

MAGIC THIEF OF GAVALOS

Sequel to the

SHIELD OF THE PALIDINE

By

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CHAPTER SAMPLE

The three teens slammed hard onto the ground for the second time that day. This time, they had landed outside, and since it was light, they could see their surroundings. They stood up quickly and looked around in fear. They hadn't returned to France. Or at least not to the *château*. This place looked like an outdoor theater or stage at the bottom of a hill with stone seats set into the hillside for the audience.

"*Merde*," Elam swore under his breath. For the second time that day, his prissy sister didn't correct him. She understood the need for strong language in these strange circumstances.

"Are we still on Amorgos?" whispered Chace, looking up at the steep hillside of seats.

"I do not know," answered his cohort in crime. "*Mere* and *Pere* never talked about a second landing place, but since the shield was damaged, God only knows."

Illieya glanced around in desperation for the shield. Elam no longer held it, and she didn't see it anywhere on the ground.

"Where is the shield?" she asked her brother accusingly.

The black-haired boy looked around, holding out his now-empty hands.

"I do not know!" There was panic in his voice. All he could think was that he must have let go of it when they entered the swirling colors and wind.

Chace ran back and forth looking frantically for the thin silver metal object. That was their ticket home. Without it, they were doomed.

The sound of clanging steel interrupted their search. They looked up the hillside to see a dozen or more men running toward them wearing what looked like leather armor and helmets from the ancient Greek age. Behind the soldiers stood a tall bearded figure in a white robe.

Illieya, who loved to read and study the classics, gasped at the sight of the men running toward them. She had seen these figures on Greek urns and mosaics pictured in her textbooks. "Olympus! *Mon dieu!* We have landed on Olympus!" She lifted her long skirt and took off running away from the soldiers down the hill behind the stage. The boys needed little encouragement to follow her. The three ran like the wind, Elam taking note of the great speed at which his sister moved. He had never seen her run before.

Illieya was terrified to think they were on Olympus, a place far more dangerous than Amorgos. If her parents' tales were true, then she and the boys were the first beings to travel back through the rift since Hestia had taken Zeus's portal stone. Illieya knew if they were caught they wouldn't survive the night. She ran into the woods at the bottom of the hill, well below the amphitheater, her skirts hitched above her knees. She didn't care if the whole world saw her bloomers. The devil himself was on her tail, and she wasn't going to let anything slow her down.

Chace and Elam were a few steps behind her when a new group of soldiers appeared in front of them seemingly out of nowhere. They grabbed the three teens roughly and held on to them tightly.

In French, Illieya yelled, "Say nothing!"

Elam wasn't about to say anything. He had also realized where they were as they ran down the hill, and understood the danger they were in. This was no longer a game, and he and Chace were not in for a simple spanking for disobeying orders. He had unwrapped the sword, which had sent them into the worst possible situation. If this place was truly Olympus, he could only pray that it was also two thousand Olympian years later and Zeus was long gone. His parents had told him that witches were long-lived, but only archons and elves were immortal. So the more time that had passed since Hestia had stolen Zeus's portal stone, the better.

He didn't have more time to ponder his capture. The bearded man in the flowing robes walked up to him, touched his forehead, and the world went black.

Elam awoke in a prison cell. Chace was lying next to him on the floor, still unconscious. Illieya lay across Chace's stomach in an uncomfortable lump as if the three had simply been dumped unceremoniously in the middle of the floor.

Elam bent to push himself up and noticed something hard on his ribcage. He could feel it through the thin material of his shirt. He pulled the neck hole forward to look down onto his chest. There, soundly fastened to his ribcage, was the Shield of the Palidine, the stone now alive, floating on its invisible axis and vibrant with color. His mother had been the unwilling bearer of this object as a necklace, and now the shield had fastened itself to him.

He held onto his ribcage in panic. If he were found with this object, he would be killed. His parents had told him how Zeus dealt with non-witches who were found with portal stones. They would be tied to a stake near the portal and then thrown in, causing their bodies to be ripped in two. Part of them would be held on Olympus by the rope and stake, and part would simply disappear into the swirling winds of the portal.

Elam couldn't think of a worse way to die. It would also be devastating to the human race if the portal between Olympus and Earth were opened again. He shuddered to think of a worldwide war erupting over things like portal stones, magic, and strange creatures inhabiting Earth. Mankind had enough problems as it was. Earth certainly didn't need the Greek gods returning.

He looked at his sister and best friend and decided not to tell them about the shield. What they didn't know, they couldn't tell.

He rolled his sister off Chace. She moaned and moved a little bit. Elam sighed in relief. At least she wasn't dead. He poked Chace, who also moaned and moved his head back and forth.

While the other two came around, Elam took stock of their prison cell. It was small, about ten feet by ten feet, with a dirt floor. The door was also small with a single window big enough to put a book through lengthwise. The walls were rough-hewn stone, and a single iron mounting on one wall held a candle. Elam wondered why the Olympians would use candles instead of luminite. Then he remembered that luminite existed only on Amorgos.

Illieya sat up and grunted. "Great. Now look what you have done."

"I have done?" her brother replied indignantly. "I remember you touching the shield out of curiosity as well."

“You are the motley-minded pignut who unwrapped the Sword of the Western Sun and then picked up the shield,” she accused.

“You are the churlish harpy who picked up the sword and touched the portal stone. You took us to Amorgos.” His face was a mere inch from hers as they yelled at each other.

“I only picked it up to hand it to *Pere*, you *imbécile*. If you had stayed in your bed like a good boy, we—”

“Will you two please stop it!” shouted Chace over the din. “You are not helping our situation.”

“Like you ever help. You are just as addlepatated, you ninny-headed lout,” sniped Illieya at the younger boy.

“Oh, yeah? Well at least I am not screaming loud enough to wake the dead.”

“If you two could just leave well enough alone—” Approaching footsteps stopped Illieya from completing her insult. “Say nothing of Amorgos,” she warned the boys, “and do not—”

Before she could finish, the door flung open. The three held tightly to each other as a tall and intimidating soldier entered the room. He wore a beige tunic with black accents which draped to his knees. His shoulders and chest were covered with armor plating, but his arms and legs were bare. He had a helmet with a line of feathers on top running from front to back. In his hand, he carried a pike.

“Έξω η πόρτα, Άνθρωποι!”

The children stood still, staring at him.

“Είστε επιθυμητοί, τώρα έξω η πόρτα,” he ordered again, this time pointing to the door.

The children moved as one to the door and exited. Another soldier grabbed Elam and Chace by the arms, holding one in each hand, and nearly dragged them up the stairs and out into the sunlight. The first soldier did the same with Illieya and held a spear menacingly in his other hand. The soldiers marched the three across a courtyard surrounded by elaborately carved pillars. Once past the courtyard they entered a grand hall filled with huge columns and statues of people in robes holding musical instruments, animals, or weaponry. The soldiers then pushed the three in front of a man sitting on a large stone throne situated on the top of a grand dais.

Illieya stared up at the man. Until that moment, she had thought her father the most handsome man in the world. This man, however, put her father’s good looks to shame. His chiseled features exuded power and control. His light-blue eyes were framed by long eyelashes. His hair, though gray, was full and wavy. Every feature on his face fit perfectly with every other feature: the straight nose, full lips, glistening teeth, high cheekbones. The man wore a Greek-style tunic off one shoulder which showed well-developed arm and chest muscles.

Illieya melted inside.

“Ποιος είσαι,” he boomed. “Πού είστε από.”

Illieya’s parents had become fluent in Greek while on Amorgos, and they had insisted that she and Elam learn the language from their tutors. Elam didn’t put much effort into his studies, preferring adventure over schoolwork. Illieya had learned enough to understand what the imposing man was saying. However, she wasn’t about to tell him who they were and where they were from.

“Ποιος είσαι. Πού είστε από. Πού είναι η πύδα πέτρα?” the man demanded more loudly. This time, he also asked where their portal stone was.

The three young people stared back at him. The man in robes finally concluded they couldn't understand him, which made him angry. Had his children forgotten how to speak the language of the gods?

The man stood and boomed out, “Γονατίστε ενώπιον μου, Άνθρωποι! Είμαι ο Θεός σας.”

Illieya tried to keep a straight face, continuing to pretend she didn't understand. He had told the humans to kneel before him, their god. She nearly did, his charisma was so great. However, her knees weren't paying attention to her brain at the moment.

The man changed his tact. Pointing to himself, he said, “Zeus.” He then pointed to others around the room. “Atlas. Eros. Boreas. Tyche. Persephone.”

Illieya nearly fainted. The warm, adoring feeling within her breast instantly disappeared and was replaced by sheer terror. Standing in front of them was their worst nightmare come to life. They had indeed returned to Olympus, and Zeus was still the reigning despot.

Elam struggled mightily to keep a straight face as his heart nearly leapt out of his throat when he heard the names spoken by the man. Here before him were the very witches who had fought Yefana and Hestia as they escaped from Olympus with the last of the portal stones, effectively sealing Earth from the Greek gods for all eternity. But here he was now, with Zeus's own portal stone stuck soundly to his ribcage, a few feet from the most powerful witch in the world. He had never felt fear like this in his life.

Chace's eyes opened wide. *Zut alors!* The adventures of Amorgos suddenly seemed less of a game and more real as the names of the Greek gods passed from Zeus's lips. They were in very big trouble. The only thing worse would be for Zeus to introduce Hades.

Zeus could tell from the looks on the children's faces that they recognized the names. Good. The humans may have forgotten the language of the gods but they had not forgotten the names of their gods.

Illieya recovered first and decided they should at least introduce themselves. She gave her best courtly curtsy, and spoke to Zeus in French. “I am Illieya Tonnelier, of the *Château de Saint-Germain en Laye*. I am the daughter of the *Marquis* and *Marquise du Laye*.”

Elam followed his sister's lead. He bowed deeply and said, “I am Elam Tonnelier, her brother.”

Chace finally found his voice. “I am Chace Bagot, son of the squire to the *Marquis du Laye*.”

The witch before them laughed heartily and said in perfect French, “*Merci, mon ami*, for now your language belongs to me!”

Illieya's eyes grew as large as saucers. She realized she had made a grave error in speaking. *Lingua seeds*—the magical seeds that gave her father the gift of speaking any language spoken to him first—were from Olympus. She should have realized the witches of the Pantheon would all have these seeds. She had just given them the ability to understand and speak French. She and the boys could no longer hide their conversations from Zeus.

“So now that we understand each other, you are humans from Earth, are you not?”

The three nodded. “Of course,” said Illieya, quickly learning to play the game. “What else would we be? Are you not humans from Earth?”

The Olympians in the room laughed at the children’s naiveté.

“I will ask again, where did you come from?” Zeus demanded, leaning forward with an evil glint in his eye. “How did you come through the portal?”

Elam was masterful at talking his way out of trouble, and he brought all his skills to bear now before Zeus. “We come from the *Château de Saint-Germain en Laye* in France. We are not sure how we came to be here in Greece. Chace and I were playing in the woods outside the *château* when I fell into a big hole.” His father’s story flowed easily from his lips.

“While Chace looked for a big branch to help me out of the hole, I found a strange necklace that I tucked into my waistband. When we returned to the *château*, Chace and I were looking at it when Illieya tried to snatch it from our hands.”

“We were surrounded by strange colors and a fierce wind for a few seconds, and then we landed in the amphitheater where you all found us.” He gazed at the god with innocent eyes.

Zeus looked sideways at the young man. “Where is this necklace now? Πού είναι η πύιδα πέτρα?” He wanted that portal stone.

Elam shrugged his shoulders. Illieya spoke up this time. “We do not know. We were looking for it when you chased us away.”

Zeus stood up, pounding his fist on the stone of the armrest. “What do you mean, you do not know? What did you do with it?”

Chace shrugged this time, keeping the story going. “She snatched it from his hands. I think it was lost in the swirling colors and wind. We could not find it. We want it back so we can go home.”

“It must have come through the portal with you. Guards! Search every inch of ground between the amphitheater and where we caught the children.” The soldiers left to do his bidding.

Zeus stepped off the dais and walked around the three humans. “Greece. Is that where you think you are?”

Illieya nodded. “The clothing and architecture are indicative of the ancient Greek civilization. However, I thought in modern times the Greeks were very similar to the rest of Europe in their dress and in the architecture of their buildings.”

“You are a know-it-all, and I do not like know-it-alls,” Zeus snarled.

Elam almost tittered, but held his tongue. The old witch certainly had his sister figured out.

“Why can you not speak the language of the gods?”

Chace looked up at the very tall being. “Only Greeks speak Greek, and no one on Earth believes in the gods of Mount Olympus anymore. They have been relegated to legend and fairy tales.”

Elam wished Chace hadn’t said that, as the witch was tall and powerful and had a murderous look in his eye.

Zeus drew back his arm and then thrust his hand forward in Chace's direction. A strange ball of blue light erupted from his fingertips and struck the boy in the center of his chest, sending him flying backwards across the room.

Illieya screamed and ran to Chace. She knelt next to him, afraid he might be dead. His eyes were open as he tried to draw in a breath. She shook him, and he gasped for air. Her fingers tingled slightly as she touched him, the energy of the magical weapon passing to her. "Do not make him mad," he whispered, clutching his chest. "That hurt like hell."

Zeus strode up behind Illieya and, pushing her aside, picked up Chace by the front of his shirt. "You are alive? That is impossible! No one survives a blast from one of my energy bolts." Chace struggled to breathe. His feet dangled a few feet off the ground as the pretend god held his shirt tight across his neck. Zeus finally dropped him, and he again gasped for air.

"What magic do you possess that allows you to survive my bolt, demon?"

Chace crawled like a crab, backwards on his feet and hands. Zeus drew back his hand and threw another energy bolt into the boy's chest. Chace skidded across the floor and landed hard against the base of a statue. He felt like a thousand pins and needles were piercing his body. He curled up into a little ball, the tears flowing uncontrollably. The pain in his chest was unbearable, and he struggled to take short, shallow breaths.

Illieya was terrified Zeus would kill Chace. "Please stop!" she pleaded. "He is just a child."

The witch turned on the human girl, grabbing her by the neck. "Then you tell me. What magic does he possess to protect him from my wrath? What did he mean when he said we have been relegated to legend and fairy tales? We are your gods!"

Illieya wasn't about to say anything else to Zeus, for fear of angering him further.

Elam spoke up from behind the witch. "It has been well over three thousand years since your stories were written. You have passed into memory."

Zeus dropped Illieya unceremoniously to the floor. She crawled to where Chace lay motionless.

Zeus knew that time wasn't a constant through the portal. On some trips to Earth, they were gone for only minutes, while other times years passed. But he couldn't believe it had been three thousand Earth years since Hestia had stolen his portal stone. It had only been ten months on Olympus since that had occurred.

The other witches along the walls were murmuring as Illieya helped Chace off the floor. His breathing was still labored, and he hunched over to protect his body from more damage.

Zeus wandered back over to Chace and pulled him up by the shirt again. "You are a powerful witch, human boy, and I want to know your secrets."

"I am not a witch," croaked Chace. "I am just a boy. I have no magic powers. I do not know why I am not dead." At that moment, he dearly wished he was dead, the pain in his chest was so excruciating.

"I have killed adult centaurs and minotaurs with an energy blast like the one that hit you. How do you survive, human?"

Chace squeaked. Zeus dropped him on the floor again.

“Take them away,” said the witch as he climbed back up to his throne. “I will deal with them later.”

Guards grabbed the youngsters and dragged them back to their cell.

“That did not go well,” moaned Chace as he lay on the floor and hugged his chest with his arms. “He tried to kill me. Twice.”

“Yet he could not,” observed Elam. “He is not happy you have the ability to survive. I find it surprising myself.”

Illieya sat next to Chace and stroked his hair. The residual energy from the blast transferred from Chace’s body into her fingers, causing them to tingle strangely. Chace was her foolish little brother’s pudden-headed friend, but even he didn’t deserve to be tortured by Zeus.

Chace lay still, allowing her to stroke him. It felt calming after his ordeal.

“If the shield is truly lost in the rift,” Illieya said, “then we are trapped here forever. If it is somewhere at the landing place, Zeus’s guards will find it, and Earth will once again have to deal with the malevolent race of witches.” She let go of Chace and moved to her knees. Claspng her hands together, she began to pray.

Elam ran to the door to make sure no one was watching. “What do you think you are doing?”

Illieya paused. “I am praying, *stupide*. What do you think I am doing?”

Her brother shook his head. “That is very dangerous here, *Soeur*. The witches expect us to pray to them, not to God.”

“Yes, but He is the only one who can help us now so I am going to pray to Him, Jesus, the Blessed Virgin, and every saint I can think of.”

Chace agreed. “We need all the help we can find.”

Elam sat on the floor with his back to the wall and laid his head back, listening to her pray. She eventually stopped.

“Do you think he will let us go?” Elam asked, knowing the answer already.

Illieya shrugged her shoulders. “It depends on how much fun he has playing with us, I suppose. As long as we are entertaining, he will keep us around. If he grows tired of us, he has two choices: kill us, or set us free.”

“He will kill us,” croaked Chace. He had no doubt about that. “Remember what joy tossing betrayers into the portal brought him. He would have fun watching us be ripped apart.”

Elam inadvertently touched the shield through his shirt thinking about that very thing. If anyone was going to die, it would be him first. He had to keep the shield hidden at all cost.

The three teens were abruptly awakened the next morning by the sound of their prison door clanging open. Two guards then marched in and dragged Chace out.

Illieya ran to stop them, only to have the door slammed in her face.

“Come back with him!” she yelled in French, forgetting that the guards wouldn’t understand her. “Come back!” She pounded her fists against the door in frustration and fear. They couldn’t be separated. She disliked her brother and Chace, but they were the only allies she had in this horrid land. She feared for Chace’s life, as she knew that Zeus could do all manner of harmful things to him.

Elam stood like a statue, his hand on his ribcage, in total panic. He was sure he was going to die today, for he didn’t see how he could prevent Zeus from finding the portal stone. He dropped to his knees and began to pray. “Please hide it,” he whispered. “Please use whatever magic is necessary to hide it. It must stay safe and out of Zeus’s hands. Please.”

Illieya was too busy pummeling the door to notice what her brother was doing.

Elam suddenly felt as if a giant hand had grabbed him and was squeezing him. The pressure was so intense he couldn’t breathe. He desperately gasped for air, and everything began to go black. He knew he was about to die, and he couldn’t speak to tell Illieya about the shield. He hit the ground with a thud.

Illieya turned around to see her brother lying face down on the dirt floor. She looked around in desperation, thinking someone must have done something to him. Seeing no one, she ran to him and rolled him over onto his back. She could tell he wasn’t breathing. Terrified, she began to shake him, trying desperately to revive him. Chace had very likely been dragged to his death, and now it appeared Elam was dying from some unknown cause. That would leave Illieya alone to face whatever unpleasant fate awaited her.

Elam suddenly drew in a breath and coughed. His sister, relieved to her very core, began to hug and cradle him as she would a small infant.

“What happened?” he asked her, confused. He had prayed to hide the shield, not pass out.

“You stopped breathing and fell to the ground,” she said in between sobs. “I thought you were dead.”

He took note of the death grip she had on him now. “I thought you hated me,” he commented.

Illieya suddenly regained her composure. “If you are going to take that stance, you are right,” she snapped. “I do not like you at all, you dog-eared maggot-pie.” She immediately released her hold on Elam and stood up.

Elam half smiled. Nothing brought out sibling love or sibling rivalry as much as great adversity. But now was not the time to dwell on their relationship. They had bigger worries.

A few moments later, the door burst open again. Two burly witches entered, and each grabbed one of the children. Elam fought as if the devil were on his back. The witch simply put his forefinger in the middle of the boy’s forehead, said a few words, and Elam’s world went black again. The witch then slung him over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes.

Illieya stopped struggling when she saw what the witch had done to Elam. She wanted to be conscious when she faced her fate. She wondered if a witch had performed that particular trick on Elam from a distance when he passed out the first time.

The guards dragged the siblings into another part of the prison. It was a large, dark room, which smelled of piss and death. Illieya swallowed hard to keep from retching.

Chace was chained to a wall across from them. He had been stripped to his drawers. His head hung down, his body drooping, pulling against the shackles that bound his wrists.

Just as they entered, a blue streak of light zipped across the room and slammed into Chace. He yelped in pain, his body stiffening for a moment, and then went limp again. Illieya looked toward the source and saw Zeus pacing back and forth. Several other witches were also in the room.

The witch who carried Elam tossed him on the floor next to Chace. Two other witches stripped the youth to his drawers as well and hung his unconscious form in shackles to the right of Chace.

Zeus motioned for Illieya to join him. “Ah, *ma cherie*,” he said in French. “It is time for some answers.” He nodded toward the boys. “Or you can join them there.”

Illieya gulped. Tears formed in her eyes. Zeus was happy to see her resolve weaken.

“What magic does the boy, Chace Bagot, possess that allows him to survive my energy blasts?”

She shook her head, “I do not know. There is no magic on Earth. We have no magic. We found a necklace in the woods which brought us here. That is all I know.”

Zeus pushed his hands together, formed another ball of light, and hurled it toward Chace. The teen screamed again as the ball of magic slammed into his chest.

At the sound of his friend’s cry, Elam opened his eyes. He realized Chace was in grave danger, and he tried to go to him, but the shackles held him tight. He then saw that his clothes were missing. He looked down at his chest, terrified he would see the shield, but it was gone. *They must have taken it!* he thought. But how had they managed to remove it from him, and where was it now? He looked around the room but didn’t see the witches behaving as if they had the shield.

He suddenly realized the squeezing he had felt in the cell must have caused the shield to disappear. But where did it go? Elam’s thoughts were racing as he tried to figure out what had happened since the guards had pulled Chace from the cell.

“I repeat,” the false god began, his voice gaining strength. “What magic does he possess to thwart my power?”

Illieya shook her head again. “I do not know! We have no magic. We are humans!”

Zeus swirled a finger in the air and zapped a small streak toward her brother. It struck his left cheek, laying it open. Elam’s head slammed against the wall from the force of the bolt. He howled in pain.

“That is what is supposed to happen, *ma cherie*, and I want to know why it does not happen to Chace.”

Zeus motioned to an auburn-haired female witch who crossed the room to Elam. She seemed startled at first as she focused on him with her oddly colored brown-yellow eyes, as if noticing something out of the ordinary. However, she quickly refocused her attention on the task at hand. Touching Elam's cheek, she chanted some words he didn't understand. Instantly, his cheek felt better. "I cannot keep it from scarring," she whispered, "but it will heal."

She grabbed his shirt and wrapped it around his shoulders. "Let him down," she commanded. One of the guards walked over and unlocked the shackles. Elam slumped down onto the floor and lay there in a heap.

Without warning, Zeus gathered another ball of magic and hit Chace again. Illieya ran over to protect her brother's friend.

"Stop it!" she screamed. "Stop it! You are killing him!"

In anger, Zeus flicked a finger of magic her way. It sliced into her left arm, nearly severing it. Illieya screamed as pain radiated from her arm throughout her body. She had never before felt such agony, and it was more than she could bear. She passed out.

Elam paced back and forth in the cell. Chace lay on the floor, curled up in a little ball. He had lost count of the number of blasts he had absorbed that day. Every time Zeus hit him, it felt like thousands of pins and needles penetrated his skin. The sensation didn't last long, but it took his breath away.

Illieya sat next to Chace. The witch who had ministered to Elam had magically reattached Illieya's injured arm and wrapped it in a bandage. A sling held it to her torso. With her uninjured arm, she reached over and took his hand in hers. She could feel a tingling, so she knew he was still feeling the effects of the magic.

Elam put his hand to his ribcage. He could feel the shield as plain as day. However, no one could see it. Someone or something had heard his pleas for help and made the thing invisible. He didn't understand what had happened, but he wasn't about to question his good fortune.

He gingerly moved his hand over his injured cheek. He now understood how energy blasts could kill. They simply tore their victims apart. He was on the receiving end of a tiny bit of what Chace had received multiple times, and he had a swollen red scab to show for it. How Chace could survive blast after blast was indeed a mystery. Elam didn't know how much more of Zeus's torture they could take. He silently prayed for a miracle.

A few days later, Zeus introduced them to a new torment—the Chamber of Screams. The chamber was a fifteen-foot-deep pit filled with rotting corpses and bones. Zeus had the three carefully lowered into the pit by a rope, for he didn't want them to be injured on the way down. His goal was to break their spirits rather than their bodies. He was desperate to know what magic

Chace possessed. As a dictator, Zeus's greatest fear was that he would be overthrown. If word got out that there was a defense against his energy blasts, his subjects might use it against him.

Illieya stood in the middle of the cell, utterly terrified in these new and revolting surroundings. She stood knee deep in rotting flesh and bones. The odor was unbearable. She closed her eyes and tried to block out the smell, but it was too strong. She felt something scurry past her. For some reason, the thought of rats didn't bother her. After everything they had suffered at Zeus's hand, little rats seemed rather benign.

Chace simply sat down, seemingly not bothered by this new torture. At least in here, he wasn't being hit by Zeus's painful bolts. He decided this Chamber of Screams was the lesser of two evils.

Elam tried to walk around but finally gave up and sat down next to Chace. He kicked idly at a rat that had come to investigate the newcomers. New bodies in the chamber usually meant fresh meat on which to gnaw.

They were left in there for hours, unable to do anything more than wait for the guards to come back and let them out. Illieya's tired legs finally gave way, and she sat down next to her brother.

As night approached, it became harder to keep the rats away. The three teens moved to sit with their backs toward one another. Elam and Chace each picked up a large bone to use to swat at the rats. As the hours drug on, Chace began to think that magic blasts might be a more preferable torture. At least he was allowed to sleep in his cell afterwards.

In the wee hours of the morning, the guards finally returned and lowered a rope to pull them out. The three still didn't answer Zeus's relentless questions. If they had known the answers, they would have happily told him all their secrets, but they knew nothing. Zeus's patience was wearing thin.

A few days later, Zeus had the three chained to a post in the courtyard. The sun burned hot, and they were left there to bake, with no food or water.

They moved around the column as best they could to protect one another from burning too much in the sun. Their arms ached and their wrists chafed. However, the worst part of this torture was the embarrassment of soiling themselves in front of one another. The humiliation they felt was worse than the pain from their burned skin.

"Maybe I should just kill myself," Chace moaned that evening as he lay in their cell. "Zeus would have no reason to torture the two of you if I were gone."

Illieya was desperately trying to clean her tattered purple day dress in the bucket of water in the corner. The degradation of the past twelve hours wore heavily on her psyche. She wanted to die of embarrassment. The boys seemed less traumatized.

"That would do no good," commented Elam, as he pulled off his breeches and handed them to his sister to wash. "I think he would continue to torture Illieya and me out of sheer pleasure."

“He is beastly,” ranted Chace. “How the ancient Greeks could consider him a god, I will never know. He is evil and sadistic.”

Illieya recalled some stories of the ancient Greeks her tutors had told her. “In mythology, Zeus turned someone to stone for stealing a golden guard dog, killed another with a thunderbolt for attempting to impersonate him, transformed a nymph into a tortoise, turned King Haemus and Queen Rhodope into mountains for their vanity, and blinded the seer Phineus for revealing secrets. His temper and punishments are legendary.”

“If we are lucky, maybe he will turn us into mountains,” commented Chace dryly.

“It becomes better,” recalled Illieya. “Zeus punished his own wife by having her hung upside down from the sky when she attempted to drown Heracles in a storm. He condemned Prometheus to having his liver eaten by a giant eagle for giving the Flames of Olympus to the mortals. He threw one of his infant sons off the top of Mount Olympus because of his repulsive appearance.”

“Good thing I am not ugly,” said Chace.

“That is debatable,” murmured Illieya under her breath.

“I agree with Chace!” groused Elam. “Being turned into a mountain would be much better than being tossed off the top of one.”

Just when the three teens thought it couldn't get worse, it did.

Early one morning, the three heard the guards outside their cell. Elam began praying as he always did when the guards came. “Please hide it,” he whispered. “Please use whatever magic is necessary to hide the Shield of the Palidine. It must stay safe and out of Zeus's hands. Please.” The squeezing no longer made him pass out, as he was now familiar with the sensation and was prepared for it. Each time he spoke the prayer, the shield would disappear and remain hidden for a few days before eventually reappearing.

Illieya was happy to see her brother praying. She spent most of her time praying as well. Since they were still alive, she assumed God was answering at least part of their prayers. Amazingly, they were rather unscathed physically. It was their egos that had suffered the worst damage. They just didn't seem to care anymore. Zeus dished it out, they took it, and survived to the next day. It was a vicious cycle of torture.

The guards dragged Chace out first, and soon returned for Elam. Illieya stood aside. She knew that fighting was useless. The witch guards would simply touch their foreheads and render them unconscious.

The guards finally returned for Illieya and took her down the hall to the first torture chamber they had been in, where Elam's face had been cut and she had nearly lost her arm.

She gasped when she entered the room. Chace and Elam had been stripped to their drawers. Their bare arms were raised above their heads in shackles. Each boy's legs straddled a pole about four inches in diameter protruding from the wall. Their feet dangled a few inches from the floor on either side of the pole, and their ankles were also chained to keep them from lifting their legs

and resting them on the pole. The majority of their weight rested on their groins, and when they tried to move, it only made the situation worse. They were obviously in agony.

The witch grabbed Illieya and placed her on her own pole. Straddling it was uncomfortable, but not as bad as it was for the boys, she knew. After chaining Illieya to the wall and floor, the witch left the three alone in the dark.

“Are you all right?” whispered Illieya.

“Do not ask,” croaked her brother.

“I would rather be hit by energy blasts,” moaned Chace.

“I am so sorry,” said Illieya as the tears began to stream down her cheeks. “I am so sorry.”

“Why are you sorry?” asked Elam weakly. “The sword called to me. I touched it. I brought forth this horror.”

“I am sorry for not listening to the sword when I was young and telling *Pere* and *Mere*. If I had not ignored it, we would not be here.”

The flickering light of the single lantern kept them from total darkness. There was nothing more to say as the three suffered in deep and heartrending silence.

Elam stood to the side of the courtyard where they had been taken their first day on Olympus. Since their arrival, they had learned this place was called the Arcadia, the seat of Olympus’s government. Zeus daily brought out his “pets,” as he now called the three, to show them off to guests. He made them sing, do tricks, stand in awkward poses, make animal noises, and anything else that came to his twisted mind.

He discovered Illieya could play a harp, harpsichord, and violin. Elam and Chace played the violin, but did so poorly. After enduring several minutes of screeching, Zeus simply hit Chace with one of his bolts to make them stop. He never again asked the boys to play for him.

The three teens had spent the last three cycles of the moon in Zeus’s clutches. As time wore on, the torture sessions had abated, and the three now mainly served as Zeus’s personal jesters. After they entertained him each day, Zeus would personally escort them back to their cell so he could hit Chace with an energy blast. His fear of Chace’s magic kept him from doing so in front of guests, but he enjoyed watching the boy fly across a room after being hit by one of his bolts.

Elam reached up to touch the scab on his left cheek. For the rest of his life he would carry the ugly scar as a reminder of their horrific experience on Olympus. He looked across the hall where Illieya was chained to a fancy post. It broke his heart to see her thus. Zeus had demanded that she sing a song for him. She had chosen one she learned in church, about the Virgin Mary. Zeus didn’t understand it, and demanded that she explain the words. When she told him about God and his son, Jesus, he grew livid at the thought that mankind no longer revered him as their god. Zeus didn’t want to kill his pets, but he wanted them to be subservient. Learning that humans now bowed to another god infuriated him. So he had put Illieya in chains.

Today, Zeus had promised great entertainment. Elam dreaded to see what it was. Usually, whatever Zeus found amusing, the young humans found utterly disturbing.

A horn blared in the courtyard, bringing Elam back to the present. A soldier walked in, dragging a dirty, half-starved male to the space in front of the dais. Elam assumed he was a local beggar. Seeing that another poor soul was about to be tortured for Zeus's pleasure, Chace crawled behind a pillar to hide.

"Today, my pets, I will show you the power of my lightning bolts. You have all felt the power of my energy bolts, especially young Bagot." Zeus spotted Chace behind the pillar and smiled broadly.

While the witch was talking, Elam took a closer look at the beggar. Suddenly, he realized the beggar was actually an elf! *Merde!* A real elf. Not even his parents had ever seen a real elf. His mother had been inhabited by the spirit of a dead elf, but neither had ever met a live one. This one looked as if he'd been tortured. Then Elam realized that he wasn't a beggar, but a persecuted prisoner. He had several visible cuts, and dried blood on his torn clothing. As bad as their existence seemed to them, Elam realized they were being treated much better than the average prisoner.

The soldier let go of the elf and moved back. The three humans watched as Zeus pulled a jagged silver spear-like weapon out of a box to his right and threw it directly at the elf.

The teens screamed as the lightning bolt tore through the elf. They watched in horror as he disintegrated in front of their eyes. Nothing remained but a small pile of ash smoldering on the floor.

The lightning bolt did a graceful turn in the air and flew back to Zeus, who caught it easily. He then tossed it in the air to turn it around and held it up as if to aim and throw once again. The whole cycle took mere seconds. In this fashion, Zeus could kill five or six people a minute.

Illieya fainted.