

Celestial Cause

Prologue

Thank you for your patronage.

Now, I have a story for you, one that I don't want forgotten.

Chapter 1

Solis Han was destined to be sacrificed for the good of the universe. Why she was chosen is unknown. Perhaps it was because she was left-handed, or that her eyes were unnaturally blue.

No, that's untrue.

The reason is simply because she was born with the mark of Yusu. Now that I think about it, I remember that day very clearly.

In a small town on the outskirts of the capital, the last light was born to a miner and cloth weaver. A sun marked her left arm as her parents gasped in awe. They knew the legend for it had been told for generations, but to have it become a reality sent Solis' parents into a panic. For in the next town over was the home base of the Cult of Truazor, who would stop at nothing to grant the dark being passage into the mortal plane. Solis' parents vowed to hide the mark of Yusu from the world in hopes that she would live a peaceful life. To do this, Solis' mother wrapped little Solis' mark in cloth every day and made sure that no one would ever know. Solis' would grow to be a healthy child because of her mothers efforts.

How I wish that time would have lasted longer, but alas came the day where Solis' secret was spilled.

Not more than six years after her birth, rain clouds crowded overhead and mirrored the clusters of people on the cobblestone road below. Her mother screamed as she was ripped away from her arms. All because the single strip of cloth that covered Solis' arm fell off while playing at the market. People in robes pushed her mother to the dirt ground as she desperately tried to get to little Solis.

Before she knew it Solis' mother was out of sight, the last image of her mother reaching out for her engraved in Solis' memory. Everything after that was a blur. The next thing she knew, Solis woke up in a cold, dank room. Hooded figures in red velvet robes surrounded her. They chanted in an ancient tongue as ropes tied her in place. Around the neck of the dagger-wielding cultist, laid a pendant with a dragon eating its tail; the symbol of Truazor. The stone slab beneath her was inscribed with runes of an unknown language. As the chanting got louder, the runes began to glow. To top it all off, an ornate dagger was positioned over her heart, just waiting to take the plunge into her chest.

Solis' ears started to ring as a single beam of moonlight illuminated her night blue hair from the skylight as she accepted her fate.

Of course, our tale doesn't end there. What kind of a story would that be?

Certainly not worth your money.

Just before the dagger was thrust into Solis' chest, an army of men poured into the sinister chamber. Most of them were dressed in guard uniforms from the capital city. At the end of the platoon was a woman wearing robes of the noble court. Her chest was adorned in silver armor with precious gems encrusted in the shoulder plates. Her high status was felt all throughout the room as the guards parted like the sea to let her through.

"Let the girl go," her voice commanded, "Or face the wrath of the Knights of the High Council."

"Victoria Elvaris, how nice it is to see you. Captain of the Knights. Impressive if I do say so myself." The hooded leader said, his voice smooth and conniving.

The hooded leader pulled out a full syringe from his pocket and thrust it into Solis' neck. The world started to spin as a blue serum coursed through her body and her vision started to blur.

"Kill them!" Captain Elvaris ordered.

The platoon of knights attacked the hooded figures without hesitation. Blood painted the walls and cries echoed throughout the halls.

All the while the room fell into chaos, Solis laid on the stone slab drifting off into the land of dreams, the serum coursing through her veins. However, just before she was plunged into darkness, Captain Elvaris stood over her and whispered

"Should the cult strike again, find me in the capital."

Chapter 2

16 years later Solis still had no idea why the mark on her arm made her special, but she did know that the Cult of Truazor was after her.

Nestled in the woods on the outskirts of the capital city, sat the house left to Solis by her late parents.

"Solis, Solis are you listening?" Aunt Paya said as she snapped her fingers in front of Solis' face.

Solis' gaze snapped back to reality as her aunt stood in front of her with her hands on her hips, waiting for a response.

"I'm sorry, I totally wasn't paying attention. What did you say?" Solis said, her gaze wandering around the room.

Aunt Paya sighed and tilted her head back as she turned to grab a loaf of bread from the cabinet, "We were talking about your art. How your commissions have run out."

"Oh yeah... Well, I just got one from Mr. Lucero the other day." Solis said searching for good news as she shrugged her shoulders, "That will last us another day or so."

"In another day or so of this, I'll be the woman who goes mad because she and her niece don't have any food to eat." Aunt Paya said as she cut a piece of bread from the loaf and rolled her eyes.

"Another day and I'll be the girl with an insufferable aunt." Solis muttered under her breath.

"You're lucky I'm supportive of this hobby of yours. It makes a pretty penny if you find the right client. Your jewelry sells better than your paintings, you know." Aunt Paya said with a snap and a mouth full of bread.

Aunt Paya plated a piece of bread for Solis, despite her seemingly cutting words. The plate slid across the wooden table with ease, landing in front of Solis.

"I do wish we had butter to go with this delicious bread."

"Is that all you care about? The money?" Solis said as she took a bite.

"I also care about having enough to eat." Aunt Paya said as she moved one of her long curls out of her face.

"Not helping."

Solis sighed as she ate the piece of bread in her hands.

"You could sell that thing you have in your room, you know." Aunt Paya said, wiping crumbs from her mouth.

"No, I couldn't. It's my life's work." Solis said, taken aback.

"It's got more precious stones in it than I've seen during my time down in those jewel mines."

"But that's all I have left of them."

"Solis dear, we're *starving* because of your parents." Aunt Paya said, "This may be their house, but it's not putting food on the table. We're scraping by with a mere 70 nova a week. If we are to keep it, then you need to make a choice."

"Fine."

After taking the last bite of her bread, Solis went to her room and got dressed for the market. Solis picked a dark blue linen shirt that she had embroidered small beads into so that it looked like the sun and stars. She shook the dirt off of her gray pants, grabbed her leather boots and then gathered all of her wares into a large

backpack. She saved the most important piece for last; the tapestry in her room. A photo of her parents sat on a shelf beneath the tapestry.

How she longed to see them again.

A heavy sigh entered the room as she took the tapestry down from the wall and carefully rolled it up.

Solis then went to the marketplace where people could sell, scam, and bargain for almost anything. If you could think of it, it was there. Somewhere.

Solis held her wares close to her as she weaved through the main road, trying to not bump into anyone.

Eventually, Solis found an empty slot in between a baker and blacksmith.

"Do my eyes deceive me, is that Solis?!" The blacksmith said, his deep, raspy voice booming with jollity, "It's been ages since you've set up shop next to me. How old are you now?"

"It's good to see you too, Ignatius," said Solis, "I'll be 22 in a few months, sir."

"My, you're the spitting image of your mother. When I was your age I was out in the world, exploring! I thought that the last commission would have been enough to get out of this chaotic scene." The Blacksmith said as he put down his hammer and offered his massive hand to Solis.

The Blacksmith's tool belt clanked as he stepped towards Solis. He wiped the sweat from his prominent brow and set his gloves aside.

"I wish, but times have been rough as of late. Aunt Paya and I can't seem to keep food on the table." said Solis as she handed him the bag around her shoulder.

"Well, if you ever are able to get out of Onryx and find yourself in Farburn say hi to Dorian for me. I'm sure he and his husband would love to see you. Tell him his old man sent you and maybe he'll give you a free upgrade from that old dagger you've been carrying around."

Ignatius let out a hearty laugh as he patted Solis' back.

Solis had known him since she was small. Memories of Ignatius striking up a conversation with her mother and days playing with Dorian filled Solis' mind.

"You got it."

Solis turned her attention back to her wares, now spread out along a small wooden table. In her shop, Solis sold all sorts of wares: Bracelets, jewelry, paintings, woven flowers, and wood carvings to name a few. All hand made of course. However, this time Solis brought something even more grand than her most intricate weaving. Front and center of the stall sat a tapestry that depicted a dragon perching regally on a stone with the sun rising behind it. What made this tapestry so special was what was woven into the fabric. Precious stones made up the dragon's eyes, claws, and most of the sun behind it. As soon as Solis unveiled her masterpiece, all who were within the area stopped and took a glance.

"700,000 nova is the price! Woven within these fine threads from the silkworms of Tenby are precious jewels from the Runeswick mines. Rubies, sapphires, you name it. It's center piece, a shard of painite that resides in the heart of the dragon."

It would seem that Solis' advertisement worked. All her shouting caught the attention of two red-hooded figures in the crowd. The hooded figures wore crests of nobility over their cloaked bodies. One of the figures whispered something to the

other. After this exchange, both figures nodded and started walking away. Solis' hands started to sweat as they made their way out of her sight. Solis threw her pitch in every which way until her throat was sore. All of this shouting, and not one bid. Solis' sighed in defeat as people passed by her stall, not even giving her work so much as a passing glance. Solis began to cover her masterpiece as she thought that it was never going to sell.

"700,000 nova? That's a hefty price you're asking for, miss." A familiar voice said.

Solis whipped her head around to see a young man with long black hair tied back into a low ponytail. He wore a dark blue, asymmetrical collared shirt that had silver trim. Embroidered stars lay throughout the fabric of his shirt forming an elegant pattern. The buttons that lay on the trim were slightly transparent, emerald colored buttons.

"Itri, what are you doing here? I thought you were busy helping your parents with the shop?" Solis said as she put down the rings in her hand.

"Nah they're in Mossguard Forest picking up some new items for the store. Something about a rare bioluminescent tree you can make stuff from. Left me in charge of running the place. Just doing my delivery runs. I thought I'd stop by to see how our favorite artist, and most loyal customer, is doing."

"Well, that's very sweet of you." Solis said, fixing her long, dark hair as she smiled at the statement, "You look like you're being run ragged. I hope you're getting the rest you need."

“Well, it’s not as if I don’t live upstairs” Itri said, rubbing the back of his head, “Oh, right! I’ve got something for you. Think of it as a thank you from the other day when you scared off those thugs from the shop.” Itri said as he reached into the pocket of his burgundy pants.

“It was nothing, really! I just couldn’t stand the thought of my favorite supply store going out of business, you know?”

“I insist,” Itri said, chuckling as he smiled, “You don’t even know what it is yet.”

Itri then pulled out an ornate key on a piece of twine from his pocket.

“It’s a key?”

“Well, I couldn’t bring it here. Too busy. Stop by sometime soon and I’ll give it to you then!” Itri said, putting the key around Solis’ neck, “I should get back to the shop. Can’t leave it alone for too long.”

A light blush crept upon Solis’s cheeks.

“You should stop by sometime soon.” Itri said as he started to walk away.

“If time allows!” Solis called.

As the sun was starting to set, the vendors of the market packed up their stalls and their wares for the next day. Solis had just finished putting the last bracelet in her bag when she felt a chill fall down her spine. The air around her went silent. Her body tensed up as she looked around her, frantically scanning her surroundings.

Without warning she felt a hand over her mouth. Arms wrapped around her to make sure she wouldn’t escape.

“Don’t struggle, it’ll only make things worse for you.” A man’s voice said, “I’m not here to hurt you.”

Solis struggled as she tried to free herself. A hooded figure in a red velvet robe tore off the gloves that Solis wore, revealing the mark of Yusu.

"So you're the one they're looking for?"

"No, I won't be taken! Not again." Solis pleaded as she clawed at her attacker's grasp. She then bit down on the hand that covered her mouth. The man let her go instantly, blood dripping from his hand.

"Damn, you're a handful. Listen, I'm not here to take you. I'm here to warn you!"

Solis looked back at her attacker as she ran away. The man was dressed in cultist robes that hid most of his body and his face.

Solis ran all the way home without any of her wares. She hoped that nothing would happen to them before the next day. When Solis got home, Aunt Paya was waiting for her.

"Solis, where have you been!?" Aunt Paya questioned, "The market closed an hour ago."

"I know I know, I was packing up and then I was attacked by this guy and he was wearing the symbol of that cult that tried to sacrifice me and..."

Aunt Paya hugged Solis to comfort her in one swift movement.

"Hush dear child, It's okay. I'm sure it must have been scary."

"I need to go back for my wares."

"That can wait until tomorrow. Right now I want to make sure you're okay."

Solis stayed there for a while, still shaking, as Aunt Paya stroked her hair until she fell asleep. Aunt Paya then carried her to bed where Solis drifted off into the land of dreams.

Chapter 3

The next day Solis went back to the market to retrieve her work. There was a small crowd around her stall uttering worried murmurs. When Solis broke through the crowd, she saw that all of her art was gone. Every necklace, bracelet and brooch. Everything, including the dragon tapestry that she held so dear. Solis dropped to her knees as her heart and stomach sank. However, underneath the stall shelf, a glint of light caught Solis' eye. Upon further inspection, it was a bag of nova with a note attached to it:

Solis Han,
Use it wisely.

- Z

Solis went back to Aunt Paya with fury in her step.

"Gone. Gone! They took everything." Solis said, bursting through the door of their small house, "The only thing left was this"

Aunt Paya's life flashed before her eyes as thoughts of living on the streets ran through her head as she counted the money.

Just then the words that were spoken to her all those years ago rang in her head.

Should the cult strike again, find me in the capital.

The next day Solis and Aunt Paya then went to the capital city to meet with the high council, dragging her aunt through the city streets. Grand buildings of stone towered over Solis. People were all over the streets busking and selling merchandise in carts.

"Solis dear, where are we going in such a rush? " Aunt Paya questioned as Solis grabbed her by the wrist leading her towards the councilman's building. "If you're not careful I'll be out an arm and you'll be armed well- with mine. Who are we even going to see anyway?"

"Victoria Elvaris" Solis said as they reached the room before the council. The massive doors swung open and the noise reverberated through the grand hall. Five councilmen sat in a line at the center of the back wall. Solis didn't recognize any of them, but the woman in the center. Her blonde locks sat behind her ears and fell onto her shoulders. Victoria no longer wore armor of the Knights, but now she wore a white lace collared shirt with a flowing skirt and golden trim. In the middle of her chest, sat a medallion with two dragons intertwined in the middle, the symbol of the High Council.

"My my, this is certainly a surprise. Solis Han, is that you?" Victoria said, her voice regal and intrigued.

You see, in the time since Victoria was Captain of the Knights, she rose in ranks to become the Head of the High Council.

"Yes, what you said all those years ago. You told me to come to you if the cult should strike again." Solis said sheepishly.

"And has it?"

"Yes. They attacked me while I was at the market and stole my wares that I was selling."

"Did they see your mark?"

"Yes."

"Oh dear. This could be troublesome indeed." Victoria said as she furrowed her brow, "Listen closely, Solis Han."

Victoria glanced at the councilmen around her. They nodded in agreement.

"I believe the best option is for you to leave this place. We have received reports from an anonymous source that the cult plans to make a move in capturing you soon."

"And just how do you know this?" Aunt Paya questioned.

Suddenly, the air in the room shifted.

"You dare question the high council?" The scrawny, black-bearded councilman to the right of Victoria sneers.

"Now now, Advisor Kalamad, no need to frighten anyone. That's not what we're here to do." Victoria said.

"But, we've no place to go. We barely have any money to feed ourselves. Not to mention all of my wares got stolen."

"All the more reason to consider my suggestion. I know of a place. The city of Osiris. It's quite the journey, yes, but If you truly want to escape the cult that is where you should go."

Solis stood there in thought. Going to Osiris would mean leaving her customers, her friends, her home. Solis looked to Aunt Paya for an answer, but Aunt Paya remained silent as if to say to Solis that it was her choice.

"I mean to travel outside of Onryx has always been a dream of mine, but I can't just leave. This is my home. I've got people to take care of.

"She means me, just so we're clear." Aunt Paya interjected.

Victoria cocked her head to the left as she narrowed her gaze.

"I don't think you understand. This is the one place you would be safe from the cult. I have been working on this project for a long time now. Osiris is protected by a barrier that repels anything to have to do with Truazor or his cult. The mages there have done their best to ensure that the light of Yusiu stays afloat. To make sure that you stay afloat. I would also assign you a bodyguard from the Knights to personally escort you on your travels."

Solis took a step towards the door.

"Even so, I'm not going to drop everything just to escape the cult. I came here so that you might help rid the cult of Onryx here, not send me to some distant land. "

With more conviction in her step, Solis made her way towards the door.

"Plus, I still have to get my wares back."

"Atta girl! Let's go get your stuff back after a nice cup of tea. I think there's still a little left!" Aunt Paya said, wrapping her arm around Solis's shoulder as they walked out.

"Solis Han" Victoria's voice boomed.

Both Solis and Aunt Paya froze as they were nearly through the door.

"Should you change your mind for any reason, my offer will always stand."

"I'll think about it." Solis said as the doors closed behind her.

"Head Council, what are we going to do? Miss Han rejected our proposal. You know we were counting on her to accept it to protect Onryx from the cult." Advisor Kalamad exclaimed.

"She will in time. For now, how are the new recruits doing? Any candidates?" Victoria said.

"Yes, High Councilwoman. There is a promising new recruit that I'm sure will do just fine."

"Excellent"