

## Chapter 14: Abbess Tilia. Maestra Fraxina. Exam

### Ferry Crossing

Slowly the little boat glided through the mist. The ferryman stood at the stern and moved the boat forward by swinging movements of the stern rudder. Granna sat calmly and composed in front of the ferryman. Hollydeva sat at the bottom of the boat at her grandmother's feet. Pierre, the ferryman's foster son, occasionally poured water over the edge of the ferry boat while observing the surrounding sea.

Suddenly, the ferryman stopped and signaled for his passengers to be quiet. The fog parted, and a jetty became visible about thirty yards away.

»This will be the jetty on Linden Island!«

But the boatman had stopped for another reason. A large figure suddenly rose out of the waves just before them. Whitish, staring eyes gazed at them.

»Skipper!« an eerie dull voice came from the watery mouth of a water demon, simultaneously sounding desperate and threatening.

The ferryman answered, »What can I do for you, friend from the water?«

»Whom are you bringing to the island, skipper?«

»Who wants to know that?«

»My mistress, the Princess of the Nereïdes, would like to know! And if you give me no answer, I shall tear your boat down so that my mistress can see for herself whom you are bringing to the island!«

»I am a ferryman, and I am bringing the healer, Mrs. Algard, to Linden Island, so that she can heal a sick nun there! I have often taken Dame Algard to the island! Your mistress knows her well!«

»Yes, that may well be! Who else is on the boat?«

»There is only my son, useless Pierre!«

»Throw him overboard! With us, he may become useful!«

»No, good spirit of the waters, I cannot do that! His mother would be very sad, and I would suffer greatly!«

»Well, there is somebody else on the boat!«

»There's no one else! We are three on this trip!«

Hollydeva made herself smaller and crouched on the floor of the boat. The sea demon grew larger.

»There's someone else! I feel it! The Princess told me that a person, who is going to be a danger to us, is heading to the island! I'm supposed to prevent this person from reaching the island!«

»But what kind of person is that? Who can be a danger to the Nereïdes and to the mighty demons of the sea?«

»Do not mock me, skipper! The Princess has told me.«

Granna interposed. »Here, demon, bring this ring to your Princess! There is a stone of amber attached to it, which she once sent me to the beach, where I found it. She will recognize this stone! Tell her that I know whom she is talking about, whose path you should prevent! Tell her that with this ring I give her my word, that this person is in my care, and will not be the enemy of the beings of the sea ever!«

»But she'll have to obey the Abbess. And the Abbess is our enemy!«

»Yes, I know!« Hollydeva's grandmother sighed. »I assure you that I will tell the Abbess that the obedience of this person shall not and cannot force her to act as an enemy against the creatures of the sea!«

»I will return your words to the Princess!«

Granna threw the ring to the water demon, and the scary fellow dove back into the waves.

The skipper nodded his thanks, and drove the boat safely to the jetty.

When they got out, a big man dressed like a monk was awaiting them with a lance. »Stop, where are you going? Who are you?«

Granna responded, »I am the healer Algard, formerly known as Maestra Malus! I am going to meet my friend, the Abbess Tilia! I am accompanied by my granddaughter Hollydeva! The boy of the ferryman is coming with us as he is carrying some things that I am bringing to the Abbess!«

The guard seemed satisfied with the answer and invited them to follow him. Hollydeva saw a wall in the morning mist. They came to a gate, which the guard opened. Behind the wall, Hollydeva perceived a monastery of several two-storied stone houses grouped around a square. On one side of the square a majestic house, the entrance to which was reached by a broad staircase, dominated the other eight houses. In front of this house stood a tower with a bell. That was where Hollydeva's grandmother led her and Pierre.

## Abbess Tilia

»Wait here,« advised Hollydeva's grandmother and followed the guard into the main house. After a while, she returned accompanied by two women, who were dressed in a kind of floor-length robe made of solid fabric, the edges of which were marked by different colors.

»High Maestra, this is my granddaughter, Hollydeva, for whom I ask your protection! This boy is the ferry boatman's boy. His name is Pierre and I would like him to be able to stay here, so my granddaughter has a friend at the monastery!«

»As I heard, she already has a friend here, the star boy, who came back a few days ago,« the stern looking lady frowned.

She continued, »The star boy came with one of our adepts, a brother of your granddaughter. And her oldest brother and her mother are here in the monastery as well! So she would not be very alone!«

»Good, Tilia, I understand. You play to be "the difficult" again! I want the boy here to be a novice!«

»The ferryman's boy, like your granddaughter, and a few other young people who are here these days, may apply for the novitiate!«

She turned to Pierre, »But know, boy, the trial is not easy, and it is that only those who really intend to stay here who will enter the novitiate!«

Pierre nodded and muttered something. Granna pushed him. »Say it aloud, boy!«

»Yes, I want to be a novice here,« Pierre stated firmly.

»Good,« the Abbess approved. »And you, girl, do you want that too?«

Girl? Hollydeva was feeling inwardly indignant at this turkey, who was so very self-confident. But she felt her grandmother's sharp eyes on her.

»Yes, I, too, want to be a novice, as my two brothers were.«

Grand Maestra Tilia pointed to the nun next to her. »All right, Maestra Fraxina will take care of you! She is the prioress of the novice's house and will lead the examinations! But for the time being you will be silent for a week! We do not want you to speak with the other aspirants and find allies or the like! Whoever speaks a word must leave the island! The examination is already starting now!«

Hollydeva's grandmother spoke up again, before Hollydeva and Pierre would go with Fraxina. »On the ferry crossing, a sea demon wanted to prevent Hollydeva from coming here! I promised him that Hollydeva would stay neutral in your war with the Nereïdes!«

»My war with the Nereïdes? Maestra Malus, you know the sea demons have attacked us! I do not even know why they did it!«

»Well, then it is no problem!«

»But the sea demons will probably come back! And the Nereïdes themselves with them! We must defend ourselves!«

»Hollydeva can defend herself! She can defend those who are attacked, as long as they are close to her! The Nereïdes will not object to that, I think!«

»Do you have any more conditions?«

»My daughter, Maestra Castanea, always saw something evil, coming from Hollydeva's father, in her daughter. I want you to make clear to her that she is projecting her own evil onto the child!«

»But Castanea is our Garden Maestra! She cares for flowers! She is like goodness itself!«

»Yes, those are the worst, as you know. She does not even know her shadow self! But I blame it on myself and I can not blame it on her! I only ask you, dearest Tilia, to order mutual cooperation between my daughter and my granddaughter! They are both very strong people, and we absolutely need them both!«

»Well, I'll try to mediate!«

Granna turned to Hollydeva, »I am going back to my garden. You're safe here, Holly! Follow the instructions of the masters and adepts! Choose well when choosing the Yana comes up!«

They hugged each other and the guard led her grandmother, who, as Hollydeva now knew, was also called "Mrs. Algard" or "Maestra Malus", back to the ferry boat.