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“The Rebel”

“The question is...which is to be master - that’s all.” - Humpty Dumpty, Lewis Carroll,

Through the Looking Glass

Mari awoke all at once, abruptly, and with her temper in full flare. She sat up quickly, her fists clenched, and said aloud, “That’s enough.” She was rested, she had water now and a little bit of food, and she felt energy surging through her veins. She was thoroughly angry now. When she had been tired, still in shock from so many changes all at once, she had let herself crumple and fall prey to fear. Now, she felt it was time to make a change. She stood and stretched, moving her limbs to chase away the stiff, bruised feeling. She splashed her face with water, took a long drink from the flask at her belt and refilled it at the sink. Who knows when she would find water again?

Her pulse beating in her neck, the feeling of power that comes from pure anger jolting through her veins, she slammed out of the ladies’ lounge, and ran across the large ballroom. If anything, it looked even more broken than it had last night, or whatever time it was she had fallen asleep. She had completely lost track of hours and days.

She pelted up the stairs, and stopped in front of the warm, metal door. Abruptly, her movement halted before she touched the door. “Why should I follow their rules?” she said aloud. “Why do I keep doing what is expected of me?” She was

starting to feel like a rat in an experiment: controlled, watched, and following blindly; other things acted upon her, and she merely reacted.

She wanted her power back. She wanted to make the choices.

She walked slowly down the stairs again, then roamed the ballroom, looking for another door. She decided to explore this place thoroughly, and see if there were another way somewhere - anywhere - else.

Most of all, she didn't want to go where she was being herded.

She opened a door at random, and walked into a hallway, a dim, long corridor lined with doors. She walked quickly, as though now that she had made a decision, she desperately needed to act. To do something- anything- would turn the tide, she thought. If I can take an action of my own choosing, I can get out of here.

She began to run again, her breath coming faster. She stopped thinking. Pushing through doors, down hallways, turning and going a different direction, then through another door - this was an enormous place, and she was now thoroughly lost.

Her hair fell out of its construction of curls and tumbled around her face and shoulders; she began to get very hot, and was glad for the thin silk of her dress that had replaced her customary thicker wool.

Her heart slamming against her ribs, she ran down yet another hall, and through what seemed to be some kind of music room. She opened some french doors that looked as if they would lead outside, only all she could see through the glass was darkness-
and she ran into-

A forest. She slowed. Looked around. Yes, there was no doubt about it, she was in the middle of a forest, and it felt like morning. The air was cool, dew still sparkled from the needles on the pines. It smelled absolutely divine; sharp and sweet, with the spicy undertone of redwood.

She whirled around, and there was no doorway, no building, nothing to be seen but trees. Great.

Maybe rebelling without a direction or plan hadn't been the greatest idea. Mari pushed her way through the trees, grateful that her old clothes had reappeared as she exited the doors; the weight of her Grandfather's kippah on her head was comforting, and the sturdy boots and thicker cloth of her skirt and coat protected her from scratches, and would keep her warm if she could find no shelter.

She found a small trickle of stream, and sat on a large, mossy hollow log to think. If rebelling without a plan had put her here, then it was time to take stock of what she had in her favor, and carefully decide what to do next. She still had the power of choice: she just had to use her will wisely, rather than let her explosive anger drive her.

While she relished the feeling of power that anger gave her, and she was grateful that it woke her up and made her see that she didn't have to be a victim, she could now see that the illusion of power with no guiding wisdom was only going to harm.

Mari took off her belt, and laid everything out on the log, taking inventory of what she had in her "arsenal." A small flask of water. She would rather not risk sickness by drinking straight from the stream, and so must devise a way to boil the stream water. A pouch with dried fruit and biscuits, enough for maybe two days or three if she had enough water. She would be very hungry, but the main thing was to eat just enough to

keep herself strong. A small silver ear trumpet. She lifted it up and examined it. She put it to her lips and blew: it gave out a tiny, high, clear whistle. She waited, and nothing happened. What was it that Manuscript-Is had said? Something about listening, sometimes, being more vital than any other action she could take. She held it to her ear, like people did with the regular-sized ear trumpets to aid with their hearing. She heard - oh, so faintly - whispers. Many whispering voices, overlapping each other, as though there were a hundred people in a room far away, all talking at once. It sent unpleasant prickles up her spine. She took the small, curled silver thing away from her ear, and rubbed it thoughtfully. It was shaped a bit like a shofar, straight at the small end, with a bit of a curl in it before it widened at the mouth. She knew now it could both make sound, and let her hear...something. She had no idea what it would do for her, but she knew when the time came, it would become clear.

She picked up the small menorah, which looked like a brass lantern with a hinged door. She opened it; there were candles inside, but they were unlit. She thought Is had said it would light itself; perhaps that would only happen when she needed it.

It was a pretty thing; there, on the hinged front, was something she hadn't noticed before: a small brass seal with a raised ψ , the Hebrew letter *Shin*. What had Grandfather said about *Shin*? Mari closed her eyes and pictured him there in his chair, his clever hands carving letters that were big enough for her small, clumsy child's hands to hold, with the soft, undulating texture of hand-carved wood that kept her intrigued, running her hands over and over the shapes for hours.

"Shin is the letter that's like coal, Mari. It's sitting there in a cold fireplace, but it's still holding the fire inside its heart. Even when it seems that all is dark, and that light

and warmth will never burn brightly again, Shin is there to remind us of potential. That profound peace and safety can kindle, can burn brightly, and warm our hearts again. Shin is the friend you can hold when you feel lost. Just close your eyes, and remember a time when you were filled with quiet joy, with warm love, with safety, and with the deepest, most profound peace. It is never completely lost, child. Remember."

She opened her eyes, took a shaky breath to will away her tears, and smiled softly as she stroked the small ψ with her thumb. She didn't know what this would do for her yet, but it gave her heart to have a talisman.

She looked around at her other items. She had a rope, a metal cup that she used to (it seemed like so long ago!) have her coffee in at the Academy; perhaps she could find a way to boil water in it. She had hairpins, a small dagger, a notebook and graphite stick, the soft square of silk that they were wrapped in, and an arrowhead she had found when she was a child. She rubbed the arrowhead with her finger and thumb: flint. Perhaps she could make fire, after all.

She wasn't badly off, really. She packed the items away, beginning to feel like she might have a fighting chance at surviving until she could figure out why she was here, solve whatever needed to be solved, and find her way back.

As the morning passed, it grew warmer, but she was glad for her coat, as she might have to use it for a bed. It would be safest, probably, to find a hollow tree to crawl into, so that she would only be reachable on one side by predators; or, failing that, she'd dig herself a large pit, or find a tree to climb, and sleep above the ground.

She wondered if she was still within the Archives, and if this was somehow a manifestation of her inner landscape or thoughts, or if she had broken out, and was just

in the wilderness. She chuckled when she realized that the thought of being inside the Archives, even though they were seemingly infinite, felt safer to her than being out in the world with no boundaries. How silly.

The last door she went through was a door that resembled the door to the future, only it was thinner, narrower, more confined. It had the hebrew word for “Go” on it, or really “you will Go,” as it was written in the future imperative.

She filled her metal cup with water, and set about gathering some small sticks as she mulled that one over. She may as well see if she could make a fire. Her Grandfather had taken her out on wilderness “survival” trips when she was a child; they’d go to gather herbs, but really, it was mostly a fun and adventurous outing for them both - an escape from the narrow and sometimes confining world of the small town they lived in.

He taught her that it was sometimes dangerous to make a fire, because you never knew what would be drawn to it. But Mari still felt the stirrings of rebellion in her blood, and decided she’d take a chance. She almost welcomed the idea of facing off and fighting some inimical thing drawn to her fire; a knowable enemy, something she could confront with straightforward physical action, would be a relief at this point.

She laid out the sticks and looked for a suitable flat stone to try to strike sparks with her small flint. She found one by the stream, and set about clumsily striking the stones together, until she found that if she scraped it a bit at an angle; the surface contact of one sliding against the other did, indeed, raise sparks.

Mari's small pyramid of twigs caught the flame, and she hurried to clear a larger space around them. This was just an experiment, so she would have to gather more wood if she wanted the fire to last.

She sat down, mesmerized by the small flame, and surprised anew by how quickly it consumed the dead branches. In no time, it was out, and smoking tremendously. That was how her temper of this morning had consumed her. She felt powerful while it coursed through her- she felt as bright as that fire had been- but the power was an illusion, as it was quick, bright, undirected, and temporary. It shed great light while it burned, though, and illuminated a path for her, showed her her own personal truth.

Mari stamped the dying, smoldering fire out, feeling better now that she knew she could build fire at any time. She poured the cupful of brook water on the fire, deciding to boil it later.

That door. It must have been a door to the past, sister to the future. Perhaps that is what Is had meant. The future contained the past- and the past held the seeds to the future. So if the room she had entered into was contained inside the larger space that lay behind the "future" door, perhaps...perhaps she had broken through into the future, now. She was certainly no longer in the past. She looked around and knew for certain that she had never been in these woods before.

So be it. She was still healthy, strong, and she was rested and had her wits about her now. It was time to make a plan. She decided to make camp near this small stream, as running water was safer to drink, and she had no idea when she would come across more water. Then, she would begin tomorrow at sunrise, walking east and

marking the trees by cutting strips off their bark with her dagger as she went. At sunset, she would make her way back if she had not found any sign of civilization, and she would begin again in another direction the next day. Always marking, taking a careful census of her surroundings, she would eventually find something. There was plenty of food to gather in these woods- and they were teeming with life, if she grew desperate enough to kill. Mari did not eat meat, but she would do it if she needed to survive.

Feeling better now that she had a firm, if vague, plan, Mari decided to dig a large pit for herself, in the bank near the stream, where the ground was softer. She would begin under the log, so she had both a marker and a solid barrier across the top of the entrance to her sleeping place. Feeling rather foolish, like an inexperienced child trying to make her way in the unknown, she hunted for a sturdy stick. she found one that was just the height of her knee; with a little whittling to make the end sharper, it would make a fine digging tool. She would wrap the end of it in rope, to give her hands a better grip.

The day passed thus: digging, with small breaks to gather dead wood for the night's fire, hunting for mushrooms, berries, and cutting pieces out of the trees in order to both mark the area around her camp so she could find it again, and eat the sap to keep her energy up. She would not touch her small food provisions yet; there were plenty of wild herbs, mushrooms and berries to gather. "Baruch Hashem," she said aloud, when she thought of how many hours she had spent with Grandfather, learning about the herbs, and what things that grew in the wild were safe to eat.

As the afternoon sun stretched long, sparkling through the trees, Mari crawled into the small space she had carved under the hollow log. She lined the bottom with her coat, and felt safe and proud that she had made such a cozy nest for herself. She could

see out from under the log, and nothing could get in except through that single entrance. She had left enough of a crawlspace for herself, that if anything tried to get in, she would have some warning. She had sharpened some sticks and laid them in the crawlspace, to defend herself or create a barricade if she needed to.

It was as though the earth had swallowed her up. She told herself she would go out, build a fire, and boil water, and maybe make some soup with herbs and mushrooms. But for a moment, she laid her cheek down on the earth. Her muscles throbbed and ached from unaccustomed use, but the feeling was not unpleasant. She felt held in a warm, safe cocoon; the earth felt almost as though it were pulsing softly under her skin. It smelled warm, of growing, living things, and of death and decomposing things, too. She relaxed her muscles and let the earth hold her up. Contained within it, she resolved to let her power be tempered by the earth now. No more rebellion without thought. She would take this feeling of being connected with everything around her, of being contained and held safe, and she would try to remember to act from this place.

Mari's thumb ran over and over the pleasing, raised shape of the ψ , the *shin* on the menorah at her side, and made plans to build a fire.