

The Last Ember in the Skyforge

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The Skyforge buzzed with the high-pitched whine of electricity running through ancient conduits. Arlen stood there, staring at everything and looking lost.

Lyssa stomped in behind him, shouting, "Did you touch something?"

Arlen gave her a lopsided shrug. "I might have. . . interacted. . . with a gear. A *little* one. Hardly worth mentioning."

In the large chamber something exploded with a disappointingly soft *boom*. Iridescent flecks slowly spun and swirled in the center of the glowing Skyforge, like someone had spilt glitter glue into a whirlpool. Lyssa squinted at it like she was trying to read tiny print. "Oh, great. That's the ember, I guess. It's doing. . . something."

The ember flickered and made a noise like a drawn-out puff of air. Then a voice boomed out of nowhere: "WHO IS POKING ME NOW?"

Arlen winced. "Hey, uh, sorry. We didn't mean to wake you. . . Or we did. . . ? Actually, I don't know what we meant."

Lyssa slapped his arm. "Stop talking! This is a big magic thing! Or a cosmic. . . thingy."

The gears overhead began turning; their metal teeth, in need of lubrication, grinding against each other. The ember glowed more brightly. "YOU TWO ARE REALLY ANNOYING."

"Yeah," Arlen kicked a loose bolt across the floor, where it clinked sadly. "We get that a lot."

Frustrated, Lyssa threw her hands up. "We're apprentices! We don't know what we're doing! Please don't blow up everything!"

There was a moment when nothing happened and everything was strangely awkward. Then the ember said: "FINE. JUST STOP TOUCHING THINGS."

The lights dimmed. The buzzing stopped—mostly.

Arlen scratched his head. "Well, that was terrible. Let's go before the universe changes its mind."

Together, they stumbled out, arguing about whose fault it was, while the ember made a sound that might have been an eyeroll.