

Prologue

The sound of screams, the smell of blood, the feel of fire. These are the raw and primitive elements that create the battlefield. These are the elements creatures of war thrive upon. One such of these creatures stood out from the crowd of corpses: Eclipse. His chiseled and pale features created depth using the shadows casted by the raging flames behind him. His jet black hair streaked in sweat and reflected the same empty darkness as his merciless, piercing eyes. The air around him was a void of isolation. Even the gravity around him seemed different, as there was deep sense of importance in his steps.

A small child huddled under a slab rock that was propped against a burning tree from the explosion. The child shook it's parent, desperately pleading for the parent to wake. It was too late. For by the time the child turned around and realized Eclipse was right behind. Eclipse's hand was already extended and aimed at the child's forehead. His face was expressionless, cold, and exhausted. There was once a joy and expression in his life. But that was a long, long time ago.

Chapter One

Laughter of children playing up and down the dirt covered streets filled the air. The call of merchants echoed up and down, from the darkest alleys to the sapphire-like sea ports. Gossip spread throughout the ears of the young and old. Womenfolk knew how to spread this information the best.

There was no need to whisper when everyone knew what you were talking about. A mother gossiped to her daughter in a low tone, "Did you hear about the neighboring kingdom? They found their child of prophecy." Fear always ruled these lands. Children of Prophecy are feared or loved the most.

A large brute, with mud-caked hair and a few missing teeth, cockily struts down the roads. He looks around, as if someone is about to attack him out of nowhere, looking for a proper challenge. Someone to put his muscle to the test.

Everyone slinks away, not wanting more trouble than they already have, barely scraping their way through life in the outskirts of the kingdom of Telshic. This particular boy has the makings of a future warrior. Perhaps he might have had a sliver of potential to be one of the four children of prophecy, for one was a grand fighter. However, that was not his destiny. His destiny is about to run into him.

A starving orphan boy sprints for his life, holding a single loaf of bread, with men chasing after the poor child. The men pounding their feet in attempts to catch up to him holler, "Thief! Catch him, catch him!"

The orphan snickers and speeds up, turning the corner. Before he can halt, his face smacks right into the solid chest of the brute, and the orphan sprawls backwards. The loaf of bread fell into a nearby puddle of dirt water and is no longer any good. All that effort, wasted. A sneer, one not even a mother could love, crosses the much larger boy's face. A mix of anger, surprise, and happiness. Torus bends over and picks up the small child with ease, only using one hand.

The men in pursuit stop as soon as they saw his wretched smirk. They know that the child was about to receive punishment worse than what they could offer. They turn around and headed back for the bakery. One or two of them created a sloshing noise that left boot prints into the bread that had been stolen from them only minutes ago.

The sound of screams, the smell of blood, both these lingered and diffused into the known air. These are the raw and primitive elements that create the battlefield. These are the elements creatures of war thrive upon.

Within a few moments, the boy's spirit and body is broken in many more ways than one. That homeless child is thrown to the side, into a pile of horse dung. His home. The brute chortles, as he dusts himself off, walking back down the road as if nothing had happened.

There the bullied child laid, in the warmth of the steeds' excrete. His stomach continued to pain him. The malnourished child had no choice. He inhaled sharply each time he moved. Ignoring the excruciating agony, he continued to reach. Water welled up in his eyes, but it took all his will to keep them from gushing out. He had enough liquids gushing out. The orphan's shaky fingers finally reached the mushed up starch and rested for a moment. He screamed in pain as he gripped as much of what was left the loaf and pulled it into the heap of waste with the rest of him. For a moment, the entire world was quiet.

The child was able to grab a little more than a handful of what was left of the meal that was to last him until the next day. Strip by strip, he force fed the dirt covered, soggy mush into his mouth. Still, it was more than he had eaten in the past days.

A woman's voice entered in his mind. A voice he was quite fond of, but one that was not thought of for a while. One he often missed. He couldn't hold his tears back any longer, as the sense of nostalgia flooded him. Her kind words and poetic lilt echoed in his head, "Be strong, my poor, young Aaron. Misfortune won't last us much longer." That was two years ago, when the pain of loss and disgrace wouldn't last him much longer. But back then he had hope. He had one person he could trust full-heartedly. He *had* his mother.

Chapter Two

Click. Clack. Clank. Echoes upon echoes of wooden sandals clanging against stone paths pierce through the still, night sky. The moon hangs high within the air, but the boy-brute's mood is at an all-time low. Something is bothering him. Perhaps it's the reminder of how he used to be in the exact situation the boy he beat half to death is in. But at least Torus still has his family. His conscious gets to him. He makes the fatal decision that he should go back and apologize. What Torus doesn't realize is that chivalry has been dead for centuries.

He journeys back to the pile of brown warmth, where the smaller boy remains in blood-covered tatters. Torus goes onto one knee as he extends his hand as a peace offering. His low voice resonates, "I'm sorry." There is sincere regret in Torus's eyes. But he's not the one being offered the apology.

Aaron no longer has the will to go on. He can't even hear the tormented words of the bully. His eyes gaze down, half open, yet they seem to be looking off into the distance. The brute waves his hand in front of Aaron, trying to trigger a reaction that proves the boy is still alive. No matter the effort, this fails.

But suddenly, a spark of life strikes the boy as he elevates his head. There is a sudden rush of coldness as a nearby wind blows by, bringing the feeling of ice. Aaron's glare of death meets Torus unexpectedly and bores a hole into his soul. Powered by hate and loneliness, Aaron's eyes are completely engulfed in blackness.

Pressure wraps around Torus's throat like two large hands as his body lifts a couple of inches from the ground. The lungs soon ignite with the feeling of a thousand suns burning inside. The warmth spreads to his face as he burns scarlet. Water forces their way into the wells of his eyes and trickle down his face like little pearls. Nothing but crickets can be heard other than the gags of a victim staring at Death, face to face.

A person, cloaked in shadows, watches from a distance. Someone riddled with amusement.

Crack! The neck gives in to the increasing build of pressure and poor Torus's neck is snapped in two. Far from painlessly. With a *thud* his warm, lifeless body is released back to the whim of gravity as it hits the dirt-paved path.

The miniature quake startles the boy, snapping him out of his previous transe. His innocence and life returning to him. He blinks a few times before he sees that his tormenter had been executed right in front of him. But from what, he can't remember. All he knows is that he is drained. Aaron's eyes heavy and slowly slide down and cover his sight. Fight as he may, it doesn't help. Soon he is cradled in the arms of the night.

The rosy fingers of dusk breach the sky as the daylight falls upon young Aaron's eyelids. Through a window.

With soft groans, Aaron rises from his bed. No winces. The pain has subsided. His wounds are cleaned and dressed. They are wrapped with fresh, white strips of cloth. His legs are splinted, each with two slabs of wood on either side of them, wrapped in the cloth. His right arm is kept in a sling. None of this prevents him from perking up when he the aroma of beef stew seeps into the room.

A pipping hot, wooden bowl filled with rice, potatoes, carrots, celery, and of course the beef stew is placed in his lap. Despite the scalding heat, Aaron is more grateful than anything else. He becomes hypnotized by the massive amount of food that seems to be given to him by the graceful heavens. His mouth waters uncontrollably. Even though he is dying of starvation, Aaron has not forgotten his manners. He looks up at the elderly man who placed the bowl in his lap before moving. The pale man nods, "Go ahead, son. It's not poisoned. I didn't save you from that heap just to kill you."

Answering the cries of his gnawing stomach, he grabs the steaming bowl and gulps it all down at once. Never mind the burning sensation in his mouth and on his taste buds. It's worth the sacrifice. When finished, Aaron slams it back down onto his thighs, then inhales sharply, realizing he's still injured.

The man lets out a deep chortle as he gets up from his wooden stool to refill Aaron's bowel. This gives Aaron time to glance around at his surroundings. The walls on the sides are white and chalky, but the ones behind him and in front of him are made of stacked smooth, silver-like stones. Across from him, on one of the grey-silver walls, the man refills the bowel at the fireplace, by using the metal ladle to scoop out the contents of the black iron pot. Aaron scoots back in his wooden cot and examines the sheepskin draped over the majority of his legs as his blanket. The pillow is a burlap sack stuffed with feathers. The sounds of those animals, and more, sound from just outside the walls.

"Where are your parents?" Inquired the slightly hunched, white-haired man.

"Casualties of the wars. . ." Aaron's fists balled up as liquid moved to the edge of his eyes. His father was recruited and drawn into the army. He had never returned. His mother was out scouting for food for herself and her only child when she was found by soldiers from another kingdom. Her stripped, bloody body was found the next morning, barely breathing. The next afternoon, at the town hospital, she died in the arms of her twelve year old son.

"Do you know why I saved you, boy?" The man croaks. Aaron shakes his head as he's handed the second bowl and devours it at the same rate as the first.

“I saw you use magic. Quite draining magic. No wonder why you’re so hungry. Using something like that puts you in almost as much danger as your opponent.” The hermit rambled on until he was understandable again. He seemed to be digging through old memories as he narrated, “Reminds me of the *Tenebris Mortem* spell.”

“Tinny-breast more-tim?”

“Why yes! You pick up quickly, boy. That spell is also known as *Dark Death*. It guarantees the death of any chosen enemy, but only one. The spell is painful for both the caster and the victim. Not only will that one specific target die a grisly death, so will the person who summons it. It’s a shame it’s a simplistic summon. You simply spill your heart’s blood onto your hand and press that hand onto your opponent’s heart. You repeat *Tenebris Mortem indu, then their name*, until the spell engulfs you both. However, the spell will only work if you are willing to die for it.”

The room grew silent. It was a lot to process. A lot of knowledge for something Aaron declared he’d never use. It was pointless to kill yourself in order to kill someone else. Aaron soon erases it from his mind.

The man pulls up a stool in front of the cot. He begins, “I saw what you did to that boy. That big, ugly one. You have potential. I saved you because I need someone I can pass my wisdom onto. A protege or student of some sort. Someone I can entrust my belongings to when I am no longer here to own anything.”

“W-wait. . . I did that? To Torus?” Aaron squeaks, wide-eyed in bewilderment. Ignoring the question, the man continued, “Should you choose to stay with me of your own volition, you must obey every order I give you to the letter. In exchange, you will not have to worry about food, clothing, and having a roof over your head. And as a bonus, if you do everything to my standards, and if I’m not tired, the last hour and a half of the day will be dedicated to honing your talent for the arts. Do we have ourselves a deal?”

The Gods had shown mercy on Aaron. His eyes gleamed with happiness and hope of having a possible life with people that could matter to him. Without second guessing himself, he gripped the hand of the wizened man and shook it enthusiastically. He’d finally have to stop worrying about how to survive the next hour. He’d have someone to talk to, other than the rats and bugs.

Prying his veiny hand free from Aaron’s grip the old man wheezes, “They call me Ellis. However, you will only call me Master or Sir. Understood?” Aaron complied.

It takes weeks before Aaron can wake up before dawn, grab a quick meal from last night's dinner, clean the stables, milk the cows, collect the eggs, feed the animals, water everything, plant and pick the crops, let the animals out, sort the seed and crops, shove the animals back into their stalls, churn the butter, cook dinner, spin and weave, fix the clothing, and listen to stories and lectures up to Ellis's standards. Only regular farm work. What would cause most to shatter under the load, pushes Aaron further. He wants, *needs*, to be there in order to survive. On top of his chores, Ellis has been teaching him basic literacy. After months fly by, Ellis decides that the boy is ready to begin his training.

Aaron eyes the glass bottle, focusing on its emerald color and cylindrical shape and nothing else. *Burst! Ignite! Flames consume you!* His thoughts bounce everywhere. He remains on the stump of a tree that had died of sickness in the darkness of a frosty night. It wouldn't remain frosty for many more nights, for spring was well on its way. Nonetheless, the stars were not helping him see. What pierced the darkness was the squeaky, rusted hand-held lamp with its flickering candle.

The back knuckles of Ellis hit Aaron's face like the end of a sword. Cold and hard. Aaron sticks his hands out to prevent himself from falling off the stump, but doesn't dare retaliate. He knows that he's doing everything wrong. Not wanting to infuriate his master, he goes back to concentrating his thoughts onto the destruction of the bottle.

"You're doing it all wrong." Ellis slithers behind Aaron and rests his hands on both sides of pupil's head. Squeezing his hands, he thrusts Aaron's head forward just a little more and whispers into his ear, "Remember the boy that beat you raw, from limb to limb. Think of how your parents abandoned you." Aaron's hands became fists, as they squeezed so tight there was almost no circulation.

"Good. Good, my boy. Let in the anger, the resentment. Let it flow through you, fill you, power you. Use it. Focus it. Right now, that bottle is the reason why your parents left you. Why the wars started. Kill it! Get revenge for your parents and all the other people who died senseless deaths! Magic doesn't work just because you want it to. It works because you need it to!"

Cracks spreads like branches in the layers of glass within the bottle. It vibrates faster and faster until *voof*. The bottle engulfs in flames. The flames prance around their

new victim, happily dancing and displaying their skill to Aaron. Their summoner leans back, breathing heavily in a cold sweat. Ellis hisses in approval, “Weak. Even at the most basic level. But at least it’s something.”

Chapter 3

Weeks of training fly by. Months pass. Almost a year under the tutor of the great Ellis, and Aaron has barely improved. They start to doubt Aaron's gifts and lean toward the belief that Ellis was mistaken. But as a final test Ellis calls for his disciple: "Boy, come here."

A slightly more masculine, near sixteen year old boy steps into the master bedroom from the kitchen. He replies, "Yes, my master?" He cleans off his butter-covered hands with the dirty rag from his hind pocket as he approaches Ellis, who motions him to sit on the chair across from his bed.

Trying to make himself look presentable, he tries to dust off his mud-caked clothing while Ellis stares at him contently.

"I feel you are ready, Aaron, my boy." Ellis chuckles proudly, as he stares at his greatest accomplishment yet.

"Ready for what, sir?"

"The next step of your training. I need a heart. Not just any heart. One that is strong and will be put through a ceremony, giving me the strength of what the owner had." The boy's face paled, as if he became a ghost. This caused the elderly master to laugh. Laugh until he chokes on his own saliva. Each cough drives Aaron away from his sudden fright and towards curiosity. He tilts his head and goes over to aid his teacher, but Ellis waves him off. The old man wheezed, "Your job, son, is to get me a heart of a certain creature. This is a creature that will use its deceit to trick you for its life. Be wary. You must return with the creature, or die trying. I will show you how to obtain power beyond your wildest dreams."

Ellis then speaks the words that forever change Aaron's life: "*We might even be able to reunite you with your mother.*"

The boy's hands turn to tight fists. He nods in awe, eager to see what wonders magic can show. But the curiosity continues to grip him. He looks up into Ellis's eyes and asks, "Master, if not my heart, then who's?"

His grin grows wider as Ellis responds, "A child. One who has as much, if not more, magical potential than you."

“But master, who?”

“Someone. . . who is dangerous. Someone you must remain diligent around if you do not want to fall under this monster’s spell.”

The words of his master lingers in Aaron’s head as he journeys southeast, towards the land of forests. Outside of his home of Telshic. Aaron has never been out this far. And Aaron has never had to swat so many flies out of his face before today. Even the pig pens filled with feces had less pest than this.

Cssh, cssh, csh. The grass beneath his feet give into his weight. A trail of green, sunken footprints follows the hormone-filled adolescent. He’s on the hunt. For a fae, nonetheless. *The Fairy of the Forest.*

His boots squish in the watery mud, as he makes his way over the dried, fallen tree. In his hand, he clenches a golden compass, close to his chest. His master had called it a “moral compass” though it had nothing to do with morality. It is meant to help a hunter.

A light vibration from the compass becomes barely noticeable, but is still enough to cause Aaron’s heart to beat faster. She is near. As quickly and silently as possible, Aaron ducks behind a tree and waits. Nothing. The arm of the compass jerks and turns from black to blue. She’s getting closer. He waits. Nothing. The point of the arm turns red. Closer. He waits. Still nothing. The entire pointer soon becomes red, and so does Aaron’s face, from holding his breath. Right as he raises his arm to strike the compass into the dust--Laughter.

He peers over the side of the trunks. A silhouette emerges, blocky and large. Aaron braces to see the beast he is soon to make prey. The trick of light begins to fade as the silhouette shrinks to half its size and half again. Soon Aaron is able to make out the shape of what he’s hunting. His jaw drops.

From not too far away small, thin fingers trace the wrinkles of the wizened tree’s bark. For a few moments, the tree becomes younger and healthier again. Aaron guides his eyes from the hand, up the arm, and to the face.

And there it stood. Peaceful and happy. The face of the beast. Aaron stared at her freckled, lightly tanned face. A petite girl with messy hair styled in a bob, that barely scraped her shoulders. Her various shades of red-brown, bouncy curls tosses as she looks around her environment before she motions something closer. Within seconds, wildlife flood the scene.

Birds whose colors cover the mass spectrum of the rainbow, bright bugs that dance, and all creatures that prance gracefully on four legs parades in the open space.

Her light, hearty giggles seemed to mash in perfect harmony with the tweeting birds. The deer dance around her in circles. One fawn even knocks her over.

Aaron's first reaction is to lunge forward to try to catch her, though she's too far away. Suddenly the reminder why he's really here manifests itself when the compass drops onto the ground in front of him. He decides against going to her and moves back behind the tree. From there, he watches her as she rolls giddily in the flower filled grass. At first stunned from the fall, but a quick recovery soon follows. She sits up and pets the same fawn that knocked her over on the muzzle. Nothing like vengeance is in her heart. Only content.

After minutes of stalking, Aaron grows restless. Out of boldness drawn from boredom, he chooses to approach the maiden. Her glowing, sunny exterior sinks into a fear-stricken gasp as she shrieks and runs back towards the forest. The animals soon follow at her heels.

The chase is on. Aaron pushes his stamina he had gained from the year of chores to their limits. As his muscles burned and it became increasingly difficult to pull breath into his dry lungs, his mind was breaking. *No, I can't do this. She's too fast.* He thinks to himself, degrading everything he is, and slowing his pace. Right as he is about to slow to a stop, anger and the threat of his master's disappointment grips him. *I have to do this. I need to. I can't disappoint him or I won't live long enough to learn anymore magic!*

Adrenaline powered thoughts pulled his strings as if he was a puppet. Letting the anger flow through him, he sprinting as fast as he could, pumping his knees to his chest and leaning forward. Thrusting his arms back and forth as quickly as he could, he reached one out and let out a short battle cry. *Phhhhrph*. A ball of flame takes flight and shoots from his palm, hurling itself towards the girl.

As if she had anticipated this, the girl spins around to face the fireball. Her feet slides back on the gravel, due to her sudden stop. She whispers chants and slaps her hands together at her eye level, focusing on nothing else but the flames aimed at her.

Why isn't she moving? She's gonna get hurt! Aaron regrets the spells as soon as he realizes its potential harm. But there's nothing he can do about it now. He had already fired, and he already begins to show the consequences. His stamina drops rapidly as his shock fades from his quick-lived euphoria of performing a spell well. He realizing his hand is sore and stings greatly. Each time he moves the arm he shot from, a sharp pain trickles from his palm to his shoulder, causing him to wince at each movement.

When the ball is seconds away from hitting her, she finishes chanting and forcefully pulls her hands away from each other. As her fingers flutter the fireball begins to shrink as layers of fire peel off like string and change into bright colors of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple. The strips grow with each layer of the fireball melting away, and the strips start to glitter and fade. The fireball coming at her is barely more

than ashes when it reaches a foot from her face. And the magic is no longer coming towards her.

The falling strips gain momentum from their separation of what was the fireball and re-aim themselves at Aaron. He crosses his arms in front of his face, squeezes his eyes tight and braces for impact. The strings of colorful waves of light reach him and only spin around him, causing a rainbow. After a few laps around him, they slow as he opens his eyes to the draft around him that they're creating. They quickly fade away as if they were never there, but leave behind a shower of glitter-like, diamond ashes.

This was her opportunity to run. Aaron is weakened and slow. But she doesn't. For a moment, she stares at the beauty her spell caused, but then notices the ashes from the fireball falling all around her. Each ash is a possible chance of a wildfire. In a panic, she leaps onto her knees and tries to pat them all out. She doesn't mind the cinders falling onto her skin, causing a slight burn. She care only for putting them all out. As soon as they gingerly touch the ground, she pounces on them, burying them under the dust and dirt.

As she finishes, Aaron catches up to her. Frantically, she runs back and forth, covering up and burying the glowing ashes. She sighs gratefully when her mission is accomplished. He puts a hand on her shoulder, grabbing her attention. Startled, she jumps back on her feet and faces him with wrath, for he could have burned down her beloved forest.

"Look, I just wanna talk." He steps closer to her, little by little. But with each step he takes, she takes a step away. As reassuring as possible, Aaron repeats, "I just wanna talk. I swear, I'm not trying to hurt you."

"Go away." She glances him up and down with a soft, timid voice.

"So you do speak English. . . Uh, how did you do that thing earlier?" Aaron asks as clear as he thinks possible, but still the girl remains confused. He begins gesturing like a game of charades, holding his hands to his chest then pushing them out suddenly like a shooting spell. Her eyes widen and she nods as soon as she understands what Aaron asked. Quietly and calmly she responds, "Magic." She looks down into her hands, that are pushed together, and whispers quietly. She then moves them in circles, still together, and opens them like a book to reveal a small cloud. The cloud parts down the middle and creates a shimmering rainbow, but within seconds fades.

"Woah, you're really good." He chuckles in amusement. "Uhh, say, what's your name? Mine's Aaron, by the way." Aaron extends his hand out as a warm greeting, as the

girl tilts her head. She looks at the hand then at his face. That's when Aaron realizes that his face feels like it's on fire.

The girl moves in closer to him, and takes his hand that he had shot the fire out of. She traces her fingers over the second degree burns on his hand, as Aaron jerks it back and winces. Gently placing her fingers on his shoulders, the girl seems to be calming him down. Aaron's cheeks then grows into a bright scarlet. He is not the one who is lost and clueless. Everything becomes silent; the birds stop singing, the amphibians quit croaking, and all the wildlife cease to move.

Her hands grip him in a white-knuckled grip. The pain from pinching shoulders grows even more intense as he tries to break her death-lock. Then she went for it. The cheapest, oldest, dirtiest, yet most effective move in the book. She got 'em. Right in his chicken tenders.

With blood-curdling screams, he falls to his knees. The mysterious and feisty girl shoves him onto the ground, and uses her knuckles to make sure his face has tasted the earth. After a couple of kicks to the gut, she runs off.

Aaron imagines that this is what Torus must have been feeling before he died. The pain grow, as it climbs his body in an upwards path. It becomes harder and harder to breath, and he finds that he could no longer open his eyes to see. If he ever had any machismo pride, he loses it here, as he also finds himself powerless against the flooding rivers flowing from his eyes. It seems like an endless stream. A puddle forms right as the base of his mouth. He is left there in a fetal position. And he chooses to remain there for hours. This is trickier than his first thought. And more than ever, he fears running into another girl. *Master was right. They truly are the most vicious creature.*

Chapter 4

Aaron grunts as he unloads another pack of kindling onto his make-shift campsite. It has been more than two days past his acquaintance of the girl. He sits on the log and thinks to himself, staring at the fire. He didn't want to injure his hand again, so he had decided to manually create a fire by abrading two sticks together. A method that had taken him hours. The entire time he thought. Meditated almost. *How rude. She still didn't tell me her name.*

As he sits by the fire, he tries to review the spells that he had been assigned before he left. Magic never sleeps. *In lingua mea raptores atra in nebula.* He creates a loop with his fingers and blows into it. Nothing happens. He had seen his master preform magic before. He simply had to think it, and it would happen. If it was truly a complicated spell, he might have had to whisper it. The only time he needed tools, potions, and chanting was on spells that Aaron had never seen before. They were apparently too dangerous to have someone nearby that knew nothing of the arts. That is why Ellis had always preferred to live outside of Telshic.

Again and again, Aaron repeats the spell in his mind. But again and again, he only becomes more and more frustrated. He jumps to his toes and kicks over a bucket next to him and barks, "In lingua mea raptores atra in nebula!" He huffs into his hand and waits. Nothing happens. He stomps on the bucket, throwing a fit, before he realizes that dark smoke was coming out of his hand. He inhales and cups the hand to his mouth before exhaling. He smiles and is pleased when he observes a dark mist cloud float out of his palm and drift onto the floor before it vanishes.

He sits back onto the fallen tree log, when he sees the embers floating around the fire. His small rage scene had knocked over his bucket of water and some of it had gotten into the fire. After sitting the bucket back up, he looks down at the dying cinders. An idea strikes.

He waits for the skies to turn to nightfall, before executing his plan. This is so everything will be able to be seen at full affect. He channels the fear of not being able to return to the place he calls home, for not completing the mission. Through that, he snapped his fingers, and a trail of fire flittered on his finger tips. It was time for his plan to be put into action.

The animals nearby grew restless. The smell of smoke diffused into the air surrounding the forest. Within minutes, that was the only scent in the air. The animals

bolted out of the forest, causing stampedes to awaken and swarms of birds to take flight, darkening the already poorly-lit canvas of night. The girl was awake.

Her eyes seemed perfectly adapted to the colorless night. Her pupils were dilated, just enough to take a little bit more light than most creatures. This wasn't natural or a gift. She had the magical talent of bending visible light and colors to her will. It was because of this skill that she was able to dodge trees and continue running without fear of tripping in clouded night's rush.

From behind some untouched trees, the girl hid. She was up the hill from Aaron, who was scorching the plants and earth. Her eyes, wide in disbelief, no longer needed the aid of magic to see. The rage of the flames consuming her home was bright enough to illuminate everything nearby.

"What are you doing?! Stop it!" Her screams are pleas of desperation. Every second that this conflagration pursued was a dozen homes destroyed. She fell on her knees before the flames that seemed to be mocking her. One final time she chokes through the smoke, "Please! Stop it! I'll talk, I'll talk."

Aaron is someone else at this point. Whenever magic runs through his veins, it corrupts him. It is now largely the magic that is in control. He laughs boom, as he turns around to face the girl. His eyes are soulless and completely black like the night. He grins mischievously, "I'm afraid I'm gonna need more than that, missy. You're going to have to be my prisoner."

"But who will watch over the animals?"

"You fae are never alone." Aaron reached back into his mind for knowledge he would normally have long forgotten. "The others will watch. If you agree to my demands, I will hold up my end and stop the fire. If you refuse. . ." His laughter grew even more so as he gestured towards the climbing flames. She spits at the ground before him as a sign of her reluctance. After cursing him cold hearted she nods and agrees to be his prisoner in exchange for the safety of the forest and her friends.

As insurance, Aaron whispered into his left palm, as if he was spilling secrets to his best friend. A swirl of smoke circles in his hand, and flame emerges. The girl watches apprehensively, not daring to move.

Suddenly the tight grip of his right hand managed to find her left wrist. Yanking her closer, he pressed his left palm against her right collarbone and it began to sizzle. Jerking back with tears racing down her eyes, she screamed.

Falling to the floor, clutching her collar, she continued to express her pain in pitches that made Aaron believe he would go deaf. No greater pain had ever been felt in her life. Her entire body felt it was on fire, every nerve was burning up. It felt as if there

was a deep cut from her collar to her shoulder, where an army of daggers had slashed up her pearly flesh.

The sound of screams, the smell of blood, the feel of fire. These are the raw and primitive elements that create the battlefield. These are the elements creatures of war thrive upon. One such of these creatures stood out from the cloud of smoke: Aaron. His chiseled features created depth using the shadows casted by the raging flames behind him. His dark brown hair streaks in sweat, as his lighter brown highlights seem aglow. His piercing eyes are empty and merciless.

“This is to make sure you can’t run away. If you do. . . little princess abrupts into flames. And we wouldn’t want that, now would we?” He smirks. This isn’t really Aaron.

Aaron collapsed onto all fours, panting and wheezing, desperate for air. The girl’s cries turn into loud sobs, as she slowly removes her hand from her shoulder and sees that it is covered in freshly poured blood. Blood is also found from Aaron’s lips as he coughs it up. His body has rejected his use of magic. It is too straining for him.

He soon recovers, though still feeling weary, and sits up to look at the girl. Teary eyed, she returns the stare. Trying to lighten the mood, he extends his hand and smiles, “Oh, by the way, I’m Aaron. I wasn’t sure if you caught that from last time.”

“I’m. . . Myth.” She raises her right hand to meet his, but then it fall lifelessly on the ground. She winces as the tears threaten to breach through again. She moves her hand and looks at the wound that whatever had controlled Aaron had inflicted just seconds ago. It had stopped bleeding, but the pain still lingers. Where the wound was, appeared a tattoo. It was a mixture of a ring of stars with an anchor in the middle. Tiny but intricate crescent moons were etched into the entire tattoo.

“What’s wrong?” Aaron scoots in closer and scoops her shoulder towards him. “Did. . . Did I do this?” As if she was talking to a crazy person, she barely nods. It is now Aaron’s turn to take disbelief. He stutters, “N-no. . . I vaguely remember something happened. . .i-it was all a blur. . .b-but. . . I couldn’t have! I. . . I don’t even know that spell!”

“*You* didn’t. . . but you did. . .” She looks at her new tattoo solemnly before turning back to him. “You said you don’t know how to conjure the spell, but can you at least identify it?” Aaron squinted his eyes to examine it and muttered, “Uhh. . . there’s a ship weight of some sort. . . and a bunch of tiny, little moon shapes. It’s a. . . stationary spell?”

“Close, but actually I think it’s a prisoner’s spell. I have to stay a certain distance to you. If I surpass that. . . I think it kills me.” She grips it even tighter.

“That looks like it hurts. . . I’m sorry.”

“Wasn’t your fault. It’s whoever trained you.” She closed her eyes and her lips moved without creating a sound. Aaron stared at her, completely lost. He asked what she was doing, but received no reply. After what seemed like an eternity she opened her eyes and scoffed, “Don’t you know it’s dangerous to interrupt someone while performing magic? I was just removing the heat from this burn wound.”

She moves her hand from the wound in an arched manner. Streaks of yellow, orange, and red light follow her hand and sits in a ball in her palm. She smiles, “There.” before she throws it out of site.

Aaron waits for her to nod her approval before lighting brushing his hand against the tattoo. There is no more heat. In fact, it’s cold.

“ . . . H-how did you do that?” He asks in awe. She sighs, “I can manipulate visible light and heat.”

“If you’re that amazing, then how are you my prisoner?”

The girl was quiet for a few moments. When she finally opened her mouth she spoke barely more than a whisper, “I am not your prisoner. I am prisoner to the same magic you believe you control--when in reality, it controls you.”

Chapter 5

It would be a few days journey before Aaron could proudly present his captured prey to his master. With this new-found spell Aaron had performed, he didn't need to worry about binding or attaching a leash to his prisoner.

They both are weak from the excess use of magic from the past few days. Climbing through the rough terrain of the forest, the duo trip left and right. As an extra measure, Aaron has Myth marching ahead of him so he can keep a half-closed eye on her. They are in desperate need of energy and nourishment. about to fall asleep. The moist and unstable ground gives way under her foot and she shrieks as she sprawls back.

Aaron's eyes snap open as he sees a body free falling, down the steep hill, towards him. Before he knows it, Myth is in his arms, clutching his chest. When she realizes who her hero is, she shoves him away hastily. He grins, "You owe me."

"Oh I'll pay you back alright." She growled. "You'll get more than you deserve." Before Aaron can open his mouth to question her, she's out of his arms and strutting forwards.

Hssssssh. She grabs her collarbone where the tattoo lies, wincing in pain. The skin of the tattoo is glowing lava-like and starting to burn again. Myth glares at Aaron and motions, urging him to quicken the pace. For a minute she had forgotten that the spell bound her to him.

Aaron speeds up, but it isn't long before their stomachs remind them of their starvation. He sets down his gear and declares, "We need to hunt something to eat." Myth looked sick at that news.

"You're not vegetarian, are you?"

"No. I eat meat. I just don't hunt for it."

"Then how do you get it?"

"I eat the meat of those who will no longer need it."

"So. . . you wait for them to die or something?" Aaron had never heard of this method before. And to his surprise, she nods to his question. It is his turn to act superior as he shrugs, "Well, I don't need you anyways. I can hunt on my own." Aaron tried to storm away to set up, but realized Myth was following him. He waved her off as a

gesture to go away. But apparently she didn't get the message. After a few minutes, he turned around and demanded to know why she was following even though she despised hunting. She simply deadpans and tugs at the right side of her collar, displaying the tattoo. Being the idiot Aaron is, he apologizes and turns around, continues walking, and tries to play it cool. Even though he is sweating.

He comes across a tree with vines hanging down from the branches. After searching for one he found sufficient, he grips it and yanks at it with all his might. The vine is stubborn and refuses to fall. Myth points up at the branch that the vine has itself wrapped around. She scolds, "Ugh, *stultus*, you can't muscle it that way."

"Hnnnnng." Aaron puffs, "Watch me." He continues flexing his muscles as he puts all his weight on his the thick vine. Eventually Aaron falls back onto his bottom, on the ground, out of breath. He grunts, "One more time."

Myth sighs and holds up two fingers on each hand. She intertwines them together, while whispering, "ligatum nodum annuet atque maniplos." After having her hands move around each other in a circular motion, she sharply pulls her right over the other and presses her fingers tightly together. She makes an O-shape with her left fingers and sends her right fingers through the loop, roughly pushing her fingers through the loop. The vine unties itself and falls, right as Aaron resume pulling at it. The heavy, green rope plops down on his head, as he tumbles over again. He jumps up in victory, and celebrates, "Haha! I did it! See, I told you."

She rolls her eyes, "Whatever."

He tilts his head and acknowledges, "Okay okay, I saw you help a little. Wait, what was it you called me earlier? Still-puss?"

"Stultus." She grumbles, "It means idiot in old tongue. I thought you spoke it."

"Old tongue? Oh! That explains why some spells I learned were in Latin. It's supposed to make it easier or something, right?" By the time Aaron gathers the rope vine and turns to face her, Myth is almost out of her designated range. She wants out of there, desperately.

Myth taps her foot impatiently as Aaron sets up a snare between two trees. Every once in awhile she offered criticism such as "that's too loose" or "this is so slow, c'mon c'mon c'mon" or "you have to use an arbor knot, you can't just use your big muscles." This shortened Aaron's fuse, to say the least.

“You know, I live on a bit of a farm, so I think I know what I’m doing.”

“Sure, if your prey was in a corral. You need to use a knot that’ll tighten when they try to escape, or else they’re just going to slip through that hole.”

“I don’t have to listen to you. You’re my prisoner, not my teacher. Relax, I got this. What do you know about hunting anyways?”

“Nothing. But I was trained by the fae to set up traps to protect the forest.”

“Heh, and we saw how well that worked. I got you after all.”

Myth reddened almost as vividly as her hair as she turned, “I’ve been neglecting my duties to play with the animals.”

Aaron chuckled as he planted his foot onto the trunk of the tree and leaned the rest of his body back so that the knot tightened. After slapping his hands together and dusting off, he declared that he was finished. Myth bounced and clapped her hands rapidly, applauding him. To be fair, she was honestly more happy she could start moving around again. All that was left was to find something to trick into falling into it.

Myth’s pale, velvet fingers touch the moist dirt in the shade of the trees. She motions forwards. A herd of deer has been there recently. Though she was never a hunter, she developed the skill of tracking animals while playing hide and seek with them. However, when the two come in site of a field of tall, dewy grass, Myth refuses to help anymore.

Picking up a fallen, oversized branch from the pile of crisp leaves on the ground, Aaron creeps up towards the grazing herd. Myth follows closely behind. With a whoop, Aaron beckons a screech and hits the branch against the trunks of the nearby tree.

The deer perk up as they hear this. The chase is on. Dispersing like frightened cockroaches, they flee in every direction. It’s every creature for itself, as they disregard their friends and family and trample over one another to get away. Through the beauty of nature, no matter how brutal they are, there is a sense of elegance to their fear when they move ever so gracefully.

“What’re you doing? They’re getting away!” Pesterns Myth. He puts a finger to her mouth as he stays there, crouched, calculating, waiting for the right moment to strike.

There, a fawn stumbles around. Lost. Aaron's eyes narrow onto her as he goes in. Myth huffs as she tries her best to keep up with the boy sprinting and swinging the branch like a barbaric lunatic. Hooting and hollering, he chases the fawn away from the rest of the group. Myth starts to see the method to his madness.

For minutes that feel like hours, the two push their lungs and legs to the limits. They start to trek uphill, but Aaron loses his footing in the grassy soil. *Aaaaaahhh!* He flies back, right as Myth is ready to surpass him. As she sees his silhouette looming over her, she hesitates before digging her heel into the ground to slow down. With an *Omph!* the hurling Aaron "majestically" lands into her arms. His weight alone almost pulls them tumbling down the hill. He pops up, meeting Myth eye-to-eye when she smirks, "I told you I'd repay you."

"Yeah yeah yeah." Aaron blushes from embarrassment that he needed his prisoner to save him. He scurries to his feet and screams, "It's getting away!"

The two dash after the fawn, whom they have successfully gotten to run in the direction of their trap. It isn't long before the vine tied between the trees comes into site. However, they make it just soon enough to see the fawn quickly untangle itself and escape into the distance. Aaron throws his branch onto the floor and puffs with frustration. Myth collapses to the ground on her hind and swallows large gulps of air to soothe her burning lungs and flaming muscles. In between breaths she's able to wheeze, "I . . . told you. . . arbor. . . knot. . ."

Again Aaron waves her off. They take a short break while the two remain silent and stare at their poorly constructed trap, now torn. He shakes his head before popping up and looks to her. He considers trying her method, just once. The two of them agree and get to work.

Myth had never actually done an arbor knot before. She had only seen pictures through a text book. She soon found that it was much more difficult to try it in real life, rather than the kid-friendly pages of a book. She couldn't use magic on this knot, she never studied a spell for that either.

It takes her explaining to Aaron before he agrees to lend her his muscle. She first demonstrates it with a stem from a nearby flower, with peach-yellow petals that were softer than silk. Aaron suddenly gasps, "That's what that is? I know this one! Well, kinda. This one actually confused me a lot, but back on the farm we called it the horse knot."

Aaron tries it with the actual vine, but finds that he keeps confusing the steps. Myth places his hands over his, to help guide him. With their combined wits and strength, they defeat the stubborn vine and finish the knot. They had tied the knot.

They execute the plan with brilliance. This time they aren't able to capture a fawn, but an elderly one who was unable to keep up with the youngsters of the herd. Aaron had weighted for Myth's approval. She agreed, since it would seem that this one didn't have many days left as it was.

The white-hairs on the bearded deer showed its old-age and wisdom. It had survive a long time, but that is about to end. Aaron lunges at him, club in hand, but Myth throws herself in front of him before Aaron can strike.

"What's wrong with you? What were you planning exactly, huh? To beat this poor, scared animal to death with that flimsy piece of wood? That's terrible! You'd have to hit it him over and over again before he'd finally give in."

"Okay fine, what do you have in mind?" Aaron sets down this branch next to his small sack that he had brought along for the mission. Myth eyed the bag and asked, "Do you have a knife?"

"Yeah, but that would require me to get close! What if that *thing* bites me?"

"Well *this* thing is about to bite you!" She snarls, pointing at herself. After calming down she changes her tone to, "Look, I'll get in close first."

"How'll I know what to hit?"

"I'll give you the signal."

Aaron nods and stands aside, pulling his knife out of his sack and clenching it tightly in his palm. Myth feels the tension rise as he eyes her and only her. She goes towards the deer, placing one heel before her toes again and again, slowly approaching the half-frightened-to-death creature. Her eyes seem to shimmer as she reaches out a hand and gazes into the deer's large, beady eyes. It snorts a few times and calms down. It senses a friend. Aaron watches with awe, as Myth is able to place her hand on the deer's muzzle. She pulls herself closer and he lowers his head, letting her pet him more.

She whispers, "Hello, wise uncle. I'm sure you have much to teach, and we much to learn. Lady Fortune has been unfortunate with you, as she picked today to be your time. You will provide for those who are unable to provide for themselves. You will help the needs of the many by this final deed you give. And you will be remembered. . ."

She waves a hand in front of his face, showing a brightly colored rainbow, dazing the animal for a few seconds. She turns to Aaron and uses two fingers to lightly tap the back of the deer's head. Before she can blink, the blade is driven into the back of the

deer's skull. Myth squeals as she witnesses the gorey action, too slow to face away. Her eyes water as she repeats, "You will be remembered. . . Thank you for your sacrifice." She wipes the blood from her freckled face.

The body went limp, and no longer struggled. Myth seemed depressed as she aided Aaron in unloading the body from the green trap. To break the silence he lightly elbowed her, "You always talk to the animals like that?"

"To outsiders like you, it may seem stupid. But the Fae know that the animals hear us. Just because they don't respond doesn't mean they don't understand. In many ways animals are better than humans."

Aaron laughs, "How so?"

"Well, for one, animals don't take each other prisoner." Aaron's grin quickly fades. Before he can insert a rebuttal, Myth lifts her head, spins around, and struts off to collect firewood. Aaron decides to speak no more.

The corpse was hung over the pit set for the fire. Myth cleaned Aaron's knife and prepared some spices she was able to gather from the nearby woods, as the two sat there waiting. When the knife glistens and beams with the surrounding moonlight, Myth looks up, and watches with amusement of Aaron tutting his fingers. With each failed attempt, he grows angrier.

Using the knife, Myth slices off a tiny stick on the tree and hands it to him. After taking it, Aaron looks at it confused, and tilts his head at Myth. She sighs before explaining, "It's a makeshift wand, stultus."

"A wand? I don't need one."

"Yes, a wand. And yes, you need one. Some people are chanters, some are signers --like me-- and yes, some use wands. You obviously can't remember the hand signs to the basic fire spell, so just use this to focus the energy. It won't do much since it's not personalized and you don't have an emotional bond to this or anything, but it should help. Just try it."

"No, I don't need to focus. I did it earlier, remember? I shot a fireball at you."

"That was a rare chance. Like, baby-trapped-under-a-horse rare. Look, you need to focus your magical energy. Chanting, signing, and wands are all techniques you can use to help focus on one thing specific. So try it" she ordered, pointing to the pit.

“Um. . . okay. . . ig-. . . igni-. . . ignis de. . .”

Smack! Myth’s oddly soft hand had become a weapon that had caused a redness at the base of Aaron’s head. She scolds, “You don’t even know the spell? You can’t perform anything unless you focus that energy.” She grabs his palms, that have been wrapped in cloth, but peeling skin and boils are still visible. She continues, “Remember your little tricks from earlier? Sure, you might not need to focus if you have a cheat sheet, but if you use that cheat sheet I guarantee you’ll get hurt. Whoever taught you is a fool. You’re going to get yourself killed.”

“My master ain’t no fool!” Aaron tries to shoot back but realizes it’s hopeless to try to win an argument with her. Especially when he doesn’t know much. He puts his head down and mumbles, “I thought you’d like me dead anyhow.”

Myth sighed and sat down behind next to him. She lightly smacked his face and told him to look up. When he does, Myth replies, “Just because you’re a clueless follower who will follow your master blindly, doesn’t mean I want you to die. . . per-say. I just wish it didn’t have to be me. I’m sorry, I’m really frustrated right now.”

“It’s okay. It’s really my fault for being a stultus, right?” Aaron smiled without a hint of sarcasm. He meant it. Myth chuckled softly and agreed. With that, he slapped her back to return the favor and voiced, “Coolio than. Let’s go burn some stuff up!”

Aaron pointed his crudely made wand at the pit and steadied himself. He glanced over at Myth and she gave her nod of approval. She whispered, “Okay. I’m going to say the spell, you need to repeat after me.”

“Can do, Myth.”

“In flamma. . .” she leads.

“In flamma. . .” he echoes.

“...ignis de virga.” She ends.

“... ignis de virga?”

“Good, now do it on your own.”

He licks his lips before his first solo attempt. Standing straight and puffing his chest up to improve his posture, he booms, “In flamma. . . ignis. . . de virga!” *Nothing*. Nothing but the sound of wind blowing past their ears and leaves crumbling down. Myth’s eyes see nothing else but Aaron as he reads: *Again*. He points the wand tighter and blasts, “In flamma ignis de virga!”

Still nothing. Myth rises and giggles, “Oh I see what you’ve been doing wrong. You’re trying to force it to come out.”

“Hm? What’dya mean?”

“You want magic to bend to your will. Princess, that’s not how it works. Magic is so much stronger than what you could grasp with that tiny mind of yours. Wizards, witches, warlocks, sorcery-- All that isn’t controlling magic. Magic is all around. It flows through us and around us. Magic is life force. We don’t control it. It controls us. And our ability to guide it towards what we want is magic.”

“Did you just call me princess? Not nice, Myth! What if I called you that?”

“I wouldn’t like it, but I wouldn’t be angry.” Myth walks up behind him, putting one hand on his hand that holds the aimed wand. She rests her head on Aaron’s arm and watches over his shoulder. She uses her other hand and wraps it around his ribcage, under his arm, and onto his heart. She taps it a few times and encourages, “Again. You can do it. Just feel the energy flow through you.”

Aaron closes his eyes and straightens his spine. He takes a few deep breaths through his nose and feels Myth tap along, matched to his heartbeat. Everything becomes still. Aaron realizes that his body soon grows warmer. Not a hot sweat, but a more emotional feeling. As if he finally found a place he belonged. In this moment he feels at peace. Just perfect.

“In flamma ignis de virga.” The words calmly leave his lips, like gentle water trickling over a rock.

Nothing.....Nothing..... Aaron starts to lose hope. *What did I do wrong?* Myth and he grow impatient, just anticipating for something to happen. Seconds that tick by go like hours. Nothing..... *Phmmph!*

Chapter 6

“Aieeeee!” Myth squeals in delight. Her hands clap together faster than the eye can follow. She hops in circles around Aaron as she parades, “You did it, you did it! I can’t believe the trash I said actually helped! Whoo! Aaron, you did it!”

Aaron chortles softly at his small victory, but the joy from Myth’s face is highly contagious, as Aaron can’t help but to join her in their short moment of euphoria.

With a smile still on their faces, he goes to roast their prized deer. After adding all the seasoning, Myth doesn’t seem to mind that they had to hunt to catch their dinner. She seems to have forgotten that “mind-blowing” event, and rocks side to side enjoy the scent of her coming meal. Her stomach growls in approval.

After successfully cooking the deer, if not it being a little burnt, Aaron slices some off for Myth and himself. The night is cold, so they sit side by side, hoping to extract a little warmth from each other.

“So um. . . why are you so good? At magic, I mean.” Aaron is flustered when he tries to break the silence. Myth had felt comfortable, but Aaron does not. When she seems silent he continues, “Ellis--I mean my master, said that he used to be classically trained. You know, at an actual school for magic ‘n stuff. Back when they were everywhere. He told me that a lot of them shut down because too many people were being corrupted and using them for their own uses. I mean, I think a few are still open, but only in certain locations that are kept mild secrets, ya know? Uhh. . . What I’m trying to ask is, are you classically trained?”

“No, I’m not. I’m not classically trained.” Myth’s voice was barely more than a whisper. Though she is looking down, her eyes seem to look as if she is gazing into the distance. Again, Aaron asks how she became so skilled. She elaborates, “Talent, I guess. I’m not sure, really. I always felt the urge to perform it when I was a child. It just drew to me. My mother would walk into the room to find me waving my wand, and she’d scream, ‘Aurora! What are you doing? You’re supposed to be studying and practicing your duties. Not flooding your mind with uselessness and dark spirits. What will your people say about a princess that can’t prefor-’” Myth went silent.

“... Aurora? Princess?! What?”

“Nothing.”

“Like ‘ell nothin’! Say what you were saying again?”

“Aaron, it’s nothing. Please drop it.” She huffs when she sees determination burning bright in his eyes. Either that, or it was simply the reflection of the fire. It had risen for a moment when Aaron had exclaimed his surprise. Aaron then tries his secret weapon. One that would never work on someone so strong and willful as Ellis, but perhaps Myth seems weak enough. Just enough. His secret weapon? Puppy-dog eyes.

Myth groans in detest, but eventually a little smile curves upwards at the edge of her mouth. She gives into the smile and giggles, “You look like you’ve been sippin’ a little too much wine when you do that, Aaron.” She continued to laugh a little while Aaron regretfully retracted his secret weapon. In between high-pitched laughter she surrendered, “Okay, okay. I’ll tell you.”

“You’re too much, Aaron.” She sighs, “I am a princess. Or rather, was a princess. Every little girl’s dream, right? Well it’s not all cracked up as it’s meant to be. On top of all the countless hours of studying, I wanted more than anything to go to a magic school. I mean, it’s my one dream, to this day. My parents, especially my mother, disapproved when they heard about the massive corruption that was spreading. Even banned one from being created in our kingdom. But this didn’t stop me, I only practiced in secret. A few times they would find my wand, and they’d take it away and burn it. That’s when I learned about signing. I knew my parents couldn’t take away my fingers, so I studied even harder to become one. Eventually they found out, because that’s what annoying-parents-who-don’t-give-you-any-privacy do. I knew some sort of big punishment was coming, and I didn’t want any part of it. I was tired of being treated like an outsider in my own family, so. . . I just ran. I ran until I felt safe enough to practice. And everyday I did. One night I fell asleep in the woods you found me in, and in the morning I was found by the fae. I told them my little story, and they adopted me. Taught me a few things and took care of me. Sure it wasn’t a castle, but it was home.”

“I can’t believe you did that. . .”

“Did what? Pick my own needs before my family’s?” Myth shrugs as if the choice wasn’t difficult but obvious.

“No, I mean, I can’t believe you gave everythin’ up.” Aaron’s wide-eyes search her for an answer. “That’s crazy, man. You had everythin’. . . and you just gave it up.”

“Um, I’d like to think that I just improved my life. I might have given a little up, but I got so much more back. I got my freedom and happiness.”

“You had everythin’ though. And. . .” Aaron’s voice trails off for a few seconds. When it returns, he cracks, “You just don’t understand. For a kid who had nothin’ growin’ up. . . that’s just. . . unthinkable. Where I come from, there ain’t freedom or happiness if you don’t have a home or money or family or none. But you had it all. And you just gave it all up.”

It becomes quiet. The tension is so strong if you grabbed a knife and sliced through the air, the tension would feel like a block of cold butter. Seeing the metaphorical little storm cloud that follows all who’re upset, hovering over Myth, Aaron decodes to try to try to lighten the mood. He nudges her.

“So. . . Aurora, eh?” He grins slyly as if he had just figured out the secrets of magic.

“Yeah. . .” she deadpans. “That’s the name my parents chose for me. . .”

“Why Myth?”

“Because I am one.” Aaron tilts his head in curiosity, but by her current mood, he doesn’t know if he should push on. She decides to help and goes on anyways. “Myths don’t exist, though some people wish they did. That’s what I am. That’s what Princess Aurora is.”

“Well. . . I like Aurora.”

This is Myth’s turn to shift her head and raise a brow. This causes Aaron’s panicked reply, “The name, I meant. It’s really pretty. Like yo-. . . um. . . Myth is a cool name too, I mean. The meaning and how you chose it yourself and all. . . and um. . .”

Myth giggles as she pushes her finger to his lips, “You should close them before you embarrass yourself even more. You really are a stultus.” She pauses before telling him, “Thank you. Aurora isn’t the worst name, if I’m being completely honest. It means Dawn.” She smiles.

“It’s pretty.”

“Thank you. . . at least someone should know before I get sacrificed for no reason.”

“You ain't gonna get sacrificed.”

“Oh really? You can say that with one hundred and ten percent certainty? You can promise me, give me your holy word, that I won't die on your account?”

“Well. . . I-I. . .” Aaron becomes flustered. Trying to change the subject Aaron refers back to his basic mathematic lessons, “I'm one hun-dread per-scent sure that there nothing over one hun-dread per-scent.”

“That's a no.” Myth Scoffs.

“You ain't gonna get sacrificed.” Aaron's voice is firm as he repeats his statement and ends the conversation. He believes she'll survive, though it is quite impossible to live without a heart.

She shakes her head in disagreement. Myth points out everything that's happened so far. She isn't worth a ransom anymore, so she must have been chosen to take for her talents. She rants about how only a monster willing to send a child to kidnap another is desperate enough for power. And the only immediate form of that is draining everything out of the victim. She states as firmly as Aaron had, that she is going to die.

Aaron doesn't know what to say past that point. They sit there in a field of silence, focusing all their attention on the succulent deer meat in their hands. Having nothing better to do, their teeth tear into the barely seasoned skin.

“I'm bored.” Myth rises, from admiring the flames she helped to breathe life into, to her feet. It always seems that she is bored with her constant fidgeting. Aaron, who was about to doze off into slumber, looks up and shrugs, “So. . . Whatdya wanna do than?”

There is glittering gleam in her eyes as she declares, “Magic.”

“Aw, Myth. . . ain't we done enough for one day? I'm like super tired.”

“You're only tired because you waste all your energy. You need to improve your stamina. Believe me, guys are only worthwhile if they have a whole lot of stamina.” She winks.

Aaron remains lost, but his cheeks burn as brightly as the flames in front of him, as if they caught something he had not. He shifts the back of his elbows onto the log behind him and asks, “What kinda magic? I barely know any.”

“Well why don't I just practice. I'll do all the work, so you can sit back and enjoy it.”

“Be my guest.” He grins in delight. He's proud of himself, as he believes that he successfully talked himself out of doing more work than he needs. Whatever works. Hearing this, she stands in front of him, as if she's about to give a presentation to a large audience, and breathes in the smell of a fresh roast and cinders around them. While her eyes are closed, Aaron thinks back, “I know you can do rainbows an' all those pretty lights, but what else can you do?”

Her shoulders sink as soon as these words reach her ears. Sitting back down, she sighs, “That's my major--Phosphorescent Manipulation. Or in layman's terms, bending the light into colors, constructs and such. I can only borrow other people's light though. Can't really make my own. Not that good, yet. Other than basic spells, I don't know much else.”

After signing quickly, she extends her hand so that way the fire is aglow right behind it, from Aaron's point of view. It shimmers for a moment before it completely disappears. Myth bends the borrowed light from the fireplace to make her arm invisible. Aaron is in awe. A few seconds later, Myth's hand fades back to visibility. She nonchalantly waves off, “I can't hold that spell for too long, but I'm pretty decent at my major though. At least in my opinion. What's yours?”

“Uhh. . .” Aaron hesitates. Before now, he's never heard of majors. Myth catches onto this and teases, “Oh come on. Don't tell me you don't know. Wait. . . you really don't? You're kidding me! Well, what can you do?”

“Uhhhh. . .” Again Aaron hesitates. He is embarrassed that he doesn't know much. He becomes pensive before he responds, “Other than the flames, I can summon a dark cloud-mist thing?”

“Well, let's see it than.”

“Uhh wh-what?” Aaron didn't expect to be tonight's centerpiece for a show and tell.

“Let's see it.” Myth opens her hands as a gesture that she is willing to help again. Aaron brushes her off. He wants to prove to her, and himself, that he is capable of casting his own spells. He looks over at the makeshift wand Myth has plucked for him earlier. *If I can perform magic on my own, without a tool. . . maybe Ellis will be proud*

of me fin'ly. What a present to bring home to his master, on top of the girl. This in mind, he grabs the the stick and chucks it out of site.

“What are you doing? Are you crazy? You need that.”

“I don't need a crutch.” Aaron closes his eyes and takes a deep breath through his nose. Soon, the storm in his mind becomes serene. The feeling of warmth flows through his body as he tries to remember, word for word, whatever Myth had recited for him earlier.

A leaf rustles in the wind, causing the hairs on his neck to stand on end. The both of them jerk their heads to see it was just a sound.

Closing his eyes and facing forwards again, he tries to refocus. Aaron lifts his flattened hand and chants, “In lingua mea raptores atra in nebula.”

With each time he chants it, he loses more and more patience. The wind and rustling behind him increases, but Aaron consciously chooses to ignore it. He knows it's just the wind. He simply minds his spell and nothing else. The spell that is slowly driving him mad and shortening his fuse.

Then. *It* happens. The noises from the bushes weren't just noises. The creator of the sounds sprints towards Aaron, with Myth frozen from the sidelines. Adrenaline pumps through Aaron's body as he faces the beast. It pounces.

He falls backwards, unable to scream The only thing he can shout is the last thing his mind remembers, which is, “In lingua mea raptores atra in nebula, in lingua mea raptores atra in nebula!” The balck purple-tinting mist spews out of him, from a place where the sun doesn't shine, and surrounds him like an ink cloud from a cuttlefish.

Myth follows and also falls onto her hind, laughing uncontrollably. She gasps between giggles, “That's definitely one way to do it!” After calming down, she continues, “It seems like your spells only work out of aggression or fear. And that face of yours was definitely fearful. . . not to mention priceless! I mean, did you see where the smoke came out of? You must have felt it down there, wow-ee.” Again, she erupts into hoots of joy.

“Whut's so funny? I ain't scared. . . Okay okay, m'be I was, but just a little. You can't tell me you wern't scared none!”

“Of this little, cuddly, adorable fella?” Myth picked up an unusually plump, caramel coated rabbit. “No way! He's so cute, I could eat him!” Aaron's eyes narrows on the rabbit as he plots his revenge. And a delicious haffenreffer recipe he has never tried. Myth hugs the rabbit closer and deploys her puppy dog eyes and shakes her head disapprovingly, “Oh no, don't you dare.” After a couple of sweet nothings, and after she had petted it to her fill, she released it back into the foliage. It seemed overly jubilant

and way to eager to be liberated from Myth's deadly grip, as it skipped its way back into the wilderness it knew as home. Apparently facing natural predators is far more preferable than Myth's overbearing attention. The corner of Aaron's lip lifts into a grin and his dark brown eyes softens when he thinks of this.

Myth, too lazy to get back up to her feet, crawls back to the campfire and sits a mere two feet away, admiring the flames she helped produce. Aaron notices that her hair has drastically different reds than in the day. In the front, her many different layers of various reds are bright and almost orange. The flame's glow bounces onto her shining face. But in the back, her different layers seem burgundy or brown. And for the first time, Aaron is able to see her eyes. He examines them in admiration. He always had thought her eyes were hazel, but with closer inspection finds that they're green in the middle. Not only green, but close to her pupil he sees light shades of blue and sprinkles of a golden color. With the fire reflecting in them, Aaron believes he has finally found a view that matches, or even outranks, the sunset.

Suddenly he remembers what his Master had warned him before he had left. Myth realizes that there are unwanted eyes that lay on her. She turns towards him and is about to sneer, but out of nowhere she smiles. Just a little bit. However, Aaron's mind isn't in the present. He can't see what's going on around him. All he can see is what's going on in his mind. *She's a trickster. Let down your guard for even the slightest second, and a dagger will land in my back.* He snaps out of whatever spell she had placed him under.

"Aaron? Aaron, are you alright? You just got extremely pale. Like you just saw a ghost. Are you alright?"

Aaron shakes his head, pinching between his eyebrows. He waves it off as if he's fine and gives Myth a cold and empty glare. She leans back and puts her hands up in front of her in sign of a surrender. She defends, "Hey hey hey, it's alright. You don't look too well though." Myth creeps closer and extends her hand towards Aaron's forehead, but before she can come within an inch close enough Aaron slaps her hand and shoves her away.

"Don touch me, you beast."

"Woah there, boy." She tugs at the collar of her shirt and reveals her collarbone. At first, Aaron is too disgusted to look down at what she's presenting, scared she will put him into a hypnotic state of some sort. But Myth seems determined not to move until Aaron looks at what she's trying to point out. His eyes are lured down as he glances at Myth's collarbone. It's right now when the clear and obvious tattoo, even in the darkness

of night, hits Aaron's memory. The spell he had somehow put on her is powerful. When Aaron seems to have been thoroughly reminded, Myth quickly tugs her shirt back up and nods, "See. It's all alright. I won't hurt you. I can't, if I want to prolong my life with the little time I have left."

So once more Myth approaches Aaron, this time slower. She reaches out and her fingertips brush Aaron's forehead, causing him to quiver. Realizing that she is also safe, Myth brings herself close to Aaron, till their toes are practically touching each other even though they're both sitting in a leg-crossed position. Her finger soon become her entire palm, gently placed on the top of his head--light as feathers.

"Golly, Aaron, you suddenly became as warm as dragon fire."

"Heh. Well that might be a good thing, seeing how it's lookin' like it'll be awful chilly tonight, ya know?"

Myth looks up at the star-lit night and nods, "Apparently so. It's really pretty out here though." Aaron shivers before agreeing. He watches her watch the stars in aw, as he notices that the starlight reflects in her eyes. He too begins to look up, and just like Myth, his breath is drawn out of him.

Above the pair was an endless blanket of deep blue, with little diamond-like specks scattered throughout. After what feels like only a few minutes, clouds of breath form whenever the pair exhale. Myth hugs her knees and keeps what little warmth to herself, by breathing into her palms that are close to her mouth.

Aaron's eyelids bare the weight of mountains and begin to slowly sink. Before he can fall in the graceful, carefree arms of the angel of sleep, he feels a tug around his waist. He looks down and sees Myth's every-so-messy hair resting on his chest. The tug he felt was her arms wrapping around his waist.

A fuzzy warmth dispersed from the core of his chest, and through every vein of his body. He could feel her heart beat in harmony with his. She looks up at him with her emerald eyes and smiles.

"I just needed a blanket."

The night was not so cold after that.

Chapter 7

The center of warmth shifts and Myth shivers. The wind howls in her ears, which causes her eyes to open. Her head rises, as her hair blows in each and every direction and wraps around her face. Next to her lies Aaron, who had rolled over and unknowingly caused Myth to fall off his chest and get pushed away.

The fire was no more than a few embers, desperate for more fuel. Fighting to stay alive. A soft breeze caressed the embers onto some small wood chips that were not yet touched, trying to coerce life to come back into the dying flames.

Grey ash flakes, softer than silk, swirl and glide around the fire. Whispers of ideas are blown into Myth's ears by the wind. As if the wind is trying to help her, they blow up more dust and ash, revealing something sparkling and silver-like in the place where bold flames had risen. A knife.

Cut it out. Be free. Or stay, and die tomorrow. The whispers were clear. The choice seems transparent to Myth, as she crawled forwards, careful to not to make a sound. She glimpses over at Aaron, as she gingerly wraps her fingers around the smooth, cold oak handle of the blade.

As she pulls it out of the dead dust, the edge drags across the rocks surrounding the embers. A scraping noise, like nails on a wooden wall, intertwines itself with the sounds of the wind.

With a sudden stop, she turn and stares at Aaron. His eyes remain shut, and refuses to open. He sleeps as a young child, not wanting to return to the real world. Starting once again, she gradually moves the blade out from the ring of rocks, keeping her eyes on Aaron's blessed face.

She freezes up, and the hairs tingle and rise at the back of her neck when Aaron groans softly. After rubbing his nose and letting out a soft grunt, he turn to his side and mutters something in his sleep. She sighs in relief and continues to proceed to take the knife.

Pulling it close to her chest, Myth tiptoes over to where the dark of night consumes all light, so it's impossible to see. Going down on her knees once more, she pulls out the sparkly blade for examination. The metal sparkles and glows with possibility, wonder, and anticipation.

It tempts her, whispering. *Use me. Liberation is at your fingertips.* She nods solemnly and points the tip of the blade at the center of her chest. The blade's edge soon trails upwards and climbs to her collar, as she lowers her shirt line. It looms over the cursed tattoo that prevents Myth from claiming her freedom.

She inhales sharply and pressed the knife into her skin, barely skimming the bone. She grits her teeth to stifle her yelp. The tears push their way to her bottom

eyelids, as the blood crawls out of the new found flesh hole and breathe air for the first time. It dribbles onto the solid earth below her. The tattoo begins to burn more, as it feels its being is threatened to be cut out of her body.

Myth's chest rises and falls more rapidly as she breathes harder and harder. In between her breaths, soft groans of pain can be heard. She looks over to Aaron to make sure he doesn't wake. As expected, he sleeps like a babe. A sense of serenity soothes Myth, but is soon washed over by the oncoming reminder of pain.

The moment that her tears fall from her face and mix with the blood on the soil, she regrets her choice. She stares over at Aaron, who is blissfully unaware of what Myth is prepared to do.

But she stops, her mettle fading. The tears are no longer trickling down due to pain, but now due to regret. Before now, she had never seen Aaron as much more than her captor. Him sleeping this deeply gave her a realization. *He's a fool!* Sure, Myth herself couldn't kill him, but she didn't have to protect him either. Any wild beast could attack at anytime, even if this end of the forest wasn't as dense. His naivety makes her see that he is defenseless. He would blindly follow his master to the end of the Earth, even though it was clear to everyone else that the master was using someone as powerful as Aaron. *Poor, sweet Aaron.* If he didn't return with Myth, he would be severely punished. And even worse, he would not rebel.

Thud. Both the knife and Myth's cloud of ignorance drops. Before this moment Myth had never even considered Aaron's perspective. *It was him or her.* But unfortunately, due to this moment, Myth had the power to choose which.

Using her left hand to clutch her bleeding wound, she chooses her right to pick up the still-sparkling blade, that only hours ago was used to slice their dinner. Her hand shakes, as it continues to sway her to choose the path of freedom. She's tempted.

Lowering her left hand, she aims the weapon back onto its intended path. She glances over at Aaron's peaceful face. She chooses. . .

Chapter 8

Chirp chirp. Chirp chirp. The birds do ballet as they sing to their mates as they pass through the air. Aaron's try to open. At first he's sees a mirage of his home. He smells the damp wood of his old cot, and hears the crackle of a dying fire making beef stew. He blinks a few times and sees that the fire in front of him had died due to neglect during the cold night. The creaking noises he had thought were coming from a cot was really the old log he had been leaning on. As he sits up he notices that his awkward sleeping posture has caused him some pain in his lower back.

Standing up, he stretches and rubs his hands on the spot of the pain, massaging it. As if he was programed, Aaron goes over to his bag and pours himself a cup of water to drink and to start washing. After the icy clear water slaps him in the face, Aaron shoots straight up, in full-panic. *Where did she go?*

Sweat threatens to drip from his brow, as he tosses over every bag and trunk in the area of the campsite. He screams as loud as his lungs allow, "Myth? Myth! Where 're you?!" Sure enough, no answer.

After a few more seconds of frantic searching, he falls onto an overturned log, defeated. Engulfing his face into the embrace of his hands, he tugs his skin and his matted hair. Softly, he mumbles over and over, "No no no no no no no no. . ."

A silhouette of a well toned, teenage female shoots through the trees, around Aaron. It dives into a bush, with Aaron soon following.

Aaron parts aside a large branch, holding its leaves in the perfect position to make a curtain-like partition. He gets a glimpse of bright red before he hears shrieks of fear. He too repeats the calls of fear, as he falls back. Within moments, the red-headed fury flies past the bushes, pulling her shirt on as she goes. She tugs her shirt and pants to straighten them and scolds, "What is wrong with you, Aaron?"

"What's wrong wit' you?! You vanished on me, and the next thing I know you're prancing 'round the woods!"

She pulls down the collar of her dirty, torn shirt and reveals the tattoo. The tattoo has somehow grown, with its sun-flared shaped tentacles outstretched. The spell had realized that its existence was threatened, and had taken more space in exchange. As a defense, it crawled over the layer of skin that Myth had damaged. She grunts, "I couldn't go anywhere if I wanted to. Besides, I don't want to."

"You. . . don' wanna?" Aaron becomes bewildered. "What do'ya mean you don' wanna?"

“I was just being an idiot. Only looking after myself, as usual. But after I thought about it. . .” Her voice trails off as she chuckles softly to herself. “When I first met you I thought you were an idiot. Actually, no, you still are. But. . . You’re a growing idiot. Every time I’m around you when you do magic it feels. . . so strong. You have the most potential I’ve ever seen. You’re going to be important when you grow up so. . . I just thought your life would be the better choice to save than mine. Just. . . can you promise me something?”

“Uhh, yeah. Sure, Myth.”

“Don’t be a slave, okay, Aaron?” She shows a smile of sympathy and warmth, which throws Aaron off even more so.

“Slave? What do you mean? I’m not.”

Myth’s sympathy turns to simple pity as she snickers at him before explaining, “Yes, you’re a slave to Ellis. Whether you realize it or not. Just promise me that if he ever takes something from you, hurts you, breaks you, just anything. . . leave him, okay?” Still lost, Aaron nods.

Myth bends down, and slings one strap of Aaron’s bag across her shoulder before she marches forwards. Stunned in what just happened, Aaron stands there, dazed for a few seconds. He chases Myth down, and walks at her side. “What were you doing back there?”

“Hm? Back where? . . . Ohh. I was just taking a short run. It reminds me of when I used to wake up every morning in the castle, before the sun rose, to sit on the roof. I would stay there are giddy and eager, just to watch the beautiful sunrise. I love the dawn. So I just thought I’d at least do something fun before I die.”

“You’re not going to die. We don’t know that.”

“Aaron, don’t be naive. I’m pretty sure you need a heart to survive.”

“Well, uhh. . . magic is pretty powerful. We have no idea what it can do.”

“Oh Aaron. . . Magic just causes more problems.” Myth continues to march towards her death, carrying the heavy bags like a labored muel. “I just wanted to do something fun before I died.” Speechless, Aaron follows at her side. Once they reach the top of the hill, Aaron offers to carry the bag back. To which, Myth quickly accepts the

generous offer. They set off, not willing to make eye contact with each other the rest of the way down the hill.

Luckily for them, Ellis is an antisocial hermit, who lives away from the rest of society. His hut is much closer to them than the city.

Right as Myth is about to step out of the shadowy, tree-covered hill Aaron grabs her arm so tight her tan, freckled skin becomes white due to the lack of blood.

“O-ow, Aaron. What’s wrong?”

Aaron stays quiet and stands there, as if frozen to time. Each time Myth tries to pull free from his grasp, Aaron’s grip grows tighter.

“Aaron, let go. You’re hurting me.”

Her pleas fall onto his deaf ears. His body is present, holding her back, but his mind is elsewhere. A soft, dark cloud flutters in his eyes, glowing a gently and bare purple. He turns to her with his dark eyes and instructs, “Wait here. Maybe I can convince Ellis to listen to me. Maybe you don’t have to die today. Not by my hand, nor his.”

“No, I’m fine. I’ve made my peace with it. Besides, I can’t run away. Not with this cursed spell on me. I refuse to run.”

“I don’t care. You’re waiting here.” He grunts as he shoves her aside. Myth, speechless, had fallen onto her backside against a tree. Her jaw drops as she watches Aaron turn and head towards the pale-stoned hut with a small trail of smoke leaving its chimney.

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“Ellis! I’m back!” Aaron’s voice rings with a new confidence. It’s bolder, deeper, and as if he had awoken from his pubetic cocoon. “Ellis?” *No reply*. He storms through the house, knocking on the walls, and waiting for a return call from his master. As if out of nowhere, Ellis appears behind the boy, looming over him. Ellis was pale and malnourished. His eyes were blood-shot red with eye bags that could touch the bottom of the deepest, darkest canyons. The drool leaked from his mouth, as he hisses, “Where is the girl?” It’s too late. The addiction to power had consumed Ellis. It’s only now that Aaron realizes that the person who he idolizes, who saved his life, was an addict to magic this entire time. His eyes widen as his ignorance shatters like glass.

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“AAAAAAHHHHHHH!” The sound of screams, the smell of blood, the feel of fire. These are the raw and primitive elements that create the battlefield. These are the elements creatures of war thrive upon. Myth’s head shoots up, as she peers past the tree she was hiding behind, obediently waiting for her captor’s return.

Flashes of light and smoke fly from the windows. Cries of fear and scrambling fill the wind as it carries the noise over to the nearby town. Between the noises, a shriek was crystal clear as belonging to Aaron, “Myth! Run!” Instinctively Myth turns to flee. Within a couple of steps, the burn of embers imbedded in her flesh spark. They glow angrily as they start to crawl down her body. The streak of pain reaches her brain. Suddenly, she feels a link to Aaron. A flood of fear enters the mind. Even though it’s strictly in her mind, the feel of pain and assortment of minor wounds burn throughout the rest of her body.

Each nerve tingles in pain or on the verge of dying before she realizes that she is sharing the same pain as Aaron. She looks at the tattoo. The same spell that grounds her to him also links the two of them together. The bond was forcing her to stay. It was forcing her fight or flight instinct. But it cheated. She couldn't run, the whole point of the spell’s existence was to prevent her from trying to do so.

Myth wants to fight. The urge suppresses any other feeling, punching the rest down in her mind. Whether her will is due to her wish to save Aaron or herself is unclear. Perhaps it was part of the spell? Or perhaps her overwhelming pity for the boy.

A frenzy of confusion freezes her up as she tries to figure out her priorities. She was nothing but a lost, little girl running a maze with no exit and no treat. Pointless. It ends with the same event. This was the same feeling she abhorred and was so determined to run away from. The very reason she left her possible path of fame and riches. She thought she would never feel this ever again when she had accepted the hand of the fairies when she was a child.

Suddenly, the Earth beneath her shook her entire body and shattered the glass walls that separated her thoughts from reality. A tiny silhouette in the distance sprints out of the quaint cottage. It was Aaron. He stumbles out, holding his waist, limping as he runs. Myth squints as she leans in, trying to get a better picture of the scenery. Out of nowhere, the house begins to crack, with glaring lights shooting out of the cracks. Before Myth can blink, the diminutive building combusts, sending the slabs of stone scattered throughout the plot of land. The nearby farm animals yelp out as they tried to escape the falling debris. Some fall from the sky like sand or drift down like a sleeping angel’s ashes. Fortune favors Aaron, as the majority that fall on Aaron are like this, with a slight mix of coin-sized chunks of what used to be his home.

The less fortunate creatures would be the live stock. Falling rubble up to the size of more than a quarter of one of the four walls of the house fall onto them as they try to escape the madness, only to be trapped in their pens. Fur, feathers, and other pieces that once belonged to a frightened animal are let loose in the air. The beasts that had been too close to the blast were disintegrated. Perhaps that was better than having a wall flatten them out. Those who couldn't escape were crushed; their blood and guts sprayed in every direction. Aaron's jaw gapes open at the gore. Some of it unfortunately finds its way in.

Half the head of a screaming goat, skin, eyes, teeth, fur and all still intact fall only a few feet away from Aaron's foot. Its mouth wide open, as it lays still in terror; its eye bleeding while wide open. Aaron's jaw attempts to mimic the dead goat's, but he is too far in shock and his vocals refuse to work the scream he dreams.

"Aaron! Move!" Myth's voice could be heard before she was clearly seen running down the hill towards the giant scorch mark that used to be a home. The shrill harshness of her voice forced Aaron's body to obey, as he rolled onto his side and onto his feet, barely skimmed by a large concentration of lightning.

He repeatedly slaps his waist, putting out the fire before clutching it. This where it had hit. Luckily, it is no worse than a burn from bacon oils accidentally popping onto you.

Even Ellise has to recover from shooting such a large attack. His energy is drained, as his face can clearly show. His eyes close as his low voice vibrates and rumbles in a deep tone as he quietly repeats chants.

Myth, though rather on the petite side of the scale, was much stronger than she appeared. Aaron found this out first hand, when Myth used her entire body to shove him aside. Her hands fluttered and signed in a storm of range. The more she signs, the more rays from the sun was drawn towards her hands. The rays hit them directly as they start to glow, reflecting the bright concentration of light. While trying to focus her attention on her rapid signing, she grumbles, "Aaron. . ." as if he is supposed to know what to do.

He looks towards her, wide-eyed and completely lost. Under her breath, she mutters again but more firmly, "Aaron. . ." Her signing movements move increase in speed as her hands grow brighter. Ellis, no recovered from his drain, opens his eyes and extends one arm towards Myth. Her eyes start to show fear, as her signs grow sloppier and the light on her hands decreases their rate of growth. A storm cloud with a dark light forms with a blink of an eye, directly in front of Ellis's hand. Though both their energies are being focused and boosted, Ellis's is obviously growing faster.

"Aaron, do *something*. Run, try to help me, anything!" She looks down at her hands then back again at Ellis's, being hesitant about something. *It's now or never*. She

clasps her hands closed, sealing the light and magic inside. Compressing it into a palm-sized sun. Ellis smiles when the level of his energy gets to an amount he deems substantial. He turns his palm inwards, towards his face, to observe it. The energy sinks into the center of his palm, causing his veins to illuminate like lightning bolts darting around under the surface of his skin. Fearing what's to come, Myth acts.

She raises the two hands that are clasped together, as if she was in prayer, to the center of her chest. After pushing them together, she opens her right hand from the praying position. The second she opens her hand, a light gets reflected from her palm and shoots towards Ellis's hand. Even not to its fullest potential, the light-turned-laser should have burned through his flesh like a hot knife through butter; Effortlessly.

Ellis jerks back, from the sting. When the pointed light shot at him, it had first hit his force field that had not been visible until it came in contact with the blast. Luckily for Myth, it broke through. Unfortunately for Myth, not all the way. Ellis is still in tact, and the energy in his palm seemed to grow brighter.

Anxiety rises in Myth. The sun shrank after she fired her first shot. Trying not to allow Ellis time to recover, she takes a step closer and closes her hands again, back to the prayer position. With another step, this time she opens her left hand, and aims another light laser at Ellis.

This one hits square and the chest, and sends him sliding back with a grunt. Step by step, she repeats her actions opening and closing her hands, aiming to kill Ellis. As much as Myth tries, she can't do much more than wound him. But the energy in his palms, bolts to his chest and quickly restores the small wound, freeing it from any sign of injury.

She looks down at the sun in her hands, now the size of a smaller coin, and hesitates whether or not she should use it to create a few more shots.

"Aaron, if you're not going to assist. . ." She hisses, ". . . then run!" She kicks him in the side and urges him away. Her back is inches away from him as she orders under her breath, "Stay close to me."

She crushes the sun in her palm and quickly rubs them together, causing golden dust to fly about. She opens her hands and pushes them up and outward. They fly in an arch around her and dissipate into the air, to form an arch over her. The arch simmers down and start to mesh with the air and absorb the sunlight. Within seconds a cloak of invisibility surrounds Myth and Aaron. They continue to move back, towards the forest, as Myth keeps her arms up and her mind focused on maintaining the spell.

Ellis chuckles sinisterly as he fixes his posture and stands up straight. He observes his glowing palm, seeing that it remains perfectly untouched. He closes his eyes and extends his palm, using his extension as if it was his eye. He gradually takes a

few steps towards where he last saw the two running away from him as he hums in a gentle tune, "I know you're here. I can sense you."

The cloak still holds. Every second passing, Myth can feel the energy leaving her body to power the spell. Her body starts to quiver, and her knees buckle as she pushes herself to continue running backwards and hold the spell. When the energy in Ellis's palm points towards the two running away, it glows brighter. He smirks and whispers, "I have you now."

Ellis jerks back at the release of a massive amount of energy from his hand. A bolt shoots out, aimed for the closest running target: Myth. Right as he releases it, Myth is adept enough to feel a major surge of energy rapidly flying towards them. She glances over her shoulder and her eyes widen as she realizes what has targeted her.

Clasping her hands over her head, she repurposes her spell and draws more energy to it by giving up the magical cloak that surrounded her and gave her the invisibility. Instantly, she became visible again.

Separating her hands, she throws them over her head towards Aaron. Her cloak of invisibility spell shifts from surrounding her and flies at Aaron instead. A sigh of relief leaves her when she finds that the alteration to her initial spell is complete, and her running slows ever so slightly as she tenses.

Zap! High-pitched screams of pain shoots out of Myth's lips seconds after, when the energy from Ellis touches her. Within seconds the spell absorbs into her as visible electric currents dance around her convulsing body.

Reaching the cover of the trees, the spell that was hiding Aaron flies over him and dissipates, making him visible again. Holding an arm out, using a tree trunk as support, Aaron coughs and wheezes, trying to catch his breathe. He then turns and chuckles, before leaning back on the same tree and using both hands to comb straight through his dark brown, sweaty hair.

The shadows that hid him from Ellis's site made his hair and eyes much darker. Almost a piercing black. Strangely enough though, the darkness did the opposite to his skin, causing his skin to almost reflect light from how pale he appears. Between pants and almost plucky giggles, Aaron mutters, "We did it Myth."

No reply.

"Myth?" He looks around, more worried than he was when he had lost here earlier that morning. He pushes himself away from his support-tree and glances about. *Still nothing.* Aaron turns around to visually retrace his steps.

There, out in the middle of the patch of dried nothingness, lays the unconscious Myth. His

***** SPOILERS: DON'T READ *****

- master ends up betraying main and trying to kill girl
- (master ends up being old time travelling man and the one who killed his mom?)
- main protects girl (In lingua mea raptore atra in nebula) → girl uses spell to untie her rope (Et ligabis nodum solvere; ligatum nodum annuet atque maniplos) and be invisible → boy uses fire (in flamma ignis de virga)
- Ellis petrifies Aaron and shoots “a real” fireball
- girl tries to difuse (too slow) sacrifices herself for sake of battle
- main murders master
- sally sob story and good byes → “Stultus”
- main becomes a blood-thirsty warlord
- Gives up heart to obtain immense power
- ↑ is cold, heartless, and out for revenge on all who’s wronged him and girl
- taking revenge ← go back to beginning
- finish/add onto beginning

- Epilogue → birth to “Dawn” → Eclipse is banned from seeing her

BOOK 2: SUN OF MOON→ make sure the castle is described as “a Castle of Glass” and hint to technologies and present technology that has been destroyed in a apocalyptic future

BOOK 3: Cosmic Collision

- P: Dawn wakes up (@hidden place) in the ruins of the temple (reads the plate and sees Dawn, assumes that’s her name) ~acts like a hyperactive child → she walks out and sees the mass destruction everywhere
- Moon is healing people at a survival camp
- Introduction to demons attacking ← Moon uses almost depleted elixir to fight them off
- Realizes she desperately needs her sister → goes off to find her ← uses last of equipment to put up a few wards to delay any attackers
- On journey thinks that Moon being attacked by more demons → meet with Dawn (super hyper) ← explains that she saw “Dawn” and assumed it was her name
- Explains that Moon is looking for sister → Dawn asks why she doesn’t just follow the demon trail
- Moon says her sister isn’t a demon → Dawn says that she sees holy, strong light energy as a trail from the direction the demons came from (power that resembles Moon’s)
- Moon doesn’t know where else to go so she agrees to follow the hyper dawn
- (On the way) Questions Dawn on who she is ← Dawn doesn’t know
- Comes across a war torn village, and a nearby cottage that’s separated from the rest of the village ←source of energy
- Sees Sun go towards house → Moon rushes up → Sun doesn’t recognize
- Sun suddenly realizes (“You. . .”) and attacks Moon
- Moon and Dawn try to defend themselves
- Woman → “Paulullus Afferson, I am a married woman. Go away. Don’t you have your great grandfather to take care of? Peter is a honorable man. Unlike you.”
- Two horses come (pulling a dead pick up truck) and a woman rushes to Sun’s aid
- Woman → “Why are you attacking my home?” → Dawn and Moon: “Husband? That’s my sister!” (Means no harm)
- Woman talks Sun down into letting them into the house so they can explain themselves → “They mean no harm, Aaron. <<Dawn recognizes the name but Moon waves it off as a pretty common name>> “If anything, you already harmed them. You took away their friend and sister. Let’s try to make this right. I’m here, so nothing will happen to you.” (Couple Talk: Eclipse = “I wish I could make you

feel the same.” Woman = “It’s fine. Paul has been no trouble. I know you’d kick whip him to the Dark Realms if you had more energy.”)

- Moon and Dawn enters house while Eclipse settles down and Lieyan takes off armor → can see baby bump
- Moon/Dawn → “That’s why you were so protective. This is your house. And you’re pregnant.” → Lieyan → “And you were attacking my husband.” → “Husband??”
- Eclipse takes a break out of Sun → and Moon rushes over
- Sun kinda comatose/ Dawn and Moon explain the war going on → main kingdoms on continent going to war (Nalifor, Telshic, York, Michna, Alrida, Oaklorask (?) over territory and each Kingdom is desperate to get their hands on a Child of Prophecy
- Dawn suggests they just give them what they want → Land or their service in trade of peace
- Eclipse refuses ← has a family and doesn’t want to give it up (+ weak)
- MONOLOGUE: “I am my own family”