

*The Great Drift, part 5*

Maia Jacomus

*a novella chapter set in the world of Runes of Gallidon*

As everyone herded up to the deck to view the next sight on their route, Luka stopped at her room to stash the gloves, powder, and research notes in her pillowcase. She was ascending the stairs just as her brother Rurik was descending to find her.

“You okay?” he asked.

Silently, Luka mustered a weak smile and nodded.

Rurik put his arm around her as they set foot on deck and joined the rest in lining the boat’s railings to take in the sights.

*The Totem Tide Pool is the most mysterious region of the Stretch. No one knows who carved and placed the thirty totems here, nor why. Legend speculates that the totems were carved in the likeness of the Spirits that reside here. The Spirits, being offended by the caricature representations, cause the unsteady rise and fall of the pool’s tide.*

Luka had little interest, however much she had anticipated the visit before. Thoughts of Lani and her journals ran through her mind. Luka tried to decide how she felt about it all—and if she should do anything about the seizkin. But the combined astonished whispers of the other passengers finally brought her out of her stupor enough to notice her surroundings. The totems were truly miraculous. Luka had always imagined wooden totems, but all thirty totems, standing six feet out of the high-rise water, were hewn from white, moss-covered stone. And each face, some resembling a creature more than a person, was so distinctively unique, that it was like witnessing an assembly of foreign ambassadors, set throughout the area in a classroom fashion.

“How tall do you think they are?” Ilya asked, trying to peer into the water.

“From the bottom under water, to the top out here...” Esfir speculated. “Probably at least twenty yards.”

Yakim took out his compass. “They’re all facing dead west.”

“Not that one,” Kuzma pointed out.

There was one totem, set at the outermost border of the area, facing east. It had a more definitively human likeness, with a square jaw and seemingly random scrawls—like scars. For a moment, Luka turned to Enzo, but she shook her head to clear the absurd connection from her head.

As they glided through the totem field, Rurik noted that the water level was dropping, as the totems seemed to grow taller the further through they traveled.

“Is it true the Spirits control the water?” Darya asked.

“Our captain would know,” Luka remarked.

“I don’t think the totems offend them,” Rurik said. “I think the rise and fall of the water is used to protect the totems.”

Luka looked at her brother, confused. “What makes you say that?”

“I just think that if the Spirits were offended by them, they wouldn’t be standing here today.” With a slap of finality on the railing, Rurik announced, “I’m going down, taking a nap.”

Luka shrugged off her brother’s usual sloth and waited as the rest of the passengers, little by little, trickled off the deck and back to their cabins. After a moment’s hesitation, she drew a breath and crossed to Enzo at the wheel.

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“How long until we’re in Alkat?” she asked.

Enzo waved his hand forward.

“Tomorrow?”

He nodded.

Luka intertwined her fingers, wrangling with her decision. “Lani mentioned the Shadowcast. That’s...is that where the Shamaness lives?”

He nodded.

“Yes, I thought so. So, so I want to go and tell the Shamaness...you know, all about the seizkin. But I would like it if you could come, you know, so I have someone to back me up. Could you, would you come with me?”

He nodded, pointed to himself and her, then moved his hand like a duck’s beak.

“You want to talk about something?”

He cocked his head and clamped his hand into a fist, rolling it forward through the air.

“Um...later? Talk later?” He repeated the gesture. “Talk tomorrow, talk...Oh, you mean while we’re on our way to the Shadowcast?”

Enzo nodded.

“Okay. Well, maybe I’ll bring paper and something to write with. I’m not very good with...it might work better.”

He agreed, then left the wheel for the rudder to change their course. Luka returned to her room, where her brother lay dormant on his bunk. She lay down in her bed as well, for although they still had some hours of daylight left, her mind was too distracted to apply it to anything else. She could only stare at the ceiling and think about what exactly she would say to the Shamaness the following day.



Everyone woke early, mostly in excited anticipation of their arrival to Alkat. They packed their things, making sure to leave nothing behind, and wore their favorite garments, wanting to make a good first impression on the people in their new home. Rurik had still been asleep, until Ilya and Darya woke him with incessant demands for him to play his basitar at the farewell party. Luka had long been awake, but after packing her things, she only sat by the window of their room, clutching the three-hide gloves, her spine feeling like a suppressed coil eager to spring. As Rurik and his basitar were coerced from the room, he took hold of his sister’s arm and pulled her along.

On deck, everyone was talking and feasting. Captain Enzo put out a remarkable spread of food, all cooked by him in the limited means of his cabin. After a toast to the captain for his excellent services throughout the trip, Rurik began a song on his sitar. And to Luka’s surprise, he even sang original lyrics—she had no idea he could sing, and he sounded like a master. Feeling no desire to mingle, she leaned over the rail to stare at the dark waters as daylight gave way to evening dimness. She was glad they would not arrive at Alkat until night, because it would be too late to visit the Shamaness, and Luka wanted another night of possible sleep.

“I heard about Ouranos e’Kinbornu.” Yakim joined her at the side of the boat. “I’m sorry. You were friends, weren’t you?”

Luka shrugged. “I think so. I didn’t know her very long.” A moment of silence passed as she rested her head on her hand.

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“The captain’s taking us to the Traveler’s Respite. We’ll all get to stay there until we get settled as citizens.” After getting no response, Yakim continued, “Have you decided what you want to do in Alkat?”

“No, not really. Whoever needs my help, I guess that’s where I’ll work.”

“Why’d you decide on Alkat, then? I mean, usually people go on the Great Drift because they have some goal in mind.”

“I was just bored, really. Everything’s the same, every day, every place. I just needed a change.” She looked to him with a furrowed brow. “You think that’s silly, to travel so far with no greater purpose?”

He shrugged. “No, it’s fine. I’ve just found that people are afraid of change if they don’t plan for it.”

“So that makes me crazy.”

“No, it makes you different. You’re already away from the norm you wanted to leave behind.”

After considering her a moment, Yakim asked, “Was she a thief, Ouranos e’Kinbornu?”

Luka looked to see if he actually seemed interested in the truth. “No. I don’t think so. I think she was trying to stop the real thieves.”

A cheer rose up among the passengers as Alkat came into view. The stilt-hut city was alive with lights and people, as though it was a festival night, but it wasn’t. It was merely the last few hours before bed during which both business and pleasure were earnestly concluded. The people of Alkat hardly regarded *The Heron’s* passengers with a glance as they rushed to reach their destinations. Rurik took Luka’s hand to keep her from being carried away in the crowd’s current.

Where the huts in Lagun were simple and functional, the huts in Alkat were massive and stacked like towers. Luka wondered how they could survive any strong gust of wind, but evidently they stood tall and strong for years. A three-tiered structure just beyond the dock had an elaborately painted sign, which read *Traveler’s Respite*.

Rurik plowed through the masses in the inn’s direction, pulling Luka along. She turned her head, frantically searching for Enzo. She had no idea where he would be staying, and she needed him with her for her visit to the Shadowcast. Buried in the other side of the crowd, Enzo caught her attention, waving for her to go ahead.

As Rurik signed them in and received the room key, Luka found the community post, a collection of messages posted to a wall. The messages were of various kinds: ads for services, notifications of special events, and offers of employment. There were a couple of work prospects that Luka decided she would look into after her visit to the Shadowcast.

Rurik was given a room to share with Yakim, Yuli, and Esfir. Luka would share a room with Kuzma, Darya, and Ilya. The quarters did not quite provide sufficient living space for four people to each room, but they would be able to stay there, rent free, as long as it would take them to establish permanent employment and residences. No one complained.

“It shouldn’t take me long to find a husband, anyway,” Ilya said, preparing for bed. “This city’s so big, the chances of me finding the perfect man are... perfect!”

“We have some money saved,” Kuzma said. “It should be enough to get our shop going.”

“After a few weeks,” Darya added, “we should be able to afford a hut to share.”

Luka struggled to become part of the conversation. “I’m not too particular on what kind of work I do, so I don’t think it’ll take too long for me to find something and get my own place.”

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“Maybe you and Ilya could share a place to start,” Kuzma suggested. “You’re finding work, too, aren’t you, Ilya?”

Ilya burst into a fit of giggles but stopped when she saw the sincerity on Kuzma’s face. “Oh. Oh, no. I have no intention of working. With a husband, I’ll have no need to work. I’ll just keep house and raise the children.”

Kuzma shrugged. “You can meet a lot of virile men with a job. You can work closely with them, really get to know them, and they’d be impressed with how well you work, make them think of you as a good housekeeper.”

Ilya slowly grinned and said, “Well, a few days or weeks of work wouldn’t hurt. You know, until I find the right man.”

As everyone lay down to sleep in one of the four bunks, Luka drew the covers over her and stared out at the room. Kuzma and Darya had ambitions of trade, Ilya had ambitions of family. Luka never had either such ambitions. Upon reflection, she realized she did not have any ambitions at all. She could not think of any lifestyle she particularly preferred or vied for. The only thing she had ever felt any interest in or ever really cared about, she discovered, was the situation with Lani Ouranos and the seizkin.

But that could hardly be considered a profitable living.



In the morning, after dressing, Luka went downstairs, her purse strap slung over her shoulder, and found Enzo sitting in the lobby. She smiled awkwardly and bid him “good morning” as he led her out of the inn and down the crowded boardwalk. Taking out a folded paper, he handed it to her with a gesture.

“Oh, good, you wrote it all down,” Luka said. “I forgot to bring a pencil and paper.”

A scream split the air: “Thief!”

Luka pulled out the snuff box from her purse and snorted a puff. She pulled on the three-hide gloves and kept her eyes alert. It was difficult to see anything awry through the crowds until a distinct movement caught her attention: a small bunch of brown plantains being carried in the clawed right foot of a creature. The creature stood about a yard high, and its spindly, impish body was covered in silky cobalt fur. Its two fox-like ears bent down flat as it spread its arms, revealing a dark webbing connecting its arms to its body like bat wings, then it took off into the air.

“I see it!” Luka cried, pointing. “A seizkin!”

The seizkin’s yellow eyes turned to her, and the creature dove down low.

Some onlookers saw Luka pointing toward the flying plantains and declared, “It’s her telekinesis! She’s the thief!”

Enzo stepped in front of Luka, his arms folded.

Several stared at him in wonder.

“Isn’t that...?” one man asked. “Aren’t you that man, who...?”

Enzo nodded, then put his arm around Luka. He then pointed to the plantains, which were farther down the street and well away from them.

“I’m sorry I accused you,” the man told Luka. “I didn’t recognize this man at first. Still, those

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plaintains can't just be flying on their own." He looked to Enzo for an answer. "What's going on, baron?"

Luka looked to her former captain with confusion. "*Baron?*"

Enzo dismissed her query with a wave of his hand. To the man, Enzo moved his hand through the air with a slight quiver, then waved off in the direction of the stolen fruit.

An older woman in the crowd seemed to understand, and translated. "I think he said it was a Spirit who took the fruit and to let them have it?"

Enzo nodded with a slight smile.

The man shrugged, "Well, surely the Spirits are welcome to it, though I have always understood that they receive what they are given, rather than steal."

To save Enzo the effort, Luka said, "Perhaps that particular Spirit was starved for tribute. There are so many, that one is bound to be neglected once in awhile." She took Enzo's hand and said, "Now, the *baron* has an important appointment with the Shamaness."

With a murmur of understanding, the crowd parted to let them through. As the Shadowcast came in sight, Luka remembered the letter Enzo had written for her—it was gone. She guessed she had dropped it in the commotion of the robbery, but she forgot about it as she stepped into full view of the Shadowcast.

The dark wood trunk was massive in its width, yet only half the height of the trees surrounding it. The rest of its height was made up of tall-reaching branches that curled out and upward, collectively forming a large dome of deep violet leaves. The trunk was every inch engraved with totemic imagery even more intricate than those seen on the poles in the Totem Tide Pool. The carved eyes of the people and creatures shone in various colored beads, sparkling in the lanterns strung along the top every three meters. Two sentries flanked the doorway. Recognizing Enzo, they allowed him to pass. Luka pulled back the indigo flap of cloth to enter, Enzo right behind her.

They stood in a small room, just big enough for three people. In front of them was another doorway; to their right, a stairway. Enzo led her up the stairs, spiraling widely upward until they emerged into a dome of branches lit by lanterns tinted violet, so everything shone dimly with violet light. Through the dimness, Luka could not make out any surroundings except for where the light shined brightest: the Shamaness, sitting in her twig-construct throne. Her eyes, lips, and ears were painted violet, and her long dark hair was a bushel of cornrows woven with silver ribbons. The shining silk robes she wore, trimmed with silver, draped the ground at the foot of the throne, and her hands were buried in the long sleeves.

Luka, awe-struck, nudged for Enzo. With a nod, he stepped forward and genuflected before the throne with his head bowed.

"You do not address me?" the Shamaness asked, her voice quiet but stern.

Enzo raised his head.

The Shamaness leaned in to get a better look. "You are the Baron el'Adal Berat. Yes, I understand now. Please rise. A man of your worth has no business kneeling to another." Looking beyond, she asked, "And who is this you bring behind you?"

Trying to keep her hands from shaking, Luka genuflected. "Shamaness Sarvyva, Your Eminence, I am Luka e'Lagun. I have just moved here to Alkat with the Great Drift."

"Thank you; you may rise," the Shamaness said. "I would normally suspect one of the Drift to be here merely to pay their respects to me, but seeing the Baron here, I wonder that you might have another

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purpose.”

“I do, if that’s...acceptable.”

The Shamaness put her sleeved palms together and said, “Tell me what you must.”

Luka steadied her voice and clasped her hands together to keep them still. “Your Eminence, I am here to inform you of a, a peculiar circumstance relating to, to a certain mysterious outbreak of crimes. If you...perhaps you’ve heard of thieves who fly their stolen goods, you know, like those with telekinesis?”

“My advisor keeps me abreast of all local occurrences, yes. Are you admitting to these crimes?”

“No! No, you see, though I do know how they’re happening. Have you ever heard of seizkin or the seiznip plant?”

“The seiznip, yes.”

As Luka’s nervousness accumulated, her words tumbled from her mouth. “Well, these creatures are born from the plants, called seizkin, and they seem invisible because of the shadows, and they’ve been stealing everything, and I can see them when I sniff the pollen from the seiznip plant, and you may imagine that—“

Enzo held out his hand to signal for her to stop.

Luka took a deep breath to calm herself. “I have tried explaining the seizkin before, but as you may imagine, people don’t believe me. I thought you might, with all your powers of Spirit Mastery.”

After a slight pause, the Shamaness replied, “Can you prove the existence of these creatures without altering your senses with ‘pollen’?”

Luka took the three-hide gloves out of her bag. “With these gloves, I can touch them.”

“Gloves?”

“Made from the hides of a wolf, a lion, and a bear.”

“Curious.” The Shamaness took the gloves, stroking the hide. “What do these creatures look like?”

“Like big bats, somewhat. A little more humanoid than a bat but with the wings. Yellow eyes.”

The Shamaness blinked. “I do know them. They are not creatures; they are Spirits.”

“They *are*? But I’ve seen them steal. I mean no disrespect, Your Eminence, but are you sure they aren’t deceiving you?”

“I may be near your age, but I am wise beyond my years in the skill of Spirit Mastery. I know their energies.” Pulling a bell lever on the wall, she said, “If you can conceive any more likely explanations for these thefts, please call on me again.”

The summoned guard entered the room, and Luka knew she was being escorted out. “Thank you for your time, Your Eminence,” she said as she allowed herself to be led out, Enzo trailing behind.

As she and Enzo stood outside of the Shadowcast, beginning their trip back to the inn, Luka wondered aloud, “It’s just so hard to believe that all Lani’s work didn’t really mean anything.”

Enzo scoffed and pointed up to the Shadowcast. He gestured like he was unfolding something.

“The Shamaness and the letter? I was supposed to give her that letter you wrote me?”

He shook his head rigorously, pointed to her, and put his hands together like an open book.

“I was supposed to read the letter. It was about her?”

He nodded, pointed to the Shadowcast again, then shook his fingers.

“She plays the piano?”

He repeated the gesture, this time also lifting his hands up and down in the air.

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“She likes puppets? She...oh, you mean ‘control’?”

He nodded.

Luka didn't need another hint. She could guess his train of thought and whispered, “She controls the seizkin?”

He nodded with a clap of his hands.

Luka felt the blood rush from her head. “But, no, she's the Shamaness, she wouldn't...is that why Lani wanted to come here? To accuse Shamaness Sarvya?”

Enzo nodded and patted her on the back as they started walking.

“But that's ridiculous! Why would the Shamaness get seizkin to steal for her? What use does she have for all that stuff? Who are you, anyway, *baron*? What's this really all about?” Luka suddenly shrugged herself away from him. “I don't think I care anymore.”

Speeding up her strides, she separated herself from Enzo, determined to reach the inn and forget everything she ever knew about seizkin.



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