shape, its wings shimmering with hues of blue and purple.

Elias watches intently, his blue eyes wide with fascination. His small fingers open wide, eager to try the technique himself. As Yem steps back, inviting the children to begin their own drawings, Elias closes his eyes for a moment, reaching out with his senses to the energy that thrums through the chamber.

He pictures Benna in his mind, the warmth of his adoptive father's smile, the gentleness of his touch. With a deep breath, Elias holds his open hand over the paper and lets the Magence flow through him. The lines take shape, forming the contours of Benna's face, the curve of his ears, the wisdom in his eyes.

The other children pause in their own work, their gazes drawn to Elias' creation. Whispers of awe ripple through the group as they watch the portrait come to life, each stroke imbued with a love and understanding beyond Elias' years.

At the top of the parchment, Elias carefully writes the word "Daddy," his letters precise and filled with affection. As he sits back, a small smile plays at the corners of his mouth, a sense of pride and connection warming his chest.

Yem approaches, her eyes widening as she takes in the portrait. "Elias, this is extraordinary," she breathes, her voice filled with wonder. "You have a gift, little one."

The other children gather around, their own drawings forgotten as they marvel at Elias' work. "Can you teach me how to do that?" the rabbit asks, her eyes shining with admiration.

Elias nods shyly, his cheeks flushing at the attention. He carefully sets his drawing aside and moves to sit beside the rabbit, guiding her paw with gentle encouragement.

As the lesson progresses, the children flock to Elias, eager to learn from his example. They watch in awe as he demonstrates his skills in each of the six disciplines, from the delicate manipulation of water droplets to the summoning of small orbs of light.

Benna observes from his place by the wall with the other parents, who are staying for this first day, his heart swelling with pride as he witnesses Elias' growing confidence and the admiration of his peers. He sees the way Elias patiently guides each child, his explanations clear and kind, his demonstrations filled with a quiet power that belies his age.



"He's a natural leader," Yem murmurs, coming to stand beside Benna. "They look up to him, and he nurtures their talents with such grace."

Benna nods, his voice thick with emotion as he replies, "I always knew he was special, but seeing him like this... it's more than I ever dared to hope for."

As the sun begins to set, casting a warm glow through the windows of the playchamber, Elias gathers his portrait of Benna and walks to his father's side. He holds up the drawing, his eyes seeking approval and love.

Benna crouches, gathering Elias into a tight embrace. "It's beautiful, son," he whispers, his words filled with a fierce love and protection. "Just like you."

Elias nestles into Benna's fur, his small form fitting perfectly against his father. In this moment, surrounded by the warmth of acceptance and the promise of a future filled with wonder, Elias feels a sense of belonging that he has never known before.

As the children bid their farewells and the playchamber empties, Benna and Elias hop and walk side by side through the halls of the Tower, the portrait clutched tightly in Elias' hand. The challenges of the world outside may await them, but for now, they bask in the glow of a bond that transcends blood and circumstance, a love that will guide them through whatever trials lie ahead.

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As Elias' popularity grows among the Maginist children, not everyone shares in the admiration and awe. In a shadowed corner of the playchamber, Karna leans against the wall, his arms crossed and his dark eyes narrowed as he watches Elias demonstrate a particularly complex Air Magence technique. The other children gasp in delight, their faces lit with wonder, but Karna's lips curl into a sneer.

"Look at them, fawning over him like he's some kind of prodigy," Karna mutters to Eela, who stands beside him, her own gaze calculating as she observes the scene.

Eela's tail swishes, her claws flexing almost imperceptibly. "He's special," she murmurs, her voice low and melodic. "His power, his potential... it could eclipse us all."

Karna's jaw clenches, a flicker of envy burning in his eyes. He pushes off the wall, striding towards the group of children with a casual arrogance that belies the tension coiled within him.

"Impressive, Eli," he drawls, his voice dripping with sarcasm. "But I wonder, can you handle real challenge? Or do you only perform for your adoring fans?"

Elias turns, his blue eyes meeting Karna's gaze steadily. He speaks calmly, his words measured and polite. "I'm always eager to learn, Karna. If you have something to teach me, I'm willing to listen."

Karna's lips twist into a mocking smile. "Teach you? I doubt you could keep up. Why don't you stick to your parlour tricks and leave the real Magence to those who can handle it?"

The other children fall silent, their eyes wide as they watch the exchange. Melin steps forward, his gentle voice filled with quiet reproach. "There's no need for that, Karna. We're all here to learn and grow together."

Karna rounds on Melin, his eyes flashing. "Stay out of this, deer boy. Unless you want to be next on my list."

Elias' hand comes to rest on Melin's arm, a silent gesture of support and gratitude. He turns back to Karna, his voice even and controlled. "I'm not here to compete with anyone, Karna. We each have our own strengths and weaknesses. The point is to help each other improve."

Karna scoffs, his gaze raking over Elias with disdain. "Spare me your platitudes. You think you're so special, don't you? The golden child, beloved by all. But I see through you. You're nothing more than a freak, a Sar Arsam masquerading as one of us."

The words hang in the air, heavy and poisonous. Elias flinches, the barb striking deep, but he maintains his composure. "I am who I am, Karna. Just as you are who you are. Neither of us can change that."

As Karna opens his mouth to retort, Eela glides forward, her movements smooth and serpentine. She places a hand on Karna's chest, her voice a purr. "Come, brother. Let's not waste our time here. We have more important matters to attend to."

Karna hesitates, his gaze locked with Elias', before he allows Eela to guide him away. As they depart, Eela glances back over her shoulder, her green eyes meeting Elias' with a look that is both appraising and inviting.

In the wake of their departure, Melin turns to Elias, his hoof reaching out to clasp his friend's shoulder. "Don't listen to him, Elias. He's just jealous of your abilities."

Elias sighs, his gaze distant. "I know. But his words still sting. I can't help but feel like an outsider at times, no matter how hard I try to fit in."

Melin's grip tightens, his warm brown eyes filled with empathy and affection. "You're not an outsider, Elias. You belong here, with us. With me."

The words hang between them, weighted with unspoken emotion. Elias meets Melin's gaze, a small smile tugging at his lips. "Thank you, Melin. Your friendship means more to me than you know."

As the children slowly disperse, returning to their lessons and play, Elias and Melin linger, their hearts full. In the face of cruelty and jealousy, they have each other, a bond that grows stronger with each passing day.

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The sun hangs low on the horizon as the children gather on the Training Ground, their shadows stretching long across the packed earth. Elias stands among them, his blue eyes scanning the faces of his peers—some friendly, others wary or hostile. At the front of the

group, Darm, the bipedal bear Maginist, looms large, his massive frame draped in a simple yellow robe.

"Today," Darm rumbles, his voice deep and commanding, "you will choose your first training weapon. Consider carefully, for this will be your constant companion in the years to come. As you grow, your weapon will grow with you."

Elias' heart quickens, excitement and trepidation warring within him. "This is it," he thinks, "the moment I've been waiting for."

As the children step forward one by one, Elias watches as they select their weapons—gleaming swords, wickedly curved daggers, and sleek bows. Karna, his chest puffed with pride, chooses a broad-bladed axe, its weight nearly toppling him as he hefts it.

When it is Elias' turn, he steps forward, his gaze skimming over the array of weapons. His hand hovers, drawn to a simple wooden staff. As his fingers close around the smooth wood, a sense of rightness settles over him, as if the staff were made for him alone.

Darm nods, his dark eyes glinting with approval. "A wise choice, young Elias. The staff is a weapon of balance and versatility, much like yourself."

Elias flushes at the praise, warmth blooming in his chest. He steps back into line, the staff cradled in his hands like a precious gift.

As the lesson begins, Darm guides them through basic stances and grips. Elias follows along, his movements natural and fluid. The staff feels like an extension of his body, responding to his every command.

"This is what I was meant to do," he realizes, a fierce joy overtaking him.

Around him, the other children struggle, their weapons clumsy and unwieldy in their hands. Even Karna, for all his bravado, fumbles with his axe, nearly dropping it on his foot.

But Elias moves with grace and precision, his staff a blur as he spins and strikes. The other children stop to watch, their eyes wide with awe and envy.

"Look at him go," Melin whispers to Eela, his voice filled with admiration.

Eela nods, her gaze calculating. "He's a natural. It's no wonder everyone is so drawn to him."

As the lesson draws to a close, Darm calls Elias to the front, his paw resting heavily on the boy's shoulder. "You have a gift, Elias. Nurture it, and you will become a formidable warrior indeed."

Elias beams, his heart swelling with pride. For the first time, he feels truly at home, his purpose clear and his path stretching out before him. With the staff in his hand and the support of his friends, he knows he can face whatever challenges lie ahead.

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The scent of pine needles fills Elias' nostrils as he follows Benna through the dense forest, his seven-year-old legs working hard to keep up with the hare's longer hops. Sunlight filters through the canopy, dappling the ground with golden patches that dance and shimmer as the breeze rustles the leaves overhead.

"Are we almost there, Daddy?" Elias asks, his voice tinged with excitement and a hint of nervousness.

Benna glances back, his blue eyes softening as he takes in his son's eager expression. "Just a little further, Elias. The Howls are looking forward to meeting you."

As they crest a small hill, a large clearing comes into view, and Elias' breath catches in his throat. In the centre stand a herd of magnificent creatures, their bodies a seamless blend of horse and owl. Their bodies and legs are those of horses, while their heads, necks and wings are those of owls. Their tails and feet are a hybrid of the two. Their feathers gleam in the sunlight, a kaleidoscope of colours that seem to shimmer with an inner light. Two stand apart, at the front of the herd.

The larger of the two, a black-spotted white male with a regal bearing, steps forward, his hooves making no sound on the soft grass. "Welcome, young Elias," he says, his voice deep and resonant. "I am Lord Loka, and this is my mate, Lady Shayli."

Elias bows deeply, his heart pounding in his chest. "It's an honour to meet you, Lord Loka and Lady Shayli."

Lady Shayli, grey in colour, moves closer, her wings spreading wide in a gesture of welcome. "The honor is ours, Elias. We have heard much about you from Benna."

As Elias straightens, his gaze is drawn to Lady Shayli's rounded belly, a sense of wonder and connection washing over him. "There's something special about that egg," he thinks, his hand itching to reach out and touch the smooth surface.

Lady Shayli notices his interest, a knowing smile playing at the corners of her beak. "You sense it, don't you? The life growing within me?"

Elias nods, his eyes wide. "Yes, my lady. It's like...like I can feel it calling to me."

Lord Loka chuckles, the sound warm and inviting. "Perhaps it is a sign, young Elias. A sign of the bond that will one day form between you and our child."

Benna rises himself up to his full height and places a paw on Elias' shoulder, his eyes shining with pride. "Elias has a special connection to all living things. It's one of the many gifts that make him unique."

As the afternoon wears on, Elias finds himself lost in conversation with the Howls, their stories and laughter filling the clearing with a sense of warmth and acceptance. For the first time in his young life, he feels truly seen, his differences celebrated rather than shunned.

"This is where I belong," he realises, a sense of peace settling over him like a soft blanket. "With the Howls, with Daddy, with all the creatures of Denara."

As the sun begins to set, casting the clearing in a golden glow, Elias knows that this is only the beginning of a journey that will shape his life in ways he cannot yet imagine. But with the love and support of those around him, he feels ready to face whatever challenges lie ahead.

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The sun dips lower on the horizon as Elias and Benna make their way back to the Maginist Tower, the sky painted in vibrant hues of orange and pink. The crystal structure looms ahead, its surface reflecting the warm light and casting a golden glow over the surrounding landscape.

Elias pauses at the base of the Tower, his blue eyes filled with wonder as he takes in the sight. "It's beautiful, isn't it, Daddy?" he whispers, his voice soft with reverence. "I understand why it's shaped like a Howl."

Benna nods, a smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. "It is, Elias. And it's our home, a place where we can learn and grow together."

The hare Maginist places a paw on Elias' leg, the gesture both protective and affectionate. "My son," he thinks, his heart swelling with pride and love. "The child I never thought I'd have, but the one I was meant to guide and nurture."

Elias leans into Benna's touch, his small hand coming to rest on top of his father's paw. In this moment, the world seems to fall away, leaving only the two of them and the warmth of their bond.

"I'll make you proud, Daddy," Elias promises silently, his determination burning bright within him. "I'll learn everything I can and use my gifts to help others, just like you do."

As the last rays of sunlight fade, Benna and Elias stand together, their gazes fixed on the Maginist Tower and the future that awaits them. The path ahead may be uncertain, but with each other's support and the love of those around them, they know they can face whatever challenges lie ahead.

"Come on, Elias," Benna says softly, giving his son's leg a gentle squeeze. "Let's go home."

Side by side, father and son make their way towards the Tower, their hops and steps filled with hope and anticipation for the journey that lies ahead.