

Qura sighed and settled down cross-legged in the clearing.

She'd set up her bedroll and carefully built a stack of twigs for a campfire, well practised over the last month. It had been three weeks since she'd seen anyone and the loneliness was making her regret her travels.

Her tinderbox was almost empty and she had to practise making fire – something that had come naturally at the commune was proving elusive, now she needed it.

Holding her wand in both hands she closed her eyes and thought of fire – picturing the campfire ablaze and the warmth of its heat.

As the warmth filled her, her eyes snapped open and she caught sight of the fire just long enough as the careful campfire was incinerated in a flash of light, knocking her onto her back. She led back and gazed upwards, eyes filling with tears. With a sob she climbed to her feet and began rebuilding the campfire in the small circle of embers, after the last time she had gathered extra for this eventuality. No sooner as she had the collection of wood ready a twig nearby snapped, breaking her from her self-pity

Pulling her wand out, she aimed it into the forest randomly “who... who's there?!” she managed to squeak

To her surprise and horror a metal arrow point carefully poked into the back of her head “lower it.” a voice growled behind her. “it's just a child.” the voice called out as she lowered her trembling arms

“I'm not a child!” she spun, stamping her foot in emphasis “I have a name!”

She paused at the sight of the human in front of her, a really tall woman with short brown hair and piercing green eyes who lowered her bow and knelt to examine Qura closely

“Halflings are counted as adults when they get a name” a heavily armoured dwarf strode into the clearing too, sheathing his axe on his back and loosening a large shield on his arm

“And what is your name, young Havlin?” a third voice joined in, almost a yawn in its pace.

Qura's eyes widened as a second human entered the clearing – while his towering staff, pointy hat and long white beard were indicators, Qura could sense the magic surrounding the wizard

“I.. I'm Qura Lightspell” she squeaked “i'm out to learn magic!”

The wizard nodded toward his companions who began setting up their own camp in the clearing

“I am Merin the Mystic” He pulled out a pipe and began filling it from a pouch “You have met Artemis, my tracker friend and our stalwart associate Gronk Furybeard”

Qura noted the dwarf rearranging her amateur setup into something more resembling a camp Merin placed the pipe in his mouth and puffed, the tobacco lighting of its own accord

“I can tell there is magic alongside you, young Qura, but you have much to learn”

At this Qura's eyes began to fill again “i'm trying! Honest! But you're the only people i've seen in ages and there's no-one to show me!”

Merin smiled and sat by the Havlin and gestured for her to sit “Magic fills the world, us mages especially” he puffed away “you were trying to push the magic too hard – instead start small and allow it to flow naturally.” At his idly waved hand Qura readied her wand

“Instead of igniting the fire, try to create a flame – just something small and in control”

Qura closed her eyes and took a breath in, picturing a flame in front of her. As Merin's soothing voice washed over her she could see the flame clearly – barely more than an ignited match

Opening her eyes she was surprised to see the flame floating in front of her

“instead of engulfing your creation, give it a touch more power and lessen your hold on it – fire has its own needs and will consume the wood without your help...” Merin continued as Qura followed instruction – giving a gasp as she settled the fire onto the campfire and was rewarded with it catching and growing on the wood

Merin caught each of his companions eyes, Qura spotting each nodding gently as they busied themselves in the camp

"we are headed toward Yartar." Merin sat back and gazed into the campfire while Artemis began skewering some meats from her pack "perhaps you should travel with us, see about getting you closer to civilisation?"

Qura nodded rapidly, a large smile occupying her face "i'd like that a lot, please!"