Short Stories

- Kiara in the Golden City
- Vrakni's Legacy
- Love-Dove Blood
- I Want to be an Astronaut
- Miltifan's Song
- Road Trip to Goul
- Pondering On the Stars
- In My Fathers Name Part 1
- In My Father's Name Part 2
- In My Father's Name Part 3 Steel and Ice
- The Winter Wolf Comes
- Let Her Rest

Kiara in the Golden City

I guess this was it; the moment I had been waiting for. The answers came with waves of emotions as I remembered the last time I was here. The broken dilapidated stone homes, adorned with wooden roofs, and cloth doors. Fire pits left dug holes throughout the plazas and the road began to come up as the rains washed the stones free.

Kiara padded throughout the mud that rain the night before had mixed with her nose to the ground sniffing. Little squeaks and whines as she seemed docile and nervous. The incorporeal tribesmen and woman stepped from their homes to watch and greet us with gentle waves.

“It’s okay sweetheart, they won’t hurt you. You remember them, right? The night you were born.” The small wolf gives a soft whimper before sitting on her haunches as one of the beings stepped forward from the mass and kneeled to the you pup, the woman’s hand reaching to gently pat Kiara’s head.

“Good morning, Mama.” Was echoed by “Good morning, Gran’mam” that came from a little girl. She stood a few feet tall as the wolf pup changed, the sounds of bone breaking and snapping into place still making me wince, but I felt relieved to see the wristlet stay wrapped around her daughter’s wrists. The girl’s long matted straw-like hair faded closer to a grey and her eyes a glowing sea of silver.

“It is so very well to see you my dears, finally found your way back home?” I gave the woman a gentle glare, but I needed to say anything as Kiara spoke up with a rattling head shake, “ No! we have two homes Gran’mam! You should come visit with the family; Mommy will make you good food!” The girl beckoned to those that stood beyond us and as her mother stood to come and greet her, the village people shook hands with her daughter.

“I so very much missed you my blossom, I honestly thought you had forgotten about us.” I rolled my eyes at my mother’s dramatics.

“Unlikely, mama. I hear you sing to Kiara every night, and kiss Damir and Mina to sleep.” Was my response as I hugged her tight and buried my face in her clothes. The lingered with the smell of lavender and it drew me to when I was younger and would hide in her skirts.

“That boy seems wary of me, so I give him as much space as I am willing. But young Mina, her mind babbles on and on. An endless girl of questions and critiques.” My mother pushed me back to look down upon me after speaking and with a smile she kissed my forehead. “Come, it’s about time you show us your true self again. I want to see the beautiful daughter horns and all.”

I followed the woman, before scooping the giggling girl how found a friend in a small spirit in the shape of a butterfly. “And what if this is my true self?” I asked my mother.

“The request still stands the same, cheeky wind” I smirked at the woman’s response before we were led away further into the bustling forest and as we finally passed the barrier, I felt my eyesight faulter, but knew that the gasp from her daughter revealed the City of Gold. Soon my sight returned once more, and I stood as I once was to stare across the golden expanse.

“I forgot how timeless this place felt” I shivered at the feeling as the magicks seem to almost crawl across my skin.

“Look it Mama! The waterfalls, oh the dresses, they got pretty dresses! Can I have one!? Please!” My daughter turned desperate and in her unclothed form, it’s not as if I could say no, but almost as if the beings knew one stepped out to with dress in hand. I set the young girl down quickly using the woman’s help to don the white gown.

I stared into my daughter’s eyes, as the silver had warped to golden pools of energy, and her smile brought a world of calm. My mother took my attention as Kiara rushed to a nearby fountain to see herself in the waters, “You may call it timeless now, but the more you spend here the more disjointed you might feel”

My mother seemed distant as a group of Versi maybe their way down the grand steps and past buildings that stretched high into the sky, yet they blocked no sunlight. The congregation stop as a Man stepped towards me and moved to speak.

“I have not spoken yet of that Delemon, let her rest from her journey, let our granddaughter see her city before we talk business” My mother affirmed before the man. I bowed gently to my grandfather, but he nodded in my mother’s direction before giving me a hug.

“Come, let us take a tour and show them the city and all it has to offer.” My grandfather took Kiara up in arms, “Hello my beautiful princess, did you enjoy the spirits I sent your way?” Kiara nodded excitedly before babbling to the man.

“I only have time of a day, then I have to return to my life” I warned my mother, “I only came to give you and her time to meet, whatever plans—” My mother shook her head as we started to follow.

“This isn’t something we can avoid, blossom. Someone must do something, and you are the only one to even be close to accomplishing the task. Remember your vows, remember the oath you took to your people.” Was her response.

I gritted my teeth but quickly wiped the look away as Kiara called out to me. “I don’t, but I can’t keep my wife in the dark forever… I can’t lie and holds secrets, the guilts becoming to much and she will be apart of this world at one point whether you like it or not—”

I took Kiara up as the little girl gave me a kiss and a smile. “It’s okay Mama, I know you will be strong and happy, I can see it.”

My mother put a hand on my back and with a smile nodded, “She is not wrong, the little one knows how best to sneak about even our society of timeless. The river has turned, and Damir and

Mina have not quite avoided all your influence. There are talks of your wife and children, across time. This is talk for later as I have a restaurant, I wish to show you and Kiara, they have the best dumplings”

I watched my mother as she met my grandfather and they spoke in whispers. “Kiara, stay close, I worry about you regardless of what I can see”, the little girl nodded at me, “I know Mama, I love you dearly for that”

I couldn’t help but to smile at her, “Besides, you and Melody haven’t gotten the chance to meet yet, have you?”

Vrakni's Legacy

Looking beyond the stars I couldn’t help withering in grief. I don’t know what caused it, but I stumbled awake to the smell of ash and something leaving me from within. The warmth I always kept close to remind myself of what my Papa was and the love he showed me.

Even now I cringed at my own stupidity as a child to forget the one person that held me together for so long. I never spoke kindly to him, I never hugged or stood besides him, nor did I give him the breath to speak his thoughts.

Kiara’s questions in my dreams had drawn vivid thoughts in front of me and while I didn’t speak or answer the curious child just as I never did to anyone else, not even my own wife. But the questions lingered now in this cold almost lonely feeling, who was Papa and why do I never speak of him like I speak of Mama? What place did he hold in my life and most importantly, why not speak ill if the tribe was so bad?

I never cried as hard as I did the day Papa left to do his duty and never returned. The haunted way he looked at mama told me all I needed to know; he wouldn’t be returning but he couldn’t tell me that. In a way I hated him for leaving me alone but more so for leaving mother to fall apart.

“Mother, c-could you tell me of a time you were at your worst?” my child’s face stared up at me from her spot in the grass. She was so grown I barely recognized her as a pre-teen. For a second, I was sure It was just a reflection of me within the lake’s shores. Instead of answering, I wondered if Kiara would begin to resent me for keep secrets, but I didn’t know how to answer. It was like the words just couldn’t form and the taste of ash lingered in my through.

“I want to see my Papa once more my little spirit… can you go to your mother and keep her?” The girl nodded emphatically before struggling to stand whilst leaving in her wake the tracks of a small wolf as it padded its way into the cottage.

“You made me strong; you were always the brightest star in my sky papa… I even named it after you… dragon…” I felt my tongue slip and I squeezed my eyes shut as a felt a hand grasp my shoulder. I wanted to say more, I wanted to turn around, but I couldn’t and instead raised my hands to touch the empty space there.

“I am the worst daughter in the world, I should have known, I should have spoken up, I should have done my duty and protected my family…. I should have…”

“Enough…” the voice was low like a slow river over gravel. It was so familiar that I felt my knees grow heavy. “No daughter of mine will speak so lowly of herself… not when she is exactly as I expected of her. For years I struggled to understand, and I think I misunderstood much about you and about what It means to have children.”

The voice continued as I fell to my knees in the water, “I am told you are a warrior in your own right, the winter wolf that lives within, and In the passing days as I’ve tried to find my way into the Aethereal Sea I have seen the beautiful children you have bore into this world. Very much like Miltifan, so very much like her. I felt as if I was just a bystander in your life, an obstacle that held you hostage from your freedom… I knew you always loved and adored your mother mor—”

I cut the man off as I stood roughly facing where the voice emanated from the empty space, “And you are wrong!” I seethed at his words. “You were exactly as I needed you! You gave me what I needed to be here to day, you were my brightest star when my sky was black. Without you I would not have crawled my way through the endless aethereal seas I found myself in. Without your teachings I would have never… I would have died with Mother in that river… I wouldn’t have hung onto life so harshly that it left scars so deep that wind howls when it blows across me. You were my father… my lord… you were my role model, and I just had no way to tell you or show you that…”

A silence gathered between the incorporeal being who wandered to their last moments and my brokenness. I could feel as a pair of large arms drew me into a embrace. “Love is never fleeting nor is our memories of those we love…” my papa started the phrase that we shared,

“While our life seems endless the reward is worth the suffering in between the now and then”, I finished as the taste and smell of ash dispersed into the smell of the lake. Like always these moments would live within me to my death, but I felt at ease enough to maybe answer my daughters’ questions now.

“The worst I have ever been was when I let the stars shape how I showed my love, instead of just showing it how I had always know… the worst I have ever been was when I denied my own heart the single most important thing it needed…”

As I wandered back to the cottage, I felt one last fleet touch and a whisper, “Remember to keep Armina safe…”

In short, while I may never truly speak about my papa or if I do it will just be anecdotes. Vrakni was more then just a father, he was the person who shaped me and the winter wolf, he gave me the lessons that have pushed me beyond my limits. I am truly the legacy he left behind, at least a half of it.

Love-Dove Blood

It was expressive and boldness I longed for, maybe I felt cold in this otherwise burning world. Perhaps it was the rain that crashed down around me chilling to the core or maybe I was succumbing to the end. I could see little motes of aether that plagued the reliving dream, but even if it's falsehood was apparent I still felt the numbness of unsureness that I had felt that day; I mean just look at them.

I peered through the large bay windows with nothing stopping me but my own morales of which were already deflated as I could still see their blood on my skin, no amount of scrubbing could fix that.

The family ate as if the outside world existed only in their dreams. Two children, girls, adamantly spoke back and forth clearly bickering as a woman watched on amused. It wasnt long before the man, her husband, nodded and left the dinner.

I had to question why I was here and why did I suddenly feel so lowly as I watched on. Was this what it looked like to be normal? Had she found what I could not?

I hadn't even realized I had been standing there for so long and it wasn't till I had a set of blue eyes looking at me through the glass. I tried to move, but couldn't as I stood rooted to the spot and it wasn't long ofter the woman stood in boots with an umbrella a few feet from me and she called out, "Gabriella?"

I noticed the memory was fragmented as I felt the cold shift to warmth and the sound of running water stilling as the porcelain tub was filled. I watched the brunette turn back to me, her eyes watching me as I sat on the wooden stool unmoving, and my tremors shook me to my core.

"love-dove, what has happened to you..." was her question as she shifted to sit at my feet looking up at me her hands reaching to hold one of mine, stilling it's shaking. "I never thought I'd see you again, but I'd recognize that nose anywhere. Why did you come back?"

I looked beyond her to the dapper decor of the bathroom, then back as I whispered barely above the sound of her breaths, "it's done, I've gotten rid of them all, Mama is safe; I am safe". I looked away from her softening eyes and down at our joined hands.

"I can feel the blood, hear their screams, and the heat still leaves my lungs full of ash. I haven't slept in days, May." I squeezed my eyes closed, even if she didn't have much aether it was still hard to want to see even a spark.

May didn't move, speak, or breath before releasing one of her hands, it was moments later I felt the warm wash of water as she poured it across my head and shoulders. "I know I wasn't the best to you, I was apart of your torment love-dove. Put tonight off and seek the revenge you came here

for tomorrow. Tonight let me take care of you like I should have."

I felt tears leave my eyes as the women began to drag a wet sponge across my skin. For weeks I felt like I couldn't remove this burden from my body and in one movement she had me feeling lighter then air, I gripped her hand tightly in both mine.

I sought comfort from the person who created my doubt in love, yet it was what I needed most at the moment. "please, don't hurt me..."

"Never, not again. I'm sorry for falling for fear, I'm sorry my love-dove"

I listened to the sounds of the cicadas, the rain had fallen to soft drizzle leaving behind a mist across the city, and the sound of May's breathing. I found my fingers creasing the top sheet that I had pooled in my naked lap. And with sight I simply thought, and I felt. I felt the fire that licked my bones, the skin that felt lighter from the bath but still held scars and heat far over, and I felt my soul flicker in this memory.

The shifting of the bed stirred me as May was awoken by the scratching on my nails on the line or perhaps it was my thoughts that swirled the subtopic aether deep in the veins of the universe. I broke the silence, "what are you supposed to teach me, why are you here?"

The bed shifted as I felt breath on my shoulder. "Love-dove, you ask to many questions, just rest." Had all been for naught, was my demon truly gone, or was I running from the truth. These were all the things that plague my dreams, as I crawled through blood and magma even as I was awake, and deeper still my heartbeat was fake.

"Bright-Eyes, your stars fading still, always has been, and maybe the truth that you have always been your past and future in one. You wander as this husk of what everyone has done to you, you yourself withers your own breaths on what you expect of yourself. You will never escape who you are now till you learn to be what echo’s deep within you. "

Something changed as May's aether was brighter and nearly blinding. I no longer felt linen, heard cicadas and rain, I felt a cold light as the sound of prayers escalated around me. I could see and I could breathe in the prairie around me, the far-off buildings shadows in the distance as the star filled sky seemed forever large. Where a woman once was stood the crying sight of golden light holding a still babe in her hands, the shape reminiscent of Mama, and she laid the small corpse to the grass before us. I watched her sit back as another golden form reminiscent of Papa took shape holding the distraught woman as they seemed to give up under this star filled sky and it was in the baby's glassy eyes that I saw them.

"Do something! Mama! Do something, remember you saved me!" I screamed without abandon as the two made no move, even as others joined in a circle around us.

I couldn't breathe, I could feel the life fade from my heart with each beat, and I grit my teeth as I thought to myself, "this isn't happening, this isn't happening." When just the few moments of

breathe I had left I reached out and grasped the baby's hand, "You must live, how else will other’s star’s shine brighter, what other purpose is there!” I screamed again as I tilted my head back and cried out to the universe; and it answered as I reached towards the twinkling lights above, one stuck out as it fell.

As it touched my fingers, I felt true love beyond anything I had felt pass through me and sink into the baby’s form. As I felt my breath return and my sight diminish, I caught the last glimpse of the babe’s iris light a glow with a golden limbal ring and heard it cry out into the night. My last thought as I felt myself get pulled away into the void, “my Melody, my verse”.

In flashes of memories, I saw my life pass by in short, picturesque art pieces, but wasn’t long before my ears were filled with the sound of cicadas and the heavy rain, and my hands were drenched with blood, Knife still clutched within one as I stared into the lifeless set of blue.

I wiped my eyes with my arms as tears crashed to join the puddles at my feet. I knew now that some memories were meant to be forgotten and never found; this was the curse of remembering. I turned as the aether drew me deeper into the lifestream. My journey wasn’t complete, my demons still roamed, and I still had strength to wield.

I Want to be an Astronaut

It was never the cold that I felt like I had to temper myself for, nor the uncomfortable feeling of sticks, rocks, and sand that invaded their way between my toes. It was never the hollow lands and the beasts that stalked them for prey. It was this feeling that rooted itself into my bones and veins. The feeling that filled the cold augmented metals pressed and sewn into my back. It was loneliness and the pressure of thoughts.

I hadn't yet let my mind wander to the world around me, nor the memories of the faces of innocents and sinners that amalgamated my everyday thoughts like molds pressed into magma, the same magma the had torn my skin from bones leaving a forever unescapable itch between my joints.

I remember those moments the greatest and even with my memories slowly fading away I could not believe that I would not remember them when I am nothing more than a husk of emptiness. Star had been so close yet as Apoldyon fell to sink back into its womb, I felt nothing... my eyes glazed over as the lurking powers of the Winter Wolf joined the angel of the depths into its fiery domain. All I saw were stars above me and I heard the sweetest of voices beside me.

Even as I replayed these memories the cold winds of the surrounding lands gently tucked and swayed the sheer fabrics that I wore as my naked skin turned to ice underneath the slip of a sleep dress; I heard the voice once more as I gazed upon the stars above me. "Blossom, how you have grown to fill this world, it is so unlike you."

I justled everything nearly causing my stiffened joints to crack, and my sight wavered around me searching and stopping as I caught the soft glimmer that made my memories beautiful; my mama stood mere feet away with the gentlest of smiles that made all my worries drain away into nothingness.

"You know" the incorporeal woman whispered upon the winds, "I still remember the little girl that would hide herself within the flaps of the tents to escape this world. She was so fragile and frail that even the softest of words would cause her to shiver in fright. Said girl never left my side, she was the most beautiful of clothing that clung to me for years and now I find her alone among a snow-covered plateau awaiting the world to lift her up, am I wrong?"

I stuttered and tried to shift myself to stand but with no food or water and hours into my vigil there was truly little for me to offer, but to hang my head for a moment as my sight wavered. The woman's form kneeled and sat beside me, her hands reaching to pull and cradle my head within her lap, and her fingers brushed through my hair soothingly.

"You do not have to speak my blossom; I too remember this day just as any other day. Today is not my day of duty, today is your day, and I know it seems so small in the grand scheme of things, but I must speak to you bluntly. Today will be a choice that will change your future like no other,

today you choose to become a true Versi.”

I cleared my throat of tears that came from a well I did not know I had within. A sorrowful howl breached my heart at those words as if a truth that I was running from had finally found me, one of those beasts that had caught its prey within these fields. I had started to speak before I had even the thought to notice, “I’m not real, am I?”

“No more real than I am my blossom, or all those that have reached out to you in your dreams, you hear them don’t you deep down you share their emotions and thoughts, you are one of them?” the woman squeezed my arms reassuringly before brushing a tear away from my eye. “Look beyond us, can you see them, focus…”

As I heard mama’s words turn into a soft lullaby I looked past the darkness of the fields, the shine of the stars reflecting off the nearby lake still yet unfrozen. It felt like the world had turned twice before the feelings stirring within me manifested and I heard them. The cacophony of quiet whispers that each brought their own feelings and intent, some filled with anger and vitriol, others with sorrow and tears, and others darker yet with an end to life itself.

Just beyond us barely perceivable were the incorporeal outlines of tents and fires, of cloths hanging from string lines and barrels brimming with goods. People moved and gathered themselves together to stand just outside of the boundary, all watching me. “I’m a… memory,” even as I spoke that truth I watched as the beings all nodded together. Smiles of memories from pasts bringing with it a comfort that I could never put into words to anyone.

“What we are dear blossom is far beyond this star, our kind come far deep within the fabrics of the stars themselves, driven by a duty to bring light to this void of dark above us. A lesson that we do not get to learn ourselves, but instead learn from others,” mama’s hand gently cradled my abdomen, and I could almost feel the warmth she brought me. “These three are the first of the lights you have brought into our skies, there was one more before them wasn’t there, a song that turned you around, wasn’t there?”

I blinked back confusion before turning to stare into the glowing irises of the Au’Ra woman, “Melody?”

Mama smiled down at me; the woman’s eyes felt slightly empty as she turned from warming me to holding my hand as she held me. “I remember my first daughter that I had lost, a lesson to us to take our duty seriously, to teach us the truth about the world itself and the stars that shine within it, I went through it, your grandmother went through it, your great grandmother went through it. At some point in each Versi’s life they had went through it. Melody chose you that day to take this mantle.”

She watched me as my eyes darted back and forth before settling to ponder at the stars above us. One twinkled madly as if to giggle and laugh among its friends, before it shot off into the void. Realizations flooded me with each passing minute as my loneliness was traded out for contentment, the figures in the beyond stepping closer with each passing.

Almost like a diamond crawling its way from the recess of my mind and old gentleman's voice like a poet spoke a phrase I had long forgotten, "what does it mean to be alive? When purpose wonders and I keep asking for more, and as I ponder over those words, making life is what it means to be alive… making life is what it means to be alive."

Mama's voice clipped through my thoughts, "You have a choice to make blossom and it will not be one that is easy. You once lied to those you love, pretending to bind yourself to the fey when you entered the lifestream at the cost of your life. Did you never wonder why you never second guessed yourself? All Versi come to that moment in their lives as the test of merit and you survived the first step. Now it's time for the second step… realize the truth in the beyond, join us and understand your purpose."

Mama placed my head back upon the ground and I tried to cling to her to stop her from standing outside my reach but could not. I watched as she stepped to join the others with welcoming hands. "Blossom, come join us for the evenings to come and realize the truth or return back once more as a mortal as you once were, but… the sky will be three less stars than the future has foretold…"

"What does it mean… to realize the truth?" I bit my lip as I pondered on those words and the ones before.

Mama smiled, "it means you will harness the secrets of the Versi from this star and many more. A secret you will be bound to dutifully hold. It will mean your entire perspective in life will change, no longer will your wife, friends, and children be your sole focus as the Versi have tasks that far outweigh the selfish."

"But I won't be barred from my wife, my friends, or my children?" My hands lowered to hold my belly gently. The feeling of the Aethers that swirled within intermingling as triplets playing among the stars.

Mama shook her head, "You will never be barred from life" I tried to understand, but even now I realized the implications of the secret. To follow in my mother's footsteps and become the thing I always looked up to and wished to be. Another memory rushed up like a flood of warmth as I pushed and struggled to stand, the sound of a little girl's voice echoed within my thoughts, "I wanna go to the stars Mama, I wanna be an astronaut!" as she spoke to her mother in secret. As I finally stood tall and turned my neck to stare off into the distance where I knew my wife waited for me, I turned back to the woman that was always there for me when I needed it the most.

"Listen to your past self, blossom. Look into your heart and realize the truth and let us look out for you as we have done for years before and to come." I blinked at the woman's words as the little girl repeated itself and with a breath I took a step into Mama's arms, and then another, eventually standing in her warmth as the world melted away.

As I turned my sight to nothing, I was not surprised as I reached my hand out towards the woman before me, no longer did she or the others wear visages of others; They all wore my face staring back comfortingly. "Let us become astronauts and bring stars to the sky, cherish the light that we bring through the song of the universe. Not only are we discoverers but creators in the vastness of ourselves."

Miltifan's Song

A thousand star filled night

One within your shining eye

My dear daughter you shine so bright

But close your eyes, and hide from sight

For now your weary, sleep sleep, my beautiful starlight.

Road Trip to Goul

The majority of the trip will be transit across the seas to Meracydia to a largish shipping city.

From there it will be by mount back across lands till they reach a small, abandoned fishing village where across the sea a large island bordered in mountains and forests rests. Home of the Goul tribe.

The first stop is along the northern most mountains in the darkness of the canopy, rests hidden in an almost hallowed clearing where she has buried her mother Miltifan under carefully chiseled and stacked bricks of stones.

o

Here is where Gabbie unburies the body of Miltifan that is carefully wrapped in cloth.

o

The cavern itself resides with the presence of the woman and in the reflection of light her apparition can be seen, dressed in robes of white, adorned with metallic trinkets and necklaces. Her skin painted in tribalistic markings of constellations. Her hair was a bundled mess and one horn missing from the side of her head.

o

Gabbie is unaware of this and instead busies herself by unwrapping the woman’s face and neck, the pale stark face and eyes closed revealed. Gabbie murmurs to the woman almost child like and for hours she rests there on her knees in prayer.

o

She later leaves with the woman body rewrapped to take it across the sea before engaging the Goul tribe, though she takes her mothers necklace… a pearl drop that glows on a silver chain and places it around her own neck.

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Traversing the sea once more, she spends the night in the fishing village, her face pale and focused. In the morning she cuts her hair, and they make their way back across the sea towards the tribe of Goul and the volcano that rests within.

o

Initial interaction with the tribe brings for the obvious contempt and hate they seem to have for Gabriella.

o

Further investigation shows that the tribe has been tempered but holds their faculties some they are just emphatic to the deity they worship.

o

No conversation is possible, and it ends as expected… as the tribe attacks to capture Gabriella, the slaughter happens… a tireless fight that drives her to kill whoever gets in her way as she moves closer and closer to the mount of volcano in the seat of the tribe.

o

As blood runs, children woman and men lay at her feet, tired and worn she drags herself across the ashes of the Seat.

o

With in the bowls of the volcano awaits Apoldyon who looks surprisingly human, with the under beads of lava tracing itself through its veins.

o

The battle is fierce, but in the end, they persevere to push to their limits, their skin charred. Half Gabbie’s leg and arm seared to charcoal. With Apoldyon cast back into the void and all those that created him dead… Gabbie drags them away though the cooling earth.

o

Halfway back to the boat they must rush as the island itself seems to split, its heart cracked and begins sinking into the ocean. Gabbie falls her knee giving out to pain as the adrenaline rushes and is almost incapable of pushing forward, but Star drags her the last of the way and pushes the boat back away from the collapsing land. The water steaming as the heat cools in its depths, the tribe and its hells lost forever.

o

Gabbie passes out during the ride back and isn’t aware, they stay in the fishing village for some days as Gabbie rests, Star taking care of her while she has fever dreams where her mother soothes her in her sleep, her leg pain back in full force and nightmares take over her mind.

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Once they rest and heal, their next stop is the slow walk to the Temple along the southern shores of the continent to the last remnants of the Xia village. Her mother's village, where they spend a few days making rites and burns the body of her mother into ashes, collecting half the ashes into an urn and scattering the last of them among the grounds of the village.

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Over the weeks the two travels to a few places that Gabbie frequented when they lived in the fishing village, the loss of the island bums her out as much of her life was spent there.

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Eventually they return to the shipping city where they spend more time resting before the ship leaves.

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Here Gabbie sneaks out to get a glimpse of Ophel, her first love and a noble, eventually finding her married as she spies the woman through a manors window. A husband and kids around the table as they eat dinner, and she simply watches longingly.

o

They visit the bathhouse.

o

Are called upon by a Midlander, Lord Evenstin, which they later realize is a garlean, who thanks them for ridding Apoldyon and doing this land a favor.

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They eventually return home upon a ship, this time in luxury at the behest of Lord Evenstin, with Miltifan's ashes, and Gabbie's past taken care of.

o

Gabbie's wounds don't fully heal, and she is left with burn scars along her leg and arm.

Dear Family,

I hope this letter reaches you as the sun rises, and by that time… I will have set sail, Star in tow… I don't know when the feeling began but I know now is the time to shut the door on my demons… and my past… but in order to do that; I need to leave. While I was going to do this alone, Star insisted and… I'm so scared… but having him there…

We will be gone for 2 months Eorzean time, but you should still be able to reach us in emergencies.

I’m sorry, Hermana… K’ly… everyone… but this is something I need to do alone… Star doesn’t count… I think. Don’t get to angry at Rowan for not telling you anything… I swore her to secrecy.

Rowan… I’ll be back…

Love,

Gabriella

Dear Sisters,

SEE YOU LATER, ALLIGATORS!

Love,

Star Chariot

“Mama, I’m home. I… came all this way… and it’s about time… I’m so scared, so frightened, so hallow, and I don’t know if I have what you’ve told me. But, I’ve come to take you home to see those golden fields of blossoms you wanted to see once more. In your homelands, the ones you use to paint…”

The ghost of the woman shift unheard by the younger girl, her voice but a chisel in the stones of reality; it was never the fields of home that I wished to see blossom my beautiful Ella… you… you were my fields of gold. You were always my blossoms.

The girl continued to speak as both the man an women stared at each other, aware but unable to express what they thought. “Mama, can I die yet… has the stars allowed it yet?” the stone remained quiet in return.

The woman stood towering a golden glow above the man, her eyes weathered and stormy. My daughter will never love again, she can't… she bared all that the stars have given her. Hallowed are her halls, and the woman you all lookup to is naught more. She has buried herself so deep, her light has diminished, and yet she has done what that beautiful melody has taught. She has given herself over to all of you so completely that she is lost. None of you deserve my daughter, none of you will ever love her like she deserves. For you misplace naively the feelings and energy. If you at all wish to see my daughter love, if any of you wish to love her like she deserves, then love yourselves. It is there that what is left of her will rests.

The girls words continued unaltered in the background, a soft strength the felt of worlds that pushed their way through the stars. "Mama… I don't want you to see what I'm about to become… I don't want you to see the hate I harbored within myself ever since I was born. I'm gunna move you to the mainland, okay. Then I'm gunna come back and finish this… I shall rage at the dying of the light."

The woman who was the echoes of time and space upon this moment, a translucent golden robed spirit, where whence a horn burst blossomed a flower of pure light. And she turned to her sobbing daughter with the barest of smiles and kneels at her side. You will keep her safe, you will pull her back to the light, all of you. She was a world of good to do as the stars speak. My daughter, be strong find the fields of gold I once painted and storytold over and over, find rest among the stars. It isn't yet time for you to pass on the light of the verse.

I pulled on the searing heat, and I could hear my screams ricochet off the emptiness of my sight. I could feel my skin come free like a sleeve and I clutched the balled-up mass of sinews and blood as it boiled at its surface. No pain surmounted the feeling of dying without purpose, nor of sinking into the hot lava that engulfed this Seat of Ash, and here I thought child birth was too much.

I looked for the pure aether as I found him, struggling, the sweat on his brow, and his coat blood soaked and heavy. He pushed and pushed himself beyond his limits. All this I knew because I could feel it upon myself. I then searched the blackness of my sight, for the demon of my past, and the one thing that took all my reasons to live from me. I could feel the gloating, the glee, and the victory that seeped the demon's form engulfed within its strength. My rage grew, my will died, and the pain dispersed as I gritted my teeth.

I could not end like this; I would not fail. Abel, Melody, Mama, and Papa deserved their rest from the things I left to their own. My jacket and shirt torn and burned away into nothing, the swaths of flesh that was missing and boiling, the cuts and pains, none of it mattered anymore. This thing stole my heart, and I would steal it in turn. I would put an end to my past even if it meant losing it all.

I felt the world chill around me as my focus hardened and I buried the light so deep that all that was left was the void within me. The world began to freeze as I felt cold droplets and then crystal water touch my skin. This wasn't about me anymore, I wasn't strong enough, but if I just let it take me all would be well; and so, I let it consume me.

The Winter Wolf charged with her blade held firm, a growl following the whistle of the blade as she cut, not a scream of misery burst forth as she was thrown and bashed around, her body cracking and breaking under the onslaught. But with each strike the ice was left in her wake and the demon howled in pain, and the hot lake hardened. I only saw glimpses of the pure aether as it pushed on and on… the only star in my sky today. If they weren't here today, I would have failed, and this spurred the Wolf forward.

The Wolf climbed as the searing heat of the demon's body shrunk with each moment as the wolf reached higher and higher my blade forgotten at the demon's feet, my humanity lost in the rivers of lava, and the rage at the dying of the light burning brighter then this past would ever allow. She plunged her hands deep into Apoldyon's chest and with labored strength as tears ran form her eyes, the heat eating at her cold skin, she pulled and pulled and with a fall from the darkening form wretched the demon's heart into her hands from demon's chest, to press and crush. The heartbeat against the coldness that wrapped around its song, and the wolf drew on more of the aether of the Lifestream as the pressure of gravity suddenly crushed the organ down under its weight causing it to release an unimaginable screech of pain as the universe itself annihilated it, before it fell into silence.

And in this silence, I crashed into the hardening rock as I felt my back crack. The weight of the compressed demon's heart crushing and pushing me deeper into the stone as I felt the heat of magma rise along my back once more. I howled and wished that in these last moments as my eyes shut, the sight of the pure aether came into view heaving the stone from my chest with all their strength that I could see the stars above me, but I never would.

As Star found himself shoving the stone from atop the sinking girl and he rushed to her side his hands reached to grasp and slip across the exposed muscles and fats, but he held on and dragged her from the swallowing magma. There was no screams of pain, crashing of stone, or words of wisdom in the silence as he dropped to her side. And as he looked her over there could be no other feeling then horror at the skinless and broken body of a woman who only minutes earlier was whole.

Gabriella lurched and shook in pain as her jittering eyes sought out Stars and once she found them she spoke with a harsh and stuttered voice, "You have to get Mama home, please Ani. You promised me." Without realizing it Gabriella hand took his as she pleaded but the moment they touched she gasped. "I can see them, I can see the stars. "

Her eyes stared beyond him in wonder almost lost in her own world. All he could do was kneel there as he tried to keep her alive in this hell. As the girls breathing became shallow and slowed, his heart pleaded back silently. You aren't about to give up on her I would hope, for gods sake, she believed you. Star looked up to find that golden translucent form once more staring back, her eyes a blaze of ice cold embers. I don't care what you believe, you must heal her, or are you not here for this, do you not truly care.

In his eyes he tried to portray his feelings of inadequacy, his inability to heal so naturally, to him all was lost. Nonsense, anything is possible if you believe in yourself or has being around my daughter taught you nothing. Come hold her hand still and take mine. I will channel the aether as need be. You simply focus on healing her like you normally would.

Star slowly took both woman's hand, Gabriella's was cold and stiff, while the ghost of a woman's was light and tingly. The bridge between the two was heavy and as he focused on his friends face that was enraptured in a childlike wonder he found himself still as everything else stopped. Simply believe and let nature run it's course.

Star breathed heavy and with focus he felt the energy the ghost channeled through him and with relief watched as the wounds developed a thin layer of skin to protect the girls body. Her hand warming in his, and her breath became more even. He could only do so much as his body began feeling weak and lethargic from channeling aether. This will be enough, get her out of this hell, and to safety. Take care of her.

He did not wait, nor did he look back as he picked her up with the last of his strength and dragged himself from the Seat of Ash. The lands itself crumbling around them without abandon. He would get them to safety; he knew he had to.

Pondering On the Stars

In the dazzling lights of night, I sit alone watching as stars twinkled in their dancing universe and the sea of black that holds them. I would often ponder of things beyond, let my imagination birth such eccentricities, and feel as if I was solving the largest mystery to ever present itself to me. I never really learned how misplaced I was not until my eyes turned to hers. It was in the eyes of another that I saw the truth of how small the universe was in compared to how big I was in it, at least in her eyes.

She is everything I seemed to want and need. She is the meaning in the meaningless days, she is the life in the face of imminent death, and she is the beauty within the mundaneness of the world--she is love, my love. None of it really makes sense to me, even now as I find myself once more watching the stars, because no matter how hard I look I won't find hers out there. And so, I close my eyes to listen to the enrapturing wind that whispers the most subtle of caresses.

The words I hear seem uttered from stretches of miles of ocean that is soft, quiet and reminiscent of my Mama's voice; "My lost blossom of light, what blessings woe your heart tonight?"
The words "Mama… I don't know" leave my lips and are joined by the inevitable tears that I feel fall down my cheeks.

"Then perhaps this pondering is not yet ready to be pondered? Perhaps your stars aren't yet ready to divine you an answer… if then… why my blossom do you suffer yourself so?", the voice is pleasant in my ear and for the barest of moment I feel the wind brush against my cheeks drying the trails left behind as if to wipe away my tears.

"My stars aren't your same stars anymore Mama…" my words become caught as the wind rushes about to wrap me within its grace and it is followed by the washing of ocean waters as it once more touches the shore.
"My blossom, the stars were never in the sky… that wasn't the lesson I wished to pass on to you and for that I am sorry." There is a soft chuckle of leaves from a tree nearby and a rambunctious cheer of laughter fills the night sky from nearby houses. "Your stars, my blossom, are what is reflected in the eyes of others. They are the tiny bits of your abundant light you leave for them so they may weather their darkness, their suffering, and their pain. Just as you find the same within them."
My thoughts faulter as a choked babble wants to fall from my lips, my breathing becomes a labor, and my head spins. My eyes open in earnest for in the moment as I feel just the gentlest of touches against my cheek, as if fingers dance across my windchill bitten cheeks, and I cannot help to gasp out loud my hands flying to touch my Mama's form.

My eyes widen to see the incorporeal like phantom that kneels beside me with a brilliant golden outline. The stretched smile that tugs on her crow touched eyes, the adornments of fabrics wound and hung like canvases across her form, the messy curls of dark blond hair that cradle her one remaining horn, and all joined by the pungent smell of Meracydian lavenders.

“Mama, Mama!” the tears fall sharper across my cheeks as I cannot help the fervor that I grab at the half-existent form of my childhood with. My mind continues to scream that this could not be real, yet my heart warmed, no longer caring for what was right and wrong.

“I know my sweet blossom, I know”, she says as she pulls me towards her to cradle me deep against her heart, yet I hear nothing. “My blossom, I have watched you struggle, and it has not been easy on my mind. To see you suffer alone has brought many sleepless nights as I wait and I am joyed to see you smile once again, I don’t think the world could suffer much longer to see you dazzle it, I don’t think even I have seen you so happy since you were but five summers on this world.”

She pulls my chin up only for me to fall into her aqua-green eyes and my thoughts wander, but not to her or myself, but to mi amor who lays asleep and tired whilst I ponder in tears at my confusion and folly. Even now staring at the ethereal form of my Mama, my heart much rather be sat beside another, and my mind wonders; ‘is this what love is?’.

Mama’s smile stretches bigger across her cheeks. It is reminiscent of a smile that use to tell me that she already knew my thoughts, but that she wouldn’t be so blunt to embarrass me. “Sadness, loneliness, and confusion is easy to handle my blossom. It isn’t till you are happy that all things in the world become so much more fragile. So easy is it to lose that which we adore that it’s that fear that holds you back from taking what will make you stronger. Love, my blossom, makes less sense than your Papa’s inability to clean his boots, and more so it makes less sense then all the history in the stars and more.”

I take in a breath for a chuckle remembering well my Mama’s vivid anger at Papa only for her to draw my attention forth with a kiss and speaks once more, “yet senseless, my blossom, doesn’t mean it is hard. Love is like breathing, it happens without you knowing it, but when you start trying to control it and trying to think about it, then suddenly it’s much harder.”

My lips open of their own as a thought runs rampant, “But Mama…”.

“No buts, my blossom, but yours into your bed with that wonderful woman who has made my beautiful girl smile.” I feel mama begin to draw away like a lost gust of wind, my hands wrapping to hold her close “Wait! Please!” is almost screamed from my throat and mama stills once more.

“You would love her Mama; I know you would. I wish… I wish you two could have met…” the words fell nervously from my lips while my hands and mind worked at grasping at anything to hold the world still.

“And who says we wont my blossom? I am here now aren’t I. The universe has many ways of playing tricks on us, but just as many to bless us. I already do love her so… you tell her that the next time you see her. Tell her that if there is anyone that deserves the chance to make you happy; it is her. Tell her to trust in her heart and trust in you, she might find that her confusion will become easier to understand. And tell her, my blossom, that out of all the stars of yours, I can see that her’s is the brightest. Now I must go…”

“Mama… I…”, I find myself choking on my words.

“I miss you too, my blossom. Te quero, mi carino.” Were her last words and with the last strength I can muster to hold her here and just as quickly as she came; she was gone, and the wind grew quiet.

I sat alone for a moment with the only sound being the heavy beating of my heart and the shallow labored breaths I would take. Yet in all of this, my mind wanders to mi amor and her suffering and

her pain.

“You are here, mi dulce amanecer. I can feel you right beside me, and I wont ever leave so long as I can help it.” With closed eyes I whisper these words to the night sky in hope that somewhere and at sometime my love would hear them and be comforted by them. Yet as I closed my eyes and now as I open them, no longer am I under the stars, but curled up within our nest with mi amor only centimeters away and I fall once more to sleep to the sound of her beating heart.

In My Fathers Name Part 1

I want to believe that there was always an end to my story. that one day i would be free from the Dystopia parts of my past, but often I was made aware that I would never find that freedom. what better way to be reminded then with the very evils of my past?

The city was as I remembered it, full of life and wilderness, the buildings themselves built in an almost endless sea of stone and wood. The roads chiseled with brick and gravel and the people adorned with short air breathable clothes that spoke more of practicality then fashion. Even the nobles seem to dressed down in fight against the blistering sun that burned the outskirts of the city.

This was not my place I like yet I was back, under the guise of research. I truly believed that was all it would be, I truly believed that I wouldn't be facing the very feelings of fear I once ran from. Unlike last time where Star had accompanied me, I was accompanied this time by Novalynn, my daughter from another star, and Diss the menace of spirits. This cautioned me of my fears and I couldn't help but feel as if I was missing something, as if I had forgotten something important.

The first clue to the dissent was Evenstien's death and Bruyant's lack of response. The once bustling manor was dark and sheet covered, where the maids once took care of me in my mess of flesh and blood, now walked the ghosts of faces that haunted the very wood and stone they once caretook.

"Novalynn, let Diss off his leash and keep close, don't wander" I said, never taking my eyes off the scuttling shadows that habited the manor now.

"Y-you feel that too?" was Novalynn's response as she struggled to get the leash from around the Wolf Spirits vestments. Her eyes betrayed her unease and all i could do to comfort her was step forward, the small Shortsword pulled from its scabbard.

"You remember what I said to do if anything happens, yes?" The girl nodded worriedly in my direction as she too gripped a small dagger that was at her side. I knew she had bare minimum training in the arm, but it was better then nothing.

I creeped further into the manors foyer with my eyes cast about, that first day was reconnaissance as we prowled every room in the search for some essence of life, but found none. If anything else, the manor was consumed in undeath. The very necromantic energy seeped into the veins beneath it.

"It doesn't feel good here, even Diss is scared Mama. I feel icky like something is lingering and waiting." Novalynn stood almost stock still in the center of the large office as I scrounged through the draws and hidey holes. Evenstein would not have just disappeared without knowing something. And the letter had been written in his hand, which worried me more. Someone wanted me here and

they wanted me floundering.

"That would be because it is, trust your gut Nova, it'll be your savior in the worst times. Someone wanted me here and they got it, but they didn't expect you two. Whatever it is most likely is waiting to figure it out before making its move."

"Then we should leave, right?" The girl seemed startled at her own volume as she clamped a pale hand over her mouth. Diss seemed to whine in agreeance.

"Novalynn, Diss; no matter what happens you are stronger then you think. You are to face fear straight in the face and roar, you understand?" The nod was all i needed in reply. "There is going to be clues here to what happened, its time we put our detective hats on and get searching. And remember, what ever this is is more scared of us now then you should be of it. Trust you gut and listen to your heart"

If I was being honest, I was sure something deeper was happening here. the Necromantic energy felt familiar and as we left the office for the well dressed dining room even Diss's ears flattened as we were welcomed by darkness and dreary chairs. A feast was set out with half its festivals molded and rotten where they had been left. A set of garbs draped in a pile at the head seat causing me to shiver as I realized that it was almost as if they who wore them simply vanished.

As we creeped our way into the darkness I nearly tripped over the lingering form of Diss who almost hugged my legs in fright. I looked in the direction of the Wolf Cub's gaze and watched as the shadows bent and twist in place. The eeriness molested my spine, but I continued towards the clothes and reached out. They felt too heavy for something that was made of light clothes and I hid the wince as I felt an energy claw at my arm as I lifted them.

As I scrounged through the pockets of the robes I felt Novalynn touch my arm and she nodded towards the wall where the shadows beckoned. Something was there watching us, we all felt it lingering there.

"What ever it is, its not hostile just don't forget about it. I found a note in the pockets, its crumpled." Gripping the parchment I walked the three of us out, the shadow lurking closer and closer, before I shut the doors between us. As I uncrumpled the letter Novalynn and Diss tugged me away from the Dining hall.

He has returned - look for Heart of Balor, destroy it. dont look into its eyes.

The letter hung limply in my hands after I read it and I felt a cold energy graze my mind. "Novalynn I want you to take Diss and run, don't turn around, don't stop. Find Bruyant. He should be at a dig nearby. Whatever you do, DO NOT be afra--"

I tasted the copper before it filled my mouth my hand dropping the letter as the shadow grasped at my heart from within. I stared Novalynn down with as fierce a look as possible. A feeling of relief as the girl's eyes grew wide. She lurched forward the dagger piercing the fiends energy enough for it to draw back from us.

"RUN!" I watched Novalynn drag Diss away the letter clutched in her hands as she looked to me to follow and I turned blade ready back towards the shadow fiend. "You'll come back for me, I know it... I love you but I cannot let this thing linger here and this is not a fight you are ready for."

With a slash of my blade the wall turned solid as a washing of ice placed a barrier between the children and I, the sound of Novalynn's screams and bangs against the wall mixed with Diss' barks pushing me forward as with a swish of my blade towards the lingering shadow. "This is between you and I, Father..."

In My Father's Name Part 2

Diss watched the surrounding crowds as they rushed by. The weary looks that the wolf pup gave those who wandered too close to Novalynn was filled with ice and fire. Even so much so that as a older woman approached the two of them he showed his hackles and she seemed to take the hint.

Novalynn on the other hand was panicking inside, her eyes wide and red as they would periodically search the crowd for familiar faces and find none. She remembered Gabriella telling her once about her friend Bruyant and where the dig was suppose to be happening but she had no clue how to get there. It was also taking longer to get over the anxiety of what happened.

Her mothers words filled her with both motivation and fear, to see the woman who up to this point seemed so soft, turn hard. She honestly scared the teen girl more then Rowan ever did. Something inside of her seemed to comfort her that her Mama was going to be okay and that what she needed was for her to listen.

Novalynn uncrumpled the letter in her hands as squinted at some of the faded eloquent hand writing, "*look for Heart of Balor, destroy it*". She pondered what that was or what it meant. Gabriella seemed to think Bruyant could help and that he would have the answers.

Diss seemed to bark at nothing for a moment, but as Novalynn turned to reprimand him she had to stop as just out of sight was a lingering shadow of a creature. She shook thinking it was the same creature that had infested the manor only to stop when she saw the almost cat like face that clawed itself to the wall in the alley way. What was even more peculiar was the angel like wings that flapped at its side.

A long tongue protruded from between its teeth as it licked a set of thick whiskers, before beckoning into the alley way. Before Novalynn could stop him, Diss took off after the creature forcing the golden eyed teen to rush after the wolf calling his name.

Novalynn eventually caught up and lifted the white furred wolf who struggled in her grip only to stumble back as the creature flap into her view point picking what looked like bird feathers from its teeth.

"You parentless now fleshy spirit girl?", the creature grinned and cackled causing Diss to jump from her harms to stand with his teeth bared. "whoa, whoa, whoa, calm down Shapey. I ain't gunna hurt you or her. I wanna help."

"You look creepy!" was Novalynn's response to the gremlin.

There was a a echoing "YEA" that caused Novalynn to clutch her head, the voice rattling in her skull, as Diss barked once at the gremlin. Novalynn stared at the wolf as he barked again, the word "Creep!" invading her mind.

"Got a voice now, Shapey? not all bark are yuh?" the gremlin flap down to face level to Diss who snapped at it.

"Ill bite too! I wont let you hurt Nova! She's the best sister ever!"

"I'm sure she is kid, here... i know of a place that you can hide out and a few places to get food. Don't give me that look spirit girl, its fleshy food! Fira sent us to keep an eye on you shrimps and I aint about to be on her not so nice side again, its explosive." The gremlin gargled out as it cleaned one of its wings as it hung from the wall out of Diss' reach.

Novalynn watched all this unfold with wide eyes. First her Mama is stuck in that Manor leaving her alone, then this gremlin pulls her into the alley, followed by Diss talking in her head, and to top that her stomach started to growl in betrayal.

"Y-you aren't gunna hurt me, and this Fira isn't around is she?", she'd rather talk to someone more sensible, but with a wild shake of the gremlins head she let her shoulders drop.

"Look Spirit Girl, your goddess of a mother is gunna be fine, she's just dealing with her own shit, yah? but she aint gunna be able to last long without your help so perhaps you put your big girl pants on.." The gremlin sneers at Diss who glares back. "and in your mangy case, big wolf paws on, and take care of business, ehh?"

Novalynn considered her current position, unsure of herself and of Diss, but Gabriella's words echoed in her heart. If she wanted to be like her mother she needed to breath. She could do this, she just needed to think and with an empty stomach it was hard to think. She turned to Diss, "Y-you can talk?"

Diss lowered his head sheepishly, before crawling into the girls lap, "Kinda, I think. Its gunna be okay Nova, we're gunna beat up grandpa and we are gunna get Mama back, I know you can do it." Almost on cue the wolf's stomach growled as well, sending Novalynn into a fit of snorts. Novalynn turned back to the gremlin who was tugging on a portion of its fat rolls around its hind end, amused by the way it seemed to sag.

"Can you and this Fira really help us?"

The winged beast looked thoughtful, "Ehhh can do my best, but really I don't have that much hit points so... as long as you do the fighting ill do the cheerleading. Come on stop sulking there and lets go! Got an adventure to pursue, plus... I'm gunna get paid the big buckaroos for this!"

The gremlin dashed off further into the alley way and with a puff of hot air the golden haired teen girl stood up brushing her pants off as she held diss against her chest with the other.

"Alright, you can do this Novalynn, you were born for this, just like all Versi are." She followed after the Gremlin with very little faith, but spurred on by the sound of her mother's voice in her heart.

In My Father's Name Part 3 Steel and Ice

Gabriella stared back at the shadow's form with the sinking feeling of being lost. Where its eye sockets should be were sockets that were empty of the Void and even the Lifestream. They tugged and pulled at her trying to draw her closer like gravity wells. She raised her sword taking in the towering creature.

She had to faulter at the obvious form of her father, the hulking shoulders, the curled Ram like horns, but what was unmistakable was the glaive he wielded of shadows. It bit just as sharply as her father's tongue. "*Your are a Gaol! You are strong! Do not let the dirt kill your fields! Rise Versi Spawn, Rise!*" her fathers worlds echoed in her mind's voice.

In that moment of hesitation the shadow struck out, the long polearm nearly piercing her chest, but with a stumbled parry she shoved past and under it's raised arm which promptly attempted to grab at her skull. As she passed by and down the hall she spun her Shortsword, it shone as it cut across the shadow's sinews leaving a cold trail of Steel and Ice.

She sprinted past the Dining Hall and turned the corner just in time to see the shadow bull rush her. She dodged by diving to the side, the sound of the wall splintering and cracking as it barreled through into the connecting room. As she hit the floor she felt the way the shadows at the edges of the hall seemed to grasp out at her and she managed to tug past just as in a vacuum and a gust of air the creature teleported above her and the glaive slammed into the place she just lay.

As It stood above her its face low and close it sniffed and its face stiffened as she stabbed upwards and her Shortsword slipped past its bicep. She watched as it yanked upwards and she grasps at the weapon feeling herself being pulled to her feet at the movement. With her place hanging Infront of the shadows that wrapped around her she used the position to kick against its chest and fling herself backwards and twisted midair, her Shortsword left behind in the shadows chest.

"*You are not as foolish as I remember Versi Spawn...*" its tone betrayed confusion as she stumbled to face the creature a dozen feet away. "*You aren't quite what I remember, you are missing that part which makes you me, makes you a warrior. You are missing the powers of the stars.*" It sneered.

"*The only thing I am missing is my blade!*", her voice did not betray her as the shadow lunged its open hand to grasp at her, but not before she felt the cold burst in a wave freezing the arm in place. Her eyes turned pure white as her skin paled. With a roar in response she lunged herself at the shadow, her hand reaching for the hilt of her blade.

Just as Gabriella felt her fingers touch the chilled metal a sharp cracking of pain slammed into her side as she was sent flying through the wall into an adjacent room only to feel more wood splinter as she slammed into its far wall and fell to the floor. she felt the wood splinter lodged into her thigh as blood seeped from the wound.

The shadow creature lumbered into the room, shoulder checking the wall to open the hole larger for it, and it sniffed again. "*The Versi would be ashamed of you and what you have become, once I saw you as the epiphany of gravity and light, a walker of universes and time, now you are a pitiful fiend.*"

Gabriella grabbed the protruding piece of wood and yanked it from her leg, tossing it to the side as ice crawled across her thigh sealing the wound closed. "*You are not my father, nor the man I remember you beast, he wouldn't needlessly portray himself as a demon*", Gabriella whispered in the direction of the shadows, she steadied herself to her feet.

The shadow laughed as other parts of it seemed to linger at the edges of her gaze. "*I may not be your father, but I am what was left of your memory of him, or have you forgotten all you fought for... fine then let it be that way, let us test your resolve pitiful winter wolf, slayer of gods.*" It lunged at her slamming her through the wall with all its weight and through the following walls.

Gabriella reached for her blade as each crash sent sharp waves of pain down her spine and tried to tug the weapon free. As the beast finally slammed her into stone pillar a unbearable wave of pain sent her mind into a darkness filled with silence. She struggled to pull herself free even as she could hear the howling from within herself and the familiar sound of her father's memory; "*No matter how your strength faulters my flower, remember that you are my daughter and the stars have come together for your birth, remember the gravity of the light that you carry...*"

Her eyes snapped open as the shadow pulled its glaive back to stab forward like a dagger and it looked surprised as her eyes opened with a golden glow. She could feel the overwhelming twist from within, the wolf wanted to hunt. She latched onto the hilt and growled as the sudden weight of the blade tore down the shadows chest, the gravity magic filling its length. The pain forced the creature to retch from her and she slammed into the floor standing tall, the Shortsword piercing the stone floor below it as the energy dissipated.

"Let us hunt, Arktaris!" her voice was a low whisper and it succumbed to the roar of energy as her blade clashed with the shadow's glaive. Her mind focused on the battle field before her. What followed was a weary battle between demi-gods, and the days to come would not see rest. Arktaris and Gabriella fought the very energy of scorn and memory. Her father's visage made in shadow held her equal in strength.

The Winter Wolf Comes

Arktaris came from a part of me that lingered still in the void. It reminded me of everything I sacrificed in order to stand where I do. The cold of winter wrapped around me like a cloak, I could feel little Damir shiver and clutch to my coat tighter with his little fists. His eyes gave me the long suffering look of one fed up with their current existance. How could a little boy not even a few years old give such expression to me, not to mention the the wolfess that stuck her nose pressed against the ground giving me a look of expectation.

I looked around the clearing, I could recognize it for what Rowan descibed to me, I could see in my minds eye the struggle of the little wolfess against the fisher, dragged and played with through the snow. Now as the wolfess stared on, she gave the look of a fierce pirate, one who wouldnt let the world best her again. This was a sad reminder of what the world took from me; a beautiful Melody.

Damir sniffed as I carefully found a tree with roots that would hold him, as the Wolfess stood beside him to comfort and warm him in the cold. It was adorable the way his fists balled in her fur. "Mama, cooo daaa" came his insistant cry of frustration. I gave him a long smile as I knelt before him, adjusting his snow suit made of dark sherpa.

"I know my little star, but mama wants to share a secret with you, and only you, is that okay?"

I got a sniff back before the little boy snuggled up to the wolfess and gave a lick of his lip and a toddle of his head. I stepped back and turned away with my back to the duo and breathed a thin winter air. I never knew what became of the cold or the sounds of the ruffled pines of the tree's as Arktaris awnsered the hesitant call. I knew better then to think I truely had the control I believed so I called with the simplest request, "Teach".

And I was pulled back into the void once more.

Arktaris stretched itself and gave off a long lingering howl into the wind, free from the confines of nothingness, and surprisingly warm. It turned itself and sat on its haunches, it gaze was cold and ajudicating as its eyes never left the small bundles of fur and sherpa. Damir looked up in awe as the Winter Wolf laid its length till its snout was meer feet from the little boy. The tiny wolfess' single eye stared as it moved to stand before the boy.

The boy smacked his lips as the wind brushed and frosted Arktaris' fur, "Mama".

A deep voice, sapping like the cold, yet still in its tongue lingered with the frost across the boys face, "I am not, your mother, nor am I your friend, little black blood. Nor am I your enemy little wolf. A mere moment to a mere fancy. Are you cold little babe?"

The boy's face scrunched up, as the wolfess seemed cowed by the lingering drone of the Winter Wolf's words. "Coodaa" was his babish reply.

"You do not enjoy the cold nights? or that of the winter? no pup of my partner will act as such. The cold is more then simple pain and suffering, it is the rightous state of existance. It is the reminder that we are less then the stars, but more then the tiny heights we stand upon. And you little wolf, what is your name, speak!"

"I-i dont know", it was a sheepish reply as the little wolf open its mouth and came out as a whimper. Damir grinned and reached to touch the wolfess who jumped in fright.

"You do not know or do you not wish to remember, little song?", Arktaris turned its head, its gaze now staring beyond the tree's at the shrinking nebula within the sky. "The more you linger her the more you will be stranded, you must choose. I did not find you in that void and bring you home just so you could pretend"

The wolfess bowed her head, "The Others are coming..."

"The Others will always come, they are both alive and dead, both here and not, that is the haunting reality of life." Arktaris' eyes shifted to the wolfess and then Damir.

"Kiki, is she okay...?", the wolfess laid into the little babe who had fallen to sleep in the freezing clearing, his cheeks pale and his breathing harsh.

"The Kiara of tomorrow is here as well, or have you forgetten what her being felt as?"

Arktaris shifter closer till its head was pressed against the baby boy and the tiny wolfess. "Close you eyes little Melody, let us see what stands before us."

The dream lingered like taste to the tongue, words to the page, and notes to the melody, it was a sight of a future untold. Where Damir stood tall and protective, the suffering of black blood, and rightousness of joy. Beside him followed the void furred wolfess that was Melody. Her protective gaze searching the horizons as Damir gave her a encouraging smile, "We will find Mama, can't let Kiki do all the searching obviously. Plus Mother would be beside herself if she didnt have Mama with."

"Mama, is foolish, she should have never faced the Others alone, I wish she would understand she doesnt have to always be the hero."

"I dont know if any of us would recognize her if she wasn't Mel. You and I both know that her spark shines the brightest. What does she always say?"

"You are all my shining stars in the sky, when I need awnsers I look beyond myself" both their voices harmonizing, before Melody cackled and laughed as a wolf might.

Melody, took a few steps forward, her good eyes softening as the fields of flowers drift in the winds of the plains. "What if Kiki is right, what if Mama stands in our way, what if she doesnt let us stop the Others? she is the strongest thing I have ever met that even Arktaris has lost control of her"

Damir nods, his gaze lost in thought. He kneeles down and runs his hand across Mel's head, petting her ears down. She glares in response before he sighs, "Then we fight, because sometimes love means you have to show eachother the errors of our ways. She needs ot know that the Others are not all there is anymore, she needs to know she doesnt have to linger in her memories of forever more. We dont need shepards anymore. Mina has that under control, the storytellers are locked beyond their own planes. Now we just have to clean up this mess."

Damie's looks out beyond the horizon, "and if we are lucky it will be before Starlight, cause Mother will not be pleased if we cant have dinner and presents this year."

The dream faded as little damie stares at Arktaris his eyes droppy and tired, "Mama" is his tiny whisper.

Arktaris sniffs the boy, as the little wolfess, stares off at the shrinking nebulas. "You arent the most magical of babies, your wisest sister has that for herself, you are so frightened of the cold, perhaps we can start to understand where you strength begins, and perhaps you need alittle help, little black blood."

Arktaris stands onto its haunches and releases a howl that echos across the skies, the sound passing far into the mountains as frost begins to form across its jaws it draws in the cold of the world into its maw. Arktaris leans down and with a breath releases all the frost across Damie's tiny form, causing his skin to blue and his eyes to drop closed, but as he opens them again a small ball of ice floats before him and he reaches for it. His tiny fists clench it and as they do it cracks and a single mote of energy passes through his hands and into his chest.

"The winter is your's black blood, do not let it linger and do not let it fade. A gift from the void, perhaps you will be more then I would ever imagine, perhaps you are what your mother needs. You do not understand yet, but in time you will. Melody, have you made your choice?"

The wolfess turns her head, her single eyes set in determination as she growls at the Winter Wolf. "I will stay, I will help Mama, I will do what I need to"

Arktaris nods its large head and howls once more this time the frost burst forth from its form leaving slopes of ice in their wake. A rumble shifts in the sky as the nebula falls from the sky, its blue hue slamming into the wolf pup who howls in pain. The sound of Damie coldly crying, his hands reaching for the wolfess, and grabbing onto her fur sends the nebula between them.

"The bond is complete", Arktaris stares as the two star-children fall into sleep.

Arktaris turns and walks to the center of the clearing and turns its head to the sky.

Arktaris could feel its powers wane as it relinquished its place in the material to the void. The nothingness of existance lingering as the Last Shepard slipped back from the void. it knew better then to think it truely had the control it believed so It returned Gabriella back with the simplest request, "Learn".

And It was pulled back into the void once more.

I looked about the iced clearing, where the foot of snow had fallen, except a small cacoon of ice that held the wolfess and Damir. With a sigh of relief I stood and nearly stumbled to my face as the pain of the transformation lingered. As I stepped forward, placing a warm hand against Damir's cold face, I could here his breathes.

The wolfess awoke and stared at me with her single eye, before lifting something from the snow at Damie's feet. She turned her head and placed in my lap the ice crusted collar and there written in the jagged writing of a claw was the simplest memory; "Okay M-melody-- you ready to go home?".

The wolfess nodded and as I took one more look at the now permenant iced clearing, I questioned if I was ready for what had transpired here and the futures it changed.

Let Her Rest

October 28th, 11:24 AM
The chill October winds wash over the Cottage as the world welcomes a new star into the world, the silent vigil of the home awaits with baited breaths is broken by the sound of a fussing cry of baby Estellise.

There is a moment of sighing relief from Gabriella, as a cold feeling washes over her. She accompanies her sigh with a smile as she watches her baby enter the world and join her family. Novalynn and Rowan work to help clean Gabriella, but they are unaware as she watches the world begin to grow distant, her breath slow and her heart beating slower within her chest.
Gabriella smiles as she thinks about those she loves, the family she created and brought into this world. She doesn't cry as she sees the panic in both of her nurses eyes, the near cry of Rowan as they both desperately try to figure out how to stop the escaping life of their love.

Gabriella reaches out for her loves and with the brightest of smiles says; "its going to be okay, yeah? I wont be far and we will find each other again, p-please hold me like a promise... protect them a-and--". As she lets her last breath out the cold enveloping her she falls into a cold void where Arktaris awaits who nods. "Another war comes, we must not let them win.
Rowan can feel the cold of her wife's skin and as she reacts it lingers with a cry. The cottage grows silent once more as there is sudden screams as 2 baby's and a dark wolf rushes past Arnor who attempts to hold them back. Mina pushes up against her Ma with a look as she pulls on the woman's arm. Damir looks the be clambering into the tub as Diss leaps using the toilet to go sprawling into the tub along with their mother.

As chaos ensues, the obvious dedication of the three becomes apparent as Mina and Damir starts crying. Diss shifts and soon Kiara is kneeling on her Mama's form and pulls from around her neck the phylactery and holds it out against Gabriella's chest and with a growl and a "no" the gem starts to grow "save mama" The light in the cottage dims as surrounding the family the shaded specters stand guard. "NOW!" Kiara demands as Mina casts a bright light that echoes the shadows of the Others across the room, the warmth filling each of the family.

There is a soft glow from the gem and a warmth, and as the room waits, there is a slow rise of Gabriella's chest, and then nothing, followed by another. The distant gap between heartbeats and breaths significant, but obvious life lingers.

Stepping from the shades a woman stands with a smile, the yellow shawl masking the pale skin and hood, her hands braced with metal and jewels, adn she looks around the room from Arnor whose shadow is also cast across the wall by Mina's spell, to Novalynn who she smiles a proud

smile at her lost daughtter, to Rowan who she nods to in respect, and finally on the three children who all stand protectively over their family.

"My sweet sweet grandchildren, I see you all are going to make my life just as difficult as your Mother has." Miltifans eyes look over her daughters cold form with a sad look and she moves, helping Damir into the bath with Kiara, and knees beside Rowan and Mina.
Miltifan address Rowan, "When I first met you, you floundered and cost me much. I do not know what Gods you have impressed but they seem to be doing you more favors then you might deserve. This one--" She nods towards Gabriella, "This one is mine, our love is okay, the Winterers have managed to make their way past our guard and have attempted to pull her back to the 4th. Her soul now lingers between there and here. Half with Maribeth, and the other half is here with the phlactery."

She holds her hand out to Mina who hesitates before taking it, "let us clean up your Mama". With a shy nod the little girl closes her eyes and holds out her hand and with a wash of Miltifans hand, Gabriella is cleaned and healed, a white gown adorning her body as Kiara gives her Mama a tight hug alongside with Damir.

"Arnor, you are to find Gabriella, alongside Rowan and her friends."

Miltifan looks in the direction of Novalynn, "And you my daughter are to help them but remain here with the shepherds. The 4 of you and your nieces and nephews, are all that stands in the way of Gabriella being lost."

There is a hesitation in her voice before turning to Rowan, "It is with a broken heart that I have to urge you to understand... we are moments from losing a very bright star and the only thing that stands between the collapse of your family and its hope. Trust in everyone, help Arnor find Gabriella and when they get there they will remember what they have to do."

Miltifan gives the woman a hug, before reaching towards Kiara who glares at the woman. Miltifan smiles, "You remember me then, good. She reaches for the phalectry and carefully afixes it the the little girls neck. "Protect that well, little wanderer. The spirits will help regardless of how little we Others care for this. Its time that I start accepting that the path Gabriella has chosen is not the same I created for her."

"Be strong, Nova Vers" --

As the shades disperse the tiny cry of Estellise breaks the silence once more and the cold chill of October is replaced by a cold pulse within each of the family's hearts as Gabriella gives a soft breath and a heartbeat only for the next to come minutes later, followed by many slow signs of

feeble life.