

# Chapter 1

Cleire awoke to the sensation of being suffocated, but opening her eyes she saw it was a bitter green liquid being pumped out of her lungs. She lay in a four foot deep metal casket with glass tubes coming down from all sides, each draining the same green fluid that soaked her body.

The saggy and withered face of an old man peered over her. “Oh, she’s awake,” he said, speaking in a calm but sickly voice. “Impressive, yet a great misfortune to her, and for it I must say I am sorry, because this is going to hurt. Hmm, she should not wail too loudly.”

As soon as he disappeared the tubes stopped draining, leaving a thin puddle of the green liquid inside. Cleire looked around in a panic, searching for any strength within that she may escape, but all her body was numb and drained. A harsh buzzing began to grow louder and louder in her ear, the pain growing with it. She squealed as something covered the casket, drowning her in darkness. The green liquid electrified, or perhaps it began eating away at her, and she blacked out.

When she awoke the liquid was gone, the casket was uncovered and all the tubes had been removed. She was free to move, though her body tingled dreadfully when she tried. She sat up slowly and held her forehead like she might faint. Looking down she was not wearing her usual gold and white robes, but a soaked black tunic. She tried to will them away and bring her robes, but to her bewilderment nothing happened.

Taking a look outside of the casket there were a few lights, all made up of glowing stones placed randomly around a dark cavern filled with stalactites and stalagmites. The old man had his back turned to her, hovering over a number of books and parchments on a dimly lit table.

Machines with tubes lay around connected to pools of the green liquid, and next to those was a large but empty glass container with its own tubes connected. Something about it made her sick.

“I hope she has no plans of escaping,” said the old man without turning. “Quite frankly there is no way in or out of this cave. Hmm, no, she cannot escape.”

Cleire could not respond, her mouth being dry all the way down to the stomach.

“She must be parched. Not many can go through such a rigorous process and survive, especially after so long. Certainly one of the stronger ones. There should be a jug of fresh water behind her, no poison in it or anything if she’s worried about that sort of thing.”

She turned and saw a jug filled to the brim with crystal clear water. Without a care of whether it was poisoned or not she slowly and carefully took it into her shaky hands and downed the entire thing in seconds. It didn’t do much to fill the emptiness inside, but she could feel her voice returning.

“Do you have any clean robes?” she asked hoarsely.

The old man turned “Hmm? Oh, I see. I’m sorry. Didn’t consider her clothing preferences. Yes, I shall give her something fitting.”

He turned back to his table for a moment and returned with a blue and yellow robe, tossing it into the casket and getting back to his reading.

It wasn’t white and gold, but it was better than black. She crouched awkwardly in the casket and quickly tossed away the tunic and put on the robe, now looking less like a prisoner and more like a goddess. However, she could no longer find such qualities within herself. Even her bright red hair had faded.

“How did I get here?” she asked.

“She came of her own volition,” said the old man. “Oh, perhaps she does not remember. An expected side effect.”

“I remember who and what I was, and going by that I cannot believe I would be here by my choice,” said Cleire, now regaining her strong posture and speech. “Who are you?”

The old man spoke with odd pauses, taking time to tap his chin and think with every question. “Who am I? Does she mean my name? Oh no, she can’t know that. Or can she? Yes, it is alright. Not like she’s going anywhere. I am Clay, mold me how she likes. Should I ask her name? I know it, but it would only be polite. She might not remember.”

“I remember my name just fine. Why did you capture me? What have you done to me?”

“What have I done!” said Clay, taking another one of his books and flipping through the pages. “I have done a great thing. She might not understand, she might not remember. I have done what should not be, yet I have done it. They molded Clay the way they thought right, the vile redheads. Tried molding him into brick. But no, now I am the master of the tools, the owner of the spinning wheel. They said I could not spin anything, but I have spun you. Not the *she*, you. *You* are in the jar. Somehow *she* remains attached and lives, so I must continue research. Must study. Interesting possibilities with this. Of course, she might not understand. Who would? The redheads didn’t.”

“If you could begin to make sense, I would appreciate it. I will not be patient with your meanderings.”

“Oh, she is not patient. Perhaps that is why she lives. Divine separation accelerated by spiritual impatience?” Clay took a pencil and began writing on some of his single parchments.

“Possibility of internal struggle? Quite high. Implications for the spirit? Possible wounds or scars

from procedure? Too many variables, must study. The energies flow much differently than anticipated. ‘Change the world,’ they said. Pfah. They may as well change the times of day we eat and it would cause as much difference. My work will change the world. Maybe not now, but when they find us, withered and bare-boned. When they are tolerant of the intolerant and seek with open minds. Why, that would change the world. That might very well be its doom. See, that is why I do my work. It’s why I must. Oh, but she might not understand, she might not even remember.”

Cleire became more frustrated by the minute. “I remember just fine, and I might understand if you spoke a little more straight forward! Could you speak clearly of what you intend?”

Clay chuckled. “Most noble goals, though terribly immoral means by most standards. Drastic measures taken on either side, but I had my way. Studied all my life. What a waste it would’ve been if she hadn’t helped. We’ll show the redhead sisters, show they aren’t as smart as they think.”

“Redhead *sisters*? It sounds like you speak of Allieth and Heather, but what might they have to do with this?”

“Ah, so she remembers some! But does she understand? She will in time, but it is dinnertime and she is very hungry. Come, I will make us soup. Easy on the stomach, and most healthy. Good for someone in her condition.”

## Chapter 2

Though Cleire would have liked some answers, the promise of food set her mind on easing her aching stomach. Hunger was a surprising feeling to her. It had been a long time since she last experienced it. It was a terribly traumatic feeling, one she wished to never experience again.

She sat opposite of Clay at a small dinner table, and the new smell of the hot chicken soup was a welcome change compared to the dank, musty old cave. Not to mention the old man, who smelled far worse from not bathing. There was little conversation beyond his prattling on about his studies and research, no specifics given and justifying it by reminding himself every now and then that, “She might not understand, might not even remember.” And whenever Cleire tried to speak he would be quick to say:

“No talking during dinner. Finish your soup young lady.”

Even though she already *had* finished, causing Clay to make her another bowl. She had finished five bowls before he finished his one.

“You have been a very kind dinner guest,” he said halfway through his soup. “Much kinder than many past guests. Some were downright terrible.”

“Who was your last guest?” asked Cleire.

“Hush, no talking. Finish your soup. He was a young lad, about her age by the look. Some rude city boy who went by the name Brick. One could certainly tell he was as stubborn as a brick too. No respect for the kind hosts, kept on accusing them of all these terrible things. So many questions. The nerve to ask questions at the dinner table, and such silly things too. Such impudence. Had to take his food away and throw him out, make him an outcast. They’d have

none of him for his bizarre questions, all about... Ah, but she probably wouldn't understand. Neither of them did really. Well, do you remember the lake? The big, great lake northeast of Heimen. Always went there to fish or swim. Beautiful lake."

He went on about the lake for some time, speaking of the fish, the water, the sky, the trees, the mountains, the clouds, the smells, the sounds, the birds, the squirrels, and all other little animals that inhabit forests, and he spoke about each of these things in equal amounts of time. Cleire sat impatiently and listened, having finished a total of seven bowls of soup (though they were not very big bowls). She grew quite frustrated (like anyone would) with all the trivialities he spoke of, avoiding any questions as to what he had done to her or why.

"I remember like it was yesterday," said Clay, now reminiscing about his twentieth birthday, which he mentioned was quite the event. "My brother and I found an abandoned community circle only a few miles south of our vacation lodge, which was just above the southern forests. We knew it was abandoned because it was one of the old style communities with just a stone wall, not one of the Rock Domes they build these days. Had to explore it, of course. Maybe find lost treasure from the old days."

He continued to describe the inside of the abandoned community, though the details are not so important. Cleire was still not allowed to interrupt and ask questions, and she was becoming furious. He talked a great deal about a secret tunnel that his brother found in the circled community which they began exploring.

"We been in there for hours when he said, 'Shouldn't we be getting home, Brick? You don't want to be late for your birthday party.' But I answered saying, 'We can go on a little bit

longer. Maybe there's an exit further ahead.' And so we explored on. Then, before we knew it, the ground began shaking and the ceiling above gave--"

Cleire abruptly stood up and slammed her fists on the table, nearly shattering one of the soup bowls.

"Enough, old man," she said, speaking harshly. "I demand you cease rambling on about pointless subjects and I order you, by my right as a Demi-Goddess, to tell me clearly and precisely *why* I am here, *what* you have done to me, and I *will not* tolerate you avoiding the question! Answer me!"

Clay was surprised by her outburst, stumbling backwards when she hit the table. He just stared at her shaking in fear and shock with tears welling up in his eyes. He looked down and slowly shook his head.

"No, oh no. A dreadful thing happened. A fool I've been, a great old fool. I was then and I am now. Of course she does not understand, or even remember, because I have not explained to her. I said I would if she lived, but I did not expect her to. It was so long too. I did not know what to say." He turned around and walked to the other side of the room. "I am sorry. I will tell her everything tomorrow, but it is bedtime. I must get my rest or I should not be able to speak long. She must rest too. It is good for someone in her condition. There should be a bed on the other side of the room. I hope she doesn't plan on killing me in my sleep, that would certainly cause her doom. Both of our dooms really. How terrible that would be."

Clay retired to his bed, and though Cleire wanted to question him further she remained content with his word for getting the information tomorrow. However her impatience caused her to wait a few minutes after he had gone to sleep to creep up to his book covered table. She

picked up the first open book but could not focus on the writing, realizing just how tired she was, which she certainly was not used to. She defeatedly put the book down and trudged over to her own bed on the other side of the room, a simple mattress with a dirty blanket. She immediately hated it, and hated everything about beds and sleep. She cursed the Gods for designing man to require rest.

“What a useless, horrible thing,” she thought.

As she lay down a terrifying feeling of loneliness and emptiness overcame her, and the only proper way it could be explained and understood is if you once had the ability to see, feel, hear and understand all that was going on in the world, knowing everything about those you met and all their history, always having a great love for the world and its people, feeling the love and joy all around, and suddenly all of that being taken away from you to be trapped in a small, dirty cave with a crazy old man and no escape. That was the loneliness she experienced that night; a night where no love could find her. She wept herself to sleep.



## Chapter 3

It was a terrible night, and Cleire got very little rest. This was not a fitting place for sleep no matter how needed it was. There was an uneasiness about it that would make even the bravest of souls wake every few minutes. After some troubled hours she awoke to stare at the cave ceiling wishing she could go back to sleep, and again wishing her masters hadn't created physical bodies to require rest. She silently pleaded with them to take her back, to get her out, to do *something*. It was a futile effort. Something remained in this cave that bound her, though she could not guess what.

Clay still lay sound asleep across the room, humming softly through the nose. Cleire crept out of bed and went to his table. She picked up the same book from last night and skimmed through the first few pages, which were all filled with garbled notes and odd, meaningless symbols. She stopped on a page with a picture depicting a round gateway attached to nothing, making it look more like a portal, except there was nothing else special about it. A plain and simple gateway to nowhere. Multiple notes surrounded the drawing asking questions like 'materials required?', 'mass?', 'energy type?' and 'how to transform physical elements into spiritual elements and vice-versa?' and other bits of technical jargon listed for answers. Highlighted under the gateway was the phrase 'Gateway of Divinity'. There was something familiar about it, though Cleire couldn't remember. She skimmed the next few pages full of hypothetical questions and answers, notes regarding the Afterdeath and the Demi-Gods, and historic records for significant events in which they were involved. A few pages further was an image of a glass container identical to the one in the cave, and on the following pages were

multiple diagrams of humans in different layers; flesh, muscle, organ, skeleton and spirit. Each diagram had their own set of notes pointing out specific parts of the body and detailing information for their spiritual counterparts. There were three other diagrams of spirit bodies, but these were structured differently. One had the word 'Niux' over it, while the other had 'Inniux'. These were of no interest to Cleire, but the third had a question over it that sent chills up her spine.

"What does a Demi-God's spirit look like?" said Clay, staring at her from bed.

She immediately dropped the book and stepped back, but Clay took no notice, just shook his head and tapped his chin.

"I have been wondering that and many other things for decades," he continued. "I said to myself once, 'I wonder if I could take a look at a Demi-God's spirit. They never look at it themselves, so surely they wouldn't mind.' Of course, I didn't know such ideas were illegal back then. Madman, pfah. Nothing to be mad about, they're just afraid of things they do not understand. Is she afraid?"

"Not of you," said Cleire, standing straight to boast (as she was still a strong and fair lady).

He nodded. "Good, good. She's very kind to say so. Hmm, breakfast will not be for another hour, so perhaps she will have some questions. Maybe she'll understand the answers, maybe not."

Though Cleire once again felt a pit in her stomach and would've liked to have breakfast now, she was pleased to finally have some answers.

"Finally. And I hope you speak as clearly as possible," she said. "To repeat my first questions, why am I here and what have you done to me?"

“Well,” said Clay, standing up and walking to the glass container. “She’s not here like she thinks, but she’s there.” He tapped on the container. “The true one, at least. I would address she as you, but you is here, so I cannot call her that. That is what I have done to her, I have taken *you* from *her*.”

Cleire was confused and wanted to ask for a more detailed explanation, but there was one thing she understood and immediately had to question. “If I’m not here, why am I there?”

“Because I put you there. Are you deaf?”

“But why did you put me there?”

“To study and answer the question, obviously. Now I know what a Demi-God’s spirit looks like, and many new opportunities for research have been opened. Things I could not think possible now possible.”

Cleire now felt like she had been violated, and that a terrible secret never meant to be revealed about her had been exposed. She quickly repressed these feelings and stopped herself from telling Clay how wrong he was to continue learning his plans.

“Like what is in your book?” she asked.

“What did you see in my book?” he asked.

“A round gate called the Gateway of Divinity.”

Clay chuckled and choked. “Oh no, that is a very old project. Nothing new with it, already quite possible. Though not in this place, it would serve no purpose here. There are many new ideas I am still learning and researching.”

“But what does it do? It seems familiar, though I do not know why.”

“You may or may not have been there for the idea of its conception, but it is related to your previous work and would have certainly changed things, so there may be remaining memories of it. It is a very large device that would reverse death, or at least make it seem harmless, by allowing a seamless transition between here and the Afterdeath. Going through would make you ‘dead’, and coming back would make you ‘alive’. A peace bringing device you might say, though the redheaded sisters didn’t see it that way. I’ll show them their ignorance some day.”

“I believe I remember now. A machine like that in my eyes could serve no real purpose, but I’ll leave that be. And if you still refer to Allieth and her sister, you should know by now that they are dead. It is well past their time.”

“Oh yes, I know. I keep many calendars so I don’t lose track of time, and their kind don’t last much longer than fifty. Redheads are strange like that. However I am sure I’ll see them again some day, and that will be quite an event.”

“I imagine it will, but what wrong have they done to you?”

“They revoked my being, much like I have revoked yours, except through different ways. I was once a proud Niux, capable of making all the wonders my mind could think of, and then they stole that from me. And by whose authority did they act? Their own. Changing the very essence of someone’s soul, and without any say from the Gods. Unheard of! Madman, they called me. But I wasn’t defeated yet. I fought against it in the name of my spirit’s divine essence, researching for weeks and coming up with the right tools, and in time I took back my power, or some variation of it. I had my power, but it felt different. Changed me. Possibly drove me mad. Well, doesn’t matter to me either way. When I leave this place I’ll have shown them.”

## Chapter 4

“So if I’ve been understanding this correctly,” said Cleire, who usually understood even the maddest of ideas when explained properly. “The redhead sisters took away the power of your Niux spirit because they thought your ideas were mad, you found a way to get it back somehow, then truly went mad and wished to get back at the sisters. So you obsessed over what a Demi-God’s spirit looks like, captured me and stole my spirit to see and study, and here we are.”

Clay nodded. “Very true, yes, though I wouldn’t say mad or obsessed. Curious and thoughtful are much nicer words. I would also say that the vile redheads perceived my passion for the ideas as a threat, and they were afraid of what I might do, so they took action against me by their own authority. Horrible, really. No one should judge others by their own given authority, though... I know her sort are usually the grand judges of the people and their actions and words. I wonder, how might she judge me? She has been kind thus far, and so I ask she indulge me.”

“That is hardly within my authority, which you’ve stolen. I cannot abide your request.”

“True, she does not have the authority that was rightfully given, but I give her mine. I must know if I lived such a long life for right, or as I fear, wrong. It is my last question in life.”

Cleire thought for a moment. “I will grant judgment on the condition of my release.”

He scoffed. “Hardly. I must continue my research, and how could I know you won’t leave the moment I release you? I am not even positive I could, there are so many variables. Too risky.”

“Then might I have a way to know you’ll keep your word on my release if I give you judgment now? I want no part in this, and I feel lost and empty without my soul. I will not cooperate otherwise.”

Clay stared hard at her and tapped his chin, searching for any sign of deception, but such a thing was difficult on someone without their soul. “Too risky,” he thought. “Far too risky. But... she has been kind and honorable, like any Demi-Goddess should. Indeed, such a creature should not live like this. Not with a terrible old man like me. It is hardly fair. Her mind is unreadable, but she is stern, fierce. Passionate, very passionate. Knows what she wants. Perhaps there is no risk. I’m a horrible liar, of course I could reverse the process, I needn’t lie to myself. What about the research? Well what do I *want* with the research? I had done so much to share with everyone, but I doubt it will ever see the light of day. My work... trapped in this cave. No, it was all pointless and selfish. What a fool I’ve been! A light that will not go out sees all.”

Clay began to shake and sat down at his desk, unable to look at her. “I have thought that maybe... maybe I am wrong,” he said. “Wrong many things. She has spoken straight and true, and has respected me even in this incredible place. I can’t deceive in my way. ‘A light that will not go out sees all,’ as the Gods say. Now I see my work has been in vain, and if I must use it to at least undo the wrong I’ve committed against her, I will now do so without the need for her judgment. I would do any good she asks of me, as long as it is in my power. But... my last question still stands, and I beg... I beg you have mercy.”

And now Cleire stared hard at him. Though she could not see his face she understood his tone and manner. “He is a pitiful man,” she thought. “But I cannot be impulsive. If I should demand my release without anything to give he might think to do some other dirty deed and be

my doom. If I should speak judgment against him I might say something incorrect, as I do not know him fully without a true Demi-God's authority, and that too may be my doom. I cannot say only the good else he think I lie. I might give him what he needs most, and then when my soul and authority is restored I will rightfully judge him. What does he need most? It must be the truth, and it cannot be too bad or too good. I could simply say he is not a bad man. He has not really hurt many people, so it is true, and it is not purely speaking of his good, neither his wrong. It's exactly what he wishes to know. Coming from me that must mean something to him, so that is what I will say."

Cleire walked up behind Clay who stared sadly at his books. She reluctantly gave him a hug, and said:

"You are not a bad man."

And Clay was overcome with a solemn joy, the kind that bring tears to your eyes but not a smile. He nodded and whispered:

"That will do."

He turned and walked over to his machines with the tubes and connected them to the glass container.

"Lay back in the casket. The process is complicated and not one I fully understand doing in reverse, but I have some ideas how to do it. It may hurt, so I apologize if it will be the case."

Cleire thanked him and climbed back into the casket and lay flat on her back. Clay brought the tubes into the casket and they began pouring in the green liquid until it covered all but her face.

“I will be as fast as I can with this process. Lie still and once the remaining liquid covers you hold your breath for as long as you can.”

He sealed the casket and began pumping the liquid into the glass container until it was full. The glass was hooked up with a large wire that connected with the casket. With quick fingers Clay pulled a series of switches on his machine and it began to electrify the container (it was not really electricity, but that is the easiest way to describe it), and the casket was filled the rest of the way. With another switch pulled the liquid emptied out of the glass and energy could be seen flowing within. If one looked hard enough they might've seen the shape of a female body. Then, with a flash, it all disappeared. The machinery shut down and everything went silent.

Clay slowly approached the casket. “Seems like it worked,” he thought. “The process went smoothly, even with all the variables and risks. I wonder if she's still inside.”

The casket was opened, the liquid drained, and nothing remained.

“I suppose it did work, and now she's left me,” he thought. “I wonder if she might come back. Well, if she did she may no longer understand.” He looked to the cave ceiling. “Only if she remembers...”