

Tempest of Doom

- by Jenari Skye

Queen Clarice had reigned o'er a kingdom in which happiness abounded. She ruled well, being just and fair. Consequently, her kingdom also contained riches beyond any that had ever been heard of. Her castle alone had eight spires: one of gold, one of silver, one of emerald, one of sapphire, one of tiger's eye, one of diamond, one of ruby, and one of onyx. The gold spire was the first spire that had been built by Queen Clarice's mother, as she was a staunch advocate of the Enchantress Guild. (A guild full of alchemists who, at the time of its building, were concerned with changing lead to gold.) Queen Clarice had built the remaining seven. The silver tower contained her chambers and was honeycombed with secret passageways and a labyrinth that no one could solve without a map unless they had traversed the path many times. She built the emerald spire as a monument to the elves who had saved the kingdom before her grandmother's rule. The elves – who rarely visited now – found a resting place of splendor, with the sun filtering through the emerald as it would through the leaves of their forest homes. The sapphire spire was built as a weather center. From the heights of this spire, the enchantresses could control the weather if there were some dire disaster. The spire of tiger's eye – which had only one elongated stripe falling diagonally down the spire – contained Queen Clarice's extensive library. The spire was built proportionately to the rest of the spires, but the library had to be extended below ground, it contained so much. The diamond spire naturally had been created from the Warrior Guild – diamond being the hardest known substance. The ruby spire housed the queen's audience chamber. All the surrounding village was welcome there, and even encouraged to come. The spire of onyx was reserved for the miners of the kingdom; they had, after all, mined all the needed materials for the castle and kingdom.

The village also had wondrous riches. Every house was constructed of the stone or metal of the residents choosing, though the homes were not as vast or tall as the castle. Since these riches were so common, there was no envy of

another... if one wanted more, it could always be found easily. Thus, did Queen Clarice' kingdom live content. Under a bright sun, which shone upon all the land her noble enchantresses had no need to defend or offend and therefore found time to study and invent. Queen Clarice would give wondrous feasts with jesters and singers and delicious food, inviting all the people of the village. She was so merry that she would give a feast in honor of most anything. Once she gave a feast in honor of her cat, Charlene.

One morning, the queen was awakened by a cold draft from the utmost window of her silver spire. Upon looking out of her window, she saw before her dark clouds gathering and, as she watched, rain began streaming from them. More than puzzled as to the cause of this gloomy anomaly, she vaulted from her bed and shoved off her servants as she dressed herself in her plain white dress with a corded belt hooked to a sheathed sword. She wished to be dressed in the appropriate garb for her upcoming task. She would play the role of an enchantress this day.

She flew down the many secret passages down her spire and up the ruby spire to her audience chambers while conjuring a spell to summon every enchantress within the kingdom. As she arrived, others were transporting themselves – appearing out of nowhere, in her same garb – responding to the urgency with which she had summoned them. When all had arrived she addressed the problem, though it was apparent that all knew.

“I have reigned o'er this kingdom for many a year, and happiness has abounded in my lands, yet this day that happiness has been thwarted. We have been called to action to face a mighty foe. A force of sorceresses must have forced the clouds o'er the sun, blocking happiness from my kingdom. What is their intent? Though I do not as yet know the answer to this possibly fatal question, we must discover it and put an end to this humiliating threat. Aloria, my most powerful enchantress of the weather, what have you discovered from the highest reaches of your spire?”

“My queen, I cannot understand the intricacies of the spell, but it is most certainly true that a group of sorceresses has cast a spell, blighting the heavens. To be perfectly honest, I know not how to counter this spell, and though I have probed it, I have found no holes in the weaving of the spell. It is a mighty foe indeed that we face.”

“This is more dire news than I had thought. We must take immediate action. I demand whosoever is brave enough to fight by my side against these

abominable villains for the very essence of our ways of life, meet me in the underground holdings of the library. We must research counter-spells and discover if this is mentioned in the prophecies.” (The queen herself was a specialist in the Prophecies Department of Enchantresses.)

At once, all followed Queen Clarice single file down the shining ruby spire to the underground of the more elegant tiger’s eye spire of the library through the many halls and corridors of the vast castle. So began the embarkment of the journey of the “Tempest of Doom,” which Queen Clarice had merely skimmed in the prophecies. She vaguely recalled the mention of an enchantress named Ariana. It was now time to analyze it more closely.

Each enchantress had been personally and rigorously trained. All knew their tasks and they pooled together according to their varying fields of expertise and selected the correct books for their ultimate task.

By the following day, the enchantresses had prepared as much as was humanly (ah, yes, they were human) possible. Queen Clarice was disturbed with her findings: they were said to lose if they took action. This was quite distressing, meaning that the enemy was more powerful than any had ever dreamed, for Queen Clarice had the most formidable force known to the world. Her enchantresses numbered many, and each of her eight spires possessed a power that, when called upon, would infuse a temporary power into Queen Clarice that consisted of such magnitude, that she would have utter control over the six elements.

The prophecies also provided a path of safety: “an enchantress by the name of Ariana,” was their only chance at destroying the evil force. However, though they knew who to search for, no enchantress known to her entire kingdom went by the name Ariana. Bearing all this dreadful news in mind, Queen Clarice and her enchantresses formulated a plan to defend their kingdom, but perform no injury toward the enemy: imminent doom would be their only reward.

The next morning each enchantress cast the myriad spells required to keep the storm from worsening. Late that afternoon, when all were finished, they joined in a circle. They did not connect their hands, but raised them, palms together, above their heads and closed their eyes. In the utmost room of the weather spire they performed the ritual in, a blinding white light appeared and grew before each enchantress until all lights connected in a ring. In the center of that ring, a hunter green light formed and passed each enchantress until it came

to rest before Queen Clarice: the possessor of the greatest magical power, the leader, and one who knew the needed spell.

Throughout the rest of the day, night, and next morning, Queen Clarice recited the spell. All were bodily exhausted, and magically drained. The simplest spell – a small point of light used to show the way in darkness – was impossible to perform, even had they wished it with all the power of their souls. The queen collapsed once the spell was done; the immense amount of power flowing through her during the spell had been the only force keeping her from the floor.

The Consellen, the enchantress who would assume the queen's position should something happen to her, told a passing servant of the queen's plight. The servant called three others to help her tenderly retrieved the queen from her uncomfortable resting place on the floor and carry her off to her plush, luxuriant bed.

Three days – or so it seemed – passed. Each moment their spells weakened. It was not possible to ascertain whether or not three days had truly inched past; not a single strand of golden hair was permitted by the threatening clouds to hang from the sky. Within – as best they could tell – five days, their spells were broken. The impact of the breaking of the spells alone would have been enough to keep the enchantresses from action for quite some time. However, not only was each spell broken, but sneaking behind that force was a more powerful one – a force which stripped the enchantresses of all the power they so treasured. The queen – due to her great strength – was spared, though the breaking of her spell cast with the power of the ring her enchantresses had formed, struck her mute. The kingdom was filled tears that day, but the wailing was drowned by the winds set loose over the lands, and the deluge of tears was joined by the cold, cold rain.

The castle, temple, and ruins of an ancient race, were the only buildings that remained standing throughout the force of the winds. People flocked to the castle and temple seeking what little shelter was available. The storm quickly transformed to a tempest, and it fluctuated from storm to tempest, tempest to storm, while the queen rested, seeking her strength.

The former enchantresses held fast to what they still possessed: their skill with the sword. They vowed amongst themselves that they would protect the kingdom, themselves, and foremost, the queen. Their pact united them under an existing guild: the Warrior Guild. Despite the known weakness of gold, the new

Warriors used their golden spire as an extension of the Warrior Guild, as the gift of enchantment would never recover from this blow.

And so it remained, 'til one day, while the tempest raged, and the Warriors patrolled the streets and guarded the entrance of the underground city that the people had begun to build in mourning for their lost homes (ingeniously protected from the driving rain), a woman of strange origin appeared on the horizon. Thirty warriors escorted her, each carrying a curved sword and crossbow, and riding upon white horses that pranced and tossed their manes. The strange woman, however, rode a jet-black horse whose height and build named it a horse stronger than any other. She wore a plain black dress, tied at her waist by a golden cord, and a straight-sheathed sword attached to the cord. Her dress and horse made her figure hard to discern amid the gloom of the storm. Her garments and the sight of the storm touching none of her party revealed to the Warriors her status as an enchantress.

One known as The Dragoness (originally the Consellen) strolled casually forward, showing no emotion, to greet the foreigners. As she approached, the woman in black dismounted and walked forward to meet The Dragoness, two of her escort following suit. She stood a full foot taller than The Dragoness, and The Dragoness was not trifle of a woman.

"Is your name, by chance, Ariana, the one who is foretold to deliver us from this curse of the raging storm that grows to a tempest as it wills in a righteous fury? Our people have long been plagued by this infuriating curse. You look to be a woman of great magical power; you will need it to defeat our foes. Our entire force of enchantresses, save the queen, who, from the effort of casting and the force of that same spell being broken, has not recovered, haven been, for lace of a better word, distilled of our power. No longer can one of us assist you. You must face these foes alone. We have long been hoping for your arrival, and would have searched far and wide for you had not this curse been so strong that we could not leave what is left of our kingdom."

Intelligent, perceptive eyes adorned "Ariana's" face as she listened with the hint of a smile.

"I have no knowledge of a prophecy containing my name, but I see that I cannot conceal my goal. Yes, my intent is to free your people of this curse, and, perhaps, to restore your queen to health. My name is, indeed, Ariana. I wish you to escort me to your queen, that I may request her permission to end my quest in her land. I trust she is well enough to speak?"

“Since the spell was cast and broken, she has remained mute and bed-ridden. However, she has been studying the prophecies further – in that she is resolute – and consequently, she expected you this day. Come, let me escort you to the castle. Your warriors may follow behind and will be tended to once inside the safety of our castle.”

Since the beginning of the dialogue, Ariana had cast a spell blocking the howling wind and biting rain, causing no need to yell. As Ariana motioned for her troops to follow, she cast another spell, which dried the soaking Dragoness. Though The Dragoness dared not show it in the open, she appreciated the gesture; she welcomed a change in her everyday life.

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Queen Clarice watched as a small procession calmly strode into her chamber. The Dragoness headed the small band followed by a strange, tall woman in black with two bodyguards shadowing her.

“Ahh... the longed for Ariana. Welcome to my humble kingdom. I dare say it will be less grand than your own, with the storm wreaking havoc upon the surface. I must confess that the underground is far less comfortable,” said Queen Clarice.

The Dragoness at first was startled by the sound of her queen’s voice after so long – it was not even hoarse. However, she regained control of herself as she realized that Ariana had wanted to speak with her, and would therefore make it possible.

Queen Clarice paused to see Ariana’s reaction to an underground kingdom. Appreciation, though no wonderment, met her eyes as she studied the face for a brief moment.

“I am glad you have come to rid us of this terrible storm that has claimed the lives of all my people who were sent for help. You need not ask my permission to carry out that which you wish to accomplish. I would be a fool indeed if I did not consent. Leave, and return once you have defeated the foe who has so murderously beset my people with grief. I presume our foe is a single enchantress?” Ariana nodded. “I found such in the prophecies. Now go.”

Ariana did not speak a word, but merely bowed and strode purposefully to the stables where her horse was being cared for.

“I will travel alone, for you will no longer be anything save a hindrance to me. I alone must seek the source of this menace, and once I have,” she vowed to her troops, “I shall return with this sorceress – defeated – trailing my horse.”

And so she set off on her magical steed, who had served her for one hundred years (she would live as long as Ariana) in the direction she felt the source originating from. It was not far, and she soon arrived.

She could feel the source just beyond, in a cave one hundred feet away. She dismounted and called out, “I challenge you to a duel! You have remained unchallenged long enough! I command you to come forth and fight Ariana as a true *enchantress* would! Or are you so frightened that you would surrender or cower within your cave?”

A tall woman dressed in vibrant colors walked sternly from within the cave.

“You dare call me, Carlotta, a coward? No, I am not an enchantress you fool woman! I am a sorceress. I am more powerful than any enchantress could ever hope to be! It is I alone who has, and is, and will continue to cause this tempest! It is I alone who broke the spells of all those powerless fools! I obliterated their power, and it will be no trouble for you to share their fate!”

“I am impressed. You caused this storm all by your little self?” Ariana taunted. “I hope your powers are not too drained to duel with the best. I throw my sword to the wind, and challenge you to a duel of power. Whoever wins, takes the other as her devoted slave. What do you think? Are you fair game?”

“I do not pity you the lesson you shall learn, you arrogant fool! I will make you suffer for your remarks once I have proven victorious. We shall see who is the better then, shall we not? I accept wholeheartedly!”

Both drew their sword and tossed them straight into the air. Neither would land until the duel was over. They ran cold, calculating eyes over one another. Both knew the power radiating from the other – and it was immense. Neither had encountered any one person who came even close to the power they had – until this moment.

Simultaneously, they raised their hands up towards each other. Liquid fire streaked from Ariana’s hands, and liquid ice from Carlotta’s. The blasts met each other in the middle and shards of ice shot off amid clouds of black steam in all directions save theirs. Ariana pulled one hand away and shot bolts of lightning at Carlotta’s head. Seeing this, Carlotta also pulled away a hand and conjured an invisible shield. The moment the shield was up, the electric blue bolts struck, but were nullified by the shield. In return, Carlotta took down her shield and

conjured a spell to get rid of both her liquid ice and Ariana's liquid fire. Immediately both fire and ice were caught up in what appeared to be a whirlwind, and were shrunk until both disappeared.

Ariana and Carlotta's eyes met. A self-satisfied smile spread across Carlotta's face while a smile of appreciation covered Ariana's.

Ariana clapped her hands once above her head, producing a thunder that assaulted the ears beyond the noise of the storm and pulled a sheet of yellow light into being as she brought her arms straight out from her shoulders. Carlotta immediately ducked and rolled when she saw Ariana turn sideways and send it towards her, keen-edged as a knife. No one had made Carlotta duck before.

Furious, Carlotta pounded her fist on the ground once, causing the earth beneath Ariana to split and break unevenly, but Ariana was already floating in the air, casting a paralysis spell. Just in time Carlotta deflected it with a shield as she rolled to the side. The white lightnings engulfed the shield, which had been just strong enough. Carlotta cast a morph spell and morphed into a dragoness. Ariana smiled realizing the weakness Carlotta had overlooked in her rage: air was both a blessing and a curse to a dragoness. As Carlotta thrust a tail spiked with a diamond, poison-tainted point at Ariana, Ariana made the air around Carlotta have a heavy impact upon her. Carlotta fell with an agonizing roar, and automatically changed to her previous form.

Fallen and suffering great pain, Carlotta made a last feeble attempt. With all the strength and power she had left, Carlotta sent a spell that would take Ariana's power. Almost before it was created, Ariana had cast a reflection spell around herself, and with her own power, Carlotta distilled herself.

In the air, the two swords shot towards each other, and struck with a resounding ring. Ariana lifted her eyes from Carlotta's unconscious figure, and, smiling victoriously, crossed her arms over her chest with open hands. In the shape of an "x" the swords descended, hilts downward into Ariana's waiting hands. Carlotta's sword was now Ariana's to do with as she pleased.

As Ariana tied both swords to either side of her golden cord, the tempest subsided with the death of the power that had so carefully created it. The wind no longer howled, and the rain no longer bit. The sun graced the dreary land with her shining face through the quickly evaporating clouds as Ariana heard the distant clamor of the people of the kingdom celebrating. Using a simple wind spell, Ariana lifted Carlotta from the sopping ground and took one of the ropes hanging from her saddle. With it, she bound Carlotta's hands and cast the spell

of bondage... Carlotta would now remain a part of Ariana the rest of Ariana's unnatural life.

Once Carlotta's rope was connected to Ariana's saddle, Ariana restored Carlotta enough to have coherence. Ariana mounted as Carlotta stared angrily through bitter tears. Her pride had been conquered; she could not stand straight if Ariana had restored her enough to do so. Ariana was interested in Carlotta, however, and would experiment with her to bring back who she had once been – though as more of a kindred spirit. Ariana was powerful enough to be able to reinstall the power Carlotta had once possessed, though she wasn't certain as the consequences. As Ariana rode, with Carlotta at her back on her steed, to the castle, the people of the kingdom trailed her, rejoicing.

The Dragoness greeted Ariana at the entrance of the stables, then moved aside to wait for her. Ariana left her horse to the care of the stablewomen and untied Carlotta's bonds, transferring them to the golden cord about her waist. She smiled encouragingly at Carlotta, and restored her to normal strength, raising her eyebrow in the question of willingness. Carlotta nodded, and fell in behind Ariana's guards. They had been waiting, and one moved to her left and her right, paying no heed to the forlorn figure trodding heavily behind.

The Dragoness led the procession to the queen's chambers, guiding Ariana through the many twists and turns of the labyrinth.

Queen Clarice's eyes were wide since she had felt the power that had been used, and went so far as to gape when she saw Carlotta and Ariana enter seemingly unscathed.

"You have done well, Ariana. Never have I felt such strength in a single enchantress, let alone in two!" She glanced at the woman behind Ariana, whose jaw was clenched. "Who were your mother and father, Ariana? Surely they were persons of great power!"

"I have never had a mother, nor have I ever possessed a father. I was born in a cave – the same cave as I fought Carlotta in. The magic surrounded that place and centered itself, causing my existence. You have never heard of me because memory and knowledge were a part of me since my birth. I hid from all people and left this place so that no one would question my origin, for I am sworn to tell the truth. Now that I have what I have come for, I shall restore our health and your enchantress' power, if they do so choose, that you may rule in peace once again."

The Dragoness now spoke. "I thank you for your gracious offer, but strange as it may seem, we do not wish for our power to be returned to us. We Warriors wish to remain as we are. We shall serve the queen with no less fervor, and as well as we ever had as enchantresses."

Ariana nodded her understanding, and before the queen could say a word of thanks or wonder, Ariana left. She vaulted onto her horse bareback, using the power of wind to place Carlotta behind her, and told the stablewomen to keep her horse's gear. Ariana left over the horizon the way she had come, her escort trailing behind her. Over time, the tale of Ariana became a legend, then faded to myth, her story spreading the knowledge that she has been and is waiting patiently through the ages for the next time there is need.