

## ART ALIVE

## Mare Tails: Part 1. Departure

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It was dusk, the golden after-light of the set sun quickly fading to a gray twilight. Everyone in the small village was settling down for the night, nestled by a warm crackling fire, curled up under heavy quilts on goose down mattresses, some still straggling by heavy wooden dinner tables, only very, very few still outside rushing for home. All but one, that is.

One lone figure cloaked and hooded in thick wool glided silently away from the last cottage on the main lane running through the village. The pace of the loner quickened as the lane began to gradually climb out of the village. At the top of the rise the loner paused to look over its shoulder. The silvery full moon glinted off the distant ocean quietly lapping at the narrow shore turned to pearl in the moonlight. The loner stood motionless, listening to the lullaby the ocean sang to the village, already nostalgic for the sound of it, the homelike comfort.

A gentle breeze swelled up from behind the village, a cool farewell kiss from the ocean for the loner, stirring the thick cloak about its legs and disturbing a traitorous lock of hair to dance across the hidden face, past the concealing hood. A slight chin rose stiffly, allowing the moonlight to rise silkenly up a delicate jaw and glint brightly in a confident eye.

The loner turned quickly, headed for a heavily boarded structure set off the road a bit, Orion already making a crown above its peak. The loner swept silently into the great structure, the huge wide door barely groaning audibly at the disturbance. A curly brown head rose under the glow of an oil lamp to gaze at the intruder from his slump by the wall.

Letting hood fall, Lara stepped up to the younger boy who had been positioned there to wait for her.

"Are they ready?" she questioned him. It took him a moment to answer; he had been momentarily struck speechless by the sight of Lara's auburn hair turned golden in the lamplight.

"Um..." his brain finally made connection with his mouth, "you look...golden..." he gasped. The soft light from the lamp gave him the impression that he was swimming in ale.

"Lucas!" she exclaimed exasperatedly, also caught slightly off guard. The youth in his mid-teens, curly caramel hair, dusty green eyes, and a pleasant face in general, was only a few years younger than Lara's own seventeen years of age, but in all actuality her nephew.

"I'm sorry - trick of the light," he babbled turning away from her. She still caught the flush of red that covered not only his

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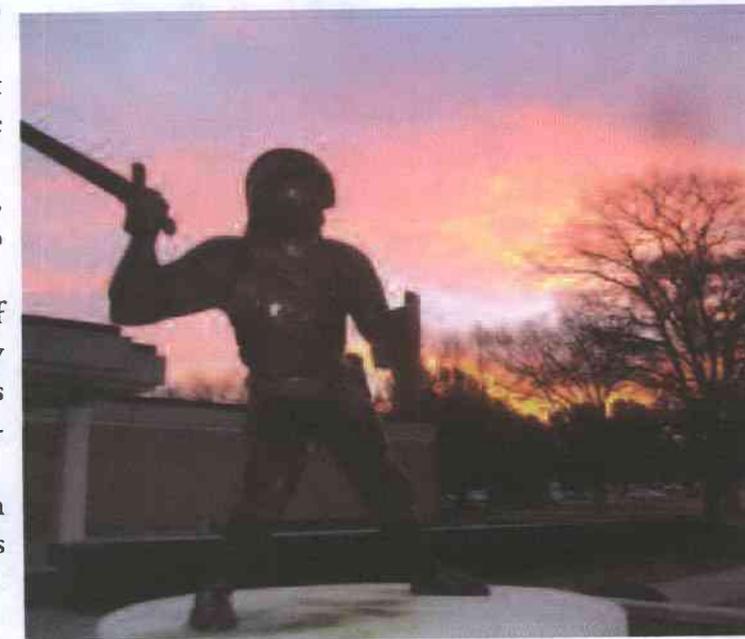
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