

Tales from the Stormthrower
Esmiralda: Of Herbs and Marshes

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All brave talk about partying in the big city never got her anywhere, still at Moon islands teaching the mermaids air and water magic. The only thing she got to show for was a bigger bank account. She and Eeva however got advanced lessons at the palace twice a week, slowly working in their replacements as they were needed elsewhere. Had mastered attacking with magic and were pretty deadly with twisters, hailstorms and air bullets. One last time she got into the lagoon to play with water nymphs and her ever growing students, made hoops out of waves for them to jump through, helped Eeva start up the reverse waterslide, pumping water up into the air, sucking up the players and spitting them out high up into the air, only to see them somersaulting back into the lagoon for another go. Said goodbye to them all and picked up their ready packed bags to become adventurers.

On the small boat they let the Ways of the Lords of the Wind take them to the western harbor and used the time to make themselves look more fierce. Were still looking like two schoolgirls on a daytrip and hoped to get far less attention if they could show off a little of their powers. She weaved air into the sun, threading the sparkling light into it and then painting with it. Lightning over eyes and cheeks and radiating petals of the Sunbellflower crawling over their arms. Together with their leather patched dresses and boots they definitely stood out in the crowd. Who knew them well in the western harbor gave them right of way, always knowing they were dealing with mighty mages however cute looking.

They boarded the first boat to the main land and settled into the flow of the journey, now and again helping the captain in the ever returning doldrums . Even got discount on their fare for getting the boat into the mainland harbor before schedule. Entered the big harbor and walked down the docks thinking how to move on, having two more days in town before they were expected to arrive. Ignored stares by sailors old and young and entered the city by one of the side gates, following directions to the inn they wanted to be their residence.

Staring at the plain looking trees and long winding hedges they soon realized they were set up, walking into a trap and followed one of the main roads into the city center instead. Found the trap was already slammed shut, walking through some shabby industrial area. Never stopped walking, just used some air to open a doorway, leaving some wide eyed ruffians flatted against the immense hedges, lining this part of the road. Got better directions from the early salesman on the market and checked in, only to be called down into the reception room again for some people willing to meet them.

They bowed before one of the men and thanked him for keeping them save in this rough city. Smiling widely he brushed it away. "If not even the northern harbor gang can faze you, not much will." Continued with introducing his two companions, the woman, Danae, their project leader. Tristan, the healer and tracker of the group en himself, Odeon, the best shadow mage this side of the ocean, but apparently a bit out shape. They bowed again, this time for the small with raven black hair adorned woman.

“Evea, Esmiralda, I hope my choice has eased the boys a bit. They seem to find hiring schoolgirls for protection a liability for the project. But if you are good enough for the lady of the waves, who would bet against you?”

They met the two ladies they had to escort at the town hall. All very official, standing in line in the huge circular space, lined with tall trees spaced very close together, their branches intertwining into a roof, leaving only space open for light to shine through above the intricate fountain placed in the middle. They paid their respects at the introduction by Danae and just stood ignoring the whispers of all attendants about their abilities until Danae asked them to help brush away the doubts with staged fights against two of the rulers own trustees.

The two were experienced fighters, well taught in the arts, but lacking in power in comparison to Evea and her. They evaded the fire bullets and hailstones easily, circling around the two mages, feeling for their abilities and only then striking out in split second. Making a hailstorm from Evea break their composure, almost immediately followed by twisters from her pushing the two mages through the hole in the roof. Stepped back in line awaiting approval. A few seconds later the magistrate found his voice and explained the importance of the mission, of finding all the herbs needed to hem in the small epidemic swamping their healers.

The marshes slowly took over the view after two full days floating through the endless grasslands surrounding the harbor city. They camped out under a big tree which had collected enough earth and mud with its tangle of roots. She found a clear pond and started to soften up the two pairs of seaweed pants and shoes they bought, switched clothes and with Evea, followed Danae for a walk in the swamp.

Splashing through ponds keeping interested wildlife at distance with water and air they finally found the tiny island Danae was searching for. She had already one of the lookouts sitting on her shoulder complaining at the racket disturbing their little haven in the sea of danger. Knowing Danae was not able to pierce through the disguises of the fluttering folk. They followed her steering her to the small flower field now abandoned by all fairies.

Danae finally stopped and said their task was near impossible, but would get easier if they could get some help from some fairies or other intelligent species native to this swamp. She had taken the girls to this island fabled by the swampcats from being one of the hideouts of the fairy folk. Both smiled telling her she should first make some apologies for barging through some fairy defenses against the wildlife. Evea had mended them already. Still, the fairies she had talked to appreciated a bit more tact.

She approached their baffled leader, held out her hand and wove some strains, revealing the fairy queen, standing upon it. Told Danae she had a few minutes to plead her case. The soft whisper of the queen sang through the air. Thanking them for the chance to plead her case. The fairies where in dire need of some rare seeds only to be found in places of the swamp far too dangerous for them to enter. She had heard they were looking for herbs and ingredients taken from the wildlife. She wondered if she could help by sending two of her

trackers with them if, in exchange, they would attempt to get the rare things needed by her people. Danae could only stammer her apologies for storming in and whispered her agreement to the deal, clearly still not convinced this loophole had worked this well.

Both she and Euea held open a pouch for their companion to hide in for their transition back to camp. Got detoured on advise of the trackers to have a full bag of green firenettle to show for back at camp.

With their two companions as guide they walked the water ditches through the marshes entering the domain of the secret with the domain of abundance spreading out above them in and on the canopy of the wild ancient marsh trees dominating the land.

Slipping through gaps in between the branches she and Euea jumped the trees and ran through the canopy, following their fairy tracker to gather the ingredients there were to find. Sometimes teaming up with Odeon chasing small animals and snakes to him, obtaining invaluable poisons not possible to replicate otherwise.

Sometimes the trees whispered of destruction and inevitably they got close to the group causing it. Leaving Tristan and the two ladies on a densely surrounded platform in one of the marsh giants, they weaved camouflaging air around themselves and on Danae and went to take a look. About fifteen men strolled through the marsh in big boots and leather clothes searching for herbs and poisons like them, only taking the more harmful ones. They kept quiet as Danae had asked them and imprinted the faces that passed them by, returning to their duty afterwards.

According to the fairy trackers they were in a place to find the dark herbs they needed from plants growing in and under water. They could not smell them but flowers always growing in close of them were here all around them. The two ladies now finally could show their use, finding the exact spots on instinct, even got hold of a useful amount of seeds of the plant so longed for by the fairy queen.

With bags and pouches full of herbs, seeds and poisons they returned the two fairy trackers to their realm, thanked the queen for her kindness and left the marches behind them to walk the grasslands to the small village the operators of the floating platforms were waiting.