

# SORMHING SINGS

THE TAROT

## Chapter 1: Death and Duty

They say that magic is a force powered by one's soul. That each conjured flame is kindled by the spark of your passion, and carries everything that is "you" within it. Yet there was no soul, much less passion, in what Isabeau was doing.

The blood, the screams, the fire- it had all become a blur to her. She cringed each time her blade would slip into someone's chest and loathed the mayhem she and her partner would leave in their wake, yet she could never force herself to stop. Magic craves death, and spellweavers are magic incarnate.

*Shink!* With one fell swoop, the head of a bandit rolled to a stop at the tip of Isabeau's foot. Under the cloak of darkness, moonlight reflected in his lifeless eyes... he almost looked beautiful as he lay there.

Licking her lips, the weaver turned toward the far off brush to signal to her partner that the path was now clear. He appeared a few seconds later, stumbling clumsily over the fallen branches.

"Well?" said Isabeau impatiently.

"I don't see anyone else patrolling the surrounding area... it's almost as if the possibility of getting caught never even crossed their minds." said Cena, his flowing black hair curtaining his broad shoulders.

"Ever wonder where they get such ego's from?" Isabeau asked, cracking her fingers neatly.

"I'm sure the voices in their heads give them all the motivation they need." Cena responded, a slow smile inching across his face.

"Mmm. so... are we going in?"

"No time like the present."

The duo crouched into the high patch of grass and cattails that hugged the murky green waters. Fireflies danced along the brush as the two inched closer to the dock. As of now, all

that could be heard was the chirping mantises and the croaking of nearby frogs. There was nothing left between the duo and the lone boathouse perched above the water.

It was a shabby thing, framed by rotting wood and moss, and had an open pier that snaked shakily into the open waters. If one had to guess, this boathouse had been long abandoned before the heretics planted roots here.

A gust of wind tore through the clearing, tousling Isabeau's pink hair wildly. Locking her hazel eyes to his, the pair knew that they had come to the same conclusion. 'Once the wind stops blowing, that's when we'll rush in.'

Isabeau could feel Cena tensing up next to her, his large muscles coiling in anticipation. As per usual, his right arm wrapped around his adjacent hip to wield the hilt of his morning star flail.

They could still hear the wind.

Slowly, Isabeau raised a hand in front of herself, invisible energy crackling around her fingers.

It was slower now.

Gone.

*PHTEW!*

In an instant, a small but strong gust of wind detonated through the thin tips of Isabeau's fingers, ripping the graying oak door clean off of its hinges and embedding itself in the opposite wall.

Cena, being much larger than his partner, rushed in first as if to cover her from anything that might lay dormant.

"Chimera knights! Congregants of the Church Aeonian! Surrender now or face the possibility of lethal force...!" Yelled Isabeau in the absolute lowest voice she could muster.

As the air cleared, she could see three silhouettes in the faint moonlight that poured through the slight fissures of the planks above them. One of an old woman, and two of young men holding daggers.

They were ragged and bony, practically naked save for the tattered cloth and beads that hid their most private areas. The two young men were shaven bald, and the woman's hair went down to her toes, as silver as moonlight. There were two boats docked next to them.

They hardly flinched, even after seeing the pair's church issued armor and weapons.

"Leave us." said the young man on the right, the shorter of the two. He flipped his dagger around menacingly.

"I guess this means you don't surrender?" asked Cena, swinging his mace in a wide arc at his side. "That's fine..."

"Finish the ritual, mother. We cannot allow Wiinthrehts return to be sullied by such trash!"

"Quiet now, Gami. let her focus." said the taller one, clearly the elder of the two. "Let's just make sure these church trash are kneeling by the time our lord makes his arrival."

"What'd I tell you." Isabeau whispered. "Ego."

It was just now that the two noticed a thin red line circling the thin legs of the old woman in the back. It glew red, with upward rising sparks that fizzled out after some time.

They were trying to summon a demon.

The tension in the room was palpable. It seemed as if one wrong move would set everyone off, subjecting them to a whirlwind of confusion and death. Isabeau let out a long breath and began to speak.

"You see what I'm seeing?"

"Mhm. last one to the summoning circle has to fill out the casualty report."

"Idiot." she chuckled, smiling slightly.

That single word was the one to set everything into motion. As the woman in the back continued to mumble her incoherent summoning rites, her sons dashed towards the congregants with surprising efficiency, closing the distance between the two groups almost instantaneously.

"Shit!" exclaimed Cena, swinging his mace downwards.

He didn't expect such speed from his opponent, and so his swing was slightly off kilter, just enough to miss the younger brother entirely. The young man didn't miss his opportunity, kicking the large framed knight square in the ribs, driving him back into the wall with a shout.

Cena regretted opting for leather armor rather than his church issued plate at the moment.

Isabeau, however, was able to react just in time, catching her attacker's knife hand between her two palms. With a blast of charged lightning, she blew the heretic away, sending him crashing into his brother with a thud.

Taking advantage of the situation, Cena took a wide step back, slamming the head of his mace into his attacker's shoulder with a sickening crunch, making his weapon fall to the ground with a clink.

Each side regrouped with each other.

“Damn it” said Cena, panting. “She's almost finished her ritual.”

The space between the summoning circle was now pitch black, and emanated a strange smoke from within. This ‘Wiinthreht’ was now mere seconds from being manifested in the physical realm.

“I can handle these two myself now.” Said Isabeau decisively. “Do you suppose that frail old lady will give you any trouble?”

“Maybe if she's half as smart-assed as you are. But leave it to me.”

Cocking his arm back, Cena sent his morning star cutting through the space between them.

*THUD!*

The old woman had dodged at the last second, and the mace was now embedded into the wall next to her. Cena wouldn't miss this moment of confusion, though. As the two brothers looked back to check on their mother, Cena made a running start toward the two, attempting to bound over their heads at the last second.

In retrospect, it seemed quite a silly idea to him, but he knew that Isabeau would have his back. With a heave, she threw a gust of wind under Cena as he leaped, propelling him towards the woman at breakneck speeds.

*CRACK!*

Cena's fist collided with the shape of the woman's head in a blur of skin and blood, staining the wall behind her in a canvas of cracks and fissures. She was knocked out cold.

And while their backs were turned, Isabeau decided to use the remainder of her energy to finish this battle with the brothers quickly. With her magic, she weaved the air in front of her into a blade. The air shimmered gorgeously as the space in front of her warped. She wasted no time in launching it.

But it only hit one.

“AAGH!”

He screamed wildly as he came down, and at that instant Isabeau heard the heart-racing sound she had all become accustomed to since the very day she was born. Pain. Fear. Oh how she loved it. And oh how she hated herself for doing so.

He cradled his leg, but it did nothing to stop the gushing blood to spread across the splintered floor below. It was clear that he would not make it.

She almost didn't notice the other run up to her, fist cocked back in an attempt to punch her. On instinct, she grabbed his face with her palms, holding him back with all her might.

He was so warm.

No, it was *her* that was warm. Her palms quickly heated to scorching temperatures, singeing the skin of his face almost instantly.

As his skin bubbled and he screamed in torment, she couldn't do anything but look into his eyes, the very spirit of pain reflected in them. So wild. So wet. So warm.

*This is what it meant to be a weaver.*

Her ears were ringing now, and her vision became blurry. She couldn't tell if it was due to the extended use of her magical energy, or the overwhelming senses that flooded every pore of her body. It didn't matter to her, all she wanted to do was sleep.

And so she did, still cradling the melted skull of a man whose name she didn't even know. It had always been this way. At least now, she could say that it was for a cause she believed in. The church had given her that much.

*THUD!*

Her vision went black as her head hit the ground.

...

She awoke some time later- unable to tell just how long it had truly been. The scent of maple and wet grass tickled her nose, seemingly bringing her back to life. As the feeling slowly began to return to her limp body, a dull pain pierced her skull. It ached terribly, so terribly she could hardly think straight. To her, everything seemed jumbled and unfamiliar. That is to say, everything except the feel of Cena's back against her chest. That feeling... it was one she would never forget.

Half consciously, and eyes still closed, she tightened her grip around his shoulders, as if afraid she might fall.

“So you're alive, huh...? That's good.”

She couldn't see him, but he sounded tired.

“This is the last time I'm carrying you, I swear... I thought I told you about overdoing it on the magic.”

She only groaned pathetically in response.

Of course he wouldn't know the true reason behind her sudden lifelessness, she had never told him. Besides the fact that he'd never experience the feeling of magic himself, she truly believed that he just wouldn't *get it*. Whatever was wrong with her, whatever caused this curdling mass in her heart, was something that was ingrained into her very soul.

“Thank you.” she said, her pink hair wrapped haphazardly across his shoulder.

“Don't thank me yet. I did still beat you to the circle. The casualty report is all yours.”

She kicked him in his back.

“Ow! You know... there's something seriously wrong with you, Beau.”

“Oh?”

“You never smile, you never joke... I'd say you're similar to a golem but only they have more life.”

“Then why are you always... buzzing around me.. Like some kind of fly?” she said , struggling with each word.

Her consciousness was gradually slipping from her grasp.

“Because you're my friend.”

“ ... ”

The weaver was fast asleep.

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## **FIVE HOURS LATER, FATE'S COLISEUM**

*'Is a single death enough to build a dream on?'*

It's the question that's been running around Sun's mind for years on end. She agonized over it, day after day until somewhere along the line, the answer had stopped mattering to her altogether. But something about those words, uttered to her so long ago...

Made her very blood boil

*Fwoosh!*

Her long white hair fluttered in the wind, and she felt something akin to bliss as she glided over the lush fields and dirt roads that led her to her destination.

She stretched her limbs languidly as they guided her through the air, traveling as no mere mortal could. No, this power... surely it could only be that of a god's.

The small town of Fate's Coliseum slowly came into view as she soared through the air, its rugged walls and straw topped roofs standing out amongst the bright green blades of grass which covered the landscape.

Despite its name, the town presented an air of calm and security, evident in the way the people bustled about the streets, unworried and unafraid.

For a brief moment, it had seemed as if the entire city paused- eager to gaze upon their salvation, for she was beautiful. They seemed like tiny ants from so high up above.... No- they had always looked this way. Maybe it was just that here, above it all, is where she truly belonged.

Contrasting greatly with the humble homes and crooked dirt roads, a large manor, made of dark stone and intricate carvings lay at the edge of the town, towering tall above the mighty oak trees of the sprawling forest behind it. Vines of ivy assaulted its jagged spires, that of which reached endlessly into the cloudless sky.

Sun's descent was light and effortless, majestic in its way. She couldn't do it by any other means, even if she tried. Scattered applause followed her as her feet touched upon the rugged earth.

Considering her current situation, being home felt bittersweet. Her sandals clacked rhythmically as she impatiently walked her way toward the towering metal doors of the manor.

Waxed in gold, the door's carvings depicted the 21 tarot cards, each with their own unique wording and illustrations. They formed a sort of pyramid, ranking themselves in order of importance and power. At the very top of the pile lay The Sun, the peak of all arcana.

At the foot of the door lay an inscription. 'Unto this country I give my undying love, and the servitude of my children. May thier undying power grant you undying peace.' - General Sorm

Her eyes grazed over her arm before landing on the marking on her wrist. Just as it was on the door, an etching of a tarot card was ingrained into her forearm. It read [THE SUN] and glowed a bright yellow.

This was a symbol of her power. A symbol marking her as a countrymans servant. A protector. Her name and past life no longer held any meaning. She was now just 'Sun'.

Raising her fist, she beat on the door with such force that its reverberations could be heard all throughout the village.

The doors groaned as the hinges swung out into the open courtyard, ripe with flowers and greenery. Sun had to take several steps back to ensure she wouldn't be blown away by the sheer force of the opening door.

The smell of vanilla and lavender washed over her as the mechanized doors fully opened, kicking up dust as it did so. The hall before her was lavish and grand, and many residents of fate's colosseum had never seen such wealth for themselves.

The chandelier, adorned in thousands of tiny crystals, bathed the hall before her in an aurora of orange and yellow lights. The several banners, all made of silk and dangling wondrously from the engraved pillars, all bore the same image: a single golden flower. At the foot of the red carpet, which snaked toward the front door, she saw two of her brothers, ready to greet her.

Yawn "About time you got here, *dear* sister. It's not kind to leave your guests waiting, now is it?" said Judgment, his long white hair brushing atop the ground.

Moon, as always, was standing in some far off corner, watching every interaction from a distance. And again, like always, a heavy black plate armor covered every inch of his body, encasing himself completely.



“Judgment.” Sun said, staring up at his towering figure. “The visitors from Doranovis, where are they?”

Judgment laughed

“Quite eager to meet the newest member of the tarot, are you? You've already left them waiting here for 3 days, what's an hour more?”

Sun narrowed her golden eyes at him.

“I'm not really in the mood for your games, brother. Which chamber are the boy and his mother sleeping in? If they really are who they say they are, then I need to go and introduce myself to them.” she said, straightening her silk white dress.

“I'll say, I expected you to be a bit more upset about their arrival... though you never really were on to lose your composure.”

Sun's eyes were deathly serious.

“Judgment.”

“Okay, if you insist,” he said, smiling. “Last I saw, Chariot was giving the young boy and his mother a tour of our trophy room... If I recall correctly, they should still be there now.”

“Bye.”

She brushed past him and made her way toward the room.

“Remember to keep your composure!” he yelled after her.

The glamorous aura of the manor extended to every crevice there was, and the trophy room was no exception. Velvet coated shelves lined the walls as far as the eye could see, trapping all within the room with their sheer mystique and intrigue.

*Chimera tooth: Mellowatter springs incident, 1292*

*Kraken tongue: Atlantis's attack on Coastal Aorta, 1301*

*Bud of Wiitnthrehts Rose: Demon March the 5th, 1313*

The list continued on.

After several minutes of searching, her eyes landed atop 3 blonde heads.

“Lady Sun! There you are...” said chariot, rushing up toward her. His tousled blonde hair and restless green eyes made him seem almost unfamiliar from the well groomed young man she had come to know.

“The kid and the missus are over there... I haven't told them anything about the fountain yet, I figured you'd want to do that yourself.” he continued, straightening his hair to look a bit more presentable.

“What did I tell you about calling me Lady Sun? It's just Sun. To you at least.” she said, her eyes staring past him.

“Right, sorry... Do you wanna take over here? I've never been to good with kids, and there's only so many questions about battles I wasn't there for that I can take.”

“Mhm, you've done good work here, brother.” she said, her hand on his shoulder. “Go ahead and return to your chambers.”

“Right, but I have to ask... is it true? Could that little kid really be one of us?”

“I'm not quite sure yet. In the letter I received from Judgement, it seemed to me that he had awakened *some* kind of power. Then again, he could just be a spellweaver who discovered his abilities late. Either way, the nobles from Doranovis seemed quite convinced. That's why they sent them here.”

“That'd be kind of crazy, right? Another person with the powers of the tarot.. After all, it's been a while since we've had a new addition.”

“Well, there needs to be 21 at all times. He was bound to show up sooner or later.”

“Right. Well, just let me know if you need anything, ma'am. I'll be.. Getting some much needed rest.”

“Of course.” she said, flashing a radiant smile.

As his footsteps faded into obscurity, her eyes grazed over a young boy in the distance, his face pressed up against the glass of a trophy case, and his mother, thin hand stroking his head.

She couldn't tell you why, but the sight of the boy made her heart break.

“Werewolf hide. You have good taste. That was one of the first monsters I had ever fought.”

Surprised, the boy and his mother turned around, stunned by the sight before them.

Sun's snow white hair contrasted perfectly with the warmth of her skin tone, and her golden eyes all but added to the allure and mystique of the painting that was... her.

Not a scar or blemish was in sight, and the pure beauty of her features- not too soft or sharp- might become unsettling if you were to look at her for too long. Her white dress, trailing behind her, looked more like wisps of smoke as they hugged her slender figure.

To put it plainly, the picture of beauty stood before them.

The boy, grabbing onto the hem of his mothers dress, hid behind her, hands trembling

“Lady Sun...” The mother gasped, bowing. “What an honor to meet you...”

Sun Smiled at her

“Amalia Duepont, correct? If so, then this young man must be Petar...”

The boy's big brown eyes trembled a little less now as he made eye contact with the woman before him.

“I hear you're special... like me” she said, kneeling to face the boy at eye level.

“But that's what I'm here to confirm, Petar...” she whispered, hands stroking his face “are you one of us?”

The boy's trembling stopped completely now. Sun stood up.

“Amalia... it's great to meet you. I've been looking forward to it for some time now. If you could do me a favor, explain to me how Petar discovered his powers. I read the report, but I'd like to hear it from you anyhow.”

“Oh.. well, of course!” she said, standing even straighter now. “ this may sound silly, but... I think he has the ability to bring things to life after death.”

Sun's left eyebrow arched.

“You see, Petar often plays near the pond near our home when I'm held back for work. Except this time, he came across a dead frog. I suppose he wanted to do something about it, so he-”

“I wanted to help him!” he shouted, his fist balled up.

“Petar!” Amalia gasped. “Quiet!”

Sun took a closer look at the boy, the essence of determination plastered on his face.

“I'm sorry about that,” Amalia continued. “He's got a good heart... he's just passionate about the things he cares about.”

“I understand.” Sun said. “He reminds me of myself in my youth. Now continue, what was this about a dead frog?”

“Well... for some reason, Petar couldn't accept the fact that the frog was dead, no matter how much I told him to let go. And then, just for a moment as he was holding the dead animal, it began to move!”

Petar looked proud.

“The next day, we went to the nobles at the king's castle, begging to gain an audience with him. At first, they didn't want to humor us, thinking us crazy. They didn't want to believe that a boy from the slums could actually be a member of the legendary tarot...” She continued, balling up her fists.

“But then, Petar showed them his ability... they were appalled! They sent us on a carriage to Fate's Colosseum as soon as we left the castle gates!”

“So I see...” Sun said, stroking her chin. “This certainly is... unusual.”

“Unusual? How so? Members of the tarot are said to have extraordinary powers, like Petar!”

“Yes, they do. The thing is, each tarot card has a specific ability assigned to them, one that's unique and cannot be replicated even by magic. For example, Chariot, who you just met, has the ability to run almost faster than the speed of sound. ”

Amalia nodded along as Sun continued to speak.

“With the way tarot cards work, if a holder of one of their abilities were to die, that power would just find itself reincarnated into an unborn child. The thing is, a tarot card which has the ability to bring things back to life simply does not exist.”

“So what else could it be? He couldn't be a spellweaver, our family has no history of magic.”

“I have an Idea of what might be going on here, but i'd still like to confirm nevertheless. Come with me.”

The trio made their way toward a dimly lit room in the heart of the manor, which seemed to act as a temple room. The aged stone walls somehow retained an air of elegance and divinity, which immediately altered the atmosphere as they entered.

In the middle of the room lay a still fountain, filled to the brim with a strange multicolored liquid. Beyond it, lying against the far wall, was a large coffin, which lay bolted shut.

“What is this?” Asked petar timidly, no longer hiding behind the hem of his mothers dress.

“This,” replied Sun, gesturing her arms toward the stone walls of the room, “Is the room which will determine your fate from here on out.”

Sun slowly walked toward the fountain in the center of the room, staring at it with an expression that was quite unreadable.

“If you are a member of the tarot, as those around you so claim, this fountain is where you will claim your birthright.”

Amalia smiled nervously. “What is it that we need to do?”

Sun pointed toward the fountain.

“Long ago, when General Sorm -founder of this nation- took this land from the demon scourge that once ruled us, he knew that he couldn't protect us forever.”

She sat on the edge of the fountain, running her hand along its marble edge.

“Even the strongest of us, sooner or later, will succumb to death. Knowing this, he split his power evenly between his 21 children before he died, marking each of them with a unique ability.”

“I think I remember this story...” Amalia said, walking closer toward the fountain. “Back in my youth, everyone was taught the legend of General Sorm, and how he founded this country.”

Sun nodded as she continued.

“For years, Sorm's children protected and died for the people they were sworn to defend. When their time came though, rather than fade into the dark realm of abbadon, their power remained in the world of the living. Do you know why that is, Petar?”

Petar looked solemnly at the ground and shook his head.

“It is because their souls were so incorruptible - so pure - that not even death could hold them. It is for that reason that our power will continue to reincarnate and reincarnate, until we all find our way here... to this fountain.”

She looked pointedly at Petar now.

“Place your hand into the water, Petar. Let us see if it reacts to your divine might.”

Petars' knees buckled as he approached the fountain slowly. It seemed as if the weight of the world itself was pressed upon his thin shoulders.

One step.

Then another.

His head was swimming. What was it about this place that made him so nauseous? As he took his final steps toward the marble structure, he looked down to see his timid reflection looking back at him. What scared brown eyes he had. He had never noticed them before.

Sun, still sitting atop the fountain, placed her hand upon his shoulder.

“Go.” she whispered.

And so he did, submerging his hands into the lukewarm water before him.

“Ah!”

A flash of yellow light began to fill the room, blinding everyone before calming down - just a bit. Gusts of wind now assaulted the room, causing strands of hair to fly wildly.

“What's happening!” shouted Petar's mother, clinging securely onto a pillar in the corner of the room.

Though it was pointless. No one could hear her over the roar of wind.

Sun's eyes, never leaving the young boy, seemed to burn holes into his skull. Her hair tousled wildly.

Petar looked below him to see that the water below him was now stained yellow, and seemed to glow with a strange electricity of the same color. As soon as he took his hands away, the chaos had all but stopped.

Petar collapsed against the floor, and his mother immediately ran to check on him.

“Justice.” Sun said, looking down at the pair. “You have the power of the justice card.”

Petar groaned before sinking into the floor. He was out cold.

Sun, reaching down, grabbed Petar in her arms before addressing his mother.

“He’ll be okay, he just needs a moment to rest.”

“Justice... What card is that?”

“It's the card with the ability to manipulate electricity. Your son didnt bring those animals back to life. It's more likely that the electrical currents from his hands caused the animal’s muscles to contract, giving the illusion of undeath.”

“Ah... I see.”

“I'm going to take Petar back to his chambers. After that, you and I need to talk.” She said, staring at the boy's mother.

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Amalia gasped in awe at the view before her. Though she hailed from the capital, Doranovis, she couldn't help but be in awe of the simplistic beauty of Fate’s Colosseum.

“Your garden is simply beautiful...” Amalia said, lightly running her fingers across the multicolored petals before her.

“I have a garden back home too, but I'd never be able to get my hands on flowers as rare and beautiful as these....” she continued, “plus, with taking care of Petar and my job at the mill, I never have time to...”

Amalia clenched her fingers as she realized.

“I'm rambling. Sorry. There was something you wanted to talk to me about? Petar I presume...” She finished, turning toward Sun.

The Tarot member's face was deadly serious.

"It's okay, I really don't mind." Sun said.

She began to make her way towards the boy's mother. How strange... the flowers seemed to lean toward her as she walked.

"How old is your son?" She asked, staring absentmindedly at the stems at her feet

"He's twelve, ma'am..."

"Ah.."

"You know, it really is a miracle..."

Sun glanced at her inquisitively, waiting for her to go on.

"Once the previous Justice died... everyone wondered which child would inherit his power. How lucky am I that it turned out to be my very own son..." Amalia sighed.

"What a joke." Sun chuckled to herself.

Amalia was taken aback by this

"Excuse me?"

"I just can't understand why you'd bring him here... You know what we do, right?"

Amalia gulped as she wiped her clammy hands on the hem of her dress

"Well, yes... you'll raise him to become a warrior, no? A true defender of Sormhing and her people... we've all learned about it in our youth. It's why you're all so revered."

"And not just that." Sun said, that blank look still plastered upon her face. "He'll be stripped of his memories, forced to fight for the rest of his life. He could die..."

Amalia's eyes hit the ground.

"Yes I know... I know. But here," she said, gesturing broadly toward the gorgeous manor behind her, "he could be given a life better than he could ever dream of with me... and if my son were to die protecting the innocent, I couldn't be prouder... is that not why he has the mark? It's God's call to him... a call to give his life for others."

Sun chuckled to herself.



“You know...” Sun began, “ My earliest memories were of bloodshed. I try to think back on what my life was like before but... all I can see is that red. It's so sticky and rotten inside of my mind... so colorless.”

Sun began to slowly pace along the garden as she walked

“I don't know how old I was when I first started fighting, I can't remember. Even now, after searching for years, I still know nothing of my past life. It's such a strange feeling. As if a part of you has been cut out. ”

Sun shook her head, as if the thought she just had was somehow silly.

“But I suppose that is to be expected when you've had your memories stripped from you, isn't it?” she continued, staring down at her feet.

“There was a girl back then when I first moved to Fates coliseum. She was the only one I could really connect with. We were around the same age, the only two girls, and the only ones who really got each other. We were abandoned and lost. Who else could we turn to?”

Amalia fidgeted uncomfortably as Sun continued.

“Her name-No, her tarot card... it was the same as the one on Petar's arm right now.”

Amalia looked up worriedly.

“I remember that the two of us were tasked with aiding this fishing village that was being attacked by sirens. It wasn't the first time we were sent on dangerous missions such as this, but it was certainly the worst of them. When we got there, everything was placed into our hands. The villagers became lazy as soon as they thought someone else would handle their problems for them, the bastards. Me and my sister spent days slowly hacking away at them, experienced killers at that point. One day, the village chief had discovered where the sirens were coming from. It was this cave, far off from the shore. He directed us there. I still remember us stealing one of the fishermans boats to get there” she said, smiling at the memory.

“But simple joys don't last long, not for us.” Her face once again serious. “She died there, in my arms. Do you want to know what her final words to me were? ‘Keep me in your memories always’.... Funny thing is, I can hardly even remember her face anymore”

Amalia was silent.

“I was trapped for days in that cave, with the rotting body of my sister next to me all the while . Once the villagers' problems were solved, they had forgotten all about us. It was

only after learning to fly that I had finally made it back home. Don't you see? This fate... it's all that awaits your son, and you still want him to come with us?"

Still, she was silent. How annoying.

"I asked you a question. Do *not* make me repeat myself."

"Yes... I do. I'm sorry. Believe me, it's not as if I want him to die... but a life of grandeur, lived gloriously, is so much more than I could ever offer him. He doesn't need me."

Sun sighed in disappointment.

"You know, I imagine my mother- whoever she was- had the same mindset as you when sending me off. For years and years, I had always wondered how it would go if I ever got the chance to speak to her. I imagine that it would go something like this."

*FMOOW!*

Instantly, two bright beams of pure light burst forth from Sun's golden eyes. There were no cries, no gurgles, and no sound from Amalia as the light split her torso in two, her body careening to the ground. Black and red streaks now colored the fauna behind her, following the path that the beams did just a moment ago.

This death, the one that Sun had crafted for herself, rather than others... made her feel invincible.

*"I won't do it, you know. I won't erase his memories or make him fight."* Sun thought to herself, *"It's as you said, he's been chosen by god. The world is his... Ours."*

After taking in the wonderful view before her once more, Sun returned to the mansion, and the garden went ever so silent.

## **THE NEXT MORNING: COASTAL CITY OF AORTA**

White and endless. That is how Isabeau would describe the halls of the church if you were to ask her. The word 'empty' would never come to mind, though. Perhaps that's why she was utterly confused at the sight before her.

"Hello?" she shouted, her cries echoing against the empty walls

Once more, empty silence filled the room. Fuming, she blew a strand of pink hair from her face in frustration.

As per procedure, she unstrapped the harness of her longsword and hung it onto a rack near the entrance. She let down her hair, too, that of which she had to tie up due to the several hours of horseback she and Cena had to endure to get back to civilization.

Step after step, she made her way toward the altar at the end of the hall, passing painting after painting depicting past battles which the church had won for the kingdom. One in particular, 'Starjump', had always managed to grab her attention. It depicted man, surrounded by hordes of demons, leaping into the sky and asking the gods for their power, his arm stretched outward.

She often imagined that if she too tried hard enough, the gods would reach down their loving hands and embrace her in true and honest peace. She had been told, though, that the gods were long dead.

The gold lined tiles made no noise as Isabeau glided over them, as if she were a phantom or something unworldly.

As she reached the altar, she ran her hands along the marble surface, turning around to stand behind it. Staring down at the passage before her, she saw that the book was opened to a verse named 'The Heavenly destruction of Earthly Bodies.'

"Gaerhart!" someone yelled.

She recognized the voice quickly. Straightening her posture, she put her fist to her heart, as was customary to do to high ranking officers of the church.

"Pastor Ivan!" She shouted back, bowing her head slightly.

"That's cardinal to you, congregant. At least for the time being."

Looking up, she saw the warmth of a smile she had long become accustomed to since she joined the church. Pastor Ivan, son of the cardinal, had been around for as long as she could remember.

"And why would that be? *Cardinal Ivan?*" she asked, accentuating her words.

"My father is out of the area for the time being, and needs someone to fill his shoes. But I'll get to that later. Where's Cena? It's rare to see the two of you apart."

Isabeau arched her eyebrow suspiciously.

"I dunno. I'd guess he'd be at his apartment by now. We were both exhausted from the ride from Dawnusk and he seemed quite sick anyways."

Bright green eyes sparked as Ivan smiled. It complimented the color of his caramel skin.

“Right. I’d forgotten that he’d chosen to live outside the church walls, unlike the rest of the congregants.”

“Right, well. Cena never was a social creature. He prefers to stay away from others.”

“Really? I think that description might fit you a little better, Gaerhart.”

“Oh.” she said, grimacing.

“Ah, and before I forget...” Reaching into his breast pocket, Ivan handed Isabeau 2 slips of paper, each wrapped in parchment. “Two checks, Issued to Isabeau Gaerhart and Cena Garrick.”

“Checks? What’s that?” She asked, eyeing the paper with interest.

“It’s your payment. It’s a new thing the church is trying to be more integrated with the central government.”

“And how’s it work?”

“Just take them to any city bank to be exchanged for silver coins. I know it’s quite tedious and more work than you’re used to but my father was quite proud of this development. All his hard work, paying off.”

“Right. Remind me to congratulate him the next time I see him. Speaking of...”

“Ah right.” he said, dusting off his tunic. “There was no time to send out a message to the two of you, but the cardinal and all congregants of the Aorta church have been called to Doranovis for their participation in an honoration festival.”

“Who’d we kill this time?”

“It isn’t us, but the Tarot who are being praised here. They pushed back a demon horde who managed to climb over the walls a few weeks ago, and the king decided that they deserved recognition for such a feat.”

“And why are we going?” asked Isabeau, slipping from behind the altar “to show solidarity?”

“Sharp as ever, Gaerhart. The church and the Tarot have always shared a common enemy: the demons that plague this land. A victory for them means a victory for us. It would be a shame were we not there to congratulate them.”

“Yeah...” Replied Isabeau. “You really do sound like a cardinal.”

Ivan laughed at that comment.

“Please, I'm only repeating my fathers words. He gave me quite a long speech about why he's leaving and how to care for the church in his absence.”

“So that's where everyone else is? On a carriage to Doranovis?”

“Actually, Gaerhart, I'd expect them to be there by now already. *Your* carriage has been scheduled to take off tomorrow afternoon.”

“Okay. I'll use this time to prepare. You'll have to tell Cena yourself, though. After a few days on the road with him I'm not so eager to see him quite so soon again.”

“Yeah, right. Don't think of your remaining time as a chance to relax, though. The two of you will have another assignment on your way to the capital.”

“Yes, Pastor Ivan?”

“You'll be escorting Sir Neville Stone to the capital as well, acting as his bodyguard as you make way to Doranovis. He, too, will be a very important figure at the festival.”

“Neville Stone... Principle of the spellweavers school on the island to the west of us, no? Do you think it's safe for me to do that? After all, I am an unregistered weaver. The only reason I was allowed to stay here was due to the cardinal's kindness. I may cause trouble if I'm forced to reveal myself to him.”

“Worry naught, Gaerhart. It's unlikely that you'll actually have to perform any combat on your way toward the city. You'll be taking a route that passes through an underground tunnel, which will hide you for most of the journey. It's specifically used to move high profile individuals such as Sir Neville, and besides...”

Ivan spread his arms out wide before continuing.

“Sir Neville is among one of the strongest spellweavers to ever exist within Sormhings walls. He's practically untouchable. Once again, this is more a show of comradery than anything.”

“Okay.”

“Haha... I can tell you aren't fully convinced.” he said, shaking his head. “Tell, you what, just as a precaution, the carriages will be lead by the churches chalicotherium's . Think...”

the horse of a head on the body of a gorilla. Even if you were to get attacked, they would tear the enemy to shreds without you having to lift a finger.”

“Alright.. On second thought, I'll go debrief Cena on the mission after all. I'll have to bring him his payment either way.”

“Right, but take this first.” Reaching behind a shelf beneath the altar, Ivan pulled out a warm wrapped bundle, which had a pleasant aroma. “I was planning to eat this later today, but it seems like you could use it.”

“What is it?”

“A tart. Strawberry cream, your favorite.”

Isabeau smiled brightly as she took the bundle from the temporary cardinal's arms.

“Thank you, Pastor.”

“That's cardinal, Gaerhart.”

The Cardinal placed a fist upon his heart.

“Death and duty, Congregant.”

Mimicking his pose, the weaver finished the phrase.

“And duty and death.”

And with that, she left the halls of church, leaving it a little more empty.

...

It started to rain later that evening, and Isabeau made it to Cena's apartment much later than planned. It was either for that reason, or her simple impatience which influenced her decision to scale the window into his dwelling.

*Knock knock*

Through the well lit window, she could see a strange lump in the bed that wiggled as she made noise.

“Hurry up...” she whispered, continuing the rhythmic beat of her fist against the window pane.

After several seconds, a disheveled Cena emerged from the snow white bed sheets, appalled at the sight before him.

“Beau what the hell-”

*KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK*

“Alright alright...”

Sluggishly, Cena made his way toward the window and let the hooded weaver in, a damp trail following her as she entered.

“Beau, if the landlord see’s you up there again he’ll be pissed...”

Isabeau pulled back her hood to reveal her newly styled hair. It had been bunched into a single large braid which lay elegantly across her shoulder.

“Oh, nice hair.. What's the occasion?”

“We’ll be heading to the capitol tomorrow afternoon for a festival taking place the same night. I wanted to look presentable. Thing is, we also have an assignment as we ride there..” she said, pressing a folded piece of paper to his bare chest. “I wrote down all the details for you here.”

“Right. Great. I'll look at it later.” Cena said half heartedly, collapsing onto his bed.

“Um, Cena? Are you... alright?”

“Me? Yeah, just a bit winded. It's strange, usually I'm back on my feet within a couple of hours, but now...”

“But now, you feel what it's like to be human, just like the rest of us.”

“Ha... *this*, coming from the woman who shoots fire from her hands.” he said, panting. “I’ll be fine. I may just be human, but I can be strong when I need to.”

“Cena, i think you should-”

“Beau, I'm *fine*. Nag me some other day.”

The weaver narrowed her eyes at the dormant figure before her. She opened her mouth, then closed it again.

“Clean your room, Cena. It’s filthy.” she said, tossing his check onto the bed. “I’ll tease you if you aren't able to show up tomorrow.”

With catlike grace, she exited the window without a sound.

With the state he was in, Cena couldn't tell if he imagined it or not, but he could have sworn he heard the shouts of the landlord for but a moment.

He had no time to think, though. By this time tomorrow, they would be out of the city.

For some odd reason, he couldn't shake the feeling that something was about to go terribly wrong.