Short Stories

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A Story From Another Time

I can’t help to reminisce while I sit alone in the dark, the sound of chaos muted by the gentle river of thoughts. Its was provocative and was nostalgic, like long weekends outside as a child. Where was my worries then, because they have come anew. If I wait long enough my breathing matches the wind that passes through the window drawing the soft scent of flowers and sunlight. Its cooling to the touch and I can almost feel the cool warmth that it brings across my burned and semi buried skin.

Sometimes I imagine that I’m left in the center of a large library, the walls stretch nearly endless into the sky and around me is perpetual cases and shelves all adorned with leather and metal bound papers drafts and letters; stories. My thoughts eventually cast to sink among the most indefinite plagiarism of the Universe. It feels bitter sweet as almost in conversation with Being itself through that open window, I find a little peace in my wrinkled and shriveled soul as my mind wanders to and fro.

Would I join this collection of antiques and history? Will I be stamped and bound within leather or the hardest of metals for others to wonder upon? Or will the wind take me with it to melt among the stars?

“Which would I prefer?” was the childish voice I imagined upon the wind, a mature depth to its tone but an innocence lost. I wasn’t surprised by this gentle wash of water along my spine. This warmth that left a light lit in the back of my mind.

I’m not even sure what I might say in turn as in merriment the wind turns of few pages of old and dry tomes left upon a nearby wobbly table. The creak of wood pleasant addition to the already silent image.

Merlin, I imagined myself left entirely alone among the stories here within these fabled halls of time. To flip pages with the slowly cracking and wrinkling digits upon my hands. Sure my tongue would dry out among the star gazing, but the words would float through the ever dying age of my mind.

It is almost as if I knew them all along. Where would my story sit? Would it be worth the read, the gander? I wonder if I weren’t me would I enjoy it as if I enjoyed life?

“I already do, you shouldn’t worry, others will too” again is the benevolent reply within the winds touch. There’s a bit of the smell of coal within its path now. Its heavy within my nostrils but earthy among the picture that they conjure.

I open another book and my fingers drop like a soft swing clock as they tap across the first page and I feel my breath stop. Is this it, the last story that I can consume? I can feel my chest fall still as I turn the next page.

“The little girl rushed out in delight as the falling rain fell within the empty streets. Her star like smile left the world happy that day as all the worlds pain was cleaned away.” And then the next page…

“It was another year that has passed as she finds her heart taken to beats of angst, the world didn’t know her name and she struggled to become who she wanted her heart to be. Another man has broken her heart, tears might wash away the pain, but all she wanted was her father’s familiar face . For him to be able to hold her and tell her that everything will be alright”

Another page flashed across my mind’s eye as the scent of coal grew stronger among this cathedral of time, a piece of mind. The sound of the voice among the wind has become tired, but still it held an innocence that I was coming to know well in my beautiful time. I almost forgot to keep track of the suns passing but now the window was almost closed and the moon was passing high among the stars. One blinks out and then another and then another, those left twinkling their own peace.

“The woman she heard the cry of the newborn child. Its grating tone was never a lost moment, but a reminder of what she has fought so hard for. Another life among the stars that would grow and pass its stories into time, bring more life with it. She was beautiful in her own right for being… yet she was no longer that innocent girl who danced in the rain, kissed her father on her cheek as the ever growing flatline grew louder among those hospital machines. She found herself remembering the past with fondness.”

I felt my soul smile against the coldness that held my form still. And as my senses dulled into nothing ness the last glimmering light passing across my sight the voice pressed a kiss to my cheek, “it’s time to leave your story and join the stars. She will always remember your light.”

The voice felt familiar in the back of my mind as the river of thoughts left me. The wind gently turned the last page for me. It ended with this…

“The man she called a father, a warrior, her world stood still the book within his aging hands. The orange leather bound tome heavy as his arms sagged, but his eyes continued to cherish in its peace as they closed gently. The wind picked up and with the softest sound of sand falling apart, his form crumbled into ash to be carried through the finally closing window. The soft click followed as it locked the sound of the young girl’s laughter filling these halls of time.”

Perhaps there is a lesson to be learned at the center of life, that sometimes your story was never about you at all, but someone else entirely, someone that needed you in their life.

I Just Want To Sleep

I just need to be honest with myself and everything; I am not okay and I will never be. And the worst part is that I am entirely convinced that the universe does not care. That everyone around me is to busy to give me a few minutes of the attention, that the people who talk of my importance and how I matter have left me on “read” and in silence.

I haven’t slept and I can’t get to sleep because all these dark thoughts, worries, and heavy ideas are tearing me apart, but damn me for thinking I really matter and that I am the only one. I wish people could hear how I lay in misery and loneliness. Even writing this I know that those who read it will not bring it up because none of them have. I have cried out to the world so much and again… nothing.

All the while I fight to struggle and convince myself otherwise because I inwardly know that I am worth something. That I matter or else I would have never been born. Yet it is hard to convince myself of this when the world acts in opposite. Words mean so little when they fall from dry tongues. And maybe this is me lashing out at myself for my inability to stop my thoughts, to just die like I should? I do not know anymore what I am doing, and I am not myself anymore. I am lost and no one wants to help me only control me.

I cried for the first time since I can remember last Thursday and Friday, it was not much but it was agony and it was not as relieving as I would have hoped. I thinking I am losing even more then myself day by day and I have nothing telling me otherwise.

I just want someone to talk to, something to talk to. I just want to sleep. I really just want to sleep because I can’t beat my skull anymore, both figuratively and literally.

But I am fine… I must be, it’s the only way.

I found that I have been apologizing a lot more lately and I don’t know if that’s a good thing… because I really don’t understand what I am apologizing for and It hurts to know my words are beginning to fall hollow. Either way… I really am sorry to whoever is listening, I’m sorry to myself, but this is the only way.

“With a winter cold face, I keep frosted window pane. No one will see into my house, to get a peek at my pain.” That has a poetic ring to it ha-ha.

My Tiny Noo(se)sance

I thought of poem today, one that suffers in my heart and burns a hole in my brain. It’s sad in a way, but a beautiful approach to the writhing suffering of man in his world. For this man who stumbles unforgiven by himself into the meadows of life knows of his fate but will never know what he gave.

I search for a tree,

Where I will leave,

Within its leaves,

The thing that is freed.

He searches for a tree that many have tried to find one of earth and of presence. The roots perfectly set to hold heavy weight. A resemblance of a carving within the juniper’s bark, like stories and like art. Yet he will never find it in time, I think as his vision turns narrow in his wake. The cold winds as they pass, changing to blow warm and then back sending his body through seasons over and over, a realization he lacks.

There it stands mighty and tall,

Not of great journey at all,

But a branch to hang, that which against my back bangs,

Lest I will be crushed as I fall.

His vision turns tunnel as his walk grows slower, but he has found the courage and power to make it this far and it seems that the meadow has given to his call. Before his is the might of an oak casting shadows from its branches that are like arms while the roots dig far, at least he knows it won’t fall from the heavy weight that he will have to hang from its branches, that is his saint at least I pray and I think.

Now to fashion a resting place to dry the fat and meat,

The rope must be tau(gh)t with all its defeat.

It seems a recipe is in store as I think, the changing of his words and verbiage leaves me wondering what it is he really seems to think. To wonder that I may be just as close as the man’s feats, where they touch across the grounds that are weak. It’s the fat and meat the hangs against his back it seems but I don’t think that he drags his feet. He must stay quiet and sneak, doesn’t want others to know of what it is that he seeks.

I’ve noticed the slowing of the beats,

Against my back, with each passing of heat,

My fingers grow cold, with the changing of seasons,

Yet I tighten the noose, the meat, with salt and pleading, now seasoned.

It seems that time has passed longer and I’m begging to see what’s upon his back as I feel a pang in my chest. Yet he still works in the cold, seemingly working hard to simply find a place to dry his cumbersome meat. He doesn’t seem weak, to take a journey this far simply to make jerky in a tree.

With the last pray as I take a seat at the trees base,

I watch the red skinned meat swing as it bleeds,

From eternal (internal) death in this case,

Upon its dripping blood, the world feasts.

I imagine he has hung the meat now in the tree. The creature that the meat is from must have had internal bleeding, but I don’t understand what’s eternal about this death. It’s not a mythical nonsensical creature he has taken the meat from and hung with a noose, is it? But is he tired and will he wait like I wait for the ending of the story?

The gaping hole I now see, as I take the last breath so I can sleep,

No longer heavy… I keep.

Finally, now he sleeps, the weight off his shoulders it seems. But what gapping hole does he talk about; I think I know what he means. The last breath that he keeps, the gaping hole that seeps, and the taut rope that bleed. I can feel it in my chest as I weep, the cold wind as he sleeps. I’ve been thinking about this poem, yet never was a poet to write my words for others to read. He is Me. I can still hear the swinging of My Tiny Noo(se)sance.

Placating My Mind

Let me ask, what placates your mind more than knowing your right?

What placates your mind more then knowing you were right?

As I walk through tired hells of mine within red nights.

Firelight; of a hearth warmth with home and story. I ask for I am wrong and with that these storms rage on, My mind forever torn with roses and thorns made fond. Its not a hardship of mine that buries my songs, that brings tears that belong to form ponds. I am alone in this battle, long fought.

I cannot know I am wrong without this sight. For, What placates the mind more, then knowing your right? Oh, how it will deceive you, and lie to ensue undue doubt. Doubt in mind of the heart’s internal drought. I am alone in this battle, leather wrought.

I see in this fire that I am wrong, eternally burning with esoteric matter, Yet my mind wishes to ask once more for it despises the latter, Within this feeling of melancholic and mesmeric, Friends, I must ask as I walk through tired hells of thine within blue sights, What placates the mind more than knowing your right? What placates the mind more then knowing you were right?

Simply Will

I wish to tell you of a friend that I once had and the deepest lesson he taught me. Never did it seem so prevalent then now, when all seems lost. You see Will never seemed oft far from the world. While many of us sought the future and what our careers held, you'd find will with a book of some astronomic proportions of narrative drivel, basking in the shade of some tree. Always he seemed so happy to be simply him, and so I give him the name, Simply Will.

Will and I grow up in a larger-than-life world, where there was always some adventure around the corner, something so obvious and everyone would be doing it. Yet Will, well you see he didn't like the almost expectant adventure that oft left us less ourselves at the end. And while id find my self stumbling back from a world of delight, Will would smile and clap me on the back and say 'Ahh, if it isn't the Star in the night, be careful even stars collapse under their own gravity.'

I would shrug off his hand with a bit of disdain and joke with some tired and, in the later years, drunken sarcasm, and he would eventually walk away shaking his head. Every time, I swear, every time he would have such a smile that would evaporate any sense of frustration, and he would turn and walk backwards with a wave.

"Hey, Shiloh! Don't forget to set your alarm!" he'd call out with the most serious of scrunched up brows.

'w-what alarm!?' I'd call back, even knowing what his next words were next.

'The alarm to remind you to smell the roses and live' and with that he would spin on his feet, pull a tattered paperback from his jacket pocket, and make his way into the world beyond. And to this day I didn't understand what he meant. That was until Will walked away for the last time, to seek adventure beyond this world. Its shocking to learn that you took something so living for granted.

Will, was my best friend and I never really told him that. It always seemed misspoken and out of place, to tell him that I love him and that even in those times of frustration he always made sense, at least to my soul. You know, now that I think about it, he did leave with parting words. Words that

seem so Simply Will like.

‘You know Shiloh, people always seem to be looking to the sky, to the stars above and often compare hearts to burning stars. You ever think to look down?’ he said with the most quizzical look about him as if waiting for the world of answers to ambush him from the shadows.

‘L-look down?’ honest I wasn’t sure anymore if there was a right response to Will’s beyond-this-world questions.

‘In the earth, why not a heart of molten iron. Maybe the things our heart seeks isn’t up towards the stars like we think. Just maybe, what our hearts desire has always been here.’ He told me those words the day he learned he had months left to live, god damn it, even then he was not thinking about anything more then enjoying the world he saw in front of him.

I guess, what I’m trying to say is this; don’t trip on the step your taking cause your too busy worrying about the next, try to smile, simply like Will did, Simply Will .

-%-

As I looked on into the crowd all sat in black, the little black folded chairs, and their looks filled with tears, hell mine left my cheeks drenched in the thought that I would know Will only in my heart. I stared beyond the first few rows to each the jeweled eyes of my wife sat with the most encouraging of smiles. Our kids looking more bored and without adventure then I had ever seen them.

“You know, idk if Will would want any of us frowning right now, let alone dressed in black. But he would understand that I think.” I looked beyond the seating to just where the gravel road met the grass and I blinked. As if almost warped in my mind a man stood with umbrella in hand his face half hidden, and a familiar smile. But just as I blinked to look closer, he was gone.

“I-I am so grateful and am better for having known Will, and I know I didn’t get to say it to him before now, but I love you Will and I think I understand what you meant all those years ago.” I turned to face the casket, my hands trembling, and my lip caught between my teeth. With strengthened steps, I stood before the last still image of my best friend.

His hands atop his chest adorned with a suit and tie, but like always his team jersey kept him warm among the white lining of the casket. His hairless face and liver spotted dilapidated skin seemingly beamed back, as like always, even in death his lips were set in a smile that spoke of truths that none of us would ever truly understand.

I was surprised to find myself smiling as with timid movements I adjusted his tie before reaching into my inner jacket pocket and pulling from It the old worn paperback novel. The selfsame novel that Will had read time after time again before gifting it to me. The front adorned with the beagle, the same book that garnered Will to nickname me, “ Shiloh ”. I carefully worked the book into Wills jacket pocket.

Time seemed to slow as my heart hammered and the words echoed in my mind, “ Just maybe, what our hearts desire has always been here.”

I felt a sob wrack my body as a hand gently touched my shoulder as I felt Milly wrap her arm around me. I hadn’t realized but people had moved to stand around to take their own final look before the casket closed. With a shuddered breath, I called out to my son, “ Will, bring me your Mama’s purse !” and in seconds the little blonde boy was at my side, handing the bag towards Milly, and standing to peek at our smiling friend.

“ You pushed me my friend to be what I wanted to be, to write… and I do so remember how much you loved to read. I think its about time you read something new. I love you, and one day we will meet again .” I grabbed Milly’s hand, and tugged on Will’s shoulder, “ Come on, lets go for a walk, get some Ice Cream ”, everyone smiled around us as Will smiled brightly and exclaimed, “ Can we get orange sherbet, dada?! ” and I could only nod as we made our way out, peeking only once to see facing up between my old friends folded hands another paperback with the title, “ Simply Will ”.

Stories from the Silver Isle's

A Song of Lorelei; Unseen Destinies

I can feel the shivered and shallow depths of the ice capped waters that I rest in. The gentle ripples left by the slow-moving islands of frozen death that awaits those caught in their grasps. A floating abyss of quiet and ear shattering silence. Its in these waters that I live to watch the ever-shifting molecules.

My father once told me that the changes in time can be read in the ripples of the ocean's waters. His main point being that of the waters quick reaction to things that disturb it from its slumber. He would look on in wisdom as the school of fish cradled themselves in the warmth of the heat geyser near our home. I was skeptical until the waters spoke of his death and not soon after the waters stilled with his breath.

It was also his wisdom that the earth is the most ordered of Primals. "Earth does not move easily, not without the hammer" were his words, planted in my mind to remember them to this day. But it is on earth that fire burns unwatched, rampant and dangerous. "Man is naturally made of Fire. A Fire deep within their core that surfaces when their frigid waters melt. When the Earth does hold their waters back from stemming their fire, that is when war surfaces and the ocean feels their ripples." Father was wise, I wish he was here. I wish he was here to interpret the ripples in the ocean, for now I must read of their wheel and woe.

I couldn't help the skepticism or the need to look back on my father's wisdom as I watched the kelp that looked strangled in the distance; A few fish floated upon their touch. The Geyser has risen in heat and the whale bone made artifact has shadowed with a storm that brews energy too dark to behold. It bothers me that I do not know what is to be done. There is light in this darkness, but I don't know where to seek this light or how my touch will help.

I couldn't help but struggle as a cold breeze washed through the waves. The feeling of woe passing through the atmosphere and I could feel my gills freezing under the pressure. It was a few moments before the feeling passed by. I could only catch my breath before, within the guise of water born spirits, my eyes were caught by the sight a few mermaids as they beckoned me.

I couldn't hesitate with the signs that were shown, and I rushed after them and followed. Bearing my head to the surface frightened me. The open air pressed down upon my skull and the warm rush passed through my body. It left me shivering, but the spirits nodded my attention to a floating figure, its arms pushing against the waves that mattered it.

The woman's body was colored blue, like mine, the bleeding pink of hair pressed against her skull as her heavy gulps of air left me still in the water as I admired her beauty. I felt the breath catch

within my lungs… my mind whirled as I felt warmth fill my cold-blooded heart. I watched her push on against the onslaught; the fierceness and bravery enamored me. I was nudged to follow the woman by the spirits, and I did so. Pushing my own body against the bruising fight. I did not know what she was looking for or where she was going but I could only push on.

She stilled in the water, her breaths heavy and her eyes lidded as I looked on from afar. The droplets of sea water dripping from her face and her skin glistened in their tracks. Fathers words filled my mind, “There are those that are not of fire, but of a light deep from the bowels of the worlds creation. Those destined by the Primal to move earth, to ripple water, to snuff flames, to gust wind, and to harness arcane. Heroes and villains, those who define history. You will meet one eventually, the waters have destined that, and one day you will know where you are needed. Ask yourself; are you ready for that destiny?”

I turned my head to the spirits to see them off in the distance. They were restrained and unable to further help the woman, the clear look of a worry etched in their ethereal presence. I looked back at the lionheart to see her eyes rolled back and her body attempting to push forward. I’ve seen that look on father’s face long ago and I myself had taken that very same look when I “saw”. I realized then that this wasn’t real. A dream perhaps, but it sure felt real. I remember when I had my first vision where I saw all creatures as soulless entities. Their eyes pure nothing; a void where something should belong. I did not belong here in this realm, but I was needed. This was her vision not mine and it only confused me more.

I will admit to myself that my heart fluttered and plummeted to know I wouldn’t see her eyes. To be able to see her soulless wasn’t enough, I wanted to see her for who she was inside. I wanted to look into her eyes and feel my heart swell with her beauty. I could already feel my cheeks chill as they blushed under her allure; as I was so named for.

A crack of lightning lit up the sky and the crash of thunder reminded me of where I was. The sight of the woman as she struggled against some unseen force within her mind. It scared me, but her bravery as her arms pushed forward struck a chord in my heart and I swam forward my arms stretching towards her.

I don’t think she was aware of my presence as my hands touched her, pulling her forward through the waters, as I pressed my warmth into her skin. Whether through some help or the effect of her proximity, warmth flooded my own form as I used the hammering of our hearts to ignore the thunder that filled the skies. I tried to memorize the feeling of her against me as we pushed forward, the battle no longer fought alone as the ice tried to overtake her and the waters beating her.

I was growing tired as we eventually hit the shallows of an island. The shores almost glass as our bare skin pressed into its frostbitten sands. I pulled her close and with me as she mindlessly clawed her way forward, my hands slipped against her smooth skin, and her eyes flitted across the landscape. I could see the skin-burned sheets of ice that formed across her arms. My eyes latched onto her chest as her shirt pulled taught and parted from its newfound weight. The sight of ink drawn into her skin kept me enamored and pulled the cold from my form even further, a symbol I only saw once before and had long forgotten, but I am sure I won’t forget again; a skillfully etched compass rose against her water blue skin.

A rumble and growl from nearby drew my attention and I turned my head to then shutter in fear. This Spirit was enormous and that of a bear. It shadowed me under its maw as its eyes pierced into my soul. It wasn't long before the Spirit nudged me towards the woman, who shivered against the ground, her arms tried to push herself upwards, but it was clear she was once again under another onslaught of psychic pain. I looked back towards the Spirit before I crawled forward and cradled the woman's form.

I reached my hand to caress her collar and pulled for my Primals. The feeling of positive warmth filled me as my eyes shifted to watch my Spirit Animal peak itself from around my back to study the woman. The small polar bear Spirit sparked with healing energy and warmth that cascaded around us. I could see and feel the positive effect it had on her. It flustered me and filled me with pride knowing that my energies could help even a goddess.

There was another growl and her Spirit nudged me. Its eyes convey the simplest of commands, "leave". I don't' know why, but that truly dug shattered ice into my heart with jolts of pain. My cold heart turned numb as the woman gathered herself and moved forward. She pushed herself up and followed the Spirit into the whitewashed lands without a second thought. My voice caught in my throat as I wanted to holler out. It surprised me to watch as my Spirit rushed off after her, the normally frightened thing, bouldering its way towards the fading forms.

My help was no longer needed, I was no longer apart of her vision and I could feel it, and It pulled my heart to lay in the frozen shore. I felt weak and I could remember my father's last spoken words as I felt my vision darken and I stumbled to un-cradle myself from the ocean floor within my adobe, "There will be a time, when you are needed, the ocean will call you to its behest, and then the waves will move on without your touch. Your heart will swell and warm with love; you should remember that, perhaps in time it will find its way home."

This place did not seem like my home anymore. The geyser that boiled with a gush of heat and the kelp fields that swayed with the water's movement, nor the small cove that I rested within. They were nothing to the fluttering of my heart that lay upon that frozen shore. I was filled with a wish to see that woman's face just one more time, whether in my dreams or in life, to see her eyes and to see her beautiful light.

Battle of Desperation

It’s the painful writhing of the necrosis This Night , the blood pulsing like a drowning arachnid, that wakes me up. The soft divine light that sheds away its light exacerbating the affliction further, but there’s a familiar storm like energy that moves with it, the sound of a jester’s laugh in the silence of my echo chamber. The dark nightmare playing once more in my mind’s eye leaving me feeling numb. I wasn’t meant to be on deck that night, to think that had I chosen to fall asleep I may not have had the chance to react.

My hands had been stained black with the ink that painted itself into the parchment that was pierced to the table. I remember the feeling of cold and the sound of the waves washing upon stone in the chamber; It can be quite irritating when one only wants to concentrate. The already sleepless nights becoming even more so. I just couldn’t tell anyone that I haven’t really taken a trance in days, let alone truly slept. I felt anemic and broken, I still do.

Hearing the story of Cordelia, and her struggle to return home after abandoning it for freedom, that hit home. Is that what I was doing all this time? Would father be irate with me? Could I return to be what it is that he wished for me to be? Those are the thoughts I was able to get out, not even answer, before the sound of the water stilling drew my attention and then a choked scream. MY head whipping up to stare out the double doors of the conference room to watch the figure drop the life drained corpse with a heavy thud.

The stench of death filled my nostrils and my throat with vomit at the sight of the creature. Its large form hunched, its bulbous nose thick with scabs around its nostrils, and the heavy dark robes hanging open. The abundance of necklaces all strung with teeth, ears, dried eyeballs, and other entrails of humanoids probably once killed by this creature. It was obvious to me that the pink leathered skin stitched along his left ribs was not his own, nor were the other various stitching of skins along its chest. Some holding partial tattoos of its once owner. The sea troll turned its red gaze towards me and with a sickening grin, his serrated teeth showing in his black maw, the rosing tentacles all hanging like a beard around his lips dripping a mucus to the floor with each lumbering step.

My eyes dart with a quick glance at the staff held within his hands as it walked itself besides him with its own clomps, the gem at its zenith seeped with a dark necrotic pulse. The bodies that littered the deck, a few in mid throes of soundless screams as the skin wrinkled and darkened, the fat melting away from the body as amidst the screams they vomited black and green mucus that

evaporated with a green energy that was whisked into the gem of the staff. The grin frightened me to my core, and I could feel the tremors within my very being.

The creature, dare I say vestige, lumbered forward hand outstretched towards me. Its claws yellowed and black as he gripped a tiny pebble of dark stone within his hand. “Look towards me half one, you are powerful I can feel it, the weak have been culled do not worry for you have use…” Its voice a growl that combined a grinding of teeth with the lick of a tongue along its upper lip. The voice was interrupted as it was stopped in its tracks, the purple scaled form of Cordelia’s draconic friend slammed into and its teeth shredding into the forearm of the troll.

That was enough to throw me out of my fright as the troll grunted in frustration the heavy thud of the faerie dragon slamming into one of the double doors before me. A clomp of the troll’s staff against wood sent a pulse of necrotic energy about it and from the corpses awoke my horrors. The bodies shifting and snapping back, their spines twisted to reform as the undead pushed and crawled their way to life. The sound of thuds and crashes below deck brought more crawling humanoids upwards. “Stupid and weak… you will suffer for that…” An explosion was emitted as my hands scrambled to my staff and with a familiar energy within of the storm sending sparks between my fingers, a small bead of flame emitted from the staff and slammed into the ground before the troll and sending a few of the undead flying overboard. There was a crack of the storm from within me and I vaulted myself towards the Faerie Dragon while diving the last feet to land prone my hand grasping about its tail and pulling it away from a sickening bolt of necrotic energy. The squeak it gave me was a comedic moment of the dragon’s head glaring at me that was short lived as from the smoldering embers the troll stood untouched its grin now a snarl.

“I see, quite powerful indeed. Tell me, you are young… perhaps you would wish to join me… no, well I wouldn’t have taken you living at least… very well, a messenger I keep for those fools to find. Let us test your might little sorcerer.” The troll smirked towards me and with its last words, my tongue caught in my throat.

I remember the days my father’s head mage had learned of my inner powers; upon his tower I had come into contact with a storm so strong that it filled me with joy. I remember the days spent learning magic and learning the ways of a knights dual and a wizards dual… Mage Walrist I had always thought to be the most powerful elven arcane user I had seen. The stories of his battles both in competition and in the wars before spoke of his this even further.

But the dual that followed with the troll surpassed this. It left me drained and it left me… dead inside… the storm abandoned me as I slumped against the saloon’s walls. The troll watched me from a few feet away admiring the damage surrounding him. The blackened spots and cracks along the ships haul striking points of my lightning bolts. A layer of ice filling a large area about him and

a heavy darkness that filled with a vapid necrosis filled the deck, remnants of his lazy or uncommitted spell work. A sign that he hadn't even tried and simply let me run myself out. He hadn't even moved only turned to keep his red gaze with me. "Who are you? " were the words that fell from my lips in a tired breath. The sight of the faerie dragon peaking from behind some broken crates ready to pounce before stilling at the shake of my head.

"You are worthy, little half one. I am Sollix, the Damned to Drown, the Soul Carver. Your power intrigues me Talia Permin, an heir apparent Permin of Karn. Where did you find it?" As Sollix drew his staff back to the crook of his arm, he riffled through his robes. His words made me feel defeated and broken.

"Why don't you just take it from my mind like the rest!?" I felt a bite of frustration bring me strength, but with the amused look Sollix gave me I slumped further to the floor. "I found it when I was young, inside myself… a storm struck me when I was younger and again on a mages tower…" my voice faltered as he step forward to kneel down by my side. I tried to move but I felt the spell take hold of me and keep me still.

"An interesting insight into magic… why they would leave such a valuable sorcerer aboard a ship to waste it's abilities… Either way half one, I have need of a messenger and with your close connection to those 'Heroes' and that savage princess that wander the sea floors, I think you will do nicely. Don't worry, as a gift for your worthiness I will leave this one alive." Sollix nodded towards the dragon and a small sense of relief filled me. " As well as yourself. Such should not be wasted and maybe in time you will see and favor what I am doing."

I eyed him, my lips barely moving as I spoke, "Why, what did we do?" I felt tears fill my eyes in shock. I just didn't understand what happened. I had tried my best, but he spoke of the others, so they must be safe. I closed my eyes as his claw brought that stone close to my neck.

"To bring the world to order, so those who think they should rule through name alone will understand that Magitocracy is the only path and those who control the powers should rule. To return that which was rendered from this world by those with stupid goals and notions of morality and ethics. You have a strong will, Stormsinger. I wish to hear your storm sing one day, so that I can truly see your power so I may emulate it, control it. I wouldn't stay here long the others are beginning to reawaken and they like the taste of flesh." With a press of the cold stone I felt heavy sting in my neck as it burrowed its way into my flesh. It was oddly painless for those few moments but as a flash of green light filled my vision my body writhed in pain and my throat become horse from the scream that ripped its way from my throat.

My vision turned black and with a pulse of energy I felt my strength begin to return as I blinked. The feeling of a kick against my side as I turned to find the faerie dragon screaming at the undeads that lumbered their way forward. I could feel the red eyes watching from somewhere, but I couldn't find them and as one of the once crew, a dwarf, lunged towards the dragon I raised my hand with a charred stick pulled from my ripped tunic. A blast of lightning slammed into the form encompassing the area in light and burning away at the tatters of its clothes. The undead being pushed away by the blast of energy. Another lunged towards me this time its hands gripped at my shirt, I in turned lifting my free hand to grasp at the biting skull and with a burst of lightning the creatures head popped covering me in its gore. Then I turned and with that free hand I grasped at the dragon as

with a flash of lightning I felt myself get tugged by my inner storm to land upon the Forecastle and I took a breath as the feeling the lightning bolt slam into another undead below and in the process leaving another flash of light to cast its way in the chamber.

It was dark and cold as I felt myself shiver as I watched a few more crawl their way from below. I felt fear fill me and a regret pushed its way into my heart. As the red gaze seemed to shift away to leave me alone, I concentrated while I grasped the Faerie Dragon close and with a burst of lightning, I found myself wobble to being sickened, at the sight of the captain's quarters I felt relieved. Rushing outside into the conference room I grabbed the staff that fell to the floor in my panic and I glimpsed the rushing undead forms as they made their way into the room and with the last bit of energy I had I sprinted back into the quarters. Turning as the undead rounded the corner I let the last two embers within the staff fly forward and two explosions left the entrance to the captains' quarters in flame as I slammed the door closed. I let out a tired and wobbled breath before I grabbed the vanity and with the dragons help, we pushed it to seal the door closed. I slumped to the floor the last of the energy leaving me as my eyes began to darken.

"What would Barnaby do? What would Clarence do?" I whispered in my horror and exhaustion, before a voice filled the room.

"I gotcha okay, so just rest and we will watch over you. You guys really need to stop getting into trouble or someone's gunna get killed... again." I couldn't even see, as I opened my eyes to darkness to frantically look about. "Ill keep his nightmare away, but I can't do much else so try to be strong… and for Luna's sake don't die. I don't think I could explain this to your captain." Before I could ask the voice answered my inner thought, "names Cesper, but you can call me Philip, got it?"

With a moment of tense fight or fright I felt myself give up and I soon followed suit. I slumped prone with my eyes closed and let out what felt like my last breath. The feeling of prickling pain burst in my neck superseded by the need to sleep.

The nightmare I lived in the time to follow, before waking up to vomit in Barnaby's arms, were moments I wish to never relive but I know I will be reliving them the rest of my life. That and the pain of Necrosis that now fills me are reminders that I need to grow stronger. I don't ever want to feel so helpless again. I return back to sleep This Night just like the last few nights to endless suffering, wondering if I could ever feel inner warmth again, and whether this necrosis could be healed.

Samara's Insight

Sam – do you know what it is like to feel pain, from the loss of love never gained?

Muse – What do you mean?

Sam – It must be nice to live where others have framed your being. I was stricken and thrown from my people, and then yours, long ago.

Muse – And why were you excommunicated from your people?

Sam chuckles and Muse looks on in wonder and curiosity.

Sam (flippantly) - because I loved someone, because I loved a woman, because of love.

Muse – You loved? That seems preposterous… (unsure) What was this woman's name?

A smile stretches across Sam's face and she almost dances merrily in place.

Sam (tenderly) – Juniper, they called her Ezthra, but I called her Juniper.

Muse – Juniper, you loved her? You speak as if they call her nomore.

Sam (growing angry and then softens) - They killed her, they thought her tainted by me and drug her to the queen's feet to be skewered like a rat. Gutted with her heart pulled to dangle like a necklace from her throat. I couldn't do anything but watch from my knees. Then they changed me and forced me above to suffer with the memories.

Muse – And how did they change you? Did you at least get a memory to say goodbye to this love?

Sam falls into a state of uncontrollable laughter, almost keeled over, before straightening back into a gentle pose.

Sam (inwardly hurt)- no, she didn't know my name and found me hideous faced. I wasn't like this before, they forced me into this… sickness.

Muse (thoughtfully) – hmm, she didn't know your name? What is it your implying?

Sam's visage seems to shift a furrow into anger, her eyes darkening and her back hunching under the tense pose. Muse feels a different aura cast from the woman's being as she interrupts him.

Sam (angry) - I watched her from afar, we never spoke, SHE DIDN’T KNOW MY NAME! that is what I am implying your insolent fool, she was dead. has your wisdom been drug so far into the abyss…?

A breath is released, and Sam stills and slackens back into a softer pose.

Muse (knowingly) – Is that why you seek power? To bring her back.

Sam fills the room with tinkling laughter.

Sam (softly) – if only it was that simple (darkly) I have done things I wish I hadn’t, more than a fool like you would understand. (tears up) I wish I hadn’t done it…

Muse (worried) – What have you done, woman!?

Sam (tearfully) – I need power to fix her… to put her back…

Muse’s worry grows as Sam shifts in place to stand far away from the sage.

Muse (pointed) – Where is she? Where is this Juniper?

Sam’s face furrows and then stretches in a grin, her eyes darkening and muse notices with a wince the red bead of color staining her iris.

Sam (both fearfully and savagely, two voices speaking almost at once) – I am (she is) right here.

To Be Continued…

The Crown rests in Perl

When the crown rests upon pearl, to see the dragon’s future, and evil rests before the crowns hand, like thorns in his death time will be spent and kept. For the dragon’s rider must meet fire to the flame of her destiny.’ Those were the words that were emblazoned within my mind’s eye. Claw Night’s words always ran through my mind like sharpened blades. An unfair future for me, but a glory I accepted when I took an oath from my throat to his blade. The rain stung just enough, and I found myself pierced with another blade from that mages staff, this one too faded like ice to water.

As I fell, I was reminded of all those long training hours in my youth. The war formed exhaustion that I had not felt up to that point in a while. Claw’s blades like a storm that grew violent and red but these blades weren’t his; These blades were of my death.

I found my eyes wandering as a yell drew my attention, the sight of the others rushing into the courtyard, the obvious ploy and trap finally found out and the butchered troll would be stopped. ‘At least I would leave them with a quarter of his power to deal with’ was my thought as a reminiscent chuckle left my lips and for a moment it sounded more like that of an old friend. I counted on them, Lady Cordelia and her friends, the heroes this moment was truly divined for, to bare the future for. My sight of the battle was lost as I toppled only to be replaced by the heterochrome amber brown and blue eyes that stared down in shock.

“It has been a long time since I have seen those eyes stare back at me, dragon rider, a long time since I have been frightened of the future.” I mumbled and watched the young Nara stare at me unsure and confused. “Your mother was always kind to me as a child and later in my life. I only regret I wasn’t able to convince my father to let her free sooner. And your father was the steel forge of my life. More so then any other.” Both our attention was torn for a barest of moment to watch as the Soul Carver rend the earth in two, sending us toppling aside, but it wasn’t long before I was gently lifted and a hand pressed into my chest stoppering the bleeding to the best of the young rider's ability, the feeling of the divine energy withering as she pressed her divine powers to heal. I knew this feeling well, “when fate choses your destiny, no magic can thwart the Tapestry, those were your father’s words …” I coughed as I looked back and forth from the sight of the group exhausted, wet, and enraged pressing harder into the fight with the Soul Carver. I could see his power weening and pride entered me for them, for Cordelia. I turned my head back towards Nara as she finally spoke.

“You knew my father and my mother?” Her voice was meek and shocked as I could tell my death would weigh heavy on her even with those words. “You saved me too?” and now there was also confusion.

I could not help feeling the pain seep deeper into my organs as my vision went blurry. I had not even noticed the quieting of the courtyard as the rain stopped. I squinted against the blurriness

and I watched the glaive tear itself from the troll's form as it toppled and Cordelia step back her spine arched and the exhaustion evident before she turned on her heal rushing towards me. I turned my gaze back upon the teary eyed tabaxi and nodding a short nod, "He was a father to me and your mother a healer long before that. I was the one to help protect her from the mountains to the monastery and I…" I fell short a blackness consumed my vison but struggling I found myself back, the others surrounding me. Bleeding into the courtyard, those fighters who came to protect against the evils outside wandered in. Many of their faces in shock and many eventually found acceptance at the sight of me.

I looked towards Cordelia and found myself smiling before turning once again towards the young face full of tears next to me. It still shocked me the resemblance that Nara had to them both, and more so the sight of the bronze dragon the lumber over us watching on. I noticed the obvious nod of pride towards me form the being. "Disguised; I was the one that left you with the Tomfellows." I looked towards the crowd and then at Cordelia and as I gazed at her face, I realized I could not tell if she was crying. Lifting my head and feeling Nara's hands help me up I looked about and hollered, "Listen Brothers and Sisters, I lay here having done my duty to not only you, our family, or the Silver Isles, but also to the world, to Eldar! I spill my blood for all of those under my wing and our nest! And I did not fear, I did not faulter, I did not hesitate!". I coughed and quieted before calling out feeling my voice weaken, " nor shall you… You know of what I expect of you, Listen well to me and spread these words… The Bloody King of Roedaren will not wait for you to learn to fight, he will not wait for when it conveniences you, he will not wait for your nest to grow! So do not wait for him, follow those who will see his downfall, rise up and carry each other and love who you are and cherish the nest…"

As the numb feeling my body had entered into caught up to me and I felt my eyes wanting to slip shut I pushed hard for a third wind… 'one more' I pleaded to the Moonsisters as they gazed down upon me. "Listen Brothers and Sisters, stand beside your new queen, stand besides Lady Cordelia, Queen of Maristela and The Silverrise Waters, Champion of Light, bringer of peace to the lands of the Silver Isles, Slayer of the Soul Carver! Nara, give her my amulet and do not cry, this is not the end for you, you must stay strong."

As Nara reached for the symbol hanging from my neck, the silver eagle heavy in her hands she hesitated before pulling it from my neck and handing it over to the surprised triton woman. I looked towards Cordelia, her face set in shock, and I spoke directly to her as my eyes began to close, "This will prove all you need to others, no other can bare this amulet without the permission of the family of Silverrise. You must see that Nara finds her destiny; the Dragon Riders must return. Take care of our nest, take care of my brothers and sisters, take care of all…you are queen now, you must not waste the time we have. I am proud that you have proved me wrong, you are strong, and you should not fear, your father and mother would be proud of you, you are going to be a strong queen to all. When you feel Ana is ready, help her take her seat."

My words faulter as I watched her lips move and a high-pitched noise coiled into my ears. My vision blackened and with each beat slowing, the soft soothing sound of a song I had not heard in a long while pierced the last moments of my life. "The eagle flies to be free, and it must spread its wings, leave the nest with the wind, you are the eagle that will set us free." And then a singular thought as the sound of Mellow Nights voice lulled me into sleep, 'I am free and will be waiting to see you free'.

The Severance of Sol

It was an exhausted broken breath that left me leaning against a splintered fence pole. My eyes wandering to watch as a local farmer as he dragged a cart loaded up with a thick yellow rind fruit and as he passed a flood of a heavy burnt spleen smell filled my nostrils and left me gagging to choke on my feeble breath. The farmers eyes turning to watch me as he passed causing me to pull my heavy cloak about myself in my embarrassment and insecurity.

Turning away with a huff and looking into the roads distance, the large cathedral buried in the mountains wall, the colored glass windows sending a scatter of rainbows in the nearby waterways, I found myself fruitlessly dragging the heavy boulder behind my trail. It weighed a ton and I hated it. It was a useless job for a useless fellow. To think Kril'grox wanted this test to pain me and leave me brain dead. I wasn't stupid and knew of his attempts to end me, 'A proper apprentice dies at the follies of his tasks.' It may be considered a test to some, to others like me, it was torture.

I worked damn hard to gain the merits of a disciple of the Sun. To be spat upon by those that called themselves good willed. I wasn't even sure why I continued to study under their terms. Rumors of the Silvered Isles to the far south presenting a freedom and advancement in recent years, perhaps I could find a place there. Maybe I am stupid, I grunted in frustration as with a heavy tug I pulled the boulder further along the path.

I could measure the sun's movements as the time passed, the boulder proving to strain my already breaking spirit. I left my village to get away from the fears, bullies, and darkness. Yet I only traded one master for another.

'Bring the boulder to the cliffs, that way you can drop it in as proof of your strength of will. I will not have you cheating, and he will know of your heresy if you do so, do you understand?' I had nodded my head then when Kril'grox said those words, but now that they played themselves in my head again, I once again grunted at my own stupidity. With another heavy shove the boulder made its way further and further.

The closer I got to the cliffs the more I found relief, only a few hundred feet left along the back end of the Cathedral. Sure, it was uphill, but at least it wasn't too steep of a trip. I think after this I am gunna return home. The other masters spoke of letting their apprentices make their way home to reunion with their families and I don't think it will take much convincing of Kril'grox to let me do the same. I wonder if Maey would be happy to see me. It has been a few years since we saw each other

it would do wonders for my sanity to hear her voice once more. At those thoughts time seem to pass much faster and the path dwindled away in thoughts.

I let out a relaxed breath as I watched the waters wash against the cliffs base. The smell of salt and the warmth of the setting sun washing over me. I finally made it with my test complete. I only needed to wait for Kril'grox to watch on in witness. My mood darkened as the sun set and I took a moment to clutch under my robes at the holy symbol that felt warm to the touch. My prayers were usually simple, but this time with the recent thoughts of Maey I went much simpler. "Let Maey live happy, that is all my Sun, for I have no other purpose." I smiled slightly as a burst of warmth filled the symbol; That was until it turned ice cold.

I felt my body lock still and my hand tightly gripping the metal and it pierced into the skin of my palm. I tried to blink, to move, or to speak, but nothing seemed to work. I felt my heart turn cold as, barely perceptible, I felt a snake slither at my feet. Its tail wrapped and twisted about my boot's ankle. Its form morphed to that of a tightly knotted rope that melded into the boulders surface besides me. Fear took over my mind as without a moments hesitation the boulder began to roll, not downhill, but towards the edge of the cliff. It teetered for a few moments, my heart hammering as I struggled against the magics that held me.

A voice filled my ear, "I have seen your heart, you blither fool. Your heresy to the sun and will be judge harshly and the Sun will be better off without your darkness in the weave. You damned to be drowned, human heretic." With that the boulder tipped over the edge and the heavy tug sent me falling. My head cracking against the ground, sending stars in my eyes, and the spell was released causing my body to slacken. It was to late, my hands clawed to find purchase on anything to stop the dragging. I felt my fingers snap and brake as I tried to grip at the edge. My arm being ripped from its socket as I plummeted over the edge.

I don't understand. That was all I could think and hear in my head. It washed away the scream from my lips. I only got a few thoughts before my body slammed heavily into the waters surface as the boulder dragged me deeper into the waters. My body was so fragile as It took on a frantic mind of its own; desperate to reach the surface. It was like all my training was lost in this moment. Eventually, my body stilled from its attempted escape. I was left to wrinkle and drown, but in these last moments my mind tried to reach out to a singular person. A plea for help, yet none came.

Nara's Escape

The Escape of the Bonded

Within the broiling acidic waters of the belly and current cage of Nips and Kildren the two stomped about as another wash of sea water cascaded to fill the belly further. Nips clamored upon the slippery back of Kildren, the dragon grumbling at the thought of having a rider of all things, and Nips took a moment to stare down at her scarred and hairless legs, the broken leather armor, her melted sword, torn clothes, and the bone carved flute stuffed within her belt. She let out a groan of exhaustion before she found her grip on the dragon as the grumbling of Kildren filled the room.

“Remember stupid child, hit fast and hit hard. Its either the front end or the back and I’d prefer to not get sick.” The dragons head turned to stare piercingly at the small tabaxi, and its eye spoke words where his nonchalant gait did not. He shifted about to face the front of the belly before continuing his directions, “When we jettisoned out its going to be rough so hold on tight and mind my wings, I can’t control them as well as I might hope so no apologies if you get smacked in your empty skull.”

Another wave of sea water washed its way in splashing to sear at what was left of Nips legs. A roar from Kildren left vibrations in the surrounding walls and from within the young bronze dragons throat heavy burst a lightning that spidered out against the entrance to the kraken’s stomach charring the fragile skin surrounding it. With another roar Kildren brandished all his weight against his claws as he pushed forward tearing further into the skin taking large chunks of flesh with each pull.

There was a visible shake as the innards of the Kraken wavered under the onslaught and Nips watched shocked for a moment, her hand reaching to grasp at the necklace around her neck, and with a soft warmth from within she shook herself to focus. A burst of Blue energy shimmered out from around her as Kildren’s claws that continued to rip at the flesh flashed with and were joined by lightning and thunder that torn and reverberated the flesh even further. Another burst of darker and stronger energy nearly blinded her as she closed her eyes tight.

From within the watered floors and the various sea life that grew within, spectral vines and leaf covered wood barks grew to push the throat open further. The divine energy channeled to strong arm an opening for the two.

For a moment the two felt weak as they waited, Kildren’s last clawed effort resounding with a boom of thunder before he stood back to stare at their work. Nips opened her eyes watching as the spectral vines continued to pull harder and harder. “I do not know if it worked Tomsfellow…”

A sadness filled her lungs with cold breath, that thought of ‘ No this cant fail!’ filled her head and with a grunt she squeezed her eyes tight and her fist tightened against her necklace; ‘Please I need help!’ . A deeper and unimaginable flash of energy pierced the walls as the vines gave way to grow not spectral, but of moss and real white wood bark tearing and piercing the creatures flesh

uninhibited by its strength. There was a shake and convulsion in the Kraken's innards as a rush of air pulled the contents of its belly towards its throat.

Kildren reared his head with a roar, "Yes! Stupid child do not stop! Hold on tight and for whatever purpose do not pull out any of my scales!" The air pulled hard as the vines twisted and turned, Kildren and Nips were given a glace behind them as the air turned them about. Kildren was surprised to watch as from the bellies floor a tree grew; one of white pine bark and crimson leaves.

"Well let me concentrate you Stupid Dragon and maybe I can!" came the holler as Nips lowered her head close to Kildren's neck, her hand clutching her holy symbol tight, and the other digging her claw into what ever flesh she could find along Kildren's back. A deep voice rattled her skull with each pulse of energy, 'Keep calm, you'll find your way. I will watch on; find your friends as they may need your help sooner than later.'

Any thoughts were interrupted as the dragon was picked up by the force of the contents pushing him out and through the Kraken's throat. With the last glimpse of the tree's roots growing into the monstrosity's inner walls, the duo was thrown forth into the dark and cold depths of the surrounding ocean.

Nips was in shock as she blinked her head tumbling as it took a moment to come to focus on the surrounding waters. Kildren nearby was quicker to grab at the small form nudging her back into to place, 'No time to lay around stupid child!' were the only warning and words that slammed into Nip's head. She turned about to see the colossal form of the Kraken they once were trapped in writhe in pain as tree roots pierced out from its form to tighten and wrap around it. Its deep crimson eyes glared but remained still as the tree's growth finally began to still.

Nips only got another glance as Kildren pushed off into the waters beginning to propel himself further through the waters. She watched as hundreds of yellow eyes turned to stare after the two before making chase.

The water pushed back against the two as Kildren tipped himself upwards swimming to the surface of the waters. The pressure of the waters rippled and pressed against his scales causing grunts of pain to fill his throat and a fear of failure filled his mind. But with each meter up that he swam it became easier and easier. What was fearful was the distance being gained by the spawn behind him. An obvious advantage to their underwater nativity.

He craned his neck to search and as they pierced over an underwater cliff his eyes caught the sight of buildings all strewn across the sea floor. A city that seemed to stretch as far as his eyes could see and he felt Nips nudge him her voice filling his mind, 'We can lose them in there!' fear filled his lungs as he remember the words 'a dragon did not fear', his mother's words before she would attempt to crush him under her weight. From the dark of his mind Nips voice pushed forward, 'Trust me! I can guide you!'

Kildren did not hesitate as he twisted his form following the words of his rider with the ever-growing mass of krakens that followed behind and the ever-growing fear that filled his head. ‘You need to tuck your wings as close to you as possible! Use the buildings to pull your self through the water and make quick turns! Maybe we can find a place to hide that they can’t reach!’ Kildren had to admit that he was impressed with the little ones bravery, that is if he hadn’t heard the shake in her voice as she spoke, but with a nod and another heavy flap of his wings against the water he pulled his form closed and propelled into the tight streets of the drowned city.

The quick chase was a lot for the dragon’s eyes to keep focus as buildings passed by as blurs. Every opportunity to grab at the ocean floor was another propulsion forward as he waited for the feeling of his rider’s intent. He could feel the relief as Nips watched a large portion of the chasers break off to wait in the distance above the city leaving a few to try and follow alone. The sound of stone breaking was heard as one went headfirst into a building nearby was signaled by the feeling of cheer from Nips.

‘Break!’, the stupid child’s scream filled both their heads as Kildren dipped down pushing all his weight against the sand. They slid as he ground himself against the ocean floor and his eyes turned wide as the intersection before them came to an end in the form of a stone building. He felt her intent and with that he let go of the ground aiming for the corner of the building that turned right into the intersection. He twisted onto his side and with a surprising quickness, even for himself, used the corner to pull himself forward. Another deft turn and with a whip of his tail he braced himself as what was left of his momentum pressed against the stone of the far building before twisting once again to turn once more before slipping into a long stretch of a street. The pain overwhelmed him for only a moment when with a flash of blue light, he felt the pain subside, his rider’s healing powers were joined by a whisper in their minds by her, ‘We lost them for now! Be quick but slow down!’

Kildren knew his form was bulky and heavy. He wouldn’t last long in these tight corners but with the chasers forced to follow above instead of behind he was at advantage in some ways. Knowing that just twisting and turning throughout these streets wouldn’t get them anywhere he rose up from the ocean floor to fly for a moment just above the buildings rise. The moment gave their chasers a glimpse of them, but off in the distance he was able to pinpoint a larger building that rose above the rest. With his task done he dipped low to the ground and quickly slowed to turn into an even tighter street as they began shifting and turning through the maze.

‘We need to move quiet; I think I have lost them again’ Kildren thought and waited for a response as he prowled through the oceans floor, ducking under a shadow as a set of krakens swam above them.

Nips took a moment to breathe and release the tense muscles that threatened to spasm. ‘Where do we go?’ She thought into their connection as she looked about at the black hewn stone of the buildings intent on figuring out where they may be upon the ocean floor. She couldn’t believe they had made it that far but knew that Kildren was growing exhausted and to push him further would not be good.

Kildren came to a stop just before they would exit out into a larger street and taking care to try and press his form against the buildings shadow. His eyes would capture the sight of their

predators every so often as the mass of them moved in patterns above the city. He thought back to his rider ‘I saw a cathedral of some sort far off in the distance. It will hold me better then any of these buildings would, but we can’t stay for long we have to escape this city, or we are trading one cage for another.’ He caught a momentary thought of Nip’s in which she wished her could be smaller and with a chuckle he answered her unasked question. ‘I can be smaller but for not long an hour at most; it was at least the best I could do for my mother to excel at one aspect of being a dragon.’

Nips was visibly surprised before she took a calculating look, ‘ We need something small if not tiny, something that can fit in my pocket if not arms. Can you do that?’ Kildren gave her a look as if to ask if she was questioning his abilities. He tensed under her as a shadow past above them. She only had a moment to react her head turning to look into the maw of the kraken that stared down with its yellow eyes.

Kildren’s form fell out from under her as she floundered for only a moment as she felt the paws of something grab at her. The Krakens pseudopods and tentacles all reached to grasp at her only for them to meet ground as with the help of the small otter they both swam quickly towards the other end of the alley; the Kraken soon followed to give chase.

Nips and the otter, its metallic blue eyes and the bonded connection solidifying the form as Kildren, rushed to twist into a window cut out of a building only moments as the kraken tried to fit itself after them. Each taking a quick glance as the stone around the sill began to crack under the onslaught, they took off into the city through another cut out.

Nips had to admit to herself as the skulked through the drowned city that it had been long since she had played this game of hide and go seek. Normally they would be guards or drunkards after her and sometimes whole taverns, but this had to top those games. Shadows passed over the two as they swam their way through building to building rushing off into the distance where Kildren had seen the cathedral in the distance.

It was eerie quiet and tense, each moment was mere meters to their deaths. With each meter came a warming to Nips chest. Her hand coming to press against the clawed necklace that Barnaby had given her in Clarence’s stead to feel it warm to the touch. It was as if each meter closer to this building they came the stronger the warmth filled her and the safer she felt.

Each wasn’t sure how long they were building hopping, yet it was in their already chilled bodies that the waters grew colder and a massive shadow overcame the city. Above them moved the colossal form of the crimson eyed Kraken as it took its turn to prowl the city. They stilled to watch it form a window that overlooked the courtyard. It was the last stretch of waters before the cathedral doors that lay slightly cracked open to their safety.

It was almost unimaginative for her to see the tree that grew from the kraken’s center and it left Kildren to wonder at what power could cause such an ability. His eyes turning to his young rider calculating and he wondered if he had misread her abilities. Meanwhile her face turned to look out into the courtyard only to cause her to gasp.

The once dark city was a glow by soft flittering lights that drifted among the water leaving a dull glow in their wake. Off in the distance she could see as these lights filled the streets beyond only to float into the waters above. A singular word filled her mind, ‘Go!’, that sent her scrambling out of the window and Kildren pushed after her before the building they once stood within was demolished under the heavy weight of the Kraken’s siege.

She wasn’t sure what to think or what to do but to push onwards forcing her feline dexterity to help her further. Kildren swam behind her as fast as he could, his more nature form dashing through the waters to pass through the cathedral doors only to turn and wait.

Nips pushed onwards with each kick of her feet and the shadow that towered over her coming ever closer. She clutched at her necklace as her breath caught in her throat. She heard deep in the back of her mind a familiar voice that made her stop still.

“Well, I suppose little one. You’ve made it all by yourself didntchya? I knew you could do it; I always had faith. But Its best ye look up and keep still, Okay? Well I suppose a little help once in a while might help won’ it? I want you to remember that when you find yourself stuck on the golden shores that the talking waters are not far from your flippers or your ears. You will find your light, little one. I know I wasn’t the best in life, but I hope I did the best by you and I will be here if you really need me… now swim quick my little turtle, captain and the first mate may need you, the crew too.”

Nara felt the tears well up in her eyes and the warmth that filled her chest… with another kick she closed her eyes the mass of tentacles wrapped around her to hold and crush. A roar pierced the waters followed by the light of Kildren’s breath filling the ocean’s floor. And then her eyes tightened as a familiar burst of blue energy flooded around her and her consciousness slipped away into exhaustion and sleep.

Kildren watched as the spectral vines solidified as they burst from the center of the courtyard. This time he watched as the tree pierced from the stone floors and grew to wrap and ensnare the Kraken, a few pulling the tentacles from around the slow drifting form of Nips. He rushed forward grabbing her in his now dragon wings and paddled towards the cathedral doors. He wasn’t even sure he would fit, but that was solved as a lone figure swam out from within the building her eyes filled with panic and the merfolk pushed the door open, her free hand beckoning him forward and so he swam with the last energy he held a small burst of cat like energy pushed him passed the threshold. The sounds of the door closing behind him followed by the siege of the kraken outside.

He lay unmoving upon the floor, the stupid child’s form curled under his claw as he watched wearily as the merfolk stepped forward. They both listened as the cathedral stood strong against the bombardment, finally with the softest of voices the mermaid spoke to him; “Hello, I’m Lorelei, what’s your name?” He was surprised for only a moment before speaking in broken common ; “Kildren and Nara, can you heal?” and the mermaid nodded in response as Kildren fell into darkness.

Caged in the Belly of Malign Truth

‘I am cold and alone’ is Nara’s response as the shifting of the inner gut jostles its contents to and fro. A gush of water filling its floor to her knees in stomach acid, eaten sea life, and inevitable death of those that could not escape. A not so new concept to Nara is the grunting and complaining of a beast much more annoying then the kraken she resides in.

“Stupid Child, what exactly was your plan? Now we are both locked in this beast” is Kildren’s annoying growl that meets deaf ears. Nara’s fingers holding the white bone, a femur, of a lost friend. The sharp knife cutting and shaving pieces from its length. Every so often she hisses in pain as the dagger pierces her hand staining the fur, that matted with saltwater and gunk form the floor, with blood. Kildren grunts once more, before shifting to stare out past the guts wobbling sphincter that connects to the creature’s intestines further in.

“Fine then, what is it you carve with your fingers and blade?” is the bronze dragons next attempt at conversation. This does not end on deaf ears as Nara turns her head and shifts her body to draw herself closer to the warmth of the dragon.

“It’s a flute. My other one was lost in the fight. I figured it might shut your negative nattering up, but I don’t know if you even know what that means… Stupid Dragon” is Nara’s response, dripping with the poison of sarcasm . There is quiet that follows as the chamber fills with another gush of water. A hiss breaks the silence as Nara and the Dragon stare down at her legs. The fur is matted in acid burning away slightly at her skin and drying it to a peel. ‘It doesn’t hurt anymore…’ is her thoughts before she turns her head to stare at the snout of the dragon who peers down upon her. Kildren looks concerned as he turns to stare back into her eyes.

“I know how it hurts little kitten so do not lie to me, it is honorable I suppose to take such suffering for me and the others. If you hadn’t went with your gods awful, dare I say it, friends you would be safe right now and we wouldn’t be in this situation.” Nara’s eyes dart to glare into the dragon’s amber ones her mouth opened in a hiss. Kildren wavers his head with a sigh, “I didn’t mean it as an insult clearly… What am I to do with such fragility?” The duo grows quiet as they both turn to their own tasks of emotions.

‘I don’t know what to do, why can’t I figure this out, papa what am I supposed to do? I feel so alone now; everyone has left me…’ Nara’s thoughts still as tears join the saltwater below. Her eyes pressed closed, the tight strain of muscles causing her to twist her fingers into fists.

“Do I need to remind you that I am here, Tomsfellow. Let alone that your friends didn’t leave you. You got a message from one of them, right? The changeling?” Nara stills, Kildren’s words shocked

her, and her fists uncurl. “Your father watches I am sure, both of them, your mothers too. But you have a point we need to figure out what we are gunna do with you… how am I to trust you on your own with those vagabonds if you can’t protect yourself.”

“I can be stronger, I know I can” Nara stands as she speaks, turning her head to look about the creature’s belly for the weak points. Her eyes darting back and forth with a deep, fear driven, determination

“We have been over this; we must wait till we have healed some before we start tearing holes in this creature. We will…” the dragon’s words are muted by the sound a thunder that booms within the chamber as Nara’s clawless fingers begin digging into the belly’s flesh. It wobbles and stretches against the force, but no damage is done. A few more booms fill the chamber each time as Kildren watches before lashing his tail out to grab at Nara pulling her from the walls.

“I want out, I want out, I hate being in here, it feels like everything is shrinking like a cage! Like a burning room…” Her voice beginning as a struggle against Kildren that ends in a whisper of shock as she gives up shrinking into herself as she is pressed against the draconic form.

“Little Nara, we will find a way out and we must be prepared for the battle to come as this creature will not let us go easily; its master wont like that. Which means we need our resources when the time comes, so stop wasting your breath on a wall that wont move.” Nara does not shift and remains quiet against the dragon her arms wrapping around its tail. “I have seen your dreams, they may not understand your pain, but they will appreciate your determination stupid child. But its clear now that we must stick together, and we must make you strong against the elements that try to tear you asunder. And the others that come to take you away for their own plans. To do that I need help, are you ready to throw aside foolishness now?”

Again, there is quiet as another gush passes by, Kildren’s claw reaching for a bone white shape in the waters and plucking the carved flute from the floor. “First, we need to rest and get out of here, how about you finish this, what was it?”

Nara raises her head before shaking it to fall tired against the dragon’s belly as he turns onto his side. “It’s a flute, you stupid dragon.”

“Well whatever you call it, make music and sing me to sleep or something as payment for protecting you” Kildren closes his eyes as Nara’s light fades away again, before flaring back to life . “And when the time comes, we will escape this cage and I will turn you into a survivor; a warrior. Like the riders my mother used to tell me about, well that’s before she tried to kill me.”

The quiet belly is contested by the sound of Nara’s carving of bone as she continues on her flute. Her face set in a stare at her hands as she is trying to keep the thought of a burning room and the sight of the heavy beam falling against her mother’s body from her mind; trying to rupture the bubbling fear that grips hard to clutch at her heart.

“Oh Kay… I can do this” falls from her lips only this time they are met with a different set of deaf ears. The soft purring and snoring of Kildren creating a white noise. ‘ I will do this papa, like you and mama asked me to… I will be strong… I will get back to my friends, to help them… to save

them…’ Each word interrupted as her eyes lull closed, Kildren’s claw coming to pull her further into his embrace of warmth. ‘I’m alone again…’