

# the Epic Tale of the Lady and the Mage

## I. Prologue

**M**any rumors surround the story of Lady Iteyvara, the centaur who united the planet Chivanu and introduced the younglings to flight and power before mysteriously vanishing. Some questioned where she received her Intelligence, her seemingly limitless quantity of Knowledge, while others chose to focus their energies on the Lady's history. Her surname, as many researchers found, was impossible to discover, let alone her previous occupations or residencies. The Lady, it seemed, had appeared and disappeared, like the fabled White Mountain residing over the land of Iiir.

No searcher ever thought to check the Lady's personal quarters. She being nearly a deity herself, her palace and its quarters were viewed as sacred by most. The Devout, the Lady's followers, worshipped daily in the lower Courtyards of the palace but never came near the Upper Courtyard doors. They were afraid of the Lady's divine Wrath. Though, with the newly discovered information, they might have been exaggerating that godliness more than originally thought.

For the Lady kept a journal.

And in this journal she wrote her secrets and truths, and of her journeys to speak with a wizened old man no one believed existed, on the mountain of mystery. The truth of Lady Iteyvara rests in these cracked pages, ancient and scattered with specks of dust along the ink-dried sentences.

It begins during the aftermath of the Zarrein Wars, when the land of Iiir was still a small province on the Arain landmass instead of the prime jewel city of the planet Chivanu. There, on the slopes of an as yet unnamed mountain, a young woman, born to a common family, climbed the rocky terrain, seeking power.

## II. Of Power

**A**s one ascends the mountain one is destined to die on, one would assumedly feel some sort of remorse or despair, or fear, even. But for **I**levara **Z**erra, daughter of **T**aira and **V**ern, fear did not even come close to the anticipation racing within the young girl's mind.

She was born on a wet and stormy night reserved usually for fairy tales and nightmares. Her parents, unable to afford the care of a midwife or the shelter of a hovel, birthed her in the shady confines of an alleyway. And, as the case usually was in matters of fairytales, on the back stoop of a storefront sat the old herbal woman. Throughout the ordeal, she simply watched and said nothing, until **I**levara's beastly cry broke the rhythmic pounding of the storm. Then she stood up, brushed the wet raindrops off her clothing, and walked slowly over to the shivering couple.

**T**aira, still exhausted from the task, lay in her lover's arms, cradling the small squalling baby that was to become **I**levara. **V**ern, focused on keeping **T**aira upright, paid no mind to the approaching figure until her shadow was cast starkly over the two.

"You would do well to cast her out with the rubbish," **D**aera, the old herbalist cautioned, in her lilting tones of **C**hivanan, the most widely known language amongst the rivaling city-states. "This child will bring nothing but suffering to you both until her death on the **W**hite **M**ountain."

The young parents both looked up at the encompassing shadow in disbelief. **T**aira, weak though she was, found the energy to spit out a curse at the woman's guidance. **V**ern hushed her and took great care to lean her and babe together against an alleyway wall, then stood up to face the old hag.

"How dare you frighten us on a night such as this, **D**aera **V**i-  
**e**nné? My wife has just been through much tribulation, which I note you took no pains to assist with, though I have seen you watching this whole night over our suffering. So why do you interject now?"

**D**aera smiled wickedly. "Dear one, you should heed what I say. Your little 'common one' will grow up to become a menace until she is struck down on the **M**ountain of **D**reams."

"You are no prophet, Daera," Vern spat. "Leave that up to the scholars at temple."

The woman shrugged. "Believe what you wish." She turned her back on the three and began walking back to her storefront. As she was about halfway returned, she heard a scream of anguish come from the man she had just conversed with.

"I suppose I forgot to mention that the first to perish under your little common one, your little Ilevara Serra's rule would be her mother?" Daera mused as she continued walking, not looking back at the wreckage of family left behind.

Despite the loss of his love, Vern Caeren refused to let Daera's prophecies into his mind. He rescued the babe from his dead girl's arms and took her to live out in the country. He believed in facing one's fears and proudly worked as a shepherd in the flock nearest to the famed White Mountain as possible. He brought Ilevara Serra (which indeed meant "common one" in the ancient tongue, though he was never to know that in his lifetime) up reminding her constantly of the lies the old woman spouted.

"Ilevara, she thought you were to be a menace. A special girl who would die on the slopes of the mountain. But we know you're just as plain and simple as any of these sheep here, right, girl?" he would frequently say, and tousle the girl's hair a bit.

Had it been any other child he had to raise, Vern would have been an excellent parent. But Ilevara Serra Caeren refused to believe she was just another ordinary child. She played along with her father's rants about the madwoman in town, but in reality, she despised him every time he called her common. She was to scale the White Mountain, the place no other being had ever stepped foot on! If she was to die doing it, then so be it. The world was going to know her name if it was the last thing she did.

And so, one overcast morning, Ilevara set out with nothing but the clothes on her body, scampering up the rocky slopes of the White Mountain, hoping with all her heart that today, she would be confirmed as one of the "special" people.

A day's worth of climbing through clouds passed, and Ilevara finally reached the summit of the peak. There, the rocks were covered in a light dusting of snow, and her bare feet left strange footprints where before she had no place to leave them. The whole summit had an eerie

feel to it, as if some magical residue had left it more alive than usual. For one who had spent her entire life looking forward to this moment, Ilevara was suddenly hesitant. She wavered on taking another step, lifting her left foot back, she hinged on placing it behind her rather than in front, when all of a sudden a voice rang out from beyond the mists.

“Ilevara Zerra, come, seek me out. Seek out your power.” The voice was unlike any she had ever heard; the Chivanan syllables floated along the exhale rather than briskly accompanying the breaths, and the tone had a unique quality that pulled her toward it. She found her feet walking forward into the mists on her own, her body taking over for her wary mind. Inwardly, the girl cursed herself. To be so close to power and then to run away, that was sheer cowardice. She deserved to die if she was to act a coward’s role.

Her feet abruptly stopped their brisk walk, and she found herself in a rocky clearing covered in the same light layer of snow as before. However, this time there was a slight change—the addition of a small, wizened man to the center of the clearing.

“Good day to you, common one.” said He, and Ilevara jumped slightly at the verbalization.

“What was that last part?” she asked rather boldly. “That comoneone stuff. Is that a Chivanan word?”

The man lifted his head so that Ilevara could see his eyes, pale blue and deeply scarred with a great deal of living. These stormy eyes glowed amongst a sea of greying white hair, draped around his shoulders like a massive cape over the ragged brown tunic he wore. Despite the unsettling nature of his eyes, Ilevara almost scoffed. He was no more special than any of the other old shepherds down in the village. How had he ventured up this mountain before her, and how did he know her name? Best to let him answer one question at a time, though, she thought, and kept her mouth silent.

The man smiled. “An English word. Common one. This language I am speaking is called English, something those down in the valley have forgotten.” When she looked confused still, he continued. “You believe me mad for speaking in what you believe to be nonsensical words, but I was demonstrating for you the lost tongue of English. It was once used by the scholars of this land, but has since been forgotten. The word I said translates to your name, Ilevara Zerra. It means something akin to ‘she who is plain’.”

Ilevara fumed. "Plain? I am not plain! I will never be plain. I am Ilevara Zerra, the special girl who will go on to lead a nation or perish right here on these slopes. Ancient language or no, my name does not correlate to a word like plain, and if it indeed does, then I wish to change my name."

The man stood up to his full height—a frame, Ilevara noted, that barely exceed a meter—eyes still half-hidden by cascades of grey hair, and took a step toward her. The girl almost stepped back toward the path before her mind reminded her that this short, albeit frightening-looking man could do her no harm, even if he did speak the forbidden language.

"Change your name, hmm?" the man took another step toward her. Ilevara flinched but said nothing. "So do you not believe in the power of your own self?"

"Power is how everyone sees you," Ilevara answered curtly, "And I cannot be powerful with such a common name. Perhaps I might be among the villagers, at first, the ones without any knowledge of your English. But what about if I ever tried to join the ranks of the scholars, and the priests? They would call me out for that which they believe I am, common, and I cannot allow that."

The man nodded slightly to her words, that awkward half-smile still on his face, then changed the subject. "Why is it then, Miss Ilevara, that you want power? Are you really so set on becoming a priest of Ikir, or of the High Chivanan Temples? That seems a waste of your agile tongue, as priests rarely will debate with scholars, and the common people are obviously below their notice, correct?"

She scoffed at him. "To become a priestess is obviously not my desire, old man. They only have power under a select group of people, their fellowship. I need something more than this. Yes, I want the position similar to the priest, because people in high positions, they are revered. No one ever looks at them like they would a simple shepherd's daughter. If a priest says something, their fellowship will rally behind them and obey their every word.

"A priest could murder and get away with it by proclaiming it a holy act. For him, the laws of society are overruled by his power. The followers of the priesthood fall before him in awe, that he vindicated this poor woman or man for the sake of his belief, whereas a poor villager who killed to protect his family would be put to death. You

would think that the villagers would rally for one of their own, but they merely spite him, even if they are going through these similar troubles. No one dares to take the side of a mere commoner.”

“What if the commoner were of a higher being, like yourself?” Ilevara couldn’t tell if the man was being sarcastic, but she answered anyway.

“The commoner himself—or herself, I suppose—would know of his impending power and glory, but how would anyone else? He might live and die thinking he had served a noble cause, but no one would remember it. He would die right then and there with no legacy. If he had a wife and babe, they would be given different names by the community, so as not to stir up any more trouble, so even his seed would not carry on his name. He would effectively disappear, and all his cause and glory would never get the chance to live on.”

“So you care less about this lifetime as you do the power of being remembered?” the man commented. “Say, if I were to kill you now, on the slopes of this famed mountain, and send a message to the countryside that Ilevara Serra had died valiantly defeating the White Mountain and the sorcerer who lived atop it, that would get you the fame and recognition you seek. Perhaps even a mention in the storybooks.”

“But that’s just temporary fame!” Ilevara exclaimed. “In storybooks, no one ever really believes that this character ever did the things proclaimed about. It becomes simply a good story, a great laughing point during a gathering, and your memory fades away into morals about ideals and responsibility. I don’t want to be represented by other people affixing ideas to me. I want to be feared and mysterious. I want people to be utterly confused about me and how I came to be on this planet.

“When I die, I will not be immortalized merely in storybooks but in thousands of researchers’ diaries. They will struggle to find out more about me, each piece they find over the years re-illuminating my spirit rather than degrading it as stories would. If I gave them my life in pieces, then they might stray occasionally, but once another piece is found, the whole case is illuminated once more and everyone will come running to see the new picture created by this extra piece. Simply martyring yourself brings you no lasting fame and fortune. Even the recent wars we’ve had, in twenty years nothing but battle names will be remembered. Perhaps a general or two might come up, but they will be

immortalized in stories, with no definitive fact holding them down. I need there to be proof of my existence, that I am indeed special." After this speech, Ilevara needed a few moments to catch her breath, but the man did not seem to mind. He, it appeared, was deep in thought about her words. Finally, he looked up at her.

"You want to be in power without the class limitations. Absolute power over a nation, that allows you to control or correct as you see fit, with everyone behind you. You would be above the classes, you would certainly be special... But you would be alone. Completely alone. If you separate yourself from the world, then expect no comfort from it. You will have no friends, no one to lean on, for no one will be at your level. You will be above the relative moralities of the world, no one will ever question your deeds, but you must reconcile them with yourself. When you die, things will happen as you wish. Your legacy, if you have made one for yourself—I can only give you the power, not teach you how to use it—will be burned in the minds, hearts, souls, and textbooks of scholars for hundreds of years to come."

He paused, then looked her straight in the eye. "Is this what you want, Miss Ilevara Zerra Caeren?"

She opened her mouth to answer, but he cut her off. "Think carefully before you answer me. Once you have spoken, you can never go back."

Ilevara nodded slowly at the man, then sat down on the snow-covered ground, intently focusing on the individual snow crystals lying on top of each other. She would be alone. Well, what was being alone? She had been alone her whole life. No one had been at her standards, not even her father, whom she was supposed to love and respect. Being alone, she could handle. On morals, well, didn't she already dutifully punish herself for missing chores or supper, why couldn't she handle something bigger? She knew her own concepts of right and wrong. They were personal, not universal, and she could reconcile them just as easily in her new state as she could as a shepherd. As for her legacy, she certainly didn't need any old man worrying about laying it out for her. She was Ilevara Zerra, common one or no, she would show the world her true power.

"Before I answer you," she spoke softly, "answer me one thing. Who are you?"

The man sat down opposite her and gazed into her eyes. "I am called Zayere. Did you understand that, child?"

Ilevara, slightly stunned, nodded. "Was that... English you just spoke?"

"Yes. Your understanding of it means that your transformation is already beginning to take place."

Ilevara blinked in surprise, but found herself unable to move from her seat. "But I never said anything!"

"You asked me my name, child." Zayere responded, and Ilevara found it odd that even though she could tell that he was speaking in the ancient tongue, did not have to think to translate it. "If you had decided to leave, you would not have asked my name, for it would haunt you the rest of your ordinary, commonplace life. The possibilities you could have had with the sorcerer Zayere. Then you would ask around for people who had heard of me, maybe even find a few, but all would laugh in your face. You would become less powerful than you are right now. So child, dear child, asking me my name was your answer."

"You're... a sorcerer?" Ilevara murmured, unable to turn her head away from the man's sharp gaze. She was trapped in it, whether she liked it or not.

"The sorcerer of Chivanu. Za zayre di Chivanu. The sorcerer of Chivanu. It is where my name comes from, little one. And your name shall be similar. See, child, we must fulfill the prophecy dear Daera Vienne set out for you in order to begin this, and your old self must die. Ilevara Serra, 'the common one,' you must forget this title. It is no longer yours. Instead, your name will be linked to the thing you desire—power. You may not have realized it, but the Chivanan word for commonness—l'vara—and power—ley'vara—are very similar. We will drop your surname and title, you have no need to be linked to Caeren. Instead, you will be known as the Lady Ilevara. Lady of Power."

He stood, and the girl followed him with her eyes as he came to rest a hand on her shoulder. "Now, let's see what we can do about making the mystery of the Lady."

### III. Of Death and Love

**Z**ayere liked watching people. He had the **White Mountain** take root in **Iiir** specifically to watch people. The other parts of **Chivanu** were still too war-stricken for its inhabitants to properly interact, but in **Iiir**, the citizens at least tried to pretend that a massive fifty year war had not torn them limb from limb.

Also, his prodigy happened to be helping them out.

The **Lady Ieyvara**, who most were surprised to find out was not a lady at all, but a magnificent centaur, thought to have gone extinct during the war, had graced the town five years prior. On the eve of the **Caeren** funeral pyre, where the shepherds mourned the loss of one of their own, the **Lady** came floating down through the city, attracting stares and yelps of excitement. To have a centaur—a lady centaur—suddenly come throughout the village was a major event.

**Zayere** had much enjoyed that next part. The normally busy yet worried undertone of the city had become one of happiness. No matter the problems with the rest of the world, they had a demi-goddess gracing their soil and their city. People-watching had never been more fun, he found. Being unable to predict the movements of the average village-folk was new to **Zayere**, but not entirely unwelcome. It added a flair of interest to his life.

Throughout the five years the **Lady** had been with **Iiir**, it strengthened over a hundredfold. **Ieyvara** had rallied together these beaten-down people much more efficiently and kindly than a priestess, and in much larger scale. Soon, **Iiir** went from a small provincial town to the second biggest city in the world. Priests and scholars started to waft in from the higher cities of **Vaerl** and **Fiers**, to try and investigate the lady. But it was like little **Ieyvara Zerra** had said—her influence overpowered that of priests or scholars, because her base of followers outnumbered them both.

Needless to say, numerous attacks were made on the **Lady's** life shortly after. However, her survival after every one only increased the townsfolk's awe of the **Lady**. She was nigh invincible, she spoke the ancient tongues, and she could ward off the priests and their ceremonies with a single gesture. Soon, realizing that a war between **Iiir** and the **Church** was not the best of solutions, she made a pact with the priests,

and from then on, they at least treated her with respect, and were allowed to traffick the city, while the Lady got the added increase of the priests' fellowship to her amassing wealth of followers.

Zayere admitted little, but he did have to acknowledge a bit of awe for the Lady. Some, when given the power and respect they so desperately craved, went crazy, calling themselves "supermen", believing that just because they could get away with what would otherwise be a crime to anyone else, they could reign free and unchecked. The problem, of course, with that logic, was that even though they had what they thought were "higher morals," they could not go and destroy people on that basis, as those people did not subscribe to that higher theory. Supermen or not, Zayere thought, they had to understand that their actions affected the world. If they could get away with murder, better to murder a corrupt criminal than an innocent bystander in the lower world.

But for all his mutterings and wishes, Zayere could not interfere, merely watch. Thankfully, his newest pick seemed to be turning out rather well.

Well, at least, until the crisis of the spy.

Two years after the resolutions with the priests, the Lady once again climbed the rocky slopes of the White Mountain to meet with Zayere. He had known she was coming, of course, but still did his best to lurk in the shadows until she cried out his name. It would not do well to surprise her, as she seemed to not be in the best of moods.

"You beckoned, Lady?" he said, bowing with a flourish. The two talked solely in the ancient language with each other, now. Chivanan was no real use on the White Mountain, it could easily be twisted around to mean things the speaker or listener did not wish; English was much more transparent.

Ieyvara simply rolled her eyes at the man's gesture. "Get up, Zayere. Just because the fools down in town do that does not mean you must as well."

He grinned. "Oh, is my Lady growing tired of her power?"

The Lady stomped one of her hooves. "Zayere, your antics get on my last nerve."

He bowed again. "I live to serve." He stood a few moments later and regarded Ieyvara for awhile before speaking. "What is it you have

come to the White Mountain for, Ileyvara? Your city is flourishing. In a few years time, I imagine it will be more than just a city. You certainly have surprised me, child. I expected a lot more foolishness, but you, it seems, have a talent for natural leading, even if you do still have that selfish streak in you."

Ileyvara scoffed. "I am not selfish."

"Of course not, my Lady," Zayere responded, grinning. "Who said that? But I do not understand your thought patterns as of late. You seem troubled amongst a sea of content, and yet there is some happiness lurking within you. I do not understand."

"When you gave me this power, you told me I would be alone, Zayere," Ileyvara said simply. The old man nodded, and she continued.

"But there is someone... Someone else who understands me. A human man. He... Zayere, I feel affection toward him, when I have never felt more than distaste for anyone else."

"Even me, my Lady?" Zayere said, in mock astonishment. Ileyvara scoffed.

"You don't count." He made a false hurt noise, but she continued. "You said I would never find anyone, but here he is. Zayere, I feel that I can trust him. He would... He would understand. Why I did what I did. He could accept me..." She trailed off.

"What is it you are asking, Ileyvara?" Zayere questioned, rather apprehensively.

"I... I no longer wish to be in this position. I have had my experience, my glory, my power. But... he means more to me than that, Zayere. I... I have found love. Real love, which matters more to me than my foolish expectations of power. He is my equal, and will remember me more than these legions of followers. I wish to leave."

Zayere was silent.

"Well?" she demanded. "Is silence the only treatment to my cure? Return me to my former state. I will be common in order to be loved. I can bear it."

Zayere slowly shook his head. "You cannot, Ileyvara. What has been done, has been done."

She stomped her hooves and screeched at him. "Zayere, you are foolish! I will destroy everything you have wanted, all your fun and games, until you turn me back. I wish to have love. I wish to be loved! Let me love!"

“Ro.”

“WHY? Why are you so selfish?” she screamed at him.

“Ikeyvara, a woman in your position can never love or be loved.

No one really knows you, let alone loves you. This is a love that cannot possibly be brought to reality. You may think he loves you, but that love is a false idolization. If I restored you to your former common state, and all of a sudden he did not feel for you the same as before, you would be devastated. And all you worked for would be ruined, for a simple flight of fancy. That, my child, is true foolishness. You will not be happy with him, and once you have lost your allure, he will not be happy with you. It is better to resign yourself to your love.”

“Resign? What can I resign myself to? Living forever with no hope of anyone returning my affections?”

“Technically,” Zayere interjected, “You won’t live forever.”

“That’s beside the point, you foolish old man!” she screamed. “I cannot just hold happiness like that, it’s like a storybook, it diminishes every time I think of it. Soon it will only be a distant memory, a meaningless heartache. I cannot do that.”

“Then let him live on in your heart instead of just holding him to a particular memory,” Zayere replied. “You are right, holding a single memory in your mind, it will get corrupted and tainted. So do not hold anything in your mind except the emotion. Remember what love feels like, and keep hold of that. Memories won’t last you, but the hope of revitalizing love, that will energize you more than anything else.”

“The hope of what? You said yourself, Zayere, that I can never love.”

“The hope that you will someday be able to. Even if it is never possible in your lifetime, Ikeyvara, you can always hope.”

“Expectation breeds disappointment,” Ikeyvara mumbled, and let her head fall to her chest.

“Child...” Zayere started. “Dearest Ikeyvara, you have known what I told you already. You already worked your way through this tribulation. So why ask me to return yourself if you have no need of it?”

“He told me he loved me, and I returned his love, and I told him my story.”

Zayere’s eyes widened. “Ikeyvara, how could you—”

"I know." she said forlornly. "He was a spy. We at the palace were trying to discern his true nature, and I was the successful one. I killed him. I killed the man I loved because his love for me was, as you said, idolistic. He worshipped me for my secrets to bring to the priesthood, and I wanted to believe otherwise. If I turned myself human, I could go to his beheading like any commoner and feel the love a wife or lover might feel for him, rather than the despair and hatred. If I were common, then he might love me without strings, even for those few desperate moments."

Ileyvara knelt into the soft snow and bowed her head. Zayere could not see whether she was crying or not, but the image of his greatest student defeated and broken tore him.

"Ileyvara... This is the price we make when we take a higher calling upon us. I warned you that you would have to reconcile your beliefs, did I not?"

"You did." Her voice fell flat against the snow.

Zayere walked over to her and put a hand on her shoulder, a gesture he had only done for her once before. "To rule, you must accept the consequences as well as the responsibility. Do you understand?"

"I do."

"Get up, then, child. I will let you see the beheading if you wish. This is your one day of commonness, Ileyvara Zerra. One day where you may relinquish your higher morality and go to live with the common people and share their own."

Ileyvara looked up at him and shook her head slowly. "No, Zayere. You are right. If I am to rule properly, I must not make exceptions. I apologize for wasting your time." She stood, bowed her head slightly, and left Zayere, saddened for his prodigy's loss of innocence in the soft snow.

## IV. Epilogue

From then on, Ileyvara was never quite as spirited as before. She continued to build followers and cities until she had the whole of Chivanu united under her. Such a miracle had never been seen since the Queensage. But Ileyvara herself was distant and cold. She only came to visit Zayere once more, and on that visit, they argued for the last time. For after that, Zayere and his White Mountain vanished, moved by nothing, the scholars would later exclaim. Ileyvara died to the exact kind of spectacle she wanted; Zayere had kept that promise before he disappeared with his wonderland of snow.

Thus the Lady was forever immortalized, her power firmly planted in the minds and hearts of those to follow.

But no one ever once suggested that she was happy.