

Pronunciations

Neefleheim: Knee-full-high-m

Rhea:	Ray-uh
Daemon:	Day-men
Sara:	Sar-ruh
André:	On-dray

Please Note this book is pure fabrication and in no way reflects the author or current/future events, all events and characters are written for the pure reason of storytelling and are not based on any real life persons.

Chapter 1: Rhea

A man lay unconscious in a bed; covered by woolen sheets and blankets, his body completely lifeless and his skin pale white; when all of a sudden, with a twitch and painful gasp he sprang to life; hastily sitting up clutching for air...

"H... Hello... Is anyone there...", He coughed as his body began curled over in pain, his lungs quickly filling with the cold air of his surroundings.

"Oh thank the god, you're finally awake! I almost began to fear the worst!", Hastily spoke a woman's voice from the rooms corner.

"Where am I!? Who are you!?", The man coughed.

"Calm down you're safe, I'm not going to hurt you..."

"Where am I?!"

"Calm down; it's okay... I found you in the snow five days ago, you were barely breathing when I found you so I brought you back here, you had me worried you wouldn't wake up..."

As the man raised his head up, he looked around and as his head turned to his left he saw the woman who was responsible for the voice, she stood from her wooden chair in the small rooms far corner and began walking to the bed. She was beautiful, with luminescent emerald green eyes, smooth white skin dotted with freckles and long orange hair, she was captivating and her eyes almost hypnotic. He couldn't take his eyes away from her and the closer she came, the harder his heart would beat yet the calmer he felt.

"My name is Rhea... You're in my cabin... You're safe..."

The man tore himself from his locked gaze and his face turned to one of emptiness.

"What's your name?" Asked Rhea, as she slowly sat on the bed's edge.

"My name... My... Name..." he thought to himself; still with a blank and empty look on his face.

"You don't remember your name? Can you think of anything to help jog your memory?"

The man tried to conjure forth any memories regarding his own life or any knowledge of his surroundings but to no avail, the only moment's springing to mind were his violent awakening and an empty void.

"Nothing..."

"Really? Can you remember anything? Anything at all?"

"No I can't... It's just empty, all I can remember is black..."

"Well no matter, I'm sure your memory will be back in no time. You're going to need a name though, I feel uncomfortable having a naked man in my bed without knowing his name" Smiled Rhea, moving the hair from his face.

The man was confused, but as he moved; he felt the sheets run over his bare skin. The man lifted the sheets and to his shock sore his bare groin and legs laid in the bed.

"What the fuck?! Why am I naked?!", He screamed.

"It's okay, please calm down! I would much have rathered not to see you naked but I swear it's how I found you, I didn't have time to dress you before the frost would have caused any damage to your body...", Hastily explained Rhea.

"Well I pray you're telling the truth...", He returned in dulled suspicion.

"I am, I swear...", Rhea said as she held her hands over her heart.

"Well It's not like I have anyone else to tell me otherwise so I guess I'll take your word this time..."

The man lowered the sheet over himself and rested his back against the bed's wooden headboard. Rhea looked at Daemon and tilted her head with a joyful smirk.

"Daemon, you look like a Daemon to me..."

"What?"

"Well you'll need a name or something to go by, you would suit Daemon..."

"What makes you say that?"

"I don't know why but that's what I imagine, did you want me to call you something else?", Asked Rhea.

"No I like it, just trying to work out what would make you think that is all..."

Rhea smiled at Daemon and shook her head laughing under her breath. Daemon turned away and stared at the corner he first saw Rhea, web's crowded the corner meeting the roof and her chair sat dusty.

"Are you okay Daemon? You look troubled."

"Well waking up naked in someone's bed with no memory of what happened is a little troubling..."

"You're right, I'm sorry", Apologised Rhea, "Lay down, I will fetch some tea for us."

Rhea stood up and walked through the doorway directly opposing her bed; Daemon looked around the room, it was clean and organised. A small 4 drawer wooden dresser sat along the wall opposite to Rhea's bed, the top of which was covered in a thin layer of dust with faded hand prints left in the dust.

Directly next to the bed sat a small bedside table built in the same construction as the dresser. A burnt out candle rested on a small saucer with the wick still letting of a small stream of smoke.

Directly next Rhea's chair stood a wooden mannequin draped in full armour fittings, a thin black cowl sat atop the mannequin's two dark leather shoulder braces, it's chest piece; comprised of large dark leather patches detailed and lined with purple cloth.

"That was my partner's, he made it himself and I added a few touches of detail for him..." Said Rhea as she walked in carrying a wooden tray with a teapot, two teacups and a small jar.

"It's impressive, where is your partner at the moment, hope he doesn't mind my presence?"

"He passed on a few years ago, I keep it to remind me of him, it's one of the last of his things I have..."

Rhea put the tray on top of the bedside table and poured deep golden tea into the cups as floral scents filled the room.

"Would you like any honey? The tea is rather bitter without it, it's made from lavender and mint."

"Please, just a small amount", Said Daemon with shaken breath.

Rhea lightly swirled in a small teaspoon of the sweet golden honey into the tea. The sweet smell of honey permeated through the room and began to melt into the strong scent of the floral tea.

"Feel free to add more honey if you need, it will help ease your body..."

"Thankyou Rhea, I hope it does..."

Daemon took a large sip of the tea, the strong bitter taste of lavender slowly faded into that of wild mint with the underlying taste of sweet honey, his chest filled with warmth and his nose cleared as the tea made its way through to his stomach.

"This is delicious, did you make it yourself?"

"Brewed fresh this morning, I was taught by a friend of mine not long after I met her, learnt quite a few tea recipes from her actually..."

The two continued to sip their tea in silence occasionally glancing back at each other and exchanging awkward smiles.

"Tell me about your partner? If you don't mind talking about him that is..."

"No it's ok, he was handsome and took me by the heart from the moment I laid eyes on him, we both came from afar and decided we would settle down here. He didn't work but instead we would fend for ourselves, he taught me so much about the forest, kind of hard to believe he isn't here anymore...", Explained Rhea as she lowered her head.

"I'm sorry, I can't even begin to imagine...", Consolidated Daemon.

"Don't be sorry, but enough of me moping, how're you feeling?"

"Much better, still can't recall anything but I'm feeling much more alive at least."

"Glad to hear...", Rhea smiled as she sipped her tea.

Daemon took another sip of tea and lifted his head as a sheen of light broke through a window in the room.

"I hope I'm not keeping you from anything..."

"No you're not, it's only just past sunrise. I will have to leave soon and go run some errands, I can wait a bit if you don't think you'll be okay on your own else I can give you a quick walkthrough of where everything is...", Smiled Rhea.

"I should be fine thank you, but do you mind if I accompany you? I could do with a leg stretch and some fresh air..."

"Can you even stand?", Concerned Rhea.

"I think so.... I can feel and move my legs so I don't see why not..."

Daemon sat his cup on the wooden side table and slowly pulled the bed sheets off of himself, he sat on the edge of the bed and stared at his naked legs as they began to tingle and flutter. After a moment he pushed himself off the bed slowly, he could feel all of his leg and back muscles stretching and pulling back into place, as his body relaxed; he could feel and hear his bones clicking and cracking with every slight movement.

"Well I didn't expect that... I'm happy for you to come but I don't want you hurting yourself, I think you have dealt with enough these past few days..."

"Well standing is the hardest part, I'm sure a bit of walking will do me good..."

"Well if you insist, but we can't have you going out like that, I think you might get some odd looks", Said Rhea as she stood and walked to the dresser Daemon noticed earlier.

Daemon ambled to a mirror next to the mannequin, stood before him, staring straight back was a fair skinned man, his body stood tall with moderately defined muscle tone.

After gazing at himself he saw his face, short dark brown hair with thick stubble lined his face, Daemon slowly rubbed his hand threw the stubble and down his neck, he looked down at his forearms, both riddled with deep scars as if he had been attacked by a savage animal.

"Here take these, they should cover your forearms", Said Rhea as she held out a pair of light brown leather bracers before turning back to the dresser.

Daemon rested the bracers on top of his arms one by one and pulled the fitting strings tight and buckled them in place. The bracers had bright white stitching around the edging in an almost decorative yet random pattern.

"Do you live here on your own?"

"Unfortunately yes, people don't take too kindly to anyone elven, so I don't make many friends, if any..."

"Elven?", Asked Daemon.

"You're not observant are you?", Smiled Rhea as she parted her hair and revealed her pointed elven ears.

Rhea closed the dresser and handing Daemon some clothing, it was a mix of green, brown and black fabrics and leathers

"Here put these on, hopefully these clothes will fit you, just come through into the living area when you're ready okay, no rush."

Rhea walked out of the room closing the door behind her, the wind whirled outside and through a small window; the pine trees could be seen swaying calmly. Daemon placed the outfits bottoms on the bed and held the shirt up, it was a soft short sleeved and hooded green cloth tunic, it was lined with brown detailing with thick, prominent black stitching. The pants were more of the same with brown cloth and green highlighting.

Everything fit near perfect to Daemon's surprise, he ran his hand over all of the clothing and its softness felt comforting and near familiar. He slowly turned holding his forearm and approached the door, with a slight handle turn; the door creaked open. A stoked fireplace sat on the ground against a wall to Daemon's left with two small seats and one larger couch sat directly in front of the fire with a large kitchen area to his right.

"How do the clothes fit?" asked Rhea from one of the seats.

"They fit well, surprisingly well actually..."

"Good, good. Lucky for you, else you would have been stuck with one of my dresses, but I think you'd be able to pull it off...", Smiled Rhea as she stood from her seat and began walking to Daemon.

"If you say so", Smirked Daemon.

"Now, I'm going to ask you this one more time, are you really sure you are going to be okay to come out with me?"

"Yes Rhea, I already feel better now that I'm on my feet", Reassured Daemon.

"You don't feel shaky or light headed?"

"No Rhea, I'm fine, trust me..."

Rhea looked at Daemon with concern before turning away and grabbing a thick black overcoat with a large hood, after putting on the coat; she grabbed a copper circlet with intricate carvings deep in the metal.

"Well come then, I have some horses we can take into town."

Daemon and Rhea walked out of the cabin and into the howling winds and pelting snow, a clearing in the pine tree's stretched as far as the eye could see through the snow and fog. Across from the cabin stood a wooden stable with a large wooden door.

As the pair approached the stable, the smell of pine and straw filled their nose, Rhea pulled the door open and two large brown steeds lifted their heads in curiosity.

"Here Daemon, these are Aria and Edward, you can take Aria if you like."

"Sorry but, how do you tell them apart? They look exactly the same..."

"Well they are twins; of course they look the same and just remember, a horse has the same parts we do..."

Daemon stood confused for a moment and raised an eyebrow at Rhea...

"Daemon, Edward has a penis so look for the one without one and that'll be Aria..."

"Oh... I see..."

Rhea giggled as she handed Daemon a thick black padded leather saddle lined with thick white stitching.

"How old are the horses?"

"I wouldn't know, my partner purchased them and neither of us knew much about them; if anything, but I do know they are still young, only had them for four years and they've grown so much since."

Daemon threw the saddle over the horse and a flood of deja vu ran over him and soon his body felt comfortable and he had straddled the horse without thought nor effort, as if he had done it prior.

"Follow me, shouldn't be too long of a ride..."

As the two set off into the snow along the barely visible path that stretched into the far off fog; Rhea turned to Daemon...

"You're a natural, Aria is normally very wary of strangers..."

"Guess I'm lucky then, she seems friendly, can't imagine her being otherwise...", he replied as he slowly rub Aria's neck.

Some time passed at the cabin began to fade away into the fog and the path fade away into less trodden snow.

"So tell me about yourself Rhea..."

"What would you like to know? I'm not that interesting..."

"Well you said you were elven, what do you mean? No offence but I'm just curious ..."

"No, no offense taken, well I'm not entirely elven, I'm a halfling..."

"A halfling?", Asked Daemon

"A halfling is someone who had a dark elf parent and a human parent, the long ears seem to always make there way to the child for some reason but never the dark skin..."

"Wait, a dark elf? What do you mean a dark elf..."

"The dark elves live in the forests away from the humans who despise them inside the city but some humans do not despise the dark elves and run away to live a life with them, halflings are their offspring I guess you could say"

"Are halflings hated?"

"In a way, humans accept my kind only because of our human bloodline but not everyone is happy to treat us as one of them."

"Have the dark elves tried to reason with the humans?"

"No not the dark elves but, the light elves did; and now they have been hunted to extinction as far as we know, hence why the dark elves don't bother trying. They're hated enough as is..."

"What do you mean 'hunted to extinction'? Why?", Asked Daemon with concerned tone.

"The light elves tried to be calm and reason with the humans to live side by side, but a larger portion of the humans saw it as a weakness and decided to hunt them for fun, sport or simply to be cunts..."

"Well I'm not like them Rhea..."

"Don't worry, I know, you're talking to me right now and haven't spoken out about anything", Smiled Rhea, looking back at Daemon out the corner of her eye.

The wind continued to bellow and the snow continued to fall, vision limited only to a few feet ahead until it became nothing but a grey opaque fog with nothing but light shafts beaming through the fog.

"How do you know where we are going?", Asked Daemon with hesitation.

"Daemon I've lived here for ten years now and used to ride into town near on every two days, you learn where you're going really fast after getting off track too many times..."

"Okay good, what do you need to get from the city?"

"I just need to purchase some cloth and a few other things, but first of all I need to see a friend of mine, I need to give them something I owe them"

Daemon went to speak but was interrupted by a deep chesty cough.

"Are you alright back there? Don't want you dying on me, not in the cold at least, makes it harder to dispose the bodies...", Smirked Rhea.

"Yes I'm fine, think i'm just getting used to being up and moving again."

A silence fell as Rhea and Daemon rode forward, no noise bar the wind and trees.

"So anything else you want to know about me?", Asked Rhea, breaking the silence

Daemon sat quietly for a moment until a question broke into his mind.

"Yes actually, if you're accepted inside the city, why live in a cabin in the forest?"

"My partner and I spoke of having children and didn't want them being exposed to the humans every day, we wanted them to grow their own opinions and not be forced into others beliefs whether it be religious or opinion..."

"Well I'm sorry to hear those plans never came through..."

"As am I, look the sun is above the trees now, we shouldn't have much longer left till we reach Neefleheim.", Explained Rhea, gesturing to the sun's rays poking above the tall pine trees.

"Daemon I need to ask a favour of you while we are in the city."

"Sure? What do you need?"

"After we meet my friend we can't talk about it until we get back to my cottage..."

"I can do that, why though? Is something wrong with your friend?"

"In a way, you'll understand when we meet them, hopefully..."

The wind slowed and the fog lifted to reveal a tall wall constructed of pine logs each side of an open wooden gate. Tower stood each side of the gate, casting long shadows onto the ground.

"And we're here, once we enter through the gate; turn Aria to the right and there will be some hitching posts to use..."

As Rhea and Daemon approached the city, two guards stood In front of the gate, they stood dressed in cloth armour and metal shoulder pads with a small blue shield pattern sewn into the chest.

"Please don't say anything to the guards, rather not have to deal with their shit today."

The guards parted as the pair approached the gate.

"Fucking halflings in our city, should be out there with the filth", Grumbled one of the guards as Daemon and Rhea rode past.

Chapter 2: Neefleheim

Neefleheim's walls stood tall and gloomy, surrounded on all sides by the snowy forests and scattered rivers running in and out of the city through grates in the walling.

"Here take this...", Said Rhea, handing Daemon a small pouch, "It's a little bit of money if you see anything you fancy..."

"You don't have to do that..."

"I know I don't have to, I'm still going to give you some, it's thirty pounds so you should be able to buy some things if you like...", She smiled.

The two hitched their horse to the posts stuck into the ground and started to walk through the main entrance street. Crowds of people lined the streets and alleys, yelling and gesturing to each other.

"Stand close Daemon, if you get lost in the crowd you might get stuck here forever", Warned Rhea.

Daemon turned to speak to Rhea but noticed her eyes were no longer their normal luminescent emerald green, instead they were a light blue colour, no longer illuminated and vibrant.

"Why are your eyes different?", Asked Daemon.

"I'm a strange person, I don't know why but my eyes change colour throughout the day, always been like that for me, must be something from one of my parents..."

"Oh, okay...", Said Daemon with slight suspicion.

As the pair walked further down the street, some of the crowds began to stare at Rhea as she went by and some began muttering under their breath to each other and covering their mouths.

"You weren't lying..."

"What do you mean?", Asked Rhea.

"About halflings being allowed in the city but not everyone agreeing with that..."

"I know, and things aren't going to get better, not while the lord protector has any power... But don't mind them, they are talking about you more than me..."

"Who? And how do you know?"

"Look at my ears, I'm pretty sure I would be able to hear them, and the lord protector is the 'lord' of Neefleheim and its surroundings, his name is Ethan Miller..."

"Is something wrong with him? You don't sound fond of him..."

"I... I don't know, I have issues with his family mostly, he speaks of respecting the dark elves and letting them be with the human but his ancestors were the ones who founded the city and slaughtered anything that moved just to 'protect' the people... I don't trust what he has to say, he may not bare his family name but he is still there blood regardless..."

"I hope for everyone's sake that he doesn't end up like his ancestors..."

"You and me both, even if he doesn't make the same mistakes; things will only get worse..."

"Why, what makes you say that?"

"Ethan has spoken of stepping down and passing his role to another... His sister Rebecca, Ethan trusts her to do the right thing but she is a horrible person; I can feel it!"

Daemon could feel anger in Rhea, she knew more than she was telling and it sent chills down Daemons spine. The pair walked silent around the never ending streets of Neefleheim until finally broken by Rhea...

"Okay enough depressing silence, still got a little bit till we get to the market..."

"Shouldn't we see your friend first?"

"No, they aren't here yet..."

"How do you know?"

"Trust me, I just do. They won't be far off though..."

The further the pair wandered into the city, the more densely packed it became, people huddled up and packed together like schools of fish. Pushing through the crowd became difficult and with every person pushed aside, two more took their place.

After what felt like hours of ducking and weaving; the market was finally sprawled in front of them. Stalls scattered the flat, grey and brown cobblestone area, some with brightly coloured cloth roofing and some with nothing but a tattered sheet to cover them. The market was alive with the sounds of chatter, animals and crackling fire and oils, the air was filled with smells of exotic foods, spices and smoke, it felt like a bombardment on the senses.

"Where are we off to first?", Said Daemon, but met with no reply.

"Rhea?", He asked as he turned around to see Rhea had vanished.

Daemon continued to turn on the spot trying to poke his head above the crowd in hopes to see her but to no avail, people walked past glaring at Daemon as if he was crazed.

"Sorry sir but have you seen a young redheaded elven girl go anywhere?", Daemon asked to a passer by.

"What...", He asked.

"Have you seen a young redheaded elven girl, I was just with her a second ago and now I can't find her..."

"I heard what you said boy, why the fuck is one of those purple skinned fucks wandering the city, take my advice, stay the fuck away from those freaks and report them to the guards...", The man snapped; before storming off back into the crowd.

"Well... Should of said halfling then, asshole...", Daemon muttered to himself.

Before he could turn around and approach another passerby, he could feel a tap on his right shoulder, Daemon turned and stood before him was a young boy wearing thick maroon dyed woolen clothing; topped with a dark blue flat cap.

"I'm sorry sir, didn't mean to bother but are you looking for a woman called Rhea by any chance?"

"Yes that's her! Have you seen her?"

"Yes I have sir, if you just follow the path you'll find her at a textiles stall to your left near a stall selling fried meats", Explained the boy, gesturing along the cobbled path.

"Thankyou, I'm Daemon by the way.", Thanked Daemon as he held his hand out.

"Im André, glad to meet you Daemon.", Returned André as he firmly shook Daemon's hand.

"Likewise André, here take some money for your help...", Said Daemon; handing over 5 golden coins from his pouch.

"Ten pounds?! Thankyou so much Mr. Daemon!", Exclaimed the André, "Hopefully it won't be too long till I repay the favour!"

Before Daemon could respond, André had run off and disappeared into the crowd not to be seen, Daemon turned and followed the cobble path that was pointed out to him. He could barely see over the crowd but was able spot Rhea's long orange hair right where André had described, the smell of cooking meat became stronger the further Daemon walked. The sound of sizzling oil came from his right and he could see a light skinned woman and man in front of a large metal pan tossing various meats and vegetables in sweet smelling red sauce.

Daemon turned around and saw a bright coloured stall covered in rolls of cloth, leather and other materials, as Daemon pushed through the crowd towards the stall he could hear Rhea and the merchant talking.

"Okay so two metres of red cotton and two metres of black deer leather, that's fifteen pounds right?", Asked Rhea.

"Twenty pounds..."

"What do you mean? I saw you sell someone a three metres of just leather for fifteen yesterday..."

"Yes, you did see me sell a human three metres for fifteen, they weren't a little halfling..."

"Fine, take your twenty pounds!", Returned Rhea handing over the coins.

"Good doing business with you lass", Smirked the merchant.

Rhea quickly turned and began walking away until she ran into Daemon; nearly pushing him over.

"Oh Daemon, sorry I didn't see you there..."

"It's okay, I lost you for a moment but a young boy pointed me in your direction."

"Was his name André by any chance?"

"Yes, how'd you know?", Daemon asked in surprise.

"Ah, he's a good kid, I ran into him just before and told him to keep a look out for you", Explained Rhea, "Come on, my friend should be here by now..."

"Let's get moving then", smiled Daemon.

Rhea and Daemon continued through the market, ducking, weaving and pushing their way back through the crowd again for what felt like an age. Daemon went to continue walking until Rhea pulled him back.

"Not so fast Daemon, we're here...", Said Rhea gesturing towards an alley branching off the path.

The alley was dark and empty, a thin layer of mist rolled over the ground and a cold blue tint lined the walls and bounced off of the wet tiling.

"Are you sure? There's no one here?"

"Don't worry, they're here, I can feel it..."

Rhea entered first with Daemon following suit, as the pair walked down the alley; their footsteps echoed louder and louder until a cloaked figure appeared out of a small hole at the alley's end.

"There she is...", Said Rhea, "Now Daemon, just let me do the talking for now..."

Daemon swallowed and nodded his head, as the pair approached the supposed woman; her eyes were all you could see from under her cloak, bright luminescent purple eyes...

Rhea and Daemon stood mere metres away from the woman and she removed her cowl to reveal her long brown hair draped behind her long elven ears, her skin a light shade of purple with the sun breaking past the buildings cast a bright light streak across her face.

"Rhea, why is a human with us?", She asked in a hesitant tone clutching a

"It's okay Sara, this is my friend Daemon, he isn't like the other humans, I'm just showing him around while I do some errands..."

Sara raised an eyebrow and looked Daemon from head to toe...

"Well they do say the handsome ones are the tastiest..."

"Stop it Sara..."

"Don't worry Daemon, we don't eat humans, well not how you think..."

"Sara!"

"Fine fine, I'll stop toying with the white one, he loves it though I can tell...", Winked Sara.

"Can we hurry this up, I don't want to run the risk of getting caught with you inside of the city... Would get very ugly for them..."

Sara nodded her head and handed Rhea a small brown pouch that rustled with the sound of coins. Rhea reached inside her cloak and passed Sara four vials of bright red liquid.

"Only four vials today?", Asked Sara.

"Yes, as much as you wish I did, I really don't enjoy draining some of my blood day in day out..."

"I suppose you have a point, just ask your friend next time, I'm sure he'd love to get close to you neck and drain some..."

Rhea opened her mouth to speak but stopped herself, both Rhea and Sara's ears twitched simultaneously towards the alley's end.

"Well sorry kids but guards are nearby so I think this is the part that we disappear..."

"Agreed, come passed the cottage tonight, we have things we need to talk about, come Daemon..."

Rhea pulled Daemon away and back down the alley, as they turned away Daemon could hear faint unintelligible whispers behind him; but once he had turned his head Sara had vanished and a thick smoke like fog rolled to the ground.

Daemon continued looking behind him and walking forward until he was quickly pulled back just before he exited the alley.

"Quick against the wall Daemon..."

"Why what's wrong?", Asked Daemon as he pressed his back against the left side wall.

"The guards are just around the corner, I can hear someone running up to them..."

Daemon went to say he couldn't hear anything, but was interrupted by the sound of voices from around the corner.

"Captain... I have a message from the hunter...", Panted a man's voice.

"Well spit it out then boy...", Growled another voice.

"One of the hunters saw one of those crazed people in the southern residential area sir..."

"Do you mean one of those weird whispering things?", Asked a third voice.

"Yes, the hunters said it looked fresh; whatever that means, they were apparently told not to engage it by direct order from the lord protector..."

"Great, fucking great, so in other words send the cannon fodder and if they die; send the hunters, nice to know where we stand in his eyes.", Snarled the second voice.

"Captain, we should still go look, I'd rather not have to deal with the lord if civilians end up getting killed, you know he will probably execute us all publicly..."

"Fine, come men, let's see if we can hunt this thing down..."

Rhea's ears twitched with the sound of clanging metal plate and rustling of chain link armour.

"Shit, Daemon we have to find those guards before they get to the residential district, they have no idea what they are getting himself into..."

"Do you know what we are getting ourselves into?", Asked Daemon.

"Unfortunately, yes. Come, we need to take the alleys, residential is just a couple blocks over."

Daemon stood in the middle of the alleys path as Rhea walked on ahead before looking back.

"Look, if you're not ready to come, just go back to the cottage and I'll go back home as soon as I've finished here."

"Fuck, what have I gotten myself into...", Thought Daemon as he slowly began to follow Rhea.

Chapter 3: Husk

Rhea led Daemon through what felt like an endless maze of alleys and empty streets, with the weather becoming worse with every turn. The wind howled violently and echoed through the long empty alleys, broken by the occasional sound of muffled voices from inside the surrounding buildings.

"How do you know where we are going..."

"When I was a younger girl; I was not as accepted as I am now, I would always get chased by the younger humans and had to learn my way through the city quickly."

"How long have you been around the city then?"

"Now is not the time for personal questions Daemon, you can ask whatever you like when we get back home, but for now just keep your ears and eyes open..."

Daemon nodded despite Rhea facing away from him, he began to feel increasingly uneasy about his surroundings. The clanging of metal could be heard in the distance with the faint sound of the guards voices muffled by the wind.

"We're nearby, I can hear them bickering with each other who should check the next corner."

"Why would they be arguing about that?"

"Because if they find what they are after, the first person to see it will probably have their body torn apart and spread across the alley", Said Rhea calmly.

Daemon grabbed Rhea's arm firmly and looked her in the eye.

"Rhea, what is going on?! Why would someone be getting torn apart and why would we be going anywhere near it?!"

"I'll explain later, for now just follow what I say and everything will be alright, I promise okay?"

"Why can't you tell me now?"

"It's hard to explain, you wouldn't understand if I told you now..."

"Fine, I'll trust you for now but you need..."

Daemon was cut off by Rhea holding her hand up in front of his mouth and Rhea's ears twitch erratically in all directions.

"Shit, it's around the corner..."

"How could you know that, all you can hear is the wind?"

"Daemon, go home now. I don't want you to be hurt fighting someone else's fight...", Said Rhea staring into Daemon's eyes.

"Why? You helped me so now it's my turn to help you..."

"You don't understand, this is something beyond what you should be helping me with right now... Now go!", Snarled Rhea as she swiftly turned the corner.

"Rhea? RHEA?!", Daemon whispered before following.

As Daemon turned the corner, he saw Rhea staring off into the fog with a look of concern.

"See, nothing is here..."

"I told you to leave... It's hiding itself in the fog, it knows someone is following it...", Whispered Rhea as she covered Daemon's mouth.

"Daemon, go back to my cottage, your body won't hold up and I don't want you to get hurt..."

"No, I'm not leaving you on your own, I feel fine.", Said Daemon as Rhea slowly moved her hand.

"There's no convincing you is there?", sighed Rhea.

"I've followed you through an unknown city and into dingy alley's filled with god knows what... I think I'm far beyond convincing at the moment..."

Rhea grabbed Daemon by the hand and looked him in the eyes, her eyes glassy and filled with concern penetrated through Daemon, filling him with comfort and fear all at once. Rhea smiled, turned around and slowly began walking into the fog; still holding onto Daemons hand.

The fog was thick and haunting, clouding the pairs vision in a light haze of grey. A dull thudding could be heard further down the street accompanying a faint unintelligible whispering.

Rhea began walking slower the louder the whispering became. Daemon held her hand tight in fear and concern. Daemon's heart was pounding and he could feel Rhea's pulse rushing through her body.

Suddenly everything was quiet, no thudding; no whispers, just pure silence. A bead of sweat ran down Daemons face as the pair stopped moving and Rhea let go of his hand. Time felt as if it had slowed and just as the silence became near unbearable, until an ear piercing and gut wrenching shriek came from behind.

"RUN!", Screamed Rhea.

Daemon's heart pounded like tribal drums as he lunged himself forward, leaping step by leaping step into the blinding fog.

"Left, go left!", Shouted Rhea as she vanished from sight.

Daemons threw himself to his left into what he could only imagine as an alleyway. The sounds of near footsteps echoed through the fog as they kept pace with Rhea and Daemon. As Daemon ran he turned around expecting to see what was chasing them down, the fog blocked all vision except a sole human hand breaking through the fog, its fingers skinny and claw like.

The hand vanished back into the fog and Daemon continued running next to Rhea.

"What the fuck is that thing?! How can it see us?!"

"Not now! Just keep running, I'm going to try and distract it!"

“Wait what?! How are you...”

Daemon was cut off, Rhea suddenly stopped running and stood still as he ran on. Daemon expected to hear Rhea’s screams but all he could hear through the fog was the sound of whispers echoing through the fog followed by more footsteps and yet another loud shriek.

“Fuck! Rhea?!”, Daemon yelled, no answer...

It felt as if the running would never end, Daemon turning at every glimpse of a corner he could see; only to constantly be pursued by his hunter. Suddenly on Daemons final turn he was met by a wall at the alley’s, nowhere to run, nowhere to hide...

The fog began to dissipate and as Daemon turned around, nothing was there to greet him, only thin air and the stone alley walls. He leant against the wall and leant his hands on his thighs; letting out a sigh of relief and laugh of panic.

Before he could catch his breath, his pursuer charged around the corner. A woman stood at the alley’s end, he body skinny and malnourished, her long blonde hair draped over her face like a curtain.

The woman let out another ear piercing cry before charging for Daemon. As she rapidly approached; time began to feel as if it was slowed; almost to the point halting all together. Daemon heart pounded with every second, with nowhere to run he closed his eyes and prepared for his end.

The sound of the woman's screeching went silent and Daemon’s heart slowed, whispers filled his ears as if he was surrounded by a hushing crowd.

“It’s over Daemon...”, Whispered a voice.

“Fight back! Don’t be weak...”, Taunted another.

Suddenly the whispers went silent and one final screech was heard before more silence. Daemon thought he surely should be dead by now but reluctantly he opened his eyes, as he stood confused he noticed that he was at the opposite end of the alley from moments ago.

Daemon slowly turned around, the woman now stood swiping and clawing at thick black tendrils of smoke as they flowed to the ground, the same tendrils left from Sara. As the smoke rested on the ground, the woman quickly flung herself around to face Daemon and began charging again.

Daemon went to run away but something held him in place and stopped his body from moving, the woman leaped into the air and lunged at Daemon, suddenly Daemon felt as if his body had been drained of blood and a uncontrollable rush of adrenaline filled his veins, without his control he forced the palm of his right hand into the woman's chest. A shockwave flung the woman back into the back wall of the alley and flung the loose stones on the ground up into the air.

The woman slammed against the brickwork; cracking the wall and knocking bricks loose. She slowly pushed her body up and tilted her head towards Daemon...

"Help... Me... Please...", She whimpered.

"What? How?", Daemon returned.

"Help..."

The woman fell limp on the ground before she could continue, Daemon stepped forward two measly steps before the woman let out another horrifying scream. As Daemon's ears rang, he began to feel weak and light headed before his legs caved and he fell to the ground.

The woman stood to her feet and slowly staggered her way down the alley before beginning to charge.

"Fuck... Fuck... fuck...", Daemon muttered.

Daemon tried to stand as his heart pounded as hard as it possibly could but did not have the strength to keep himself up. Before he knew it the woman had leapt atop of him and pinned his body to the ground, her long claw like fingers wrapped around his neck, strangling him.

"I can't stop it! Please do something!", She screamed.

Her face became visible through her hair, eyes of pure white with trails of dark red blood pouring from her lower eyelids...

Just as Daemon's body began to fall dead and his vision blur, another overwhelming rush of adrenaline fell over him. His muscles tensed and his veins inflamed as if they were going to tear through his skin. Daemon gripped the woman's fingers and pried them from his neck, she put up a long fight before her fingers let out a violent crack as the bones shattered; tearing through her hands skin and twisting out of place.

The woman let her defences down as she screamed and howled in pain; clutching her broken and mangled hand. Daemon pushed her back off of him and thrust the bottom of his foot into her chest causing another shockwave to force her back. He stood to his feet and as the woman recovered; time slowed yet again, Daemon scanned the alley looking for a way to escape or for a weapon.

The walls were flat grey brickwork broken up with the occasional metal pipe reaching from the surrounding buildings roofs down to the ground, just behind the crazed woman was a rusted pipe with a crack almost splitting the pipe in two.

Daemon had no control over himself, his mind ran wild with possible outcomes and thoughts of running, his body however began to charge towards the woman.

"Come on!", Screamed Daemon.

The two lunged into the air at each other, the woman swiped at Daemons face; catching his cheek and sending a small spray of blood against the bricks. Daemon clutched his face and his body flung into the woman pushing her back and landing back on her feet off balance, she stood mere metres away from the rusted pipe with her arms spread to her side trying to intimidate Daemon as she let out ear piercing screeches.

Daemon landed on his feet and looked at his hand briefly, a small trickle of blood ran down his palm and dripped onto the cobble path. The two stood still and silent for a moment; just waiting for one of them to make a move and trip themselves up.

"What are you waiting for?!", Taunted Daemon.

The woman stormed into a frantic frenzy, her arms flailed and swayed in Daemon's directory but with every swipe Daemon would push her arm away and forcing her to walk backwards.

Daemon swung his left leg up and thrust his foot against the woman's chest but before his foot could connect, the woman had grasped his leg in place showing no signs of letting her grip weaken, her fingers began to break through his cloth pants and pierce his skin.

Daemon let out a cry of pain as he saw trails of blood run down the woman's uninjured hand. The pain only grew as more and more skin broke and she began digging her nails into his leg, using his right leg to jump as high as he could, he began to roll his body and in a final effort; swung his leg and connecting his foot with the woman's jaw; knocking her off balance and releasing her grip.

Daemon landed on his feet, saw the broken pipe beside the woman and in one swift motion; he grabbed the pipe and pulled as hard as he could until it had snapped and stuck out of the wall, swiftly grabbing the woman's arm; he turned her body with her back to the wall. Daemon placed his hand on her face and for the final blow, forced her head back against the pipe.

Daemon felt her skull crack and rupture with vibrations running down his arm. A final gurgle came from the woman as blood began to stream from her mouth and run through Daemon's fingers, he slowly removed his hand from her face and saw her eyes, no longer glazed and white but bright blue and fleeting...

The rush of adrenaline faded and Daemon once again had control of his body, he collapsed to the ground with his body feeling drained and his muscles torn.

"DAEMON!", Screamed a familiar voice.

"What happened?! Are you okay?! Are you hurt!?"

Daemon lifted his head, Rhea stormed down the alley with tears streamed down her face.

"Rhea...?", Daemon muttered through broken breathe.

"She didn't follow me! I thought I had lost you!", Cried Rhea as she clambered to her knees wrapping her arms around the barely conscious Daemon.

"I don't know what happened... She... She...", Muttered Daemon.

"It's okay, you're safe now..."

Rhea looked Daemon up and down while holding his still bleeding cheek.

"Your leg! Quick we need to get you help..."

"I'm fine..."

"Daemon you can hardly breath and your leg is torn, we need to take you somewhere..."

Rhea wiped tears away from her face as she stood to her feet, she looked at the limp lifeless body of the woman before kneeling down and closing the body's eyes.

"Even the dead deserve respect Daemon..."

Daemon clambered to his feet and threw his back against the alley, Rhea wrapped his right arm over her shoulder and held him up by his hips. The sound of clanging metal and rattling chains could be heard nearby...

"Sir, the screams came from this way!", Yelled a guard.

Daemon's ears rang as he struggled to keep his eyes open, the silence of the alley would be haunting if not broken by Rhea's presence.

"So, Rhea did find you.. And you're not dead...", Whispered a woman's voice...

"What did you say?", Daemon asked.

"She can't hear you, only we can..", Returned another voice.

Daemon lifted his head to see time had frozen...

"Who... Are you?", Gaspd Daemon.

"We are the keepers, but without a doubt Rhea has kept us from you; has she not?",
Said a third voice.

"Silence Leanna! Who we are is not the question you should have child, you should be concerned of why we are here..."

"Then tell me... What do you want..."

"Wouldn't you like to know Daemon, it is not our choice that we are speaking to you now, we would have rathered the husk tear you limb from limb and paint the streets with your entrails.."

"Now; now Kalina, he is fulfilling his purpose after all.."

"I suppose that is true, maybe this one isn't the fodder we had first assumed..."

"Maybe there's some use of you Daemon, we will send you back to your existence, just remember we are watching and we expect a show..."

Before Daemon could speak time began to flow again, his body and mind feeling substantially weaker the more and more he pondered all the questions he now had.

Daemon's eyes became heavier with every staggered step and his body fell weaker with every battered breath. Daemons eyes closed and he could feel himself collapse to the ground as everything faded to black.

Chapter 4: Bonding

Daemon's body twitched and shook in his unconscious state, whispers clouded his blackened mind and taunted him.

"This is death you know..."

"Why are you sleeping Daemon!"

"Don't be weak! Open your eyes!"

The taunts grew more abundant until all the voices melded into one single unintelligible medley, but after moments the voices slowly faded away and all that remained was a single distant voice.

"Daemon... Can you hear me?"

The voice grew louder and more distinct...

"I know you can hear me Daemon, please come back... I can't lose you again..."

In a flash of light, Daemon's mind returned to his body and as he lifted his body with a loud raspy breath; he screamed...

"Rhea!"

Daemon's vision faded from a white blur to see Rhea storm out of her chair to Daemon's side, her face displayed joy but her voice was filled with anger and concern.

"Daemon, you're awake! Just stay in bed, you're too weak to get up so quickly..."

"What happened?! Who are the keepers?! Why did you leave me?!", Screamed Daemon.

"Daemon calm down, please! One question at a time..."

Rhea rested her hands on Daemon's shoulder and as Daemon began to calm himself, there breathing slowly calming and synchronising.

"Where did you go... Why did you leave me..."

"She was suppose to follow me, I don't know why she kept going for you, I kept trying to draw her attention away from you but I lost you and had no other way to distract her..."

"Well clearly it didn't work... How did you get me back?"

"I was able to get you to someone I trust and they helped me get you back here on horseback without the guards seeing us, Sara heard word of what had happened and showed up to help tend to your injuries..."

"Why would you have to sneak me past the guards..."

"Because the second they see a halfling with an unconscious human, they think it gives them motive to murder you and frame me just so they can have a torture toy..."

Daemon brushed Rheas hands off of his shoulder and threw the cotton sheets off of him to see his leg, scarred and bruised but still attached.

"When will my leg be better? It already looks better than I thought it could have"

"You should be okay to walk again already, it's been a day since we tended to it..."

"A day?! How have I been out for a day?!", Asked Daemon hastily.

"You were beyond weak, I knew I should have forced you to stay while I went out; I should tried harder to get you to leave me with that thing!", Frowned Rhea.

"Rhea, enough... Please, what is done; is done and there's no point in complaining about the past..."

"I know but it's my fault this all happened..."

"Stop!", Snarled Daemon.

"I'm sorry, I'll stop... i just didn't want you getting hurt. Now I can tell you have important questions but I have one for you first...", Apologised Rhea.

"What is it?"

"Why do you trust me? If you are telling the truth, all you know about me is that I found you naked in the snow and you just seem very trusting... I'm not trying to put you off of everything but I'm just curious..."

"I don't know why I trust you so much, I think it's mostly because; well... What else can I do? Who else can I trust really?"

"You have a point, here I'll help you up and into the living area, we need to get some food in you...", Smiled Rhea as she stood holding her hand out.

"That and if you were going to kill me or anything; you would have done it by now, so could do worse I suppose...", Daemon smiled.

Daemon extended his hand and with Rhea's help, pulled himself to his feet. His legs felt weak but still strong and controllable. Rhea let go of Daemons hand and handed him another set off clothing almost identical to his current.

"Here, get changed quickly, don't think you'll want to be in those sweaty things any more, just yell out if you need me; else walk through the door when you're ready..."

As Rhea walked through the door a wave of déjà vu ran over Daemon, once again in Rhea's bedroom changing into familiar clothes. The clothing was yet again a perfect fit and felt brand new.

Daemon laid the clothes onto the bed sheets and took one last look around, nothing out of the ordinary except on top of the dresser next to the mirror, a small square rested where something clearly use to sit, a bare patch; untouched by dust roughly the size of a man's torso. Daemon thought nothing of it as a flood of aromatic herbs seeped into his nostrils; through the cracks of the doorway.

As the door slowly creaked open the smell grew stronger and stronger. Rhea was stood in front of the fireplace stirring a large pot over the lit roaring flames with a large wooden spoon.

"That was quick, where did you put the other clothes?"

"i just put them on the bed sorry, didn't know where else to leave them..."

"No it's fine like that, sit down, I owe you some answers..."

Rhea sat a lid on top of the pot and sat down in one of the three seats positioned facing the fireplace. Daemon slowly walked to the seat opposing Rhea, the seats were of a soft material with cushioned arm rests held together by a hefty oak frame.

"Well ask away...", Said Rhea as Daemon rested in the seat.

Before a word could escape Daemon's mouth, a wave of whispers filled the room and in the blink of an eye; Sara appeared holding her hand on what would have been Rhea's shoulder, Rhea suddenly appeared behind Sara holding a small copper dagger against her throat with nothing but more fading tendrils filling her seat.

"Well that's not the hello I had hoped on, good to see you too Rhea", Smiled Sara.

"You fucking idiot! Why would you scare me like that!?", Snapped Rhea as she lowered her blade and pushed Sara away.

"Just having a little fun, you're lucky I didn't sneak up on the white boy, you would have been cleaning his shit from that seat for weeks."

"Don't be a smartass Sara, you could have used the bloody door..."

"Yes, I could have, emphasis on could..."

Rhea stared at Sara with anger in her eyes as she bent down and holstered her blade in a brown leather sheath strapped to her right leg.

"Can I please ask one fucking question without more crazy shit happening?!", Shouted Daemon as he stood to his feet and threw his arms in the air in a huff.

"I wake up in someone's bed naked and the next thing I know, I'm dumped; running from some crazed woman while people are just able to teleport around?! I've got random voices in my head; stopping time and taunting me and calling themselves fucking 'Keepers' and no answers for any of it!"

Rhea and Sara stared at Daemon in surprise...

"Well... The kid has a voice, I like that!"

"Enough Sara!", Shouted Rhea as she swung her fist into Sara's jaw.

"Fucking hell Rhea, liven up a little bit, no need to start throwing punches now.", Snarked Sara as she wiped away a small trail of blood from her lip.

"Guys can we please stop the petty arguing?! I think I deserve some answers!"

"Calm down! Are all you humans this bitchy?", Returned Sara, "Have a seat and we will answer your 'many' questions..."

Rhea looked angry and concerned as the three sat down in their seats and dotted there gaze around each other.

"Okay; first of all... Why are you two able to just vanish and appear somewhere else in an instant?", Asked Daemon.

"You can take this one Rhea...", Said Sara as she gestured her hands towards Rhea.

"Well, it's because of something us elves and some halflings have; called 'The Focus'. It grants us unusual abilities such as what you describe as jumping around, we simply call it blink...", Explained Rhea.

"What else does it let you do? How do you use it?"

"It can vary from elf to elf but almost everyone with it has a noticeably heightened sense of the world, can analyse their environment quicker and identify things. As for how we use it, that does depend on the person, we normally have triggers such as an emotion or motivation but we can learn to control it and use it on a whim."

"Well if only elves and halflings can use it... How did I?"

"Wait wait wait... You used The Focus?", Said Sara as she sat up in intrigue and suspicion with a glaring smile on her face.

"I don't know how but when that woman was chasing me, I closed my eyes, heard whispers and then everything went silent and I was stood behind the woman at the end of the alley I had just run into..."

Sara and Rhea's faces dropped in surprise, barely able to believe what Daemon had just said; the two stared at each other.

"Wait so, you... A human... Used the focus... You have no idea how rare that is whitey'....", smiled Sara.

"Well what happened after that?", Asked Rhea.

"I don't know, something came over me and I had no control over my actions against the woman, by the time I had control again; she was already dead and Rhea was running towards me, but as she carried me everything just stopped and I heard women's voices all around me...", Explained Daemon with hesitation.

"What did the voices say...", Asked Rhea as her face drained of colour and her eyes locked onto Daemon with intent.

"They said they were called 'the keepers' and that two of them were called Kalina and Leanna, they kept saying things about me 'being of use still' and other cryptic things I couldn't understand..."

"Rhea, this sounds a bit too familiar...", Said Sara.

Rhea tried to speak but her lips began to tremble and as a single tear rolled down her face, she stood and stormed off to her bedroom; slamming the door behind her.

"Well... That was unexpected...", Smirked Sara staring off into the doorway.

"Any idea what that's about?", Asked Daemon.

"Unfortunately I do know but it's not my place to comment on it kid..."

"What's with the kid shit, you look like your the same age as me, if not younger?", Enquired Daemon with a raised eyebrow.

"Prepare yourself, you're in for a surprise...", Said Sara sitting forward leaning on her knees.

"To us elves, I'm only sixteen, but to you humans I am around forty eight, give or take a couple human years, we don't age like your fish meat does."

Daemon's eyes opened wide, her smooth skin and young eyes were deceiving, much like her personality.

"Forty eight?! Wait how old is Rhea then?", Asked Daemon.

"Finally a question I can't answer, I don't know how old she is. She is very secretive about her age and I can't tell from her looks, I don't even know if she has strong elven blood or not", Smirked Sara.

"Maybe we should stop talking about her and someone should actually go check on her... I think this is your time to shine whitey!"

Daemon turned his head to Rhea's closed door, her sobbing could be faintly heard amongst the sound of crackling fire and howling winds.

"Fine, wish me luck..."

"Nah i'm good", Smiled Sara.

Sara stood and began stirring the pot atop the fire as Daemon walked to the door. As he went to knock; Rhea's spoke.

"It's okay Daemon, come in..."

Daemon slowly pushed the door open, Rhea was sat on her bed clutching an old piece of paper to her chest. As Daemon walked closer; she placed the paper into a small wooden box and locked it shut.

"What was the paper?", Asked Daemon; standing in front of Rhea.

"It's nothing, just something to remind me of the past", Explained Rhea as she tapped the sheets beside her, gesturing for Daemon to sit.

"Why did your partner kill himself?", Asked Daemon as he slowly sat.

"He also had The Focus but it became too strong for him, he began to go crazy and started to turn into something horrible, like the woman that attacked you today, it slowly breaks down your mind and takes over your body. He didn't want to hurt me so he killed himself..."

Rhea rested her head on Daemons shoulder as a tear ran down her face and dripped onto his legs. Daemon rested his hand on her shoulder in an effort to comfort her but could only feel her shaking.

"I'm sorry you saw this, I normally can hold it back but, another human having The Focus is a bit close to home, is Sara still here? Or did I scare her off?"

"No she is still here, she was stirring the pot last I saw."

"Okay, let's get back out there and I'll stop feeling sorry for myself for once..."

The two stood and went to walk back into the living area but Rhea wrapped her arms tightly around Daemon.

"Thank-you for checking on me... It's nice to know I haven't scared you off... Yet..."

As Rhea released her grip, she looked up to Daemon and the two let out a small smile towards each other before turning around and walking out of the doorway. The living area was empty, Sara had disappeared.

"Sara? Are you still here?", Asked Rhea as she looked around the room.

No answer, the room stood silent only broken by the howling winds outside and the crackling fire still bellowing away. Daemon stepped further forward and began to feel uneasy and uncontrollably concerned. Suddenly a voice came up right to Daemon's ear.

"BOO!", Whispered the voice.

Daemon felt the same rush of adrenaline from the alley corpse through his body, before he could even blink his body began moving and in a blurred haze he had moved behind the figure, he ripped their left legs out from underneath them; flinging them into the air, as the figure spun; Daemon quickly thrust his hand against the figure's body causing the same shockwave as he had caused when fighting the crazed woman.

The figure slammed into the wall with a deep thud and landed on the floor gasping for air and letting out a dry and hearty cough.

"SARA!? Are you okay?!", Screamed Rhea holding her face.

"Ah fucking hell, guess the white boy is stronger than I imagined, and I'm taking a wild guess that we know his trigger now, fear... Fucking fantastic...", Coughed Sara between breaths as she sat up on the wooden flooring holding her head.

Daemon watched the tendrils of dark grey and blue tinted smoke flow to the ground as Rhea helped Sara to her feet. Sara leant over resting her hands on her thigh as she tried to catch her knocked out breath.

"Well you already know some of the things your body is capable of... How do you feel?", Asked Sara still bent over.

"Strange, my body just takes control of me and I don't have any choice as to what happens, just then everything went blurry as I moved...", Explained Daemon with shaky breath.

"Well now you know what it's like to blink, to us you just appeared behind Sara..."

"It's odd, so you see nothing at all? What about that smoke?"

"It's from the dark space, it's just a left over when your body ends use of The Focus and returns to our reality", Explained Sara as she stood; straightening her body as her spine cracked back into place.

"The dark space?", Asked Daemon,

"Oh I forgot, of course you don't know what the Dark Space is... Can we please sit down, everything fucking hurts after that...", Asked Sara.

"Sure, but it's your fault you know...", Giggled Rhea as the three walked back to their earlier seating.

"So can either of you explain The Focus to me? What is the Dark Space and what does it have to do with all this?", Asked Daemon calmly.

"We can answer some, not all, The Focus is simply an energy that courses through us, it's part of our blood. As for the dark space, we can't explain it, your best shot at getting answers like that are from the College of Neefleheim, they specifically study the effects and cause of The Focus...", Explained Rhea.

"When can I go to the college then? Will they be happy to talk to me?", Asked Daemon.

"Tomorrow morning will probably be best, just let them know you are my friend and they will tell you everything they can", Explained Rhea as she stood and began spooning the thick liquid from inside the large pot into small wooden bowls.

The smell of fresh herbs, tangy spices and a faint smell of lamb flooded the room, coating Sara and Daemon's noses.

"That smells amazing, what is it?", Joyously asked Sara.

"Lamb soup with onions, beans and potatoes with mushrooms, herbs and a few spices from around the woods and my garden. Hopefully it doesn't taste awful, just sort of threw everything in this afternoon and hoped for the best.

As Rhea passed Sara a bowl, she began sniffing the steam as if addicted to its sweet smells. As she took a mouthful of stew, her eyes opened wide and her chewing slowed.

"Well shit... If only Ellen cooked liked that when I first came here, life would have been great!"

"Who's Ellen?", Asked Daemon as he slowly spooned stew in his mouth.

"She is my mother; well adopted mother, I'm not actually from around this area so when I came here, one of the dark elf couples took me on as their own, Samuel and Ellen."

"How far are you from?"

"Across an ocean, there was a fight between my actual parents and their village, they were outcasts for being ex hunters for the nearby human city, so one day the humans took the chance to hunt us down, they told me to run as far as I could so they could protect me...", Explained Sara as she lowered her head.

The room went silent and the sound of the crackling flames became haunting and mesmerising.

"Well at least it shows they cared about you, wanted a better life for you...", Comforted Rhea.

"Well they do say dark elves fight for what they love, good sign I suppose but it's hard to accept sometimes though..."

"I understand Sara, but now you have a new family and your own loved ones to fight for", Said Rhea.

"Well someone's got to do the fighting", Smiled Sara lifting her head.

Daemon sat silent and without words, seeing Sara so vulnerable was so out of character from what he knew of her. She seemed strong and as resilient to sadness.

"Okay time to pick up the conversation!", Said Rhea, "You seem off Daemon, you can talk you know..."

"I know, I just don't know what to say at the moment..."

"Come on whitey, there must be something you could say?", Sarcastically said Sara.

"Why do you keep calling me whitey..."

"Well... Look at your skin, you're as white as a snow cap; so what else could I call you..."

"Could call me Daemon you know?"

"Well that would just be boring now wouldn't it, I only call Rhea by her name because I've known her for years, I've known you for what; a day maybe?", Explained Sara.

Rhea giggled under her breath, "Come on Sara, be nice to him he doesn't remember much so give him a break."

Time passed as the three ate in near silence accompanied by the sounds of howling winds and birds cawing in the distant trees.

The moon now flew high in the sky casting a blue hue over the woods and the blankets of thick snow sparkled in the pale moonlight with the moon piercing through Rhea's curtains.

Rhea stood from her chair, grabbed Daemon's bowl but as she leant down and held her hand out to grab Sara's bowl, she noticed her ears twitch slightly.

"You okay Sara?"

"Yeah, Samuel is just looking for me, I suppose I should get back to the old man..."

"How do you know he is looking for you?", Asked Daemon.

"Daemon, I'm an elf, trust me...", Said Sara before handing Rhea her bowl and vanishing leaving a faint ghost of smoke.

"Well... Isn't she one for goodbye's...", Said Daemon.

"You have no idea Daemon, she gets worse the longer you know her", Smiled Rhea as she stared off into the fireplace.

"I think we should probably go to sleep if you really want to head back into the city tomorrow...:

"Might be a good idea, do you have a blanket or anything I could use?", Asked Daemon.

"What do mean?"

"A blanket? So I have something to keep me warm on your seating?"

"Daemon you can sleep in my bed, I'll stay in our spare room tonight"

Daemon tilted his head in confusion and looked at Rhea.

"Why would you sleep in the spare room? I'm just some random guy you found in the snow and brought to your house..."

"You had someone's fingers tear your leg open, I think you deserve the nice softer bed right now...", Said Rhea as she held her hand out to help Daemon to his feet.

As Daemon stood; his leg started to throb with dull pain.

"Fuck!", Muttered Daemon under his breath.

Rhea threw her arm around Daemon and supported him as he limped towards Rhea's room.

"Are you sure you'll be okay to go to into the city tomorrow? You've already passed out both times I've seen you and last time you could have died..."

"I'll be okay, but I hate to ask if you could help me around.."

"I wouldn't have it any other way; and I promise we won't have anymore incidents tomorrow...", Explained Rhea as she opened her door and limped Daemon to her bed.

As Daemon sat back onto the bed, his leg began to feel strength overcome his pain and feel as if everything was back to normal.

"Just yell out if you need me, sleep well Daemon..."

As Rhea closed the door, her footsteps echoed for a moment till silence. Daemon slowly leant back and his eyes quickly fell heavy, finally some peace and rest...

Chapter 5: College

Daemon lay peacefully in Rhea's bed as the night faded into morning. Daemon's eyes slowly opened to see a slim ray of light break through between the closed curtains. The sounds of birds chirping could be heard outside and the smell of fresh pine and lavender flooded the room.

Daemon threw the sheets off and sat at the edge of the bed; rubbing his eyes. He rolled up his left pant leg to see his leg almost completely healed, barely any marks beside five small white scars scattered around his calf.

"What the fuck... How?", Daemon muttered to himself as he ran his hand over the marks.

He slowly lifted himself off of the bed expecting a sharp jolt of pain to run down his leg, but nothing, no pain nor discomfort. Rhea's muffled voice could be heard through the still closed door, it sounded as if she was singing to herself.

Daemon slowly opened the door, Rhea stood staring out of a window next to the entrance doorway, singing in a soft voice. Daemon leant against the doorway to soak in Rhea's voice...

"... and the Keepers watch over us and will come to aid us in the dark time we need...", Sung Rhea as she slowly turned around, locking eyes with Daemon.

"Oh my! I'm sorry if I woke you... I try not to be loud...", Apologised Rhea.

"It's okay, you didn't wake me up, you have a gorgeous voice you know", Smiled Daemon, his arms now crossed in intrigue.

"Thankyou, been singing to myself ever since I was a little girl..."

"What were you singing?"

"Just an old elven song from my childhood, just reminds me of a time before the human's had such a hold on everything..."

"How long ago was that?"

"Longer than you could imagine Daemon", Said Rhea leaning against the windowsill.

"Can I ask a question?", Asked Daemon, arms still crossed.

"Of course..."

"Why are you so secretive about your age, even Sara said she doesn't know how old you are but you both seem close, almost like family..."

"There is a long story behind that, Sara may as well be my sister but she knows things about me that you couldn't even begin to understand, my age isn't really something worth noting..."

Daemon pushed himself away from the doorway, now confused; he lifted an eyebrow at Rhea and spoke...

"Well, I guess that will have to do, you're very secretive about small things aren't you..."

"I don't even know how to explain how correct you are", Smirked Rhea, "Here have a seat, we can go into the city after you've eaten if you still would like to."

"Thank you but I'm not very hungry...", Said Daemon as he walked towards the chair he sat the night prior.

"I don't care, just because you aren't hungry doesn't mean you should be skipping meals, at least have some pieces of toast..." , Said Rhea as she grabbed six freshly toasted bread slices off of a thin wired tray; hovering above the fire.

"Would you like butter? It may be a little salty, got to keep things semi fresh this far out some way..."

"Please, I'm sure a little salt won't kill me..."

Rhea giggled as she walked into her cooking area opposing the fireplace, she opened a small wooden box on her bench and cut off small slithers of butter and spread them across the pieces of bread.

"Any idea why my leg is almost completely healed already? Surely I should still be limping and in pain...", Asked Daemon.

"Dark elves have a way around medicines, don't ask what Sara did and how it works, all I know is that Sara isn't stupid and knows how to treat almost any injury...", She explained, handing Daemon a white ceramic plate holding three pieces of toast.

Daemon thanked Rhea and bit into one of the slices, a strong buttery taste coated his mouth before being broken by a strong salty taste, the butter tasted as if it was rancid.

"Oh fuck me...", Daemon said as he screwed his face.

"I did tell you, I promise the butter is fine, it's just the salt used to preserve it, you get use to the taste pretty quick...", Explained Rhea; holding her hand in front of her mouth as she slowly chewed.

"I hope so...", Daemon grumbled.

"So what do you expect to find out from going to the college today?"

"I don't know to be honest, I feel Sara had more answers to my questions than she let show. Hopefully they can at least explain how I could have gotten The Focus if elves are the only ones who are supposed to have it..."

"There have been other pureblood humans to posses The Focus in the past, my partner was one of them; but that's a long story for another day. The college can only tell you what they know..."

"Well do they know anything about dark elves and light elves?"

"Unfortunately they do, please don't mention Sara unless someone does first...", Said Rhea, her face lowered.

"Do they not accept her either?"

"Some do, a lot of them do actually, just not all, you have to remember the college is strictly humans, even halflings have to fight to be allowed in...", Explained Rhea.

Daemon finished his second slice of toast, the taste of salt still coated his mouth but had started to become more and more pleasant. As he bit into his final piece, he began to enjoy the butter's taste as the bread started breaking through the strong salty taste.

"You weren't lying, you really do get over the salt..."

"I know, would I lie to you?", Smiled Rhea as she stood from her chair and placed her plate into her bench space in her cooking area.

"I don't know, would you?", Smiled Daemon as he finished his final piece and stood to dispose his plate.

Rhea grabbed the plate out of his hand; placing on top of hers.

"Did you want to go now or did you want to rest some more?"

"I'm happy to go if you are..."

"Okay come on then, you can take Aria again if you'd like, she seemed kind of fond of you"

Daemon followed Rhea back to the stables and helped her open the heavy stable door. As soon as Aria lifted her head from eating her hay, she walked over to Daemon and rubbed her face on Daemons with her eyes closed.

"Looks like someone likes you...", Said Rhea as she saddled Edward.

"I think so...", Laughed Daemon as he rubbed Edwards nose.

Daemon threw a saddle over Edward and fastened the straps tightly and with a rub on his neck jumped up and mounted.

"Come on boy, let's go!"

Rhea and Aria took off with Daemon and Edward following behind. Snow fell from the tall trees coating the horses in a thin layer of pure white snow. A thick morning fog quickly consumed the cottage and stable as the pair rode on.

"Does it ever feel strange riding so far; so often?", Asked Daemon.

"Sometimes, but it almost feels like I've been doing it my whole life, it just becomes nothing to me"

"How long have you been doing this?"

"I can't even remember how many years now, wish I could tell you the exact amount of time..."

Daemon nodded his head in acceptance and turned away staring at the glistening snow and the dirt breaking through the thick blanket of white.

"You seem troubled Daemon..."

"You seem to say that a lot you know..."

"Well you don't seem happy so of course I'm going to say something..."

"I'm still trying to work out what's going on, especially after everything from yesterday, it's just a lot to take in...", Explained Daemon, "It is nice to have a little bit of peace at the moment though..."

"Well things should stay this way from now on, hopefully they can calm down even more..."

The pair continued riding in silence, taking in the sounds of chirping birds and rustling leaves in the light wind. Before they knew it; the time had passed and the walls of Neefleheim were breaking through the morning fog and revealing its looming stature.

The closer Rhea and Daemon got, the more the snow began to fall...

"Does it ever go a day without snowing here?", Asked Daemon.

"Very rarely, we might be lucky to get a snow free day every few weeks, but at least it doesn't always come down heavy, it's mostly just a light sprinkle throughout the day..."

As Daemon and Rhea passed through the gates, one of the guards took notice of the pair and watched them intently as they approached.

"Evening...", He saluted.

The other guard stood stationary, staring off into the distance. Moments after entering the city walls, André came wandering from one of the buildings corners and waved his hand in the air with a large smile on his face.

"Miss Rhea! Mr Daemon! Didn't expect to see you both so soon..."

"Calm down André you don't have to be so formal with us, no need for the miss and mr...", Smiled Rhea.

"Sorry, just so use to it from the orphanage, would you like me to tie down your horses?", Asked André with a joyous smile on his face.

"That would be great, I'm just taking Daemon to the college...", Said Rhea as she got off of Aria.

Daemon slowly stepped off of Edward and handed the reins over to André.

"It's good to see you up and well Daemon, you weren't so lively last time I saw you...", Smiled André.

"You saw me? How?", Asked Daemon with surprise.

"Well I wasn't going to let miss Rhea carry you out with just her friend, I helped her distract some guards on the way through..."

"Well thank you André, it's good to see you again as well", Thanked Daemon.

André nodded his head and starting leading the horses to the tie down posts, Rhea stood to the side of the long path waiting for Daemon with a slight smile on her face.

"What's the smile for?"

"Nothing, it's just nice to see André getting along with someone other than me, he didn't really get along with anyone else around here."

"Well glad he can get along with me, how far is the college from here?", Daemon smiled.

"Not far, it's just to the right of the market we went to, just follow me and try not to get lost this time...", smirked Rhea.

Daemon nodded his head and smiled as Rhea turned and began her way through the crowd. The streets once again filled with people chatting and trying to navigate their way through the congregation of beggars, citizens and the like.

People didn't cast their gaze on the pair this time, instead everyone just seemed to walk past as if they didn't even exist. The cobbled path wound through the city like a snake stalking its prey until it lead to the open market.

People grouped together as they navigated the maze of market stalls and patrols of guards. The constant sound of shouting and bickering almost completely masked Rhea's voice as she tried to speak to Daemon, he continued staring over the market until she tapped on his shoulder and leant in close to his ear...

"The college is just to the right, you can see it's bell tower from here...", Rhea said as she pointed towards a tall tower piercing out from the roofs of nearby buildings.

As Daemon followed Rhea to the right he noticed the streets slowly empty the closer they got to the college tower.

"Where did everyone go?", Asked Daemon.

"The college is sort of a feared zone, the people of Neefleheim are almost scared of what they study, they fear what they don't understand..."

Suddenly Rhea stood still and turned to one of the buildings to their left and gingerly knocked on the buildings door and slowly stepped back, she tilted her head in confusion...

Rhea slowly opened the door into a small room with dark cobbled walls and red tinged wooden beams along the ceiling mirroring the similar flooring, the room had no discerning features other than a pair of solitary lit candle torches on each side of the walls.

"Come in Daemon...", Smiled Rhea.

Daemon slowly entered the room but filled with caution, as he closed the door, Rhea knelt down on one knee facing the far wall and held her hand against a smooth stone on at the base of the wall. Nothing happened for a second but once Rhea stood to her feet, a doorway slid open in the wall revealing a long stone corridor with a figure stood in white hooded robes guarding a dark wooden door at the opposite end.

"Hello Ian, miss me?", Smiled Rhea as she walked towards the figure.

"Always Rhea, we don't see you as much now, always good to have you come past...", Returned the figure in a deep raspy voice.

As Daemon entered through the doorway, the stone wall slowly started to slide shut as he followed Rhea down the corridor and towards the figure.

"You don't have to maintain the act Ian, you can take off the robes, I know you hate them..."

"Thank the Keepers, they are so fucking horrible to wear you know, it's like dressing in cow hide! At least introduce me before I start stripping for your friends..."

As the man removed his hood, his bleach white hair and beard glistened like the forest snow, his hair long and tied back with his head shaved down on the sides. His face highlighted by his dark brown eyes and his white skin lined with multiple light scars.

"This is my friend...", Rhea said as she stood in front of Ian.

"Wait, let me guess... I can feel a Desmond, but it's not clear... How close was I?", Interrupted Ian as he closed his eyes and lowered his head.

"Very close, I'm Daemon..", Smiled Daemon as he held his hand out.

"No matter, I'm getting closer every time.", Said Ian as he shook Daemon's hand with a firm grip.

"Why did you think you could guess his name?", Asked Rhea.

"It's a new theory we have of The Focus, we believe it may have even more power than we had first imagined, we now theorise that it may even be able to create and interact with physical matter and even organic such as us humans and halflings. I've been studying and trying to use The Focus to be able to read someone's mind, nothing has been completely correct but things are getting closer than ever before!", Gleeed Ian with a smile from ear to ear.

"Well I wish you the best of luck with that!", Giggled Rhea, "I'm here because my friend would like to learn more about The Focus and The Keepers, I thought this would be the best place for him to learn a thing or two..."

"Oh by all means, I'd be more than happy to tell you what I know...", Smiled Ian as he turned his head to Daemon.

"Fantastic! Do you mind if I run some errands while you're here Daemon?"

"That's fine, Ian looks nice enough to not kill me so I think I'll be fine."

"Don't be so sure Daemon...", Smirked Ian.

"Calm down Ian, I think Daemons had enough of the smart mouth from Sara...", Said Rhea as she turned around and walked back to the sliding wall.

Ian slowly turned and opened the heavy wooden door, it lead into a large courtyard with a winding path lined with stone pillars and scattered with brightly coloured flower beds.

"It's okay Daemon you can come through, just be wary you are now on college grounds...", Explained Ian as he beckoned Daemon to follow, he slowly removed his white robes and hung them on a small hook next to the doorway.

His clothing consisted of a dark leather tunic with maroon slits over his shoulders and along his waist coupled with dark grey cloth pants. Daemon slowly walked through the door and his nose was flooded with the floral scents of the flower beds and a slight scent of citrus that he could not place.

"Now I do have one request from you before I start answering your questions...", Began Ian as he latched the door closed, "I need to ask you stay on the path, this courtyard was sewn by the light elves and is one of the last remaining things around the city from the light elf kin..."

"I can do that, so what exactly is this place?", Asked Daemon as the the two men started walking along the paved path.

"This is The College of Neefleheim, imaginative name I know. We are the sole source of education in this pittance city; however, since we began deeper study into understanding The Focus, less and less people are attending and our college is slowly dying..."

"I'm sorry to hear, what caused everyone to study further into The Focus?"

"Well honestly your friend Rhea and her dark elf friend Sara have been key to us understanding what we do now..."

Daemon walked in shock at Ian calling out Sara as a dark elf within the city walls...

"Aren't you worried about others hearing you talk about knowing a dark elf?!"

Ian chuckled to himself, "You think anyone would come close enough to the college to hear it? Even if someone did; they wouldn't believe me, us human are an ignorant race..."

"I've noticed that, so why do you guys have such a hidden entrance?", Asked Daemon as the pair approached the main building of the college.

The building stood tall with the pronounced tower taking centre stage, looming over the city. It's stone and clay brickwork looked weathered but as strong as the day the first brick was placed. A tall metal gate guarded by two figures in the same robes Ian had greeted Rhea and Daemon...

"We separated the college into two sides, this side is dedicated to studying The Focus and its effects, the other is the general public college, we did it in an effort to bring people in and sanctioning them off from our more dangerous studies", Explained Ian as he raised his hand towards the two robed figures.

They removed their hoods to reveal one of them being a man and the other a woman, both had dark brown skin and jet black hair tied back into a bun.

"A new arrival Ian?", Asked the woman.

"No Amelia, this is Rhea's friend Daemon, he wishes to learn more of The Focus and its effects on us..."

"You had us excited for a second, been years since a new scholar joined us, perhaps one day another will come...", Said the man.

Ian leant in towards Daemon and whispered in his ear, "These are the people you have to deal with if you fuck up around here, they are twins both focused on using The Focus for combat reasons, they volunteer as guards most days..."

The two guards opened the gate with a loud grinding creak as Ian spoke to Daemon.

"Come, we will have answers for you in the library upstairs, just a small walk left...", Explained Ian as he began walking towards the gate.

A large brightly lit hall spanned away from the, paintings and sculptures lined the side walls only broken by the occasional doorway, a long red carpet lined the floor with detailed images being sewn into the sides.

"Just to the left Daemon, the library is upstairs..."

Ian turned the corner as the two guards closed the gate behind them, a large spiral staircase slithered it's way to the library above the large hall. The stairs were stone with a hard polished wood plate sat atop each step. Each step would echo and reverberate down the stairwell.

Ian and Daemon reached the top of the stairs and as Ian leant his hand against the tall dark oak door he turned to Daemon...

"I have to ask you don't touch any of the documents, I personally trust you but the other scholars are a bit hesitant about outsiders touching our documents.."

Ian slowly pushed the door open to reveal the grand library, rows upon rows of shelving filled with books of immensely varied ages. No shelf left emptied and not one speck of dust. The library spanned for what seemed like forever and stood three stories in height, long walkways stretched across from each side of library.

"This is huge... How are you able to keep track of everything...", Asked Daemon in awe.

"I practically live here, you learn where things are very quickly, follow me and I should have some books with answers, in the meantime, ask away..."

Daemon wrestled his mind as he tried to figure out where to begin questioning.

"Well, what is The Focus?"

"It's hard to explain everything but I'll try. The Focus is an energy; a force of some kind that grants it's owner supernatural like abilities, I'm sure you've seen the smoke that is left behind when the someone blinks for example... That is remnants of what we call the Dark Space after it is channeled into our bodies..."

"What is the Dark space?", Asked Daemon curiously.

Ian stopped and grabbed a book from the shelving and flicked through the pages until he began reading it, "The Dark Space: The Dark Space is a conceptualised and theorised state of limbo between life and a death caused by Focus misuse. It is not a physical location but spectral in nature..."

Ian closed the book and placed it back on the shelf.

"In other words, when you use The Focus; you leave your body and The Focus takes over; carrying out any tasks you wish, hence why we think The Focus has much more power than thought..."

Daemon struggled to understand everything, but before he had a chance to comprehend anything, another question sprung to his mind and forced itself out of his mouth.

"The Keepers... Who are they? What are they?", Asked Daemon.

"What do you know of The Keepers, surely Rhea and Sara would never speak of them to you...", Asked Ian curiously.

"After I killed the husk a couple of days ago; Rhea was dragging me back out of the alley and everything froze, then I heard voices calling themselves The Keepers..."

Ian tilted his head and raised an eyebrow, "I don't mean to be rude but I need names, did they say any names?"

"Only two Kalina and Leanna, but I heard other voices, couldn't say how many though, they were all muddled together..."

"Oh this is fantastic! Fucking fantastic!", Gleeed Ian as he smiled from ear to ear, "I'll be one second, I know of a book that will be of use here!"

Ian lowered his head before suddenly he blinked away in a haze of emerald tinted smoke. Whispers echoed throughout the library. Daemon stood turning on the spot trying to pin down Ian's location in the vast library.

Before Daemon had a chance to yell out or figure out what Ian was doing; the whispers stopped and in a puff of more emerald smoke; Ian blinked directly in front of Daemon.

"Sorry about that, thought the book was in another section, for whatever reason a book on the keepers was in The Dark Space section... Anyway enough of that!"

Ian flicked through the pages and then stopped directly in the middle as if he knew the book inside and out.

"The Keeper's are a higher collective of ten woman who gave up a mortal life and forced The Focus to consume them by deliberate misuse. This act forced them into a state of a Husk, trapping there mind inside of The Dark Space and granting them unparalleled control over The Dark Space and mortal realm...", Read Ian as his finger darted across the pages.

"This book was co-written by Rhea's former partner before his passing, they both gave great insight to The Keepers, were even able to supply us with names of nine Keepers, the tenth still remains a mystery...", He continued.

"What were they called? Anything I should know about them?", Asked Daemon with intrigue.

"If only we had enough time to discuss everything you need to know about them... But most of all you should know something about Kalina, she shares the same surname as Rhea's friend Sara, both bare the surname Haas and share dark elf blood from the same part of the world, Sara is aware of this and is cause for some of her resentment towards The Keeper's so I would recommend not mentioning either of them to each other..."

"Wait, Sara said her parents were killed... How could Kalina be related to her?"

Ian shook his head slowly, "Yes her parents were killed, we think Kalina may only be two hundred elven years older than Sara's mother, personally I feel like her mother Tara may be the daughter of a Keeper and not have known it..."

"Well what are the others names...", Insisted Daemon.

"Give me a second, they are in the book somewhere...", Said Ian as he flicked the book to the beginning and slowly turned the pages forward, "Ah, here we go, The Keepers; in no order; go by the names, Maya, Kaeya, Lilith, Merin, Lian, Tali, Ayla, Leanna, Kalina and one currently unknown, little is known on many details regarding each individual Keeper; blah, blah, blah", Ian read out as he spun his wrist in a sarcastic motion.

"Why are they all women?", Asked Daemon trying to keep the names of The Keepers in his mind.

"Dark and Light elf women are born with a natural attunement to The Focus, it's apparently due to the first Keeper being a light elf woman named Tali, she had a strong friendship with a group of dark elves who had the men stay back and defend the village while the women hunted at night, when Tali became the first Keeper; she 'gifted' her elven kin with a natural attunement from birth that passed it's way through the generations, unfortunately we have no links as to how Tali knew about the Dark Space or why she wanted to become the Keeper of the focus..."

Daemon went to continue asking questions; but as he opened his mouth, he was interrupted by the sound of the libraries main entrance creaking open. Ian and Daemon both looked at the door and watched as Rhea walked into the library.

"Sorry I took so long, got caught up looking for new clothes...", She apologised.

"No Rhea, it's fine, I always enjoy teaching others about The Focus, any luck finding anything new?", Asked Ian.

"I did actually, I'll have to come out and grab it tomorrow however, did you find what you needed Daemon?"

"As much as I needed to know..."

"Good, good! Are you ready to head off, I wanted to take you to get something as an apology for the other day with the husk..."

"Sounds great, lead the way...", Said Daemon as he gestured towards the door and turned to Ian, "Thank-you Ian..."

"My pleasure Daemon, feel free to stop by at any time if you have any questions or just for a quick talk about anything!", Smiled Ian as he held his hands behind his back and watched Daemon and Rhea walk through the door into the stairwell.

Chapter 6: Gifts

"So what did you think of Ian?", Asked Rhea as the pair walked down the spiral stairs.

"I don't know, he's a very nice guy, he is hard to pin down..."

"Yeah he is a good guy, his past isn't great so he can sometimes fall out of his profesional act and let his tongue slip a bit..."

"What happened with his past?", Asked Daemon.

"Ian was a prostitute in his earlier days, he was a bit rough around the edges; but one of the high scholars and college owner offered him a room to stay till he could turn himself around, not long after he came here; he actually was interested in education and studying The Focus, he's been here ever since..."

"Well at least he could turn things around..."

The hall at the base of the stairs was now filled with white robed scholars, some had younger men and women following them in white and blue garments...

"Why aren't some of them in robes?"

"They are initiates, they are studying under one of the scholars here, hopefully they will become the next generation to keep the college alive..."

"Do all scholars have to wear the robes? Why was Ian able to take his off?"

"Ian is the head scholar of this mini college, the college is split into three parts, junior or initiates college, middle college and scholar college, this is the middle college and seeing as he wasn't with any juniors he isn't required to keep the robes on, an old rule."

The hall was lined up and down with other men and women draped in the same garments as the two entryway guards, they held their hands behind their back and sheathed their weapon in plain sight of any parsing college participants. Daemon looked up and down at the guards and noticed that almost all of them had dark brown skin or of similar shade.

"Why do so many of the guards have dark skin Rhea? Don't mean offense but..."

"Most of them fled their home island Africa or one of its surrounding sister islands due to war, they chose to assist the college as guards because it's all they know, some of them study The Focus at the same time but that is a very small portion of them...", Explained Rhea as she walked towards the entry gate.

Two guards stood either side of the gate, they wore long backed robes with a beaked hood and scarf covering their faces, they stood straight clutching long dark oak spears with a decorated metal apex, the spear was wrapped in cloth at two middle points with a small etching of unreadable words between them.

All the guards nodded towards Rhea and Daemon to acknowledge them yet didn't take their eyes away from their positions.

"We can go out through the front entrance now that the college gates are open...", Said Rhea as she began walking along a path to her right.

The path ran past the colleges main structure and was lined with yet more flower beds and stone pillars. Daemon looked around as he followed behind Rhea and noticed three figures wandering on the grass tending to some of the now visible fruit trees and flower beds.

"I though no one was allowed to walk on the grass?"

"Only a few select people are allowed...", Rhea stopped for a second and stared at the figures, "They're halflings?! I thought halflings weren't allowed to study within the college?"

Out of nowhere appeared one of the guards that greeted Daemon and Ian earlier, his face covered with beads of sweat...

"Sorry to interrupt but was just doing my exercises and heard you talking, since the Lord Protector has removed the college as a part of his ruling we have been able to open our gates to anyone who wishes to learn, been a long time coming..."

"That's fantastic! I never thought I'd see the day, why are they given the rights to tend to the gardens when they are new to the college?"

"It's all thanks to Ian but a small family of three halflings joined the college day one and they are all of light elf blood so we thought it's only fair those of blood should be the only ones allowed to set foot...", Explained the man, "Anyway I shouldn't keep you from the rest of your day, I'll be off now..."

As the guard began jogging away he suddenly vanished but rather than leave behind smoke tendrils; nothing but a small amount of dust fell to the ground.

"Well I guess Ian is right, either he blinked or something else is going on here...", Said Rhea with surprise, "Come, still have to get your present..."

Rhea led Daemon through the college grounds, they past scholar upon scholar along the cobbled as it wound throughout between buildings and recreational areas until they arrived at a large steel gate. The gate stood three times the height of Daemon and was capped with decorative pointed ends; coated in a copper like material.

Two guards armed with spears and draped in the same garments as the one guarding the college hall's entrance stood either side of the gate and slowly unlocked the latch and pushed the gate open.

"Why are the guards so formal to everyone that passes them?"

"Just courtesy I guess, don't want to be rude but don't want to strike a conversation..."

The gate opened out to a street coming off of the central market where Daemon had met André days prior.

"So where exactly are we off to now?", Asked Daemon as the gates slowly creaked closed.

"We are going to one of the blacksmiths in the city, had him make something for you..."

"What did you get me? And why?"

"Walk and talk Daemon, don't want to miss him...", Interrupted Rhea, "I had him make you a short blade, thought you might need it after what happened with the husk, last thing I want is for all my hard work keeping you alive to be for nothing", She smirked.

"You don't have to do that you know, I don't intend to be with you for much longer, I feel terrible enough having someone else look after me like this..."

"Don't be stupid Daemon, it's actually quite nice having company other than Sara again, you can stay as long as you need, it really isn't any trouble"

"Well I'll keep it in mind but I still don't want to be a burden...", Agreed Daemon, "So how do you know your way around the city so well? It just seems like a repetitive maze to me, it all looks the same..."

"As I said, I've been here for years, you kind of have to learn the layout of everything else you are kind of fucked for getting around..."

The endless stream of alley's and wide streets continued for what felt like forever till the sound of the market could be heard distantly through the streets.

"The smith should be around the corner from here if I'm right", Said Rhea, gesturing to an upcoming corner.

The pair slowly turned the corner and the smell of burning metal and smoke flooded Daemons nose, he felt nauseated for a moment before the smoke had hit his throat; causing a heavy raspy cough.

"Please don't die on me, the smoke isn't that bad you know..."

"It's fucking horrible! Is this normal?!"

"Well he has a fire going constantly and he cools his steel in a bath of water so I would say this is pretty normal...", Smiled Rhea as she watched Daemon cover his nose and mouth.

Rhea led Daemon down the street till she stopped and knocked on one of the doors to her left. A moment passed and then a small muscley man with light brown skin opened the door, his head and face were completely lacking hair other than his thick bushy eyebrows.

"Ah Rhea! Was hoping you would come by soon, business has been slow today so I was just 'bout to close up shop!"

"Sorry Peter, had to get Daemon from the college, he was just with Ian while I did some shopping..."

"No matter, come, come, I've just got the blade finished inside...", Said Peter as he beckoned Rhea and Daemon into his smith. The walls were lined with thin mud and clay bricks with wooden prongs hanging out of the wall holding up various tools and aprons.

"What else do I owe you for the blade Peter?"

"Still one hundred pounds but give me fifty and we will call it done, it's always fun working on custom blades..."

"Well thank you, you know I can't just leave it at fifty, I'll pay it somehow...", Smiled Rhea as she handed a small sack of pound coins to Peter.

"Fantastic, one moment, I'll get the weapon out of the cooling trough and give it a wipe down, please make yourself at home..."

Peter turned and exited through a tall archway into what Daemon presumed to be his main forge. Rhea sat down on one of the large white and grey cloth seats that lined the back wall opposite the hanging tools.

A loud sizzle and bubbling could be heard from the other room followed by Peter...

"Fuck; Fuck; Fuck; Fuck... Hot; Hot; Hot!"

"Are you okay Peter?", Yelled out Rhea.

"Yeah I'm fine, who would have thought freshly fired steel would be hot and make the water boil all over the place", Laughed Peter from the room.

Daemon and Rhea sat in silence waiting for Peter until Daemon broke the now lingering silence...

"You really didn't need to do this you know..."

"I know I didn't have to, I wanted to. It's my fault you ended up with that husk and if you plan on going away and finding a life on your own, you'll need protection, hands are only good for so much..."

"Yes but I'm sure I could have worked out a way to earn some money and buy one on my own..."

"I know, too late now!", She smiled.

Daemon smiled back at Rhea in acceptance, she was so resilient to Daemon being on his own, but it comforted him in some way, a warm feeling came over him knowing that someone out there actually cared about a man riddled with amnesia.

"Well, Peter isn't quite what I expected as a blacksmith..."

"How so?"

"Well I don't know why but I imagined him with a big bushy beard..."

Rhea giggled to herself...

"I did have a big bushy beard, with long glowing locks of hair too, but I learnt the hard way that hair and fire don't mix...", Chuckled Peter as he turned the corner holding something behind his back, "I'm only joking of course, any good blacksmith knows not to have too much hair else you'll go up in a ball of flames..."

Rhea and Daemon stood up as Peter cleared his throat...

"Well, sir Daemon; I present to you, your mighty blade!", Embellished Peter sarcastically as he got on one knee and held the blade; sheathed in a long leather sheath, in his palms, presenting it to Daemon.

Daemon bent down and grabbed the blade firmly...

"You may rise, noble smith", He smiled.

"Well come on, take the blade out, tell me if you like it!"

The blade unsheathed with satisfying slide, it was a long two foot single sided shortblade, it was a dark charcoal colour with a bright birch wood hilt and ornate carvings in white along the sharpened blade.

"Holy shit...", Gaspd Rhea.

"It's nice isn't it! It's using a similar technique the Damascene do to there steel. It's also modeled off of the blades smithed by some of the foreign smiths called a Tantō, strange things they are, never understood how a shorter blade is better than a longer but no matter"

"It's amazing!", Awed Daemon as he saw his reflection in the weapons blade.

"How did you get the blade so clean and shiny?", Asked Rhea.

"Honestly I have no idea, I worked on the blade as any other but it just seemed to react differently..."

"Then let's hope the blade is as useful as it is gorgeous!", Said Daemon.

Peter smiled a cheeky grin as he grabbed the blade from Daemon's hand; and with one light throw, the blade soared across the room and stabbed through the clay brick wall, embedding the entire blade; leaving nothing but the hilt resting outside of the wall.

Rhea gasped in surprise, "That's amazing! That brick has to be strong..."

"I know! It's my finest piece, so use it well Daemon... What shall you name her?", Laughed Peter as he yanked at the hilt; trying to pull it loose from the wall.

"Name her? Is that a normal thing to do?"

"To Peter it is, he even made me name my weapon when he made it for me..."

"And admit it, you still love Marley don't you, she still serves you well", Grunted Peter as the blade finally loosened from the wall.

"Yes, you're right but still feels weird naming a tool...", Sighed Rhea.

"It's only a tool if you treat it so, it's an extension of you, well Daemon, what about Harley?", Suggested Peter.

"Sounds good I suppose, I don't have any better options..."

"Then it's settled! Daemon, you better take good care of Harley now, might be worth seeking some training to use her properly..."

"Can't you train me?"

"I make the tools, doesn't mean I know how to use them..."

"Don't worry Daemon, we have a friend who can teach you...", Smiled Rhea, "We best head off Peter, I'll come past soon if I need to get something made..."

"That's fine, I suppose I should start trying to repair this wall... Maybe that wasn't the best way to show off the sharpness..."

Chapter 7: Kalina

Peter walked Daemon and Rhea out of the door and waved them goodbye. The winds had calmed and the thin layers of snow had faded, leaving trails of water to run through the path's cracks and into the gutters lining the streets.

"The streets are going to flood one day, these drains won't be able to keep up when the deep winter rolls through..."

"The deep winter? I thought it was winter now by all the snow?"

"No no no, it constantly snow's here, but sometimes the snow pours down and blankets literally everything in a thick layer", Explained Rhea.

Suddenly three hooded figures sprinted down the street, their bodies russling with the sound of thin chainmail. As they drew closer; they did not group together and almost ran Daemon over as they pounced past without a word.

"What's their problem?! ", Grunted Daemon as he staggered himself upright.

"They're just arrogant pricks, just ignore them..."

Images of the figures ran through Daemon's head; but clearer. As they ran they were blurs but inside of his head; they could only been clearer if stood in front him. Daemon studied them intently and could see their armour, brown leather tunic with thin shiny chainmail covering their shoulders and hips, the metal scratched, chipped and the leather scorched and weather worn.

Daemon's ears begin to ring and his head ache as his gaze rose to one of their faces, dark purple skin and luminescent purple eyes.

"They were dark elves...", Slurred Daemon as the images vanished from his head.

"They have the skin and blood, but what they are can not be called elves, they are no better than humans... No offence...", Grunted Rhea.

"What did they do?"

"It's what they are, not what they did... I'll explain some time, but not now..."

"Then where are we of to next?"

"Home, Sara wants to see you..."

Rhea began walking away before Daemon could open his mouth or nod. The fog had thickened and mixed with the smoke of Peter's workshop. Rays of light beamed past roofs and chimneys down into the streets, illuminating the alley's and signs.

"Does it ever not snow here?"

"Sometimes, but only for a few days at most, I feel bad for the exiles out in the forest..."

"The exiles?"

"The lord protector may rule this city and hate elves but that doesn't stop him from hating his own, if he takes a hate to someone, they simply get thrown out to nature and hunted... Some survive, but not all unfortunately..."

"Is this city just built on hate?"

"Your kind is built on hate, before they started to distance themselves from the elves; they fought amongst themselves over simple things like the colour of each other's skin... Humans seek out conflict..."

"It seems that way then, glad I don't remember any of it then, so any idea what Sara wants me for? And how do you know she wants me?"

"I can hear her, we can communicate using the focus, it's hard to explain; and I would assume it would be to teach you to use the focus or your weapon, I told her we were grabbing it today", Said Rhea.

"Great, time to deal with more sarcasm and smart ass antics from her..."

"Daemon she means well, it's just how her personality is, you'll grow to like her soon, everyone does eventually..."

Daemon chuckled to himself, he deep down knew he enjoyed being around Sara, her comments were witty and charming in a friendly way. As Rhea led their way through the maze of streets, images of the parsers still flashed in Daemon's head; revealing no more details as to who or what they may be.

The cities main gate became visible the the pair's left, jutting over the surrounding buildings and through the snowfall. Groups of people flooded in and out of the surrounding streets like schools of fish searching for food.

"I'll be able to get around here on my own one day, seems like chaos at the moment..."

"But in all chaos lies order, once you see everyones movement patterns; everything flows naturally and you can duck and weave your way through most crowds..."

Rhea and Daemon turned the final corner before the entry gate and watched as three other dark elves dressed in the same garments as the others ran through the gate into the snowy forest.

"You have to tell me why they are allowed to be in the city... That's six that we've seen now...", Said Daemon.

"Fine, once we go through the gate I'll explain if I must..."

Daemon nodded as they reached their horses, Aria turned in excitement to see Daemon returning, she rubbed her nose against his face with her eyes closed.

"Did you miss me girl?", Asked Daemon.

"She really does like you doesn't she, she's normally very hesitant when it comes to new people..."

"Guess I'm the exception...", Smiled Daemon as he rubbed Aria's nose with both of his hands.

Daemon and Rhea mounted their steeds and set off through the gates to return home, Daemon clutched his blade in it's sheath which was now latched on his back, hilt end down.

"You don't need to hold it you know, it will only come out when you pull it out of the sheath... It's the whole point...", Addressed Rhea.

"Good to know, so are you going to tell me what those dark elves were doing or am I going to have to add another unanswered question to my ever growing list?", Grunted Daemon as he slowly removed his hand from the hilt.

"I suppose I have to, they were hunters..."

"I remember Sara saying something about her parents being ex hunters...", Mentioned Daemon.

"Unfortunately, Hunter's are dark elves that were taken from their villages and in most cases; their families. They get brainwashed that humans were doing them good by bringing them inside the city... They train them to use their focus to hunt down the 'savage' dark elves inside the forest..."

"That's horrific... What happens if a Hunter starts showing regret or tries to leave?"

"They are generally hunted down or their families murdered as a message to them, seen it too many times. Sara's parents were born into life as a Hunter but snuck away once Sara was born and weren't allowed near any villages because of their Hunter mark..."

"What do you mean Hunter mark?", Asked Daemon, wiping the snow from his face.

"A Hunter has their 'birth' villages symbol burnt onto the top of either one or both of their hands, Sara has a circle with a line running down the middle on both her hands so she generally wears gloves as much as she can, the Hunter's around here have a hollowed out triangle burnt onto them..."

"But you said Sara's parents weren't allowed near their bloodlines village because they use to be hunters, why is Sara with other dark elves now?"

"Because she has no blood in that village and she is out of her home country so it is safe to say they aren't going to track her this far, especially if any of the stories Sara told of how she got here safely are true", Smirked Rhea.

Daemon squinted his eyes in curiosity but against his better judgement, decided to stay quiet and not ask further questions. Thoughts of the Hunters ran through Daemons head, his stomach felt ill once more at the thought of how cruel humans can be to the dark elves.

"Have us humans always been like this?"

"Yes and no, prior to learning of the elves in the surrounding forest, humans were hating themselves over the colour of their skin as I said or where they are even from, I remember when Ian's family first arrived to the city, they were threatened simply because they travelled over the ocean to get here..."

"So once they knew about the dark elves they started directing their hate at them?", Daemon asked with a hesitant tone.

"Mostly once they discovered the dark elves, they were somewhat okay with the light elves but turned on them too and as I said, hunted them the extinction....", Said Rhea as she stared at the ground.

"If they got rid of the light elves, how come the dark elves are still alive?"

"The dark elves stood their ground, the light elves tried to reason and share with the humans, dark elves fought back when they needed to..."

Daemon turned his head and stared straight above the path, the wind weaved through the trees but something was different, small branches and twigs fell from the tree's to Rhea's left despite the wind being too weak to even shake the trees. An overwhelming feeling ran over Daemon that eyes were pinned on them, watching closely with intent...

"Don't say it Daemon, I know someone is around...", Said Rhea.

"How could you possibly know I was thinking that?", Asked Daemon in surprise.

"I can feel it, The Focus is a powerful tool, can do more than just blink..."

"Well then, guess I'll have to learn more about it...", Said Daemon nervously.

Thoughts ran through his head, he asked himself if Rhea could hear what he was actually thinking or what she could possibly be sensing in him. Rhea's cottage slowly came into view as the pair rode on, once Daemon was mere metres away from the stable he could feel a familiar presence.

"Sara? Where are you?", Daemon yelled.

Silence filled the air for moment before Sara walked up behind Daemon and Aria.

"Well well well, the white boy has picked up on his senses all on his own, should get a painting done to celebrate the moment!", Smirked Sara.

"What do you mean picked up on his senses?", Asked Daemon as he jumped off of Aria.

"You could feel me nearby, I've been following you since you left Neefleheim, I knew you could feel me...", Smirked Sara.

Rhea turned and grabbed Aria's reins from Daemon's hand, leading her back into the stable.

"So let me see the racist's work..."

"What?", Asked Daemon.

"Peter, he isn't a fan of us elves but hell; can he work steel..."

Daemon pulled the blade from the sheath and slowly handed it to Sara, she ran her fingers along the blades edge and twirled the hilt around her hand.

"Well fuck me, it's a fantastic blade, almost makes me jealous..."

"Really? Sounds odd coming from you..."

"Of course not numb nuts, but it is a really nice blade, suppose you want to learn how to handle it huh?", Asked Sara as she crossed her arms.

"Couldn't hurt..."

Sara smiled, "Hey Rhea, mind if I steal the white meat for a bit?", she shouted.

"Fine with me, go, I'll catch up after I've tended to Aria and Edward..."

"Fantastic!", Smirked Sara, before Daemon could speak or move, Sara had spun her body and threw her fist into the side of his head, throwing him unconscious.

Daemon felt cold when his body shook and suddenly the sound of familiar voices began echoing, his eyes slowly opened and he was laying on a dark gravel path in a world of pitch black with a thick grey wall of whispering fog tendrils surrounded him.

"Hello? Sara? Rhea?"

"I'd like to think you would have worked out they can't hear you already...", Said a familiar female voice, "The other Keeper's don't know you're here, let alone that i'm speaking to you so try not to act so Human..."

"Who are you?", Grunted Daemon as he struggled to his feet.

"Kalina..."

"Fantastic, even in death I can't escape Sara's family..."

"You're not dead you fucking idiot, I've brought your conscious into the Dark Space to allow us to speak, but seems like you already know of Sara's blood ties..."

Daemon spun on the spot, peering into the fog. Slowly a silhouette of a dark elf women began to appear and slowly break through the fog.

"Then at least see me face to face if you want to speak..."

Kalina stepped through the final wall of fog, her pale purple skin broke through the shadow cast from her black cloth hood, she was dressed in dark red and black leathers, tightly hugging her body, with what looked like two long black batons crossed behind her lower back.

"Better? Or do I have to put makeup on?", She smirked.

"You're just like her you know, it's not a good look, so why did you bring me here..."

"Because you need to know what the other Keepers are planning, the focus is going to die and what they are doing can't be stopped, not by you, not by Sara and not even by Rhea..."

"Then what's the point of telling me this if nothing can be done..."

"Because you and your friends can slow it down till someone can stop it or loosen what grip the others have on everything..."

Daemon stared Kalina in eye, he could feel unease from her, her gaze firmly locked onto him made him feel uneasy in her presence...

"What aren't you telling me... I can see it in your eyes..."

"Guess you Humans aren't as stupid as your skin would let believe, I want you to protect Sara, I promised Tara I would look over her..."

"You say Tara as if I should know who that is, I've only been conscious for a few days and I'm expected to remember all of these people..."

"I take it back, you are as stupid as your skin, Tara was my Daughter and is Sara's mother, it really isn't that complicated..."

"And how am I supposed to protect someone like Sara?"

"Work it out!", Kalina spoke as she paced forward.

She lifted her left hand showing a Hunter's mark, exactly the same as Rhea described Sara's, a hollowed circle with a thick streak running through. As her hand contacted Daemon's head, a flash of white blinded him and everything felt still again.

Chapter 8: Family

As the white haze began to fade Daemon opened his eyes, he was laid on a small wooden bed in what he assumed to be a hut, he tilted his head to see Rhea standing against a wooden post reading a book.

"Where am I?", Asked Daemon as he slowly sat up.

"You're in my home village...", Said Sara's voice.

Daemon quickly spun around to face Sara at the opposite end of the hut, before he had a chance to speak or breathe; he could hear whispers in his ears as the world blurred past him and in the blink of an eye he was stood holding Sara off the ground by her throat.

"Look kid, I understand you'd be angry at me for knocking you down like a half full sack but unless you like the idea of having an arrow through your skull; I suggest you put me down...", Sighed Sara as she glanced to Daemon's right.

Daemon turned his head to see a Dark Elf man holding a drawn bow to his head, he slowly put Sara back down and watched as the Dark Elf lowered his bow and walked behind Sara and through the huts wooden door.

"What the fuck was that... Why would you knock me out and drag me here?", Asked Daemon.

"Rhea may trust you with everything and anything but I don't, you're still a human and I can't trust you to see where our village is, it was either knock you out or blindfold you and last thing I want is to find out you have a kink for getting blindfolded and led through a forest...", Smirked Sara.

"But you could have at least warned him you know...", Spoke Rhea as she walked up behind Daemon placing her hand on his back.

"Fine then, next time I'll warn him before if it makes you happy, come outside whenever you're ready chicken meat...", Said Sara as she walked through the hut's door.

"Are you okay?", Asked Rhea.

"Yeah I'm fine... Just a little bit shaken is all..."

Daemon could feel Rhea didn't believe him, her gaze seemed as if she knew exactly what had happened with Kalina as if she was there.

"So Kalina didn't scare you at all, is that it?"

"How could you know that she spoke to me..."

"I can see it in your eyes, whatever she said to you isn't my business to ask, I just hope she isn't acting like the others", Said Rhea as she walked past Daemon and through the door.

Daemon stood and looked around he hut, thin beams of wood held up its thatched roof and nothing but a bed and desk filled sat on the huts wooden floor. The book Rhea had in her hand sat on top of the desk revealing its title; 'Das Schleusentor'. The room had nothing left to show Daemon so he slowly made his way towards the door, slowly opened it and was met with a rush of the cold snowy air.

Small cloth huts with wooden supports and thatched roofing dotted themselves between the thick forestry of bushes and trees.

"So you ready to learn how to use a blade?", Asked Sara as she leant her back against the hut drawing a bow back and forth.

"I suppose, not going to knock me out again?"

"No not this time, we are going to go to the village crest clearing..."

"What do you mean?", Asked Daemon.

"I'll show you when we get there, just follow me and try not to get scared by a stray bird", Sara smirked as she threw her bow over her shoulder.

Sara pushed herself off of the wall and began walking off into the snowy woods, her hands covered by a white cloth wrap that ran up her forearm.

Minutes past as the hut began to fade away behind trees and bushes.

"Can I ask you a question?", Asked Daemon.

"As long as you keep it tame", She responded.

"Your parents, what were they and just what happened with them?"

"Hunters, born and raised from day one in our home country, they unfortunately met each other when they were just four elven years and immediately formed a bond, they trained together, grew up together and ended up beginning a relationship with each other. As time went on they both began seeing what Hunters really were but by the time they had changed their ways I was born and branded, I wasn't even a single elven when they broke free and started a life as far from the humans as they could get...", She explained as she continued walking.

"How did they die..."

"Humans is how, they sent out a small army with some of their most experienced and devoted hunters to find us. I was out gathering wood and trying to track down some animals when I found a young Human boy out there, he told me here was following some soldiers he saw leave the city, by the time I ran home my parents were already preparing for the worst, my mother gave me her mother's swords and they told me to run away and find a ship travelling to the colony of Neefleheim, I went back after a day or so and gave them a proper burial..."

"I'm sorry... Did you know your grandmother?"

"Unfortunately..."

Sara stayed silent for the remainder of their time walking until they reached a clearing in amongst the tree's.

"And we are here, this is the village crest clearing, there are three thick pine trees inside the clearing itself that form a triangle, this is where the village was first formed and they took the tree's shape and made it the crest of this village...", Explained Sara.

Daemon looked around, a large circle clearing sat in front of them with three thick and tall trees towered over the forest canopy at three points forming the triangle pattern Sara explained. The pair walked into the center of the clearing, it was silent; peaceful and calming, only the sound of their feet penetrating the blanket of snow and snapping of twigs under their feet could be heard.

"Now, unsheathe your blade...", Said Sara.

Daemon reached behind his back and gripped his blades hilt, as he tried to pull the blade free Sara began smiling. No matter how hard Daemon tugged on the hilt; it would not come free and felt as if it was permanently stuck.

"Roll your shoulders backwards...", Sara smiled.

Daemon stood confused for a moment before Sara rolled her hand; encouraging him to do as he was told. As his shoulders rolled back; a faint click came from the sheath and in an instant the blade fell into the snow.

"Well pick it up, we don't have all day snow skin..."

Daemon buried his hand in snow and lifted his blade; rolling it into a reverse grip. As he stood and turned to Sara, she crossed her arms across her chest and swiftly flicked them back down to her sides but as her arms landed by her side, one of the same batons as Kalina fell from each of her bracers into her hands, a moment passed before a puff of smoke emitted from the batons and black geometric shapes began flying over her hand; quickly forming long blades at the batons end with a bright orange glow as the shapes connected with each other.

"What the fuck are they?!", Gleeed Daemon.

"Family heirlooms, they were my mothers blades. Now I want you to charge me and let your body show me what you are capable of... Don't be scared; I promise I'll be gentle for your first time...", Smirked Sara.

"Sara I can't remember if I've ever been in a situation like this..."

"Your body will do it for you, war is in everyone's blood, it's just like making love... Your body knows what to do, now charge...", Said Sara.

Daemon stood still for a moment before he took a deep breathe and on his exhale began charging, the sound of the snow crackling and shifting under his feet echoed through the nearby trees. Sara stood motionless unless Daemon was a mere few metres away from her, he thrust his legs to the ground and leapt into the air. As he began falling towards Sara he lifted his blade above his head and began to thrust his blade downwards.

Sara smirked and blinked behind Daemon, his sword cutting through the pale grey and purple smoke left behind as he quickly fell to his knees in the snow.

"Expect everything, don't think your enemy will just stand in place and wait for you, now fight!", Yelled Sara as she thrust her foot into Daemon's shoulder causing the same shockwave as Daemon's hands, hurling him backwards; narrowly missing a tree from colliding with his head.

"Come on kid, I don't want to have to go back to Rhea and say I killed you in training..."

As Daemon staggered to his feet, his mind slowly emptied and his surroundings went mute other than his own breath and the distant sound of Sara's feet crunching through the snow. His body slowly began to feel as if his blood had been drained of blood and bone.

Daemon began slowly walking towards Sara and with every step he took, he became calmer and calmer until a violent hit of adrenaline and without control he blinked towards Sara.

There blades met with a howling echo of the metal scraping against each other, Sara tilted her head and smirked as she ripped Daemons leg from underneath him and swirled her swords around her hand.

Daemon threw his legs against Sara's chest and thrust himself into the air with a back flip, Sara rolled backwards but cocked her leg behind her and dug into the snow to stabilize herself.

The two stared off as Daemon landed on one knee, their facial expressions filled with joy and surprise at their performance. Sara lifted her right arm and with one swift move threw her blade towards Daemon, time felt slowed as his eyes followed the blade and watched it narrowly miss his face, digging itself into the ground as it landed.

He went to return attention to Sara but she had vanished without a footprint to follow. As his legs straightened, the sound of a snapping twig came from behind him and before Daemon could turn around, one of Sara's blade flew against his blade; knocking it out of his hand's and out of reach.

"Not bad white meat, I'd almost commend it as a first sword fight...", Said Sara as she walked around into Daemon's view.

Daemon's body regained its normal composure as he stood straight, "How the hell is that training... You just threw me in the fray and expected me to compete with you?"

"Oh trust me, you can't compete with me, you'd be dead otherwise..."

"So... Is that it? Is that all you're going to show me?"

"For today, yes, I wanted to gauge your abilities so I don't end up cleaning your throat off of my clothes when it gets ripped out...", Smirked Sara.

"You know a teacher is supposed to be comforting and helpful right, not a sarcastic smart mouth?", Said Daemon as he trudged towards his blade.

"You mistake me for a teacher, I am anything but..."

Daemon leant down and yanked his blade from the ground and turned towards Sara, she stood holding both her swords towards the ground and with a flick of her wrist they spun around her hand and as the sound of the blade cutting through the air began the blades began fading away leaving trails of similar smoke as left behind from blink.

"What are those... And don't say swords..."

"They were my mothers passed down from her mother, old light elf forging before they were all hunted down in my home land, somehow it has an attunement to the Dark Space and the Focus itself, don't ask how because I don't know...", Explained Sara as she slid the now bladeless hilts into slots on her bracers.

"How old are they?"

"Older than you could count, they've been in my family for generations...", Said Sara,
"Now come, we should get back before Rhea starts worrying..."

The pair began tracing their steps back to Sara's village but moments before they left the clearing and entered the forest, Rhea fell from a tree in front of them, landing on her feet and panting.

"Sara! Sia saw a Hunter making his way dangerously close to the village, we need to go find it..."

"Fuck, okay I'll run ahead, follow my tracks!", Said Sara as she ran past Rhea and leaped into the air disappearing into a cloud of smoke.

"Follow me Daemon, I'll be able to track to Sara, we can't let her go alone...", Beckoned Rhea as she began to make her way further into the forest.

Daemon couldn't get a word out before Rhea began to disappear in between the trees and shrubbery. Sounds of panting filled his ears but none of which his own, he could slowly pick out Sara and Rhea but could hear a third voice, a distant man with his breath heavy and filled with fear.

"Rhea! Where are we going?!"

"We're going to track Sara as she tries to find a Hunter sent from Neefleheim..."

"How do you know where she is going?!"

"Thought you might have noticed but us of elven blood can use the focus for all manner of things..."

Daemon continued in pursuit of Rhea as she presumably tracked down Sara, snow flying into the air after being broken by their sprinting feet. Arms flailing to push away low hanging pine branches.

Their legs carried them through kilometres of similar and dense forestry until Rhea came to a screeching halt; almost bowling herself over as her feet dug into the snow.

"Turn away!", Shouted Sara from beyond Rhea.

"You know I can't do that elf...", Returned a man's voice.

Rhea slowly began walking towards the voice and as she drew closer, Sara came into view as well as another male dark elf dressed in the same leathers and chain as the hooded elves running through the city. Rhea pulled her small blade from a holster on her boot and twirled it in her hand.

"Tell your friends to back down, this isn't there's to defend...", Said the man.

"So a hunter with morals, you're a rare breed...", Returned Sara, "Stay out of this, I'll deal with him..."

"Don't count on it bright eyes...", He muttered before vanishing into a cloud of pale green smoke.

Sara stood still for a moment before flinging her arms down and extending her blades. With the sound of a singular firststep; Sara too vanished into a cloud smoke which was quickly blown away by the approaching wind.

In a blur Sara and the Hunter broke into sight, the Hunter held a curved wooden hilt with a dark steel pick shaped blade at the ending. As their blades slide against each other, sparks flew into the air and briefly shimmered like fireflies before the cold winds blew them away.

The Hunter swung his weapon up, catching on Sara's left glove, throwing it off and into the snow. Sara's hand let out a small stream of blood as she swung her fist into the Hunter's jaw.

As the Hunter staggered backwards; Sara blinked out of sight...

"Stop hiding! Face me elf...", Shouted the Hunter.

"As you wish...", Returned Sara's distant voice.

In an instant; Sara appeared mid air in front of the Hunter, she thrust her legs against his chest; launching into a backflip. On her final rotation she drew her bow mid air, took aim and as time felt to slow down let the string go. An arrow soared through the air and pierced the Hunters right knee, he screamed in pain as he fell to his knees clutching the arrow stuck in his knee cap.

"What's your name...", Said Sara as she walked towards the crippled Hunter and held a blade in her left hand to his throat.

"Sara...", He laughed.

"What?"

"You're Sara... Aren't you? I'd recognise the mark of a German Hunter any day...", He explained as he pointed to Sara's Hunter mark threw the blood on her left hand.

"How do you know who I am!" Barked Sara.

"You're a living myth to us Hunter's, the daughter of Ivan and Tara Haas, the fiercest Hunter's to ever escape the clutches of humans... The one who gives us hope for our own families to have a life other than murdering their own kin..."

"You're families?", Asked Sara with her blade still under the Hunters chin.

"My son, Luke, he looks up to you, he hopes he can be the one to stop the generation's of future Hunter's..."

"How old is he?"

"Half an elven..."

Sara's body relaxed as she slowly lowered her blades and went to turn around.

"What are you doing?!", Asked the Hunter.

"Letting you go, go back to your family..."

"You can't do that... Don't you know what they'll do to him if I don't come back with your head!", he screamed as he grabbed Sara's arm.

"Let me go!", Shouted Sara as she shook his hand off, spraying more blood into the snow.

"They'll kill him... Make me watch and display his corpse on the city streets if I fail, they will use him as an example of what happens when you fail... Kill me...", He tremored.

"Then why not leave now and never return to the city..."

"They'll hunt me down... You know this first hand Sara, they don't stop!"

Sara stood motionless for a moment before Rhea stepped into the clearing.

"Sara, he's right... As much as I don't want to agree; it's the truth...", Spoke Rhea.

Sara continued staring at the Hunter without even a glare at Rhea. Her fist slowly clenched her blades in each hand, blood leaking down her first and running along her left blade's edge.

"You're a good father... What's your sons name..."

"Connor... Connor head..."

"Rhea, Daemon, look away...", struggled Sara.

"Are you sure you can do it Sara... I can...", spoke Rhea.

"TURN AWAY!", Sara shouted before Rhea could finish.

Daemon leant forward and pulled Rhea back, as she came closer; she turned around and buried her head in Daemons chest. Sara crossed her blades in front of the Hunter's neck as he closed his eyes.

As the pair huddled themselves together and quickly turned away from Sara, the loud sound of sharp blades swiftly slicing through skin and flesh came from Sara, a long streak of blood sprayed against Daemons boots and stained the snow a bright vibrant red as it soaked into the ice white snow, melting it slowly till the blood had coagulated and cooled.

A moment of silence sat for what felt like a lifetime till the dripping of blood could be heard as it began to pool before being silenced by a thud into the snow.

"You two should leave... I'll stay here and make sure he gets a proper send off...", Said Sara through broken breath.

"Are you sure you won't need...", Spoke Daemon as he was cut off by turning to see the hunter's limp body curled over decapitated.

Daemon's heart rose to his throat and his body began to shake, his neck stuck in the snow pouring out blood as his body twitched as his muscles died. The streaks of blood each side of the Hunter's body trailed towards Sara's blades; held at each of her sides as they dripped with bright red blood.

"Just go please..."

"Come on let's go home...", Said Rhea as she pulled Daemon back around while a stream of tears ran down her face.

Daemon tried to tear his gaze away from the corpse as Rhea walked away holding his hand and dragging him through the woods. Daemon continued to stare at the Hunter's lifeless body as Sara stood motionless until the tree's blocked his vision.

Chapter 9: Remorse

The walk back felt as if time slowed to a cold crawl, the tree's rustled in Daemons ears and the echoes through the trees with the sound of metal slicing through bone. Every gust increased in intensity and sent chills down the pairs spine.

Rhea's cabin broke through the maze of trees and blinding wall of fog.

"Are you ok?", Asked Daemon.

"I'm fine..."

"Are you sure... You were silent the whole walk..."

"I said I'm fine!", shouted Rhea as she threw her cabin door open.

As the door swung and hammered into the inside wall, Daemon could feel the shock in his bones. Snow slid off the roof and landed in heaping piles. Before Daemon could open his mouth Rhea blinked into her room; slamming the door behind her.

The cabin fell silent as the reverberation of the door calmed. The silence was haunting as clouds began passing over the sun, dimming to entire cabin into further darkness. A shiver ran down Daemon's spine as he heard a faint knock come from Rhea's spare room, he slowly began walking towards the Rhea's door and slowly poked his head around the corner of the hallway, nothing but a closed window perpendicular to the spare rooms door.

Daemon felt more and more attracted to the room the closer he drew until he reached the door, his heart began pounding as he turned the latch with his right hand, gripping his blade's hilt with the other.

As the door slowly swung open; a gust of ice cold air blew through the doorway.

The room was the same as Rhea's bedroom, yet a single sized bed sat in the far right corner with a small ornate wooden crib in the far left. A small rectangular rug sat in the middle of the room leading towards a small single drawer side table between the bed and crib. Daemon let go of his blade as he could feel his body being pulled towards the table, step by step; the cabin floor moaned under his feet.

As he leant forward and gripped the drawer handle his ears began to ring and his vision blur, he began to shake as he could feel Rhea's presence behind him. The ringing became deafening as he turned his head to see Rhea stood in the doorway, her mouth moved but Daemon could only hear a muffled jumble of sounds.

Daemon's head grew heavy and his body fell dead as he tumbled to the ground. Rhea continued to stand still in the doorway but her words became clear as she spoke...

"I've missed you...", she said through battered breathe, with tears streaming down her face from her bloodshot eyes.

"Why would you do this to me! Answer me you cunt!", She screamed; pushing herself into the room as her fists clenched by her sides and her voice filled with anger before the world had been cut out and everything fell to a stone cold blackness.

"Wake up!", Screamed a woman's voice as Daemon felt a sudden dull pain hit his ribs.

As Daemon opened his eyes; he could feel himself in a familiar location, thick neverending fog on-top of a dark grey gravel path. Footsteps echoed through the fog, someone was here and they wanted Daemon to know.

"So, I hear you have a knack for passing out pawn... This is what; the fourth time since you awoke?"

Daemon staggered to his feet and clenched his fists.

"Why can't I just have one normal day! I'm sick of getting dragged back here and having to deal with every sarcastic person ever to be born..."

"Calm down pawn, I hear Kalina has already introduced herself, thought it was my turn. I'm Merin, doubt Rhea would mention me and what she did to me..."

"What did she do?"

"She made me a monster... A husk of my former self... I don't regret it but she should have at least consulted me, right? Right..."

"What do you people want from me?!", Shouted Daemon.

His voice echoed through the fog and eventually fell silent, even Merin's footsteps had vanished and Daemon began to feel alone until a voice spoke in his ear from behind him.

"Blood...", Whispered Merin.

Daemon swiftly spun around and attempted to grab Merin but she vanished into a pile of smoke moments before his hands could touch her nor get a look at her.

"You're funny kid, we just want show is all!", Laughed Merin from within the fog.

"A show of what?!"

"Your talents, you've already killed one husk, what's next on your list?"

"Nothing... I didn't mean to kill her..."

"That thing was not a 'her' anymore... It was a weak and poor excuse for someone born with such an alignment to their gift, that husk deserves everything delivered upon her, don't tell me you feel sorry for it..."

"Why shouldn't I?! I'm still alive and she is dead!"

"I was told you were ruthless and efficient... You're nothing but soft and vulnerable from what I see, maybe the others were wrong about you..."

Daemon went to open his mouth and scream but what he presumed to be Merin's hand came into his vision from behind his head and covered his face with a blinding white. As the white clouded him; a silhouette could be seen vaguely through the haze, a woman stood with her hands behind her back, the body shape was slender and familiar but Daemon could not piece together who it belonged to.

Moments of bright white passed until a cold sensation slowly sank onto Daemon's forehead. He slowly opened his eyes to see Rhea slowly rubbing his forehead with a wet cloth with her free hand resting on his left forearm as he laid back in Rhea's bed.

"Wakey wakey sleepy head, you had me worried again...", She smiled.

"I'm sorry I heard a noise in the other room and don't know what happened..."

"What do you mean? I watched you fall in front of the fireplace..."

Daemon felt confused, Rhea's tone felt genuine, but his memory told a different story.

"No... No, no, no... I know what happened, I heard a noise, walked into the other room and then...", Daemon thought to himself before remembering Rhea's words...

"Why did you say you missed me... Why did you start blaming me for something..."

"Daemon I don't know what you're talking about, you must have been delirious, I walked out of my room as you fell to the ground, your nose was bleeding and you were burning up, we put you in bed only a few moments ago..."

"What do you mean we?"

"Sara felt me panic and appeared before I could even say your name...", She continued through a small smile.

Rhea slowly lifted her hand off Daemon's arm and her fingers lightly brushed his skin; sending chills down from his neck all the way to his feet.