

Morgan's Farewell

by Susan Cerniglia

The air smelled of smoke and sweat and bittersweet incense, and Morgan knew that the ones who mattered – and, yes, somewhere along the way they had begun to matter – wouldn't notice that she had gone. With all of the guardians and gypsies and gods making farewells elsewhere, their tree was quiet.

Above her, the egg lingered in relative piece, unmoved by what it had kept watch over. With a muted crack the stem of a rose in her hand split, giving way beneath her thumb. Morgan winced. Not that the flower would know what she'd done, but she felt guilty all the same. The sentimentality behind the reaction amused her, and she kept that look of mirthful nonchalance while stepping closer to the tree. Not that anyone should be watching, but it never hurt to be overcautious over those things that matter.

The guardians had each left their mark, gold and brown and green, beneath that which they'd sworn to protect. Morgan fingered her own, tugging on it until an amber-browed, crumbling rose fell loose and landed in the grass at her feet. With barely a glance to it, she replaced the fallen rose with her freshly cut one just as she had for four weeks gone, as she had since she'd left her own mark.

And in four weeks, Terranus had never said a word about it, Morgan acknowledged with a tight smile, light-hearted features tensing. Through no particular planning, her first paragon seemed to always be there when she was. He also seemed to know better, through his unique stoic deliberation, than to remark on it. She supposed it was silly, regardless, her knuckles wrapping against the bark. A meager tribute in a place leagues upon leagues from home.

When something blue, large, and adorable plopped down at her feet, Morgan yelped. The keys rattled against Argyle's hat and cast sunset-lit shadows over his perennially grinning face. Despite herself, Morgan smirked ruefully back, one brow lifting with patient expectation.

Argyle made a few smacking sounds with his tongue in answer.

Her shoulder leaning into the tree, Morgan folded her arms. A casual glance had told her that, as anticipated, no one else had come to trouble her. "You fought well, dear."

"Ungh... Yeah!" Morgan let out a snort of a laugh. "SMASH!"

Unable to help herself, Morgan murmured teasingly on a smile, "Ah-ooh?"

"Ah-OOH!" He corrected her admirably, she had to admit. Grease might be a good influence after all.

Tapping her fist against his hat – and getting justly swatted at for it – she crouched down at Argyle’s side. He smacked his tongue a few times more, eyes fixed on her face with their disturbing frankness. “You’re going to stay with them,” she ordered, while serious lines crossed out over her forehead.

“Ungh, yesh!”

“Until we return with the next Progress.”

“... Yesh!”

“And you won’t give Adria any trouble. Or try to eat Lilith. Or steal one of Vashta’s cookies.” Damn it, she could feel her throat getting tight.

“Ungh... noes!” The keys rattled with the shake of his head. Morgan watched his gaze drift to one side, where a fairy danced in the fading light.

“Behave, dear. Only beat on Thoren when he deserves it.” Which was often enough. And she was rambling. Fingers brushing the dirt, Morgan found the discarded flower within the grass and palmed it, holding it out beneath Argyle’s nose.

The troll gave a deep sniff and then chomped onto the blossom. He chewed loudly and wetly, even as Morgan stood and nodded over to the fairy. “Go have fun.”

She turned away then, but was fairly sure she heard him scamper off to play with the lucky fairy, club dragging behind him. Back at the gates, though, were hugs and tears to go around. She stopped to watch over the horde – her horde – and laugh at the child-heroes scampering next to the elegant elf and stubborn Spartans, but then left with a tip of her head to the champion among them all, eyes narrowing with rueful warning at the memory of the secret he’d kept even from her.

They would meet again. With more confidence and pleasure than she felt, however, Morgan hummed under her breath and strolled through the gates with an amiable half-bow to the guard there.

~ Phyll, la, la, la... Phyll, la, la, loo... Why didn’t Phyll think this thing through? ~

Bloody good question for us all, she noted with a glance back to the walls. Fare thee well, you crazy forces of good and light. Two men with bemused expressions glanced over Morgan where she’d stopped in the middle of the crowds. Clearing her throat, she dipped a curtsy to both and continued past with a deliberate and carefree stride. “... has there e’er been a story so sad, Phyll-la-la-lee, as a combustible parrot in a li-a-brary?”

When they stared after her blankly, Morgan laughed. Oh, she would miss this place.