

Ingads versus Akeens. We have a long history soaked in blood. However, there is one man who can cease the endless and senseless paint of red.

He was there before I was born, when war was at its peak; a prince of many talents. He was such a renowned prince that we built our time system on him. A legend who no one thought existed, but we accepted his presence because he was written in ancient text. His name was Guilen Ochien and just like the meaning of his name, he would light the path to victory for those who'd lost all hope. Not only was he humble but fierce on the battlefield. He stormed through the battlefield with twin swords in hand; the mark of the Devil etched on his back in thick, purple lines. The textbooks called these swords The Butterfly Dream because they would flutter past the enemy like their owner to save all in its path. Unlike so many others, Guilen didn't care what race you were. He didn't partake in the ridicule or the joys of enslavement. He just wanted the war to end as much as the rest of us. Guilen was a man of peace, of order, and he resisted bloodshed that the Akeen dictator desired. He wanted freedom, not war and for that, he inspired both sides of the conflict. Once peace was achieved, he set down The Butterfly Dream in stone. With his task completed, he departed.

No one knows where such a valiant prince went eight thousand years ago. Still, many believe he is alive. As you can see, I'm one of them. Legend says he will take up The Butterfly Dream once more and end the falsified treaty between the Ingads and Akeens. He, an Ingad and we, the Akeens.

But...we were wrong.

And you have no idea just how wrong we were.

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I never understood why my mother gave her life to protect me, but whenever I look to Suisen, I think I understand my mother a little better.

I looked up to her at the top of the stairwell. White gloves, gold embroidery, and attached to them are two beads. A black metallic skirt for armor. An off-white butterfly belt pointed to the ground.

Normally, butterflies take to the spring air, but this butterfly's wings are damp. It can only fly downward to its demise just like these two countries will if I don't put a stop to it.

Her shirt was mainly black but pellucid toward the middle with gold on the outer rims. On her forehead, a sun colored diadem to complete the look of well put together Queen with her light blue to ombre black ears. Two sets of them. Long silver hair down to her waist with light blue highlights only at the top of her head. She was born this way. Amber wide eyes that often made me feel guilty. Her most defining feature was the cobalt tattoo etched onto her mid left arm. In this battle for freedom, she'll have the role of Queen of Akeens but also my mother. I never knew

my mother, but in the two years we've gotten to know each other, Suisen's been the mother I've always wanted. I'd never hurt her intentionally.

"Guilen, are you *sure* about this? No one will be there to protect you," Her face was pale; lips toward the ground, eyebrows lifted to the ceiling, and eyes softened as she spoke, "This is a dangerous situation. If they find out who you are-"

I put my hand up to keep her from speaking further, "Suisen, you have nothing to worry about. The Ingads of Yadrill believe 'Guilen' to be nothing more than a myth. And a man at that. You were one of them after all," I walked toward Suisen, each one of my tails flickered about. Suisen cowered a bit as I came forth, so I halted after I saw the fear in her eyes along with her downward ears. I cleared my throat before speaking again.

Fight or flight. People fear what they do not know, so their guard is always up.

"I'm...a pacifist, you may not believe that from the textbooks. I want what's best for everyone," I caressed my fingers along the pristine railing as I trekked the worn and torn burgundy carpet lined staircase. I kept a sizable distance between us allowing her at the top and me at the lower level. Down on one knee, I subjected myself to humiliation and bowed my head, "Trust me. That's all I ask of you. Isn't this why you woke me up?"

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The year was 8010 A.G.D. and my husband as well as King of Mamin, Murnoi refused to believe the woman I found in the glass casket was Guilen Ochien.

"Stop dreaming, Suisen! There is no Guilen!" Murnoi slammed his hands down on his desk. Piles of paper plagued his wooden table. We were surrounded on two sides by claustrophobic bookcases that hovered above our heads in his study. Behind us was a window that touched the floor to the ceiling. We were easy prey to watchful eyes.

"What basis do you have that that person in the coffin is even alive? Does she even have the mark?!" Murnoi continued spewing with a tired eye, each breath hitched as in his throat. It pained me to see him so distraught, "I need you here! As Queen of Mamin and mother of my child! Not down in the escape routes gawking at some corpse!"

My brows furrowed as I bit my lower lip, "Murnoi, please...is this the kind of life you want to raise Arnit in? I may not have a basis to make my claim, but if I could just find her marking, then I could be sure. I won't shirk my duties as Queen, but I need time," I removed my gloves one by one to reveal perfectly aligned stab marks on them, "Do you really want Arnit to live in the world we both grew up in?"

Murnoi's face softened as he looked at the scars. He touched his own. A scar across his left eye which blinded him as a child and half of one buck horn missing. The marks that were a blight to our 'godly looks' as my mother said. Murnoi stood up and turned his back to me. He closed the curtain as a show of privacy. Much like our relationship, however, the curtains had tiny,

unnoticeable holes. I took a cautious step back when Murnoi approached me and took my hands into his own. He traced the back of my palm softly with the coarse callous of his thumb.

He chuckled a bit. Dry and uncertainty filled the note, “When was the last time you took off your gloves? You don’t even take them off when you sleep. Suisen, I know how much Guilen means to you and if waking up this girl will bring you some closure, then I’ll let you do it. However, the deadline will be Ach 21st.”

However, the casket never opened for me.

Murnoi continued his preparations for war, while I tried to force the coffin open. No one wanted to go to war again. Certainly not the Akeens. Even when the deadline passed, I continued to find a way to pry open the glass in secret.

After nine years of research, I finally found a remedy to wake up the sleeping beauty in the underground escape routes. A mix of snake venom, the blood of a wolf, a foxtail grinded up into fine powder, and the tears of someone desperate.

I poured the concoction over the casket, but it wasn’t enough. It just burned a partial hole where her face was. I leaned back against the wall at my failure and closed my eyes in frustration. There was a slight chuckle that filled the musty air.

“Thank you for clearing the air in here. I couldn’t breathe,” The voice echoed. It was coarse as if the person was sick and their throat scratchy, “Please enlighten me. What year is it?”

My eyes widened as I looked to the casket. I could see the woman's lips moving and her eyes stared at me. Her eyes were just as I imagined them: a deep-sea blue that beckons you not to turn away.

“It’s Mithona 21st, 8019 A.G.D.”

“What does the A.G.D. stand for?”

“After Guilen's Disappearance.”

Her brows furrowed and she raised her hands up to the little hole above her face. I never believed in magic, but if I did, I’m sure she’d be the greatest magician around. The hole started to melt and enlarged around her.

“What's this about a ‘disappearance?’” She growled as she stepped out of her own coffin like a phoenix rising from her ashes. Her hair was in two braids that ended up growing in length from

years of neglect. Black meshed with blue fox ears. I guess that's why the recipe called for foxtail...

Black shorts with a pellucid middle that covered over her navel and a butterfly belt that soared upward, unlike mine which sunk to the ground. Her gloves are still white despite being in that coffin for years. She had thigh socks on, and her shoes were black with a variety of cut holes in them. Her shirt was intricate. Open cuts all around with an open back. This didn't look like an outfit to fit in, let alone walk in. Four tails popped out from behind her. Pure white as they flailed around for the first time. She looked back at the tails wide eyed, "Where the hell did these come from?!"

"You mean you weren't born with them like your ears?"

"All Akeens are born with animalistic ears! What Akeen has a tail? Let alone four! Were you born with a tail?"

She had a point. I wasn't born with a tail. None of our kind was. She twisted her body to get a better look and, on her back, there it was. The mark I'd been looking for. The phoenix dressed in purple.

I pushed my body off the wall and moved closer to her, "Excuse me! Are you..." I choked and gritted my teeth. In all honesty, I had never been so scared. What if I was wrong? What if she wasn't Guilen? I've always prayed to Guilen, looked up to Guilen. Who could've thought this young woman was her? If she even is her. What kind of face did I have? How did I look to her? My lips parted and I tried to speak but no voice came out. As if knowing what I wanted to say, she simply smiled.

"That's right. I'm Guilen."

Hearing her claim that name, I lost all feeling in my knees. Those gloves I'd always worn became stained in something other than blood. Something clear. So pure and wet. We'd been suffering for so long. I just didn't want anyone to go to war. I wanted peace. It was so painful. All the emotions I'd been holding back fell into a deafening scream. Guilen knelt before me and put her hand on my shoulder.

"I'm here. I'll protect you. All of you. You don't have to go through this all alone."

For two years, I reintroduced Guilen to society before I brought her before Murnoi in his study.

Guilen stood up straight, poised and proper as a young lady should.

"This is the *great* Guilen Ochien?" He raised his brow as he eyed Guilen then turned to me, "What happened to our agreement, Suisen? You're going behind my back now? We're keeping secrets from each other these days?"

I cowered backwards slightly, but I glanced in his direction from time to time. From our first conversation to this one, his eye had grown wearier. He was the thinnest I'd ever seen him. He didn't look like the same man I'd married. A man full of life and dedication to his kingdom resigned to obsession...

He looked possessed.

"Look at what's happening, Murnoi. Mamin is dying while Yoorluk advances. They have the military advantages to wipe us out. Do you really not see the repercussions?" I tried to reason with him, but my voice couldn't touch such dead eyes.

"Repercussions?" Murnoi scoffed, "There was bound to be another war, Suisen. Whether it was this generation or not was only a matter of time. We should eradicate the Ingads before they annihilate us, like they did Arnit!"

I stomped my foot down, "Ingads didn't kill Arnit, Murnoi! Akeen bandits looking to overthrow us did!" I clenched my fists as I stared at the ground.

But when I looked up, my eyes widened to see the face of insatiable insanity. He was smiling...

"That's just what they want you to think."

He paced around the room. Now in his own world, he mumbled to himself, "It's killed or be killed. I must beat the Ingads at their own game. It's a race. A race."

There was no impending war. I had to keep telling myself that...for my own sanity. I took a deep breath and gritted my teeth, "Fine, Murnoi. From this time forward, we'll have a race of our own to see if Guilen can unite Akeens and Ingads or if you can build your army by Arnit's Death Day."

At the time, I didn't take into consideration your feelings. I didn't even see the look on your face that day. I only thought about the Akeens and Ingads of now, my family, and myself. I never thought about how you felt without your family by your side and in the two years, I got to know you, I found you really hate war. Your war ended when you disappeared. How could I involve you in one that wasn't yours to begin with? Was it really right? However, if I really want to war to end for good, then I'll need your help...

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There was a visible lump in her throat. She was hesitant and I could understand why. Lives were at stake with tensions rising every day. However, the youth needed to know of the Akeens' value. We aren't barbaric tools only good for fighting. We can do so much more than that. From battle strategies to being able to speak to our animal counterpart to our magical capabilities. With her eyes glued to mine, she admitted defeat with a single, long blink.

“Alright...but keep in touch with your Clover and don’t let anyone see your mark...” Suisen pointed to the satchel around my waist where inside was a communications device with her contact information inside.

I chuckled and dipped my head to her as I stepped back down from the staircase, “Alright, Mom.”

“And what’s your name when you get to Yoorluk Academy?”

With a slight turn of my chin, I looked her way with my fangs bared and lips curved upward, “Reaki Harim.”

Suisen’s husband is a lucky man to have her. She strives for peace something I once wanted as well.

I reached my side where no swords would comfort the growing heat inside.

But...there are some things that a silent peace cannot obtain that war can. I’m just glad she was able to wake me up in time. I hope I can save them all.

I opened the doors and looked out to Mamin. The false eighty centuries of war had beaten it down into famine and deprivation. Trees decimated and where the rivers had once been abundant in crystal clear water was now cracked and scorched by the sun. Children and elderly were hand in hand because men and women trained for war. I stepped down the concrete stairs with cracks filled at every stage. The air permeated my oversensitive nose with mortality.

Birds soared in the sky; however, they weren’t the typical avians you’d want to see flourishing. Obsidian crown, charcoal forehead, glossy black upper breast and throat paired with a white to light-grey neck. Despite their ravishing appearances, these sinister squawkers feed on the flesh of the deceased. In the corner of my eye, I saw an Elven child surrendering itself to the scavengers. No one knows the story of eight hundred years ago. Not eight thousand. The real Guilen’s Legacy formerly called The War for Yoorluk.

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My ancestor did the Akeen race the honor of disrespecting the Elven tribe by trespassing onto the sacred ground of the Divination Elf, a holy being. And for what?! He wanted to look at the mother of all Akeens. A vague legend told of how the Divination Elf loved a Minotaur and from that love came the Akeens. The foolish prince wanted a look at this immortal being and, in the process, got himself killed on the spot. Akeens traditionally hold a trial for who was right and who was wrong. We were no doubt the ones in the wrong. There was no need for a trial, but...at the time, we were too prideful to admit that, and it led to a century long war.

Born Mithona 21st of the Reaki Era or in terms of Suisen's dates: Mithona 21st, 1096 G.R. aka Guilen's Rise.

I was told my mother wanted to name me Reaki, but because my father wanted a male, I was named Guilen. Fortunately, my mother was able to convince him on the masculine equivalent. I never met my mother, but I was often told, she tried to save me. At the time, I had no idea what those words meant. I believed my actions were for myself and for the people. Who knew my father would use his magic on me?

"Father, why are we here?" I looked around to the decayed village. It was beyond recognition from the first time I'd been there. The bazaar was engulfed in smoke as if recently put out. Bodies on the ground. The corpses of both Akeens and a race unfamiliar to me. Even though the war had been ongoing for a century, I had never seen an Elf. I had been a sheltered princess.

"What sort of creature is that?"

"That is an Elf."

"You mean the Elves from the war we partake in? Why do they hunt down our people?"

My father crouched down to my level and furrowed his brows, "Isn't it obvious, Guilen? They're after the hairpin you got from your mother."

"How do you know about that?"

"I know everything there is to know, Guilen. Now, this war is a fight for that hairpin because it holds special magic. If we want this war to end, I'll need you to fight for the Akeens," He stared into my eyes. They were a murky purple that clouded my judgement.

I bowed my head, "I am at your service, father."

That's how I took up arms at thirteen and at fourteen, I was introduced to my twin swords. It was a party. An inauguration of sorts to a bloody hell that awaited me. We feasted that night while others suffered. When I look back, I can't believe how naive I was.

"All hail, Princess Guilen!" The Akeen nobility who sat in the comfort of their homes cheered and guzzled back the booze.

I watched in my highchair at the center of it all. The only feminine symbol was the diadem on my head. Long, colorless, and bland pants, a corset, and the least flattering blouse plagued my body with my hair tied back in a single braid.

“Guilen, stand,” My father entered the room with a haughty command.

In one swift movement, I was at his feet on one knee, “At your service, my king.”

“Today, I have an announcement to make. My daughter renounces her gender and shall take the form of a man as *he* always should have.”

Looking into those clouded eyes, I tried to resist. Silence crept in from all sides as everyone awaited my answer. Soon, my own eyes dusted over. All I could do was bow my head in acceptance and resignation.

“Thank you,” I grinded my teeth.

“With that said, I have a birthday present for my son. Imbued with magic, these swords are called-”

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There was a screeching caw that alerted me to the end of my long reminiscent trek. I rubbed the bridge of my nose, regaining my composure. My palms were sweaty from the sun and my mouth dry. There was no one waiting for me at the bottom. It was to be expected. I was nothing more than a specter to the world. It wasn't long before my ears flickered to the sound of tires screeching when an extended black vehicle with dark tinted windows pulled up before me. Clearly a show of the Ingads' resourcefulness and power were through their technological advancements which we were stripped of. The driver's door swung open to reveal a man suited up in navy blue with a red and orange striped tie. He was tan with an oval chin. His brown hair which glinted brick red in the sun was parted off center to the left. One set of ears that were the color of his skin, unlike mine, weren't pointed either.

No animalistic traits whatsoever covered this man, except on his right hand was his branding. Intricate and bold with a mix a thin and thick lines. Navy blue meshed with obsidian. In the shape of a phoenix.

What was most off-putting were his eyes. Pools of narrowed dark blue, and yet they didn't hold an ounce of judgement. This Ingad held no resentment toward a stereotypically looking Akeen such as myself. He was one of the few. As he smiled at me, I felt chills slither down my spine. He stood up and with an extended hand forward said, “You must be Princess Reaki Kariyata. Your luggage has been taken to the dorms. I'll be your principal. I'm Akhil Ochien.”

My heart sank immediately as my shaky hand took hold of his and with a firm grip, they dipped toward the ground. I regained ground the moment my hand regressed to my side.

With astounding confidence, I roared my name to the heavens, “I'm Reaki Harim. It's a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Ochien.”

Mr. Ochien blinked momentarily as he stared at me, “Oh, I'm sorry. That's the name you'll be going by at the Academy. I must've skimmed over the dossier. Please forgive me, Princess,” He

scratched the back of his head to cover up his mistake, though I knew better. He was testing me. But why? I'll have to push him to see why.

Mr. Ochien opened the back door for me, and I hopped in. Once he got in and we started driving off, he began to speak once more, "Your name, 'Reaki,' are you aware of what it means when combined with 'Harim?'"

I stared out the window and knew it would take an hour of enduring his roundabout questions, I had no choice but to answer. My lips parted to fulfill his query, "I am fully aware, Mr. Ochien. 'Reaki Harim' in the language of Cincatle means Hope's Light."

"Then you must be enlightened of the fact that in Cincatle that the Ingad God, Guilen Ochien's name means the same wording as well as the fact that Cincatle is the ancient text used by Ingads centuries ago?"

Cincatle...Don't make me laugh. It's some watered down language someone made up of Synphate. I don't know who made this language, but it's completely sacrilegious to Akeens alike.

I clenched my fingers into a fist.

Synphate is the official language of Yoorluk, not this trash.

I furrowed my brows in frustration with my people's language trampled on.

How dare they make a mockery of the Synphate language? If it wasn't for Suisen, I wouldn't have learned it in the first place.

Feeling myself grow increasingly annoyed, I answered: "I guess I have a God complex to the Ingads," I clicked my tongue and brought one leg across the other. I turned my head to face his eyes in the rearview mirror. Within that mirror, I could see the similarity to our eye shades. They were so identical that I had to look away.

"Careful, Princess Reaki. I'm trying to help you here. You're going to an Academy with youth who were raised with the media not only representing Akeens in a misconstrued light while also notifying them a war was not evident in the coming years. You'll be the first Akeen in an all Ingad school to facilitate relations."

I looked back out the window to see an elderly couple had lain on the ground, hand in hand. Those same birds strutting down to peck on their cracked, sunburnt flesh with numb eyes. More fodder for the birds...

"Let me ask you, Mr. Ochien, if your *so-called* God really exists, why has he waited so long to give his people the satisfaction of victory? If you can really call this a victory won with so many lives used, then I don't see the point," The words seemed to hit vapid notes because all he did was laugh.

“I like you, Princess Reaki, but you see, despite being directly descended from Guilen, I’m ankostheist,” He winked into the rearview which I caught in the corner of my wide eyes, “Don’t tell anyone. That’s our little secret. If the Ingad government caught wind, I’d probably be executed on the spot.”

I turned my head once more to match his eyes. I realized the fear I’d seen before at our initial meeting was because of this. This man had also been beaten down by centuries of war and even though he wasn’t alive through most of it, he was living in this hell. My fangs bit down on my lower lip and I closed my eyes to avoid further conversation. As I drifted off, I was taken back to the night when victory was.

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The first person to approach me. What was his name? What did his face look like? We were friends, so why can’t I remember what he looked like?

While everyone was celebrating in the tavern, he was the one who wrapped his arm around my shoulder, “What’s wrong, Guilen? You don’t want to celebrate our victory? Look at all you’ve accomplished!”

He waved his jug around to Elves and Akeens alike who cheered back at him. My little brother also took part in raising his glass of juice. I couldn’t help but grin at the festivities.

“It’s not that I don’t want to, ~~Oriel~~,” There was a crack in my memory as I tried to remember his name, “It’s more so that I find it unbelievable that the war is over. I’m still...” I look down at my hands. They were so recently stained in blood and not just anyone’s blood, my father’s.

“I should be in mourning, but here I am...celebrating a victory,” I couldn’t deny the confusion I felt.

“Yes, well...the Akeen dictator got what was coming, Guilen. I know you wanted to save him, but he couldn’t be saved. I saw no other end, did you?”

I investigated the blurred face. There were probably eyes there once, but I can’t make them out now. Why was my memory failing me now? The person responsible for my eight hundred year sleep. I had to remember his face...

“I...I saw loneliness. I saw someone who could’ve been saved, but I made the choice that the people agreed on,” I pushed his arm away. I ended up walking away with my final words being: “And I’m starting to regret it.”

We didn’t speak again until the incident resulting in my slumber happened. He’d changed...drastically. Previously, he had horns that were curved backwards with tan upright ears that flopped over with an overdose of fur. His animal characteristics were completely gone...his horns vanished. His ears were still tan color, but more so the hue of his skin and closer to his

clouded face. They were slender, curved ears. They weren't even Elf ears. Elf ears are horizontally pointed.

When I found him, he was hovering over the corpse of what he called 'his previous body.'

"~~Oriel~~? What's going on here?" Again, his name evades me.

He turned to greet me with an eerie smile, "Welcome, Princess Guilen. You're just in time for the birth of a new species!"

I couldn't remember his eyes, but that smile will stick with me for eternity.

"I've sacrificed everything! This putrid previous body of mine," He stomped on the corpse inside the enchantment circle, "For this new one! Do you want a new one, too? A male body? Like your father always wanted for you?"

I stepped back, hands on the hilts of my swords.

"I have no need for a male body. I'm who I want to be," I unsheathed my blades.

The distorted man before me frowned, then grinded his teeth, "What about you, little prince?" He pointed to behind me and I looked at the door. My little brother stood petrified at the scene.

* * *

Mr. Ochien opened the door which alerted me awake. He saw the exhaustion on my face.

"Are you alright, Ms. Harim?"

I nodded, "Just taking in the view, Mr. Ochien."

When I came out, I was met with a charge of pompous glances and timorous stares.

Before, Mr. Ochien was testing me because he wants to believe in someone. Then, put your beliefs in me. I'll take them all. Everyone here with no one to believe in. Place your beliefs in me. This time...I'll do it right.

I stared all around at the glorious two-story building made entirely of concrete and glass window panes. In the school yard, stood a tall pink chorna tree. The petals fell slowly with the oncoming breeze. In front of the tree, was a wired bench. I felt the stares as I walked around the school grounds. Despite Mr. Ochien by my side, I was threatened. I looked to my empty hip. No swords.

Mr. Ochien's Clover went off and he took it out. It's one of the newer models of Ingad tech. The royal family of Mamin were given some as a show of peace.

“Please excuse me, Ms. Harim.”

I nodded and he went to answer his device off in the corner. I went back to the front of the school. I wanted to familiarize myself with the battlefield as best I could.

I came face to face with a bronze statue of a man at the center of the Academy. He looked disproportionate and I couldn't help but scoff at the unrealistic piece. A ten-foot God with two swords held upright, one raised to the sky and the other lowered. He was adorned in jewels and treasure at his feet. However, something in this metal figure resonated with me. It called out to me as if singing a song. It sounded like it was in mourning. I shirked off the feeling and swung around to face my enemies as they etched beams into my four flickering tails and upward, pointed ears.

This was a front line I was not used to. One I would have to fight without my twin swords by my side which by the way were not named The Butterfly Dream.

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The sun began to set as I looked out my bedroom window. I carefully pulled my gloves off and set them down on the windowsill. I stared down at my wretched hands.

These scars here don't even amount to what she must be feeling inside.

Was what I was doing right by using Guilen to help in my endeavors? I sat on the extended windowsill with my shoulder against the chilled glass.

She's just a child thrown here...Legend says The Butterfly Dream is at Yoorluk Academy, so if Guilen calls those swords, she'll go back to the person she never wanted to be...

To Be Continued...