

A final strike, and they came to a stop. There was blood on Clive's gloves, and something dead and mangled on the ground, and Jill was motionless, looking at him in a way that seemed more incisive than usual.

"What?" he asked her.

She shook her head.

"Jill," said Clive, and he watched as her lips curved a little, a barely perceptible and completely opaque acknowledgement of the fact he knew she was concealing something. "What is it?"

"You used the lightning," she said.

It had been the first time. All the way back from Oriflamme to the old Hideaway, then out gathering supplies as everyone came together to build the new one – all those journeys and he could never bring himself to use it. And then: today, an ordinary day. He had thought he might get that first use out of the way, throw a few bolts at some monsters, and after that it would be normal and unremarkable, just another part of his repertoire.

But Jill had noticed, of course.

Clive bowed his head. "It's just these monsters," he said, suddenly afraid to catch her eye; his gaze drifted towards Torgal, nonchalantly sniffing at the creatures' bodies. "Lots of them – I thought lightning would – but if you don't –"

"No, Clive," said Jill, and she moved closer to him, and smiled a forced smile. "I didn't mean you shouldn't. I'm glad

you did.”

He looked up again. “Are you?”

“Yes,” she said, “of course. He gave it to you for a reason, didn’t he? He wanted it to be used. Really. It’s just ...”

“What?” he said again.

“You looked like him,” she said. “I don’t just mean the lightning – it was the way you ...” She stretched her arms out a little as if she meant to demonstrate, and then seemed to think better of it, and resumed her previous position. “It’s hard to explain. But you should have seen yourself.”

“I’m not doing it on purpose,” said Clive.

“Yes,” said Jill. “I know that.”

They began to move, walking in silence until minutes later, she spoke again. “I miss him.”

Her words were enough to draw a slow, heavy sigh from Clive as if by instinct. He closed his eyes and concentrated on the sensation in an attempt to ignore the feeling that had suddenly assaulted his stomach: a sudden, fiery ache of grief. That journey back from Oriflamme had been unspeakably miserable: months later and he still remembered the hours of silence, the occasional glances at Jill that had only confirmed that she was as close to tears as he was. Cid had never truly seen the Mothercrystal crumble: he had never known the fruits of his labour.

“I miss him too,” he said, as they walked on.