

Al'ar's Miracle

By C. Jade Wyton

Trapped by fallen rocks, Al'ar is sure he will die. But, with the emergence of a secas from a nearby lake, he soon finds all is not lost.

Contains animal death.

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It had been a long, restless night, and Al'ar could see the sun now, as it peeked over the rocky mountains on the horizon.

The chill of the dark would soon fade, and he knew the burn of the sun would return to haunt him. He tugged his trapped leg, praying silently that the fallen stones would shift to free him. But, in his heart, he knew it was pointless. He was not strong enough to save himself, and short of a miracle, he could perish here, to be torn apart in the mouths of scavengers and rot away to nothing.

A beetle, fat and well-fed, crawled beside him, but he did not bother to eat it. Despite the pain of hunger, Al'ar knew that eating would only prolong his death. Extend his suffering.

So he simply watched the creature scurry away, and then closed his eyes and lay his head to the ground to mourn his life unlived.

He was doomed. He knew it. He would never find his way home, and his family would never know what had come of him. He would miss his child's birth. He would never see their smile....

Something touched the harpy's cheek, soft and wet, and his eyes shot open to meet the yellow of another's gaze.

A secas, brown and toxic, had crawled from the nearby lake to sit at his side.

They both stared, taking each other in for a short moment, before the secas cocked their head and shifted to examine Al'ar's trapped leg.

They spoke to him, in words he did not understand, before chittering a tut-like noise through their gills and running a hand over the heavy stones.

'Help me,' Al'ar begged. '*Please*. Please help me....'

The secas looked to him, their gills flaring up with a squeal as they blinked at him. But he didn't understand their language; just as they seemed to not understand his own.

'*Please*,' tears welled in Al'ar's eyes again. The last he could muster in his thirst. '*Please*....'

A whistle was the response, and the secas rose to their feet and rushed back to the water. They disappeared under its surface, and Al'ar wailed in misery and despair.

'*PLEASE!*' he cried. 'Please! Don't leave me here! Please! *Please don't leave me to die....*'

Grief like he'd never felt before flooded through him, and Al'ar threw back his head to shout at the clouds above, begging: Why! Why!

*'WHY!'*

A shadow fell across Al'ar's body, and he dared to look at what had cast it.

The secas had returned, and behind them stood four more of their kin. They all peered curiously at the trapped harpy, looks of sympathy spreading through them as they began to speak in hushed whispers and quiet clicks.

*'Help me,'* Al'ar begged. *'Please, for the love of Zen'efay, help me....'*

Cautiously, the secas approached Al'ar and examined his predicament. They looked over his trapped legs, and the stones that had fallen on him, and talked amongst themselves in that language Al'ar didn't understand, before one—the smallest of the five— moved to cradle the harpy's head in their lap. They stroked his cheeks to comfort him, and he sniffed back his sobs and felt his breathing calm as his hair was brushed back from his eyes and his forehead softly kissed.

Then, agony. The worst he'd ever felt, as the pressure of the rocks on his leg shifted.

He shrieked, and the secas comforting him shifted to hold him down. They whispered to him softly as they pressed him tight to the ground, preventing him from flailing and hurting himself as their companions worked to free him.

By the end of it, all six of the wastelanders were out of breath and burnt; the now-midday sun biting mercilessly at cracked, bleeding skin....

But, he was free!

He laughed, a sound of disbelief, as the last of the rocks were removed and he was able to yank his broken leg out. It was painful, but it was *over*. He was free— He would *live*!

The largest of the secas scooped him under the arms, then, and dragged him towards the lake to sit him under the shade of a half-dead tree.

They stroked his cheek, a sign of their compassion, before rasping out a breath and weakly stumbling to the water to disappear with a splash; the rest of their kin following close behind.

Al'ar breathed a sigh of relief, resting back against the tree and closing his eyes.

It was about ten minutes later that one of the secas returned, their sensitive skin still blistered and sore from their time in the sun.

They brought with them a crab, still alive as it flailed helplessly, and held it out to Al'ar.

A long pause, before the secas made a biting motion to the crab and held it closer to the harpy. And Al'ar smiled, taking the animal in his good talon and placing his sharp claw between its eyes.

*'Thank you,'* he managed, before he squeezed; piercing through the shell to kill the crab. He then adjusted his grip and squeezed again, and it gave a crunch as its exoskeleton cracked.

The secas chuckled as Al'ar passed it up to his hand and peeled away the broken shell so he could eat the soft meat inside. Clearly, both were relieved at Al'ar's strength returning, and the secas offered him a warm smile and a nod, before returning to the lake and disappearing into the brown water once more.

If he'd had more tears to cry, Al'ar would have shed them in his joy. But he was too spent, and instead simply smiled and lay back against the tree, letting himself drift to sleep, and only awaking when the secas brought him dinner.

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