

## VOID

"And when the moon would shine dark, the eternal night, turned red sky, would crumble on earth while stars have fallen down. Then, and only then, shall he be vanquished. The Void, a being older than life and stronger than death, with a sole purpose, consuming. Consuming everything and everyone, causing the end of times and the awakening of the golden god. With his shining light, he would start a new genesis, a new world. And by that sheer amount of will, the purest energy of all, then would Salariël lneas, the guardian of Worlds, be reborn, announcing the new start of the cycle, of life."

" This sucks, " said Axel, her usual grin on her face.

" And why so ? " I responded in a sigh.

" Alex, you need to understand how literature works. " She added.

" You have ideas, creativity, wonderful things ! But you lack structure, you don't know how to please a reader. Your story just doesn't work, dummy".

" I don't write for others. I write for me, myself and I. " I retorted while closing the journal I was writing on and putting it on my shelf, next to my bed.

" What about me ? " She asked with a bemused face, still seated cross legged in front of me.

" You don't really count, you're just a ...harsher myself ". I answered absentmindedly before realising what I had done.

In my room, everything turned to black, wind started blowing, the smell of fresh rain on the dirt filled the air. Then everything was gone. The rain, the wind and of course Axel. For any normal human being, nothing could have shown that she was there mere seconds ago. But for a Shadowwalker like me, her vanishing was astoundingly unstealthy since no object would project a shadow in the dim lighting of my almost broken flashlight that I used to write during nighttime. Classic me, or should I say, classic dark, shadowy, cynical and way-better-writer-than-me me. Yeah, I had my issues with that last part.

Because I know that you probably don't understand a thing that I'm saying right now, let me explain.

Humans are blind. I know it sounds like a Facebook quote your 16 years old goth cousin would share but in this case, it's completely and utterly true. There are so many wonders, creatures, worlds that we cannot see !

Except we could, if we weren't only part of ourselves. You see, well no, you don't see, that's the point but anyways, humans never accepted themselves. We feared our darker sides and our dreams, because they meant thinking and doing things alone, and humans hate being alone.

It is true that working in society means sharing the guilt of your mistakes to everyone, therefore removing your responsibility as an individual, and also enjoying successes you absolutely didn't know nor cared about. The price to pay was having our extremes torn out of ourselves. The day we created society is the day we lost our shadows and our lights, the day we lost ourselves. That day is called the Dissonance.

But nothing is ever truly lost, and the shadows continued roaming Earth, apart from the humans, while the lights went to an unknown place, far from their origins, taking with them the moon and the stars.

And so we, humans, live our simple and boring lifes, never realizing everything we lost.

Well, not all of us.

The door of my room opened with a silent shriek. I closed my eyes and layed on my bed, quickly turning off my flashlight. The sound of steps grew towards me.

"Goodnight sweetheart" said a motherly voice.

"G'night." I responded in a tired tone.

I smiled, and put my right hand under my pillow, the flow of my blood pumping faster and faster beating in my head. A deep, gurgling breathing was starting to emerge at my right, freezing my veins.

I pretended not to hear it, like I should, and falling asleep. The breathing was louder and louder and after a few minutes, an icy sensation, like a pair of cold, sharp and very long claws, was beginning to hurt my right leg, from the calf all the way till the hip. I remained calm, even though my brain was sending some big " get us out of here " signals.

Only when the pain was unbearable and the breaths had stopped did I know it was time to strike.

My right hand, now armed with a glowing dagger-shaped crystal, struck the source of the sounds with a swift and precise strike. I opened my eyes. A gray aberration, looking like the unholy birthling of a praying mantis and a zombie, was laying on the ground, a shiny dagger in its forehead. " Another boogeyman," I muttered to myself. It had red glowing eyes, and you should NEVER look into those. Trust me.

I took back my dagger, the only light source of the room, stabbed the creature twice more, once in each eye -you can never be too cautious with them- and watched it slowly vanish into the shadows that started expanding in my room. Everything was back to normal again.

I laid down in my bed, looked at my leg that was pretty much unharmed except for the very thin line of blood that was drawn in my thigh, took a deep breath and started crying silently. Boogeymen only take the appearance of lost ones.

I woke up feeling even more exhausted than before I even fell asleep. It felt as if a professional soccer team had used my head for their training and rolled over the rest of my body with their van, going back and forth over my leg. Since the sun was still deep inside the horizon, I stood up to look at the stars one last time before the eternity that this day would feel like. I always felt linked to them, in a way, and Axel always called me an edgy teenager when I talked about that.

She would soon appear, I hoped. I felt guilty of what I said yesterday, and thought I needed to apologize. I took a shower, dressed myself up painfully and waited in front of the window.

Even though the morning rays of sunshine were blazing softly, my body left no shadow on the floor, like the world refused to let even a single bit of it be marked by my presence. Soon, I could feel she was there, just behind me.

"So... not too tired after using the Shard ? " She asked with a half guilty half worried voice.

" I can't even remember where we live" I responded in a laugh while turning to face her.

" I'm sorry for that, I should have been more cautious" she responded awkwardly.

"No, I'm sorry... I shouldn't have said that. You really exist, and you're way more than a part of me. For everything that I know, I'm more the part of you." I said with just as much awkwardness. Apologies weren't our forte.

"Don't say that you dummy!" She told while taking a step towards me, her hands flailing like she was about to throw a tantrum. "You're not a part of me, just really really dumb." She smiled softly, the black and pointy hair she had today making her look like a happy hedgehog.

I opened my arms, and we hugged. She desolved herself in a black puddle at my feet, before taking my form on the ground. A cold feeling in my back confirmed to me that I had gained back my shadow. I exited the house without making too much noise, carefully avoiding the kitchen, and headed towards the rest of the day.

School was as boring as it gets, so I slept during half the classes while Axel took notes. There's no school in the Shadow Realm according to her, so she actually enjoyed learning about history and sciences and languages and pretty much everything except maths. Even shadows have limits.

Being possessed by a shadow is a rather weird feeling. Your unconscious being split in half by a thin glass wall is the best way of describing it. You can see, sense what the other part is doing, but cannot interact without consent.

I generally just shut down and sleep, letting all the control go to my shadow, but on the rather rare occasions where the teacher made something look alive enough for it to interest me, I could see how Axel tried to use my brain, my ideas, my knowledge, to form new ones, to assimilate informations and emotions.

It was a scary thought to know that someone could be inside your head like this, but at the same time, it felt reassuring that at least someone could really understand you deeply. I liked the fact that I was never alone.

School ended as it started, slowly. The moment we got out was the moment our real day began. I roamed the streets, exploring every inch of unknown territory in the gray city of Cizen. Gloomed backstreets, strange shops, hidden parks, everything that didn't seem at its place, that was where Axel and I would be. We called those places anomalies, since they were parts of our world that only shadows and shadowseekers could see. That was where clues to the Bright world could be found.

We needed those, and Axel was convinced we were getting closer. We decided to go next to a residential area near a cliff, from which a weird aura emanated, that we had spotted a few days ago. There, hundreds of similar looking appartements piled on and on, like an urban Labyrinth.

We entered through a small hole in a fence circling the whole area, and reached a weirdly paved path, circled by what seemed like abandoned buildings. The walls were partly destroyed, engulfed by vines and colorful vegetation. That was what certified that we were somewhere humans shouldn't be. Colors were rare in Cizen.

We marched forwards, eager to find what was hidden in plain sight.

After walking for a bit, enjoying the silence of what seemed like a micro ghost city, a giant concrete wall blocked our passage. It felt polished, too smooth to climb, and divided the abandoned suburb in half.

"What do we do now?" I asked my fellow shadow who seemed really occupied screaming "There's one! There's one!" In my head. I had no idea what that meant.

" Well, humans aren't supposed to get here." She said, " We need to do it the shadows way." She added confidently.

That scared the crap out of me as much as it excited me.

" So we Resonante ? Now ? In the middle of a maze of concrete and ten minutes away from the supermarket ? ``My voice was full of doubtfulness, but my brown eyes were sparkling with childish excitement.

"Yep. Look around, that place seems as much human free as it gets " she said while emerging from the ground and taking physical form next to me.

" Let's do it then, " I sighed.

Achieving the state of Resonance with your shadow is like free-falling in a pitch black pit, never knowing if you'll hit the ground, or ever if there even was one. You need to let your mind completely go blank while your obscure friend enters it. Once that's done, you need to have an utter control over your body that was now bigger, stronger and probably scarier. You need to maneuver your new shape like if it was an extension of your being, each mouvement feeling natural, not even having a glimpse of thoughts about what you were doing. The moment you doubted your capacities, got afraid or just questioned what was happening, everything would go back to normal, if you can call having a sentient shadow normal.

If that happens while you're climbing something, say for example a 10 meters high concrete wall in the middle of an abandoned residential area, well you would be achieving a new world record for fastest headbutt on a garbage bag. And that would hurt, a lot. Not that it happened to me or anything.

I focused on my breathing while Axel dissolved in a dark fog that soon circled around me. Letting time do his thing, we patiently waited until we couldn't dissociate our conscience from the other's.

The form your resonated body would take depends on many factors. The bound between you and your shadow, the context of your situation, what you needed to do and your personality. For Axel and I, a pair of menacingly sharp curved-like claws would appear in my now much longer and flexible black arms.

I closed my eyes, or rather acted as if they were closed, and tried not to let my brain process any info, acting only by reactions of my more primal instincts.

My body felt cold, my mind slowly erased itself as I willingly tried to interrupt any thoughts. Don't think about anything else other than climbing. Climb, climb, climb... Why did we stop climbing ? As I regained consciousness over what I was doing, I realised we were already at the other side of the wall.

" Whoa... that was awesome ! " I said after exiting the Resonance, even though I was unsure of what I exactly felt.

"Tsss, it's easy when your shadow is as great as me " responded Axel in a laugh that didn't hide her pride, while stretching her obscure body that was now right next to me." Don't expect me to be able to make it last more than a few minutes though. " She added.

" Hey, don't take all the credit ! I'm the one Resonating, it's a human thing ! " I quickly exclaimed.

" That's why you need a shadow for it to be useful, " she gnarly said while sticking out her tongue.

She had me there, like almost always. The face she made while reading the defeat in me reminded me of how much I loved her.

Her dark and pointy hair echoed with her always playfully squinted eyes that seemed to only contain a big iris. Her usual grin had turned into a full on triumphant smile, her white teeth contrasting with her dark lips. She wore the same hoodie and sport leggings she had stolen from me the day we met, only they were now completely black. Her skin was an immaculate white, not in a pale way, more of a " I am the representation of the absence of life and joy ".

And what was the most beautiful about all of her, is that the Axel I just described was only what she wanted to look like right now. If she wanted she could, any second, decide to change shape, color, become some kind of goop or mist or have no physical attachment to the world at all just to enter my mind. Shadows had many forms, and each one was beautiful to me in its versatility.

We continued walking in a now clearly odd stone path. The buildings seemed distorted, like if they were attracted to something towards us, so strong it made them bend in it's direction. I didn't know if that meant good or really bad news. Probably bad.

Soon, the sky started taking a way darker shade, making him an ocean, the cloud becoming spume, the wind started howling. I felt chills on my back as I noticed the sun was nowhere to be seen. Definitely bad news.

Nonetheless, we continued marching to what seemed like an incredibly strong being. The ground passed from stone to concrete, then to grass. The heavy and cold air of the city became warmer, softer. I tried looking behind us. Absolute darkness.

" No going back huh ? " Muttered Axel.

" It would seem so, " I said.

Even though we were still cornered by buildings, hollow gusts of wind started blowing around us. Then, after what could have been an hour or ten minutes, we saw a lone, astoundingly normal tree on a small green hill, free from any construction, an iron bench in front of it.

" We did all of this for a tree ? " I asked, disappointed.

" Alex... you don't see it, do you ? " asked Axel in return.

" See what ? " I curiously added.

I felt a shiver in my neck as Axel put her hands over my eyes, something she often did to help me see what other humans could not, like the starry sky, and then, I understood something terrifying.

The sky didn't magically change colours, it took a darker shade because the shadow of the tree blocked the rays of the sun from touching it.

Axel had told me stories that shadows shared from time to time at the rare social gatherings they had. Most of them were more spooky stories or weird rumours, but once you paid closer attention to it, a true folklore was hidden inside and it all started with the Tree.

The Tree of life, a being older than the Dissonance, than anything that ever lived. So gigantic, so prestigious, yet invisible for those that didn't seek it. It was so big, my brain couldn't even process what I was seeing and I directly started feeling dizzy, like I had a bad case of vertigo. Earth was just a fruit, a flower, and we were mere insects.

In front of us stood a Branch that went from the ground directly to the sky. An ethereal aura filled the air, making everything around me bright and blurry. The bark of the tree oscillated from different shades of golden and green.

I turned to Axel, who had kneeled to the ground, taking a look at the grass on the hill. I could sense how painful it was for her to be here, since the place was so luminous and eerie which is the equivalent of bathing yourself in oil before taking a sunbath in the desert for shadows,

but also how she absolutely didn't care, solely focused on her objective. Did I mention my shadow was an absolute badass ?

" I'm pretty sure there's no wifi here so I can't use Shadowpedia, a bit of info could be useful." I asked her nonetheless.

" I'm as lost as you are, dummy. One thing's sure though, we're closer than ever to finding the lights." She answered, puzzled.

Finding the lights. This simple sentence meant so much yet made so little sense to me. Axel had always been vague about the lights, what they were and where they had been hiding all this time. It was a bad omen for a shadow to speak about those things, or at least that's what she had told me, but the bitterness in her voice when we talked about that had led me to think that she wasn't exactly telling me the truth.

Before I could say anything more, the ground started shaking moderately. An abrupt sound, like an invisible bell, rang from all directions at once. The Branch started to take a darker shade as golden sap oozed from the bark in some fancy, curly lines that were forming a door-like figure.

Running like a coward would have been a good idea. Asking Axel what the hell was going on would also have been a great choice. Going next to the soon-to-be door and trying to open it, absolutely not. I'll let you guess what I decided to do.

Sometimes I understood why Axel chose Dummy as my nickname.

As I stood next to the golden markings forming in the wood, ignoring Axel's warnings, a golden structure made of amber emerged around a weirdly shaped hole in the bark.

"It needs a hand" I said out loud, " Like, not in a metaphorical way " I added.

I didn't know how nor why, but I was sure it wasn't my hand that was required. I looked at my shadow that had walked towards me, feeling her disapproval.

" I know that you aren't going to like what I'm about to say but, we need to Resonate." I spoke loudly to balance with the invisible ringing that seemed to turn into an ominous chanting.

She sighted, then smiled.

" Resonating in a dark and gloomy place is already pretty hard, " she responded. " In a fairy land with overwhelming light ? That's impossible, dummy. " She added, incredulous.

" As is talking to your sentient shadow next to an infinite tree." I countered with a smile. " We're pretty much doing the impossible each evening. "

" I hate it when you're right ! How can I be mean and cynical in those conditions ? " She faked despair, like if not being able to affectionately bully me was a divine punishment.

"You're Axel, you'll find a way. " I sighted, knowing how right I was.

"Touché. Let's do this then ! " She smiled.

And so we did.

It was as easy as that. That's what was the most amazing about being a shadowwalker. On the rare occasions where you and your shadow were completely connected, with one lone and unique idea, objective and emotion in your same mind, nothing could stop you from doing what you wanted. During those moments, it seemed like even reality bended to our will.

Since a full Resonance would have taken too much time and the chanting seemed to accelerate, Axel dissolved herself in a kind of goop that covered my arm and quickly fused with it. My hand took the exact shape of the cavity in the bark, that was now circled by what I

supposed were runic figures written in golden sap. As my hand entered in it, the ground started shaking uncontrollably, and the now fully formed door opened.

We took a step back, Axel instantly materializing next to me, taking a defensive stance. A human figure emerged from the door in the Branch.

He was tall, like at least 2 meters high, but compared to everything we had just seen, he seemed rather normal. His dark brown skin, his golden eyes and his dreads made him look like he was about to drop some sick bars on a rap contenders show. However, a calm aura emanated from him and a bunch of fireflies swirled around his visibly muscular body only hidden by a cloth.

Now was the crucial second. Was he about to summon a sword and try to kill us for disturbing his sleep ? Or, preferably, was he about to thank us from freeing him and grant us a wish ?

"Hello." his grave voice was as smooth as honey. " Alex and Axel, right ? " he asked

" Who are you and how do you know our names ?" Answered harshly the latter.

" My name is Salariël, Guardian of worlds." A wooden staff, perfectly sculpted, emerged from the ground to reach his hands. " I know you are searching for the lights. I'm here to test if you are worthy of this knowledge. If so, I'll grant your wish." He smiled peacefully.

He then proceeded to rush for us and tried to homerun my face with his staff. Sometimes, life's a bit of both.

If Axel wasn't as fast, I would probably have been decapitated by the blast, but that wasn't even the scariest part. "Salariël, Guardians of worlds"... If that meant what I thought, we were in great danger.

The good thing about fights is that they are excellent to help you resonate. Every inch of your body and mind are only concentrating on one objective, survival. Since Axel also didn't want to die, we soon were only one.

My body turned into a black silhouette. Losing any form of mass, I became a single entity with the shadows, which was helpful to dodge a godlike swing, since the hardened wood would just faze through me. That was so cool, it made me remember how much I loved my occasionally endangered life.

"Axel ?" I asked in my head while trying to assess the situation.

"I'm kinda occupied saving our asses right now, please leave a message after the beep. " She quickly responded before making our body duck under another strike of the wooden staff.

" Axel, I need to know if I can use the Shard " I insisted.

" It's our only weapon, we need to give it a shot. But if it starts vampiring too much energy, get rid of it ASAP okay ? " was her final answer before cutting the fine mental line that connected both our consciousnesses.

I was stuck watching her maneuver our body through the glass wall in my mind, letting me minimal control. I felt like a grounded child, which pissed me off quite a bit, but I decided to let the anger go away and focus on the fight.

Salariël rushed again for us but instead of a regular attack, an impulse of energy emerged from his staff and blasted our ethereal body away. We landed on our back, the fall felt less painful thanks to the soft grass, and we wrenched ourselves up as fast as we could.

I understood what Axel tried to say, she needed to focus on defense while I was trying to attack if we wanted to stand a chance. Being able to focus on two things at the same time was surprisingly the most useful tool of the Shadowwalker arsenal.

The wooden god prepared another strike. His eyes were luminous, and his smile as calm as always, as if beating two teenagers who had reached an infinite tree was a casual day for him. I hated that.

The moment his staff, who radiated pure energy, was about to hit us in our waist, Axel let go of the ethereal form and executed a perfectly timed dodge, who seemed to surprise our foe who didn't have time to react as a Shard of pure light pierced through his shoulder. He took a step back, the Shard returning magically to us while we regained an ethereal stand, arms almost crossed in front of us, my right hand open and facing the sky and over which floated the crystalline dagger.

"A being of shadows using an artifact of the lights huh? Not bad, not bad at all. Hope you know the consequences though, mixing those things up can be scary" he muttered. In a snap of his fingers, his wound regenerated in seconds. "Time to give a real battle, then." He added, the spark of excitement in his eye while he maintained his calm smile making him suddenly way more intimidating.

At first, a small bush started to grow frenetically at our left, then another few appeared. After that, the roots of various trees made the ground of the hill quake and, before we could move, a luxurious forest appeared around us. From the ground emerged purple thorns that started growing around our supposedly ethereal body, rendering our movement painful and sluggish.

To make things worse, I started hearing whispers in my head that clearly weren't coming from Axel. Note to self: Resonating and using the Shard weren't a good long term mix-up. I could already feel the tiredness surging, like a punishment from using something not made for us, from only holding it for a few moments.

Salariël continued his assaults, which became harder and harder to dodge and more energy consuming to pass through. When we exited the ethereal stance, I could see that my body was covered with scratches and bruises, and the blurriness of our surroundings grew with the sharp vines on our legs, piercing my skin and Axel's shadowy figure.

My muscles felt heavy and my body weak. Axel wasn't in a better shape, the vines seemed to be able to drain her forces in a very painful way according to her internal screams. We were losing. Badly.

I needed to talk to her, but for that I needed to buy us time. As I closed my eyes to think, ignoring the whispers, an idea came to my mind, the kind of idea that only a desperate dummy could have. The dumbest idea ever. So dumb it could have a chance to work, if Salariël was who I thought he was. It was time for me to do what I did best: not knowing a thing.

I turned to my right, where a massive sequoia was growing at a ludicrous speed.

"Wow, getting to die next to a palmer, what a privilege." I said cheerfully.

The thorns stopped their infernal ascendance and Salariël looked at me like I just said the dumbest thing ever, which was my main objective.

"It's a sequoia, not a palmer!" he shouted, dumbfounded.

"Looks like a palmer to me..." I insisted.

"Can't you see the thickness of the bark?" He asked while caressing the tree. "Of course it's a sequoia!" he exclaimed.



" Isn't that like a more American palmer ? " asked the head of Axel, who materialised behind mine.

He gasped in pure shock, and hugged the tree with one of the most sad faces I ever saw. He seemed to whisper something to the non existent ears of the sequoia, then turned back at me with a determined look. A brown almanac large as a dining table materialised itself to the ground, next to me. The tree lover freed us from the thorns, and opened the book in search of the right page. Axel sighed in relief before fully entering my conscience.

" See ! A sequoia !" He exclaimed, a victorious grin on his face.

" Ohhh, now that you say it, yeah, this isn't a palmer. " I admitted.

He then proceeded to explain to me every difference between these two very distinct trees, which gave me time to talk with Axel, and realise how exhausted we were. Now was the big revelation part, I hoped.

While listening to Salariël's blattering about pretty much everything concerning vegetals, I mentally checked on Axel :

" I bought us some time" I said proudly, even though my body was still shivering " how are you ? " I asked right after, not hiding how concerned I was.

" Alive, which is kinda a miracle seeing how hard he tried to turn us to mud." She smiled. " Apart from that, the pain of the thorns vanished completely ! I'm impressed you're still standing up though, are you alright ? " she asked.

" I-i'm good... I just... Do you hear them ?" I muttered, the fear slowly setting in.

Tears were filling my eyes uncontrollably, but I wasn't feeling sad... was I ?

" Hear what ? " questioned my shadow, looking at me like I was turning crazy, which could always be a possibility.

" The whispers." I muttered. " Since I used the Shard against the vegan god up there, these voices started growing bigger, like a cold breath in my neck." Even my mind wanted to shiver.

" He did tell us that there were consequences to mixing lights and shadows." Pointed Axel. "Maybe that's what they are. I'm sorry to sound like a prick, but if they don't impact too much our chances of victory right now, I think we have other priorities. " She firmly added.

The whispers keep growing, but instead of fighting them, I just let them do their thing while I tried to do mine.

" Yeah... you're right. Have you realised the creepy part yet ? " I asked.

" Salariël, guardian of worlds." She spoke softly, like she feared that saying his name, even in my mind, would attract him. " That's exactly the start of your story. That's some weird coincidence right here." She added doubtedly. " Is that how you knew how to distract him ?" She theorised.

"Kinda. He isn't exactly how I pictured him, but has some similarities." I admitted.

" So do you know how to beat him ?" She asked excitedly.

The wooden god stopped talking and looked at me with his calm smile, his dreads floating in the air like some flying roots. The fireflies seemed agitated, like if they felt I was pretending to listen to him. I hoped he didn't.

" You understand now ?" He asked me, visibly content with his explanation.

" Absolutely ! Could you go more in detail about the algaea part though ? I think it's really interesting ! " I lied.

He seemed so excited that I felt a bit bad for completely ignoring him right after he opened his mouth.

" So, how do we beat him ?" Repeated Axel.

" We don't, because we can't. " I responded. " He's basically omnipotent, so we would already be dead where we stand if he really wanted to. This is a test, we need to prove to him we are worthy of the lights. " I responded after a moment.

" And how do we do so, Dummy ? I'm a shadow, you know, the complete opposite of a light ! " exclaimed Axel.

"Exactly ! We're already two thirds of the way to becoming full. If this Salariël is a bit like mine, he wants something impressive and unexpected. " I emphasized the unexpected.

I let Axel roam in my mind to find the idea I was thinking about. As usual, she grinned when finding the crooked thought that had germed in our shared mind.

" You mad genius." She sighted. " That's probably going to kill us, so I suppose it's the right option, " she sighed again." Let's do it !" She finally exclaimed, determination in her voice while we snapped back to reality.

I opened my hand, ignoring the whispers that were growing even stronger and scarier and let the Shard float in front of me. Our godly foe stopped talking, and looked at me with a bemused face.

" What are you doing ?" He asked, curious.

Axel, who took physical form next to me, ethereal cuts all around her body, responded with her arrogant yet charming voice.

" Showing you we're worthy."

We both closed our eyes, and started resonating, not with each other but together, with the Shard that was now floating in the air.

The weird part of axing your spirit in a way to connect it with a thirty centimetres high piece of pure light that absorbs your forces on a constant basis when you're affiliated to a shadow was the sensation of the unknown.

Instead of entering in a mind, a trail of thoughts or just a shared body, we were trying to resonate with pure energy coming from within the object. It was like pouring soup from a cup to another, too slow or too fast and it would spill on the ground. Except in this case the soup was our vital energy, the cup was a micro sun, and we were trying to do it on a bumpy road while driving with a broken car. And because this wasn't hard enough, Axel and I needed to do it in a perfect timing or else only one of us would be fused with the Shard, and the other one would probably die from a godly baseball strike. No big deal.

The only good part was that the whispers were nowhere to be seen, and I could enjoy a bit of silence while attempting the most dangerous thing of my life.

My hands were sweaty, my head ached and my spirit was basically becoming an origami from being bent out in each way possible. However, I knew I could do it, because I needed to. Letting down Axel just wasn't an option.

After what seemed an eternity and a half, so probably less than a second, I sensed the core of the shard opening to us. I gave a small nod to my gloomy partner, and we jumped in. A surge of power filled my veins while my body started heating up to some absurd degrees, no pun intended. But while my flesh was being burnt out, I did not feel any amount of pain. I was detached, like if my mind left this empty heating shell and started entering in something bigger.

I didn't know who of Axel and I realized it first.

The shard was a missing piece, a part of a portal that led to the Bright world. I had no idea where Axel was, but she was with me, that was for sure.

I felt so detached, so ecstatic, that I almost let go, forgetting to focus on the Resonance. Around me were cristaline shaped figures and countrysides that made it look like I was just falling in a kaleidoscope. I looked left and right, seeing a huge castle, a moving crowd, and a huge explosion. Distorted and mirrored images kept going on and on and on. However, I started to get lost in the ever changing palets of colored glass. I started to lose focus, then control over my surroundings that were fading out. My body didn't feel so far anymore, and the heat was suffocating. The core of the shard was nowhere to be seen, and I couldn't feel it's presence. I was lost, I was afraid, I was going to die in this sun-maze, alone.

But then, when I started to lose hope, a cold hand reached mine. Axel. She just looked at me and smiled.

You know the feeling when you're falling in your dream and then you wake up in a burst of fear ? That's exactly what happened to me. I rarely mention it because it pisses Axel off, but shadows are representations of fears and unaccepted parts of people, so they're pretty good at scaring the crap out of you. That's exactly what I needed. I focused on a shadowy trail contrasting with the rest of the luminous decor and successfully reached the core with Axel.

A blast of light blinded us, and we snapped back in reality.

My body radiated a newfound power which I couldn't quite get the grip of yet, while Axel was surrounded by a gray aura, a golden retina shining in her eyes. The shard was nowhere to be seen.

For the first time, Salariël stopped smiling, his face being a perfect mix of confusion, surprise and realisation. Axel took a step, looking directly at the god. Wind was blowing from every direction, the ground quake, and I just stood there, smiling.

" Resonating is the only thing that makes me unique, so I became rather good at it." I said, following my shadow.

" Not terribly bad at it." she corrected.

The god stood up, and opened his arms.

" Resonating with an artefact, truly impressive I've got to admit. You risked your lives to show me you are worthy, and the lights accepted you. I've got nothing to add, except that you are completely mad, this was amazing and please don't do that ever again, you could've died." He laughed.

" Weren't you trying to kill us like ten seconds ago ?" I asked before stopping myself. "You know what, don't answer, I've gotten enough cryptic infos for a lifetime and a half" I said.

" Just grant us our wish. " ordered Axel.

I was tired of my head being a cluster of thoughts and questions that clashed with each other. It was obvious Salariël knew that.

" So, what is it that you seek, mortals ? " asked the God.

Axel looked at him like if he was a maze at the side of a cereal box, easy to solve.

"Firstly, we haven't died, not even once, so who knows if we are mortal ? " she asked before quickly adding " Secondly, we want everything that you know about how to reach the Bright world and that you help us get there."

Her voice was rash, yet somehow powerful, almost imperial. I realised her hair was turning a metallic gray. She was not a simple shadow anymore, like if light had released a second nature in her, she was something way more menacing and dangerous.

" This information I cannot provide, I am deeply sorry. However, I can help you. I'm already doing it ! No shadowwalker can enter the lightworld like this." He grinned.

It was too late when I understood what happened.

In a scream, Axel and I fell to the ground. I was feeling emptier and emptier, alone, afraid, then suddenly, nothing, void. I must have gotten knocked out, since when I opened my eyes, everyone was gone. Wait... who was I expecting to be there ? Where was I ?

I wrenched myself up. I was next to the residential area, not far from the supermarket. I sighed in relief, seeing how I didn't seem injured, and started running to my house. Mom was so gonna kill me if I came late.

## END OF ACT ONE

I was walking down the streets, the moonlight brightly lit in the sky, lost in a never-ending maze of concrete, the street lamps paling in front of the darkness that roamed in my head.

Each night was identical to the last one, only the pain grew slowly with time. Everyday, as the sun would disappear under the buildings, I would walk through the city, expecting something to happen or maybe someone to come.

Of course, nothing ever happened and nobody ever came, nonetheless, I still waited patiently, counting the stars in the sky, listening to the city falling asleep. Even though it was freezing outside and I only wore a simple dress, torred in the left shoulder, I never felt cold.

I didn't know why, but somehow I was certain that there was something here, something waiting for me. It was more than a simple gut feeling or an impression. I was, in a way or another, connected to these streets, I was sure of it.

I mean, for as long as I can remember, I did live in the streets, so maybe that played a role in this weird sensation. I didn't have a home, never had one to begin with, but before you start crying pity tears, it's cool, really. I can't be nostalgic about something I never had.

As I was about to go back to my oh-so-cosy shelter, nicely hidden in the middle of Cizen, disappointed at this night like all the others, a weird figure manifested itself from the shadows of a back alley.

" Hey you ! What the hell are you doing here ? " it shouted.

It was clearly a man, probably in his mid thirties from the sound of his voice, so rocky it looked corrupted by excessive tobacco consumption. He walked menacingly to me, shouting at me to not move.

Obviously, as a homeless teen girl that had no idea who that guy was, I ran as quickly as I could. You generally met weird people in a backstreet at midnight, but I had a suspicion he wasn't the ordinary weird guy, if that made sense. The way he looked, how he appeared from nowhere, something was off. However, that man was way faster than me and after a few minutes, I was cornered in a dead end.

He stood in front of me, only a few meters separated us. My heart was beating so fast I was sure that some metal band was using it as their drumming kit. The guy spoke again.

" What is a lil' cutie like you doing in here, in the middle of the night ? Aren't you afraid of the bogeyman ? " He laughed. " Baby, I'm sure my boss would love a new toy for the night, so you're gonna follow me calmly and everybody will be happy." He added.

" Or else ? " I asked, my disgust toward this guy very badly hidden.

"Or else..." he responded.

I was in full gangster movie mode, so I expected him to show a gun or maybe say he'll call his group and take me by force. Nopes ! I screamed as a pair of sharp claws took the place of his fingers, his arms became more hairy and tore through his sleeves, he stood up and smiled while his jaw dislocated itself to take a canine look. In an instant, I was in front of a hideous beast that looked at me with appetite, saliva dripping from his animal mouth. Typical night walks, am I right ladies ?

I'd be lying if I said I was very surprised though. Scared as hell of course, but I started to become familiar with those situations, as weird as it seems.

From as long as I can remember, I always saw strange things happen while nobody noticed. It was quite disturbing watching people appear from seemingly nowhere and disappear just as randomly, or witnessing people walk over a colorful hole without even realising it.

I also saw some strange creatures, like a snake lady that tried to sell shady stuff, disguised as a fast food truck employee, or a weeping ghastly child who ran around an unnoticed businessman. But I had never seen one right in front of me, and to say it was a terrifying experience was a huge understatement.

I tried to talk, but my mouth decided to go back to " 2 years old toddler " mode. The werewolf, I recognised it now, laughed. It was more like the sound of a goat being skinned alive, but I decided not to tell him. Never anger a 2 meters tall ferocious beast was a good advice I gave myself.

" Come with me, now!" He screamed. He took my hand, probably breaking one of my fingers in the way, and lifted me in the air, holding me close to his atrocious body.

" NO !" I resisted as I could, kicking him in the head, which seemed to anger him. Crap.

He violently threw me on the ground with a slam of his arms. My ankle probably shattered and it felt like a million incandescent needles pierced my back, especially between my third and forth back rib. I screamed for help, but nobody would come, I knew it. If we were in a place where this beast was, nobody normal could see or hear us.

I was sad, I was afraid, but mostly I was pissed off. That dumb brute would soon rape me with his friends and probably eat me afterwards and there was nothing I could do about it. But I refused to go out without a fight.

I tried to stand up without much success, still shaking because of the shock. The injury must have been really bad because it didn't even hurt that much anymore, like my nervous system had saturated.

The beast smiled, amused at my pain. That was it. No matter what would happen, I'd turn this monster to dust.

"You... I'll..." I muttered.

My will just kept growing and growing and growing, so did my determination. Suddenly, the werewolf started to look afraid, but I was sure it wasn't my incoherent babbling or murderous thoughts that frightened him. A quick look at my shoulders, covered in yellow dust, made me realize that my hair was turning a metallic shade of silver, shining with the moonlight.

I felt like I wasn't completely controlling myself, that I wasn't completely myself to begin with. I took a deep breath, but didn't feel the oxygen in my lungs. However, I could sense my blood rushing, my heart pumping, and my arms sharking.

Suddenly a black tentacle emerged from my left hand and sent my aggressor flying three meters away in a swift strike. What the hell was happening to me ?

" What the hell are you ?" He asked, shrieking.

I then spoke, but it wasn't my voice.

" The name 's Axel."

Axel. I couldn't recall when was the last time I heard someone else's voice say my name.

I didn't have time to comprehend what was happening to me, which was a feeling I hated, so I closed my eyes and tried to calm down. Mixed emotions floated in my mind, I was mainly afraid, impressed and in total confusion. There was danger in front of me and I wasn't feeling like myself. I needed to focus, something inside me waited. I tried to visualise my mind like a roaring sea that I progressively turned into a tranquil black lake.

I stood there, watching my mirror self on the surface of the water. It wasn't me, but also wasn't so different from myself. Actually, I think it was more like who I wanted to be, the better Axel.

She smiled, waved and looked at me, seemingly eager for this meeting. She spoke softly, her voice echoing from all directions. She seemed nice but her presence only made me quiver in fear.

" Hey, don't be afraid. That bastard won't touch you again ! " She exclaimed.

I hadn't realised I was crying, but flows of water were running down my cheeks and landing in the nighty ocean at my feet. I didn't try to stop, mostly because I was certain I couldn't.

" Who are you ? Why are you helping me ?" I sobbed.

" Hey there, calm down," she smiled. " I'm you, or some complicated crap like this, kinda hard to explain at the moment. Let's beat the living hell out of that guy, and talk after, okay ?

" she proposed.

Seemed like a good option to me. I opened my eyes to see the werewolf wrenching himself up in a howl before rushing to us on all fours. Circling around my arms were clouds of black smog that soon completely covered my body. Great, at least he'll have an intoxication after eating me alive.

However, the moment he ferally leaped, his jaw directed at my throat, I completely phased through him. His face bashed on the wall behind me, stunning him for a while. Not enough for me to understand what had just happened though.

I walked a bit to take my distances until the pain made me stop. I stood there, under a lit street lamp that blinded me for a second, not knowing what to do. The beast soon became human again, and grunted angrily while growing back on his feet. I smiled, a very strange amount of confidence surging in my voice, like an idea surged in my mind.

" How ironic, you were wolf, now you ain't ! " I laughed.

That seemed to anger him even more, which surely was what at least "part-of-me" planned. He charged furiously, blinded by sheer rage.

I miraculously dodged the strike, and punched him in the chest. I was expecting the black goop around my body to help me, like it did with the tentacle. No such luck. My blow bounced back, and I hurt my broken finger.

" Got you ! " he groaned while catching both my hands. I tried to free myself, but he held firmly while his head turned back to a monstrous jaw, hundreds of razor-sharp teeth lurking near my face.

"What are you going to do now ?" He laughed in a distorted voice. "You're out of tricks, baby girl."

I focused, trying to mentaly visualise me punching him in the face.

I tried to remember what had led the tentacle to emerge from me. Being angry ? Check. Being afraid ? Super check.

I looked down, mainly so that my gaze could escape the werewolf's one and the blinding light over us. I noticed a black fist was forming itself from my embiggened shadow on the ground.

" Your shoelaces are undone" I said calmly, almost with arrogance, ignoring his jaw and the drops of saliva that spewed when he spoke .

" That ain't gonna work on me, baby" he growled.

" Too bad," I responded.

The fully formed fist went upwards in a single quick and powerful punch. The uppercut made him lose his grip around my hands and sent him flying up in the air as I landed gracefully on the ground. He crashed violently on the pavement, utterly unconscious, next to some garbage bags. I found that was a rather fitting place for him. I was starting to get the hang of it !

My survival instinct and the end of the adrenaline rush wanted me to flee as fast as I could from this scene, but I just walked calmly to my shelter.

I didn't know how I was so relaxed after all of this, but it was a nice feeling. Something really did happen tonight, finally.

The moon had already primed its descent when I arrived next to an arched bridge made out of colorful glass that looked like it was stolen from a fairy tale. It was one of those places that seemed out of reality, where the weird stuff that only I could see happened. I generally slept under it, the glass made for some amazing views of the starry sky.

Once I layed down in the green grass that I used as a bed, I closed my eyes. It was time for some inner chat.

I fell asleep in a dark ocean.

I stood there for a minute, watching a calm and shady lake surrounded by yellowish pointy borders, then looking at my reflection on the other side. She was laying on the ground, so I decided to do the same.

My body sank in some sort of pure darkness, a soft, freezing and almost liquid matter. However, I didn't feel cold or stuck or afraid. The darkness made me feel the feeble heat inside of me, helped me warm myself during my descent into what I supposed was my mind.

Soon I lost all notion of space and time and, on the other side of this mental place of mine, was sitted the other me. I joined her quickly, my footsteps echoing around.

"So?" I spoke softly while sitting in front of her.

" So... I couldn't introduce myself properly back then, sorry. I'm Axel, your inner self. I guess you want some explanations over what happened earlier ? " she asked, seemingly feeling guilty of the stressful situation we had just experienced.

"If possible, yeah, but first, is there any risk he followed us ? " I asked in return, chills on my back from just imagining the werewolf looking for us in the night, angrier than ever.

Remembering the hideous stench of the beast, it's nasty, ferocious eyes, made me want to make sure he was as far away from me as possible.

She smirked in a sigh, and put her hands on mine. They phased through, but I felt the warmth anyways.

" Boy, have I work to do... " she muttered to herself.

" What ? " I smiled in return.

" Stop being anxious all the time ! We knocked him out pretty hard, he ain't gonna wake up until tomorrow, at least. " she vividly answered.

"Okay ! " I took a deep breath. " Then tell me everything, please". I added, a bit reassured.

She stood up and started walking towards seemingly nothing, so as the completely lost girl I was, I followed her.

Soon, the black lake silently turned into some sort of gallery, where pieces of my memories emerged from the water in the form of almost too realistic statues. They were standing still, like a paused video, and started moving accordingly to what I recalled when we walked past them, except the whole scene was in the third person view. Seeing myself of various ages, frozen in time and staring directly at me felt all kinds of weird.

" So " she started, "what do you know about shadows ?".

"Erm... they're the dark things that we see when there is sun in the sky ? I mean, it's kinda difficult precisely defining what a shadow is. " I responded, hesitant.

"Exactly !" She said firmly. " We cannot exactly be defined. It's like an emotion. Of course there is the scientific explanation, but it doesn't capture the essential. Shadows are a state of being, something deep inside of everyone, or at least that used to be inside of everyone. And that substance is something that some people can fuse with, something people can become."

" What do you mean ?" I asked, puzzled.

She didn't answer, and started walking down a path lit by some small candles that floated on the air, clashing with the omnipresent obscurity. It seemed to go towards the center of the lake, where the light that circled it was invisible, deeper into my mind, I supposed as I followed her. While we walked in silence, I could see and hear various reminiscences of myself, younger and younger as we continued to march.

" Shadows aren't things. They are alive. We can talk, act, think, smile, dream, live. "

She finally said after a stop in front of what seemed to be one of my oldest memories, me running towards something unknown. Strangely, the statue that represented me was superficially cracked, and from the cracks emerged a very faint light. I wanted to ask my makeshift guide about it, but she had already continued talking.

" You see, Shadows are a part of humankind that decided it was better to let them be themselves and continue moving forwards. We are made of what they consider negative: fear, sadness, frustration and so on and so forth. What those blind zombies do not know is that our essence, the darkness in human minds, is what makes things real and moving.

Without the sadness of losing someone dear, there is no beauty in love. No change occurs without the frustration of someone, and the fear of someone else. But that didn't matter to them, they rejected us. And so we left. Now, everything is a cheap counterfeit that doesn't have meaning nor impact, and we roam free." She said with a taint of bitterness in her voice.

Her words seemed to vibrate in me, like some sort of truth I often told myself yet refused to accept. It was true that even normal people always seemed off to me, everything was gray in Cizen after all...

We were still walking and the elegiac aura of the gallery remained organized in a way that made me feel certain we were clearly marching towards a goal.

"But it isn't the case for everyone, is it ? " I objected.

"Touché" She smiled. " Remember all the weird things you've seen since young ? Those monsters, anomalies, or just weird individuals that randomly appeared and vanished without a trace? They are creatures from the shadowrealm, where we live. Some humans are able



to see them too, to see us ! They have lost something in them, and it broke their empty shell enough to make us visible to their eyes. Those are called the shadowseekers. When a shadow and a shadowseeker meet, they can create a bound, and the human becomes a shadowwalker. " she stopped.

" And then ?" I asked, anxious and eager for more intel.

" Hell if I know" she responded in a smirk. " To find those answers, you're gonna have to live it " She responded.

I stopped in my movement and looked up. In front of my dumbfounded eyes was myself, or should I say, newborn myself, crying in a black puddly mist, alone. It took me some time to realize the obvious, but I just couldn't process it.

"I'm a shadow. " I muttered.

"Yep" wasn't exactly the answer I expected.

Yet the truth was standing right in front of me. I, Axel, the average homeless teenager, was in fact a magical entity made up of everything that I judged bad in humans. That was a lot to take in. Nevertheless, I knew there was more coming. Gears in my mind started working until my mouth opened.

" I'm still not a shadow though. You said that we become shadows overtime by fuzing with something, that's what's happening right now ! " I exclaimed.

She looked at me, arms crossed, her silky gray hair sprouting in every direction, a surprised yet amused look on her face. " Eh, I always was a smartass." she sighted. " Yeah, today is the day. You can either choose to fully accept your true nature, or to continue your boring human life, an eternal void of dissatisfaction and unfulfillment slowly eating you out. " she added.

"Yikes, the choice seems easy. Where's the trick ? " I asked.

She laughed " Of course. Becoming a shadow means leaving this world, and you'll never be the same once your body joins his homeland. Shadows lack consistency in mind like in shape. You can never be something or someone for a long time. While humans are empty shells, stuck and blind, we are free souls, and freedom can be a nasty curse. So, what do you choose ? "

It took me like a solid half-second before responding with a smile. This gray and pale world never was for me, I now knew why.

"Where do I sign ? " I asked.

Around me, a dark temple made of seemingly nothing formed itself, a bright red fountain in it's center. The floor, walls and columns looked like black marble, while red veins glowed in the dark spheric roof, giving it the appearance of cooling magma. My reflection stood right next to me. Chills were running through my spine as an imposing aura emanated from this place, yet I felt more and more determined, more and more myself.

I walked slowly to the middle of the room. The red puddle seemed off, like it shouldn't be there. It shined a warm red light that contrasted with everything that I had seen since the beginning of this self journey.

What was it doing in my mind ? What was I supposed to do ?

I stared at it. I could see both my reflection and the one from my guide, my inner self. Who was I ? Why me ? Why now ?

It didn't matter. I put all those questions aside and let my mind go wild, embracing the mess that was my subconscious and closed my eyes.

Soon, my legs were moving on their own. I was inside the fountain, slowly emerging myself in the red water. I felt all my skin burning like I was bathing in molten acid. As adrenaline rushed in my veins my eyes stayed shut, neglecting my will to scream. Soon, I was completely underwater... but continued going downwards, the pain vanished.

My body was a star at sunrise, slowly vanishing. I was sad, I was terrified, I was everything that made me myself. Yet I was more than that. I was sadness, I was terror, I was everything that made someone themselves.

I was a shadow.

When I opened my eyes, I was in a crowded street where demons, ghosts, sad child and everything in between seemed to wander in a tranquil agitation. Everything felt so alive, so original, so real. Axel, or should I say the other me, was nowhere to be seen. However, her presence was still there, in my head.

A pair of living skeletons, dressed as imperial guards with bright red and golden coats and deep blue trousers, rushed towards me. Their weird uniform was badly torn up and let the world see their very pale bones.

One lost his head that fell on the ground and the other one tripped over it, losing its leg. When they reached me, they were only one big pile of bones.

" Welcome back to the shadowrealm, Axel ! " said a muffled voice coming from the pile.

After the voice in my head and I finished laughing, they continued while assembling themselves correctly. A weird way to learn about anatomy, but surprisingly efficient.

" Hi ! I'm Kal ! " said the first one.

" No ! I'm Kal " corrected the second.

" No, you're just a pale copy of the brilliant, excellent and superb in every shape skeletal individual I am ! " responded the first.

Before they could start to argue, I intervened.

" Nice to meet you ! Can any one of you explain to me how the hell do you know who I am and where I would appear ? "

It was hard to know if they were amused or bothered to answer my question from their facial expressions since they had, in fact, no face. Nonetheless, one Kal answered.

" Well, everybody knows ! Your inner self has been here since you were born, and she is quite popular here. The most troublesome child we ever needed to guard, to be sure ! She told us you were about to resonate ! "

" You did ? I asked aguishly at myself. And how should I call you now ? "

" Yeah I did, and call me... " She paused for 3 seconds before continuing. " Well, I'm you, dummy ! It is just a matter of time before we completely fuse... but for now, call me Selenn. "

Our calcium rich friends took me by the hand ( my broken finger seemed fixed ) and made me visit the charming city of Griëffaenscyth, part of me's birthplace, apparently.

Don't worry, I also have no idea how the hell you are supposed to pronounce that. Let's call it Gryth for now.

With Selenn, I spent the rest of the day discovering places of part-of-me's childhood, memories flowed uncontrollably.

Here was where I would've ordered everyday the same ice cold coffee with extra sugar skulls, there was the replica of the abandoned mansion of The lady in White, actually in renovation, the starry sky seemed like a bubble enveloppen the city, since the ethereal

ground of the streets let us see through it, like we were walking in a translucent and smooth surface.

It was a wonderland. A scary as hell wonderland of course, but still, it was amazing. Yet I somehow knew that what I was seeing was just a mere facade, that secrets lurked behind every corner of this unknown land. Everything looked just a bit *too* cheerful for, you know, incarnations of the worst in human nature and literal fears.

Selenn didn't say anything when I asked her about it. " You'll see " was the only answer I got.

Then the moon came.

It appeared in an instant, like it had always been there.

You'd expect the dim light of this giant yellowish sphere to bring a peaceful aura on this already joyful place. It didn't.

The streets suddenly felt so empty and foggy, the Kalls were nowhere to be seen, the silence was so oppressive, and the eyes. The cheerful creatures that roamed freely seconds ago were now terrifying beasts from which I could only imagine the form, judging by their distorted screeches.

The happy ghost children I saw playing in a park filled with black grass were now crying, shrunk next to a wall, and the eyes.

A strange, very pale man with blades in his arms and a decomposing flesh, whose slim, long and sharp appearance was already creepy enough, walked like a disarticulated puppet towards me at disturbingly fast speed and stared at me with its bright red eyes.

Suddenly, a sharp pain in my chest made my heart and stomach feel heavy, the air stopped flowing in my lungs and my skin was pierced by a thousand frozen nails. All I wanted to do was lay down in agony until death slowly took over my crooked body.

I was a mistake, we all were ; I was alone, we all were.

The creature started getting closer and closer and my muscles refused to respond. I was stuck in place as it started smiling, revealing a hideous mouth with only a dozen of very slim, long teeth that looked perfect for eating me alive.

If Selenn wasn't here, I don't know what would've happened. I felt a tingle in the small space between my third and fourth back rib, and by the time I realised what was happening, she took over my body and made us rush to a nearby tavern, escaping by only a little the fatal strike of the creature.

We entered inside the inn and I immediately felt a soft warmth around me, but I was still shivering. Soon, we were seated in front of the bar. Next to us, physical representations of guilts and sorrows, according to Selenn, drank silently to forget themselves.

"Never, ever, look into bogeymen's eyes. " Harshly said Selenn, who had been partially hit by the blast of despair, after we both were able to speak and breathe calmly again.

"Y-yeah" I mumbled while drying my tears. " Why did everything turn so horrible so fast ?" I asked, still in shock.

" Seeing the moon is a very rare phenomenon here. Essential for what we are going to do. When the moonlight comes, that's when you see the purest, harshest shadows." She answered calmly.

After a long time and two hot chocolates, when I was able to stand on my feet without crumbling in tears, we went to Selenn's house.

Well, house wasn't the appropriate term. It was more of a tree house, or a homeless squat between two ebony trees, which was perfectly fine for me. Ironically, it was without one that I felt the more at home.

A crack in the wooden roof made a hole big enough for me to see the moon that still roamed in the sky. Weirdly, I didn't fear her, even after all of that. Rather, her presence was soothing, even poetic in a way. She was the light that only shined when surrounded by darkness, and the one that showed us what was real. Even though that meant seeing a terrifying beast that made you quiver in fear. I always somehow felt connected to her, even before reaching the shadow world. The fact that she had followed me here was reassuring.

Selenn emerged from my head in a black puddle that soon took my exact shape, except in black and white. I really wasn't used to seeing myself like that, I never liked mirrors to begin with, but Selenn taking my form seemed to highlight every single thing I didn't like about myself. My face seemed so boring, with tired eyes and harsh looking skin. My long and blond hair was perfectly white, bland, and it was obvious I hadn't taken a shower in days. My yellow dress turned white, drawing attention to every single stain it had accumulated since I had it. In short, I was a mess. I didn't even want to consider what the space between my third and fourth back rib looked like.

Selenn, after seeing how I stared at her, simply smiled.

"What's the matter?" She gently asked.

"I look... bad," I said before quickly adding "But you don't! I mean, you're so cool and weird and..."

She interrupted me by putting her hands on mine. They still felt through, weirdly, but I felt the warmth anyway.

"Hey dummy, look," She smugly voiced.

In a matter of seconds, her hair got so short it didn't even reach her shoulders, her dress became an oversized hoodie, and her face became way rounder. She was someone else, someone beautiful.

"How?" I asked, agape.

"Fears take many forms, they are ever changing, ever moving. Beauty isn't a moment or a certain shape, it's a whole." she promptly responded. "Plus, you rock the homeless style, girl." She added, and we both started laughing for a while. Selenn quickly fell asleep on the only bed of the house.

I crashed on a ripped apart sofa and quickly fell asleep too, getting scared was an incredibly tiring activity.

However, in a state of semi consciousness, a feeling of doubt appeared and quickly started drowning me. Was all that real? Everything seemed so supernatural and happened so quickly. Even with all the ressurging memories, I still didn't feel at my place here, for now at least.

I decided to blame those doubts on sleep deprivation and closed my eyes.

I was in a crystalline palace. High columns of glass, saphyr, rubis, topaz, emerald and so on were supporting a vaulted roof that radiated from the sheer amount of gold it was made of. I was crawling, trying to hide from something. Sounds of footsteps were echoing in my direction. I stayed still, cutting off my breath.

Only then I realised I was only a 5 or 6 years old child. Hands gripped my shoulders and lifted me up. Somehow, I was giggling.

The next image I saw was a wedding, a cheerful crowd. Then a tombstone. Then only darkness.

I woke up to the voice of Selenn, even more confused than the day before.

" Come on you narcoleptic piece of trash ! Wake up ! "

My response was a very good imitation of a dying whale, which apparently did not satisfy my other self.

" Wake up or I'll bring Miss Muffet here with her billion babies "

That was enough to make me wrench myself up in a split second. I hated spiders. Wait, how did I know who Miss Muffet was ? A ton of memories that didn't feel mine were now germinating inside my poor little lost mind.

Instinctively I put my hand on the lower part of my vertebral column, still feeling *it*.

" Selenn, why are you feeling... " I couldn't end my sentence, the words just didn't come.

" Because I am ? What's with that philosophical crap ? " She smiled, perfectly aware that I didn't mean that.

" You're so energetic, what do you have in mind ? " I asked, still only half awake.

"Well today's Dissonance Day ! There's going to be everybody on the streets, parades, songs, and even ah-ka performers ! "

" I'm going to pretend I know what you're talking about and just roll with it "

She smirked " Yeah, you're getting it "

And so were we, going our gloomy yet merely way to the center of the town, passing by the place I almost got scared to death a few hours ago like it was nothing. I guess traumas weren't really a thing in the land of fears.

As I entered back in my house, still confused about what had happened, I realised the door was locked. " Weird, Mom usually left it open since I always forget my keys, " I thought to myself. Lucky me, this time I hadn't and so I opened the door and headed inside. No one was to be seen, but I could hear a faint scratching coming from upstairs. She was surely outside, buying groceries so Dad could prepare the diner when he finished working.

I climbed the stairs and went to my bedroom, greeted by a strange yet pleasing smell of flowers.

I couldn't wrap my head around what the hell had happened outside. It's not that I couldn't remember, more like the moment I stopped focusing on my memories, they vanished, except for a faint familiar voice asking for me. I tried not thinking too much about it, it was probably just sleep deprivation doing things to my brain. I jumped on my Oh-so-comfy bed, and immediately knew something was off.

Next to my wooden nightstand was a potted plant that looked like a fully shaped tree, with tiny silver leaves, pitch black roots emerging from the dirt and a perfectly blank bark. I grabbed the pot and inspected the mysterious vegetable.

It seemed real, and alive, yet weighed almost nothing. I tore off one of the leaves and the bark became shinier, almost glowy. Directly after, my head became dense and cottony, and I collapsed back on my bed.

I opened my eyes.

My room had been replaced by a luxurious beachside. The rays of the sun made it clear it was a summer afternoon. I could hear joyful music coming from a nearby restaurant and the salted smell of the sea floated in the air. Next to me were friends I didn't really know and I was walking to go somewhere I didn't really care about. What was important was the feel.

I just felt *good*. An awkward mix of feeling like nothing of what you were doing really mattered yet you knew you were able to control every aspect of it. Like a temporary sensation of plenitude, a pleasant illusion, a happy dream. Things that weren't important in the grand scheme of things, but so essential to you. And in the blink of a teary eye, it was gone. I was back in my room, only a few meters to the right, in the direction I was walking in this happy moment. A new leaf grew back in an instant.

After catching my breath, I repeated the experience with a root.

I was in the same place, with the same people. Only I exactly knew where we were going, and who they were. More precisely, what they were.

Chimeras, some lezard-like deadly creatures that fed on human flesh and hid among us, leading me to a trap, to their nest. I was sure that the moment we would turn left, the blond boy would reveal a scaly hand, with venomous stingers at the end of each menacingly long finger. I blinked, reading myself to land back in my room.

But nothing happened. I was still there, walking to my certain death.

My heart was drumming and I had problems breathing normally. I tried pacing my steps, walking slower than them, but I was stuck in my motion. I couldn't move my arms, couldn't see the ground, just walked with a smile hiding my fear, readying myself for my incoming doom.

We turned left, entering a small backstreet covered by black umbrellas, and Danner, his name was Danner, stretched his arm. Once we were all in the shadows of the blazing sun, he revealed his hand, exactly how I imagined it, and pointed it at me.

I tried to answer, to move, to do anything, but I just couldn't. I saw his limb getting closer and closer, and finally, as my blood was icy and my heart had stopped beating, we shook hands.

He then explained to me how much it was nice spending some time with a fellow chimera, and hoped to see me again soon. I realised that my hand was, in fact, similar to his. The other chimeras behind me waved me goodbye, and in the blink of an eye, they were gone. Only then I appeared back in my room, again a bit to the right from my original position.

In front of the tree had appeared a small note, written in golden sap.

" The lights show you an ideal, something to smile about, the good in a situation, they make you focus on yourself. The shadows give you clues, something to fear, the worst of a situation, they make you focus on the rest of the world. Together, they make what is real, together, they form the truth. You'll need to bend them to your will, Alex. Good luck "

I then cried a lot, remembering what happened to my mother... and what my dad had become.

I spent an hour just laying in my bed, looking at the ceiling, the window, one of my favorite books, standing tall next to his fallen brothers inside my small bookshelf, looking at nothing, everything except this damn tree.

I knew there was more to Cizen, more to life, after what had happened to my father, but I never was a fan of it.

Things happened, your world grew, moved, and sometimes you just couldn't follow. Not alone, at least.

I took a last look at the setting sun through the window. Mom would have loved the view here. A small, cozy room with blue wallpaper and filled with books already read a thousand times. How could I have forgotten her ?

I took a last look at the small tree, refraining myself to throw it in the night because of anger, then decided to head downstairs.

Each step I took on the wooden stair resonated in the house, bringing me closer to him. Instinctively, I crossed my arms and started to shiver from the cold vapors that emanated from the kitchen, my head felt heavy and my breath became sharper. I reached the room.

The kitchen smelled like cigarettes and regret. My dad was there, as always. His entire light gray body looked like it was constantly evaporating, letting grayer fumes evade him. His skin had almost disappeared, only a faint ethereal sheet maintained his misty entity in one place. There was so much fog around him that I could barely see the black and white tiled floor and walls.

" Hey there son, how was school ? " he asked calmly, not too excited yet visibly interested.

Small evanacing clouds floated around the table where he was seated. His eyes were hollow and cold, like empty vessels, yet his smile could have felt close and warm, if I didn't know better. \*

Him smiling generally meant he was lost, losing grasp over his own microcosm. He could remain stuck like that for a long time, ever so slowly forgetting everything, everyone, then forgetting himself out of existence if he didn't snap back to reality.

" You know, the usual." I responded, a lump in my stomach. Powerlessness was a slow and insidious pain.

I slowly took a seat , trying not to make too much noise or disturbing the eerie mist around us. " I hate this kind of small talk and you know it. " I sighted softly. " I need to ask you something weird. Like worse-than-usual weird " I added fearfully.

" Go for it... " he responded with a grin, various colorful fumes coming from his mouth. " We already had the "bees and the flowers" discussion... cannot get worse than that !" He bursted a laugh that soon was echoed by mine.

The bastard always was a funny guy. I chose my words carefully before fleshing out my thoughts.

"Yeah , nothing like that. Just picture this : Ever since the accident, our lives have been getting weirder and weirder and, I don't know how to explain it but, I guess I'm just lost. I thought I figured everything out and then boun, it's just like when Mom died again."

I stayed silent for a moment, holding my tears and my grudge towards... I didn't even know what. After a deep, cold smoke-filled breath, I continued.

" Where do you go when you're lost, Dad ? "

For a moment, it looked like he wasn't even listening. He blinked twice, and when I was about to leave my chair, his entire body sparked. I couldn't contain a smile, because that meant I had impacted him.

He took a deep breath, inhaling the remains of his already started cigarette. He exhaled slowly, giving a mystical aura to his already gray skin, hair and beard. He then started.

" That's a good summary of life you just gave me. But disregard...Give things time. Some things aren't meant to be understood directly, others you cannot accomplish today. Move with them. It'll all make sense one day, you'll succeed at *something*, and if you don't, at least you had a journey. Change will happen, good or bad, that isn't something we chose.... it really isn't... However, you have the choice to embrace it, or fear it. And I think you had your load of fear... "

After that, a small silence installed itself. He looked at me right in the eye, his translucent glare entering mine. I knew it was just a way for him to not shift, to stay calm, to keep a bit of consciousness for the time being, but I liked to think it was also his way of telling me that he cared. He soon shook his head and continued.

" You know, the job of a father isn't to create a perfect son, even less so when you're a trashy ex-human being like myself. It's to help and to know things. One thing I know is that I'm proud of you. The other is that you're capable of doing things, be it out of fear or to achieve a dream, that's on you. Just... never stop doing things, never stop continuing walking forward. I stopped and-" he coughed a bit, his eyes went from light gray to pitch black, he was starting to lose it, the mist was getting colder and colder.

"Yeah, I know. Thank you, really. You can go now, I promise I won't lit the house on fire."

He stayed there, a smile on his face, staring at the void like he usually did, like nothing ever happened, only now he seemed a bit more transparent and his eyes were completely yet gently lost. He'd probably be shaken up and snap back during the night.

God I hated... that. To be just a shadow of yourself, of your past, and to be sometimes, in bursts of lucidity, conscious of it... just thinking about it chilled my blood. Especially the loss of memory, and of grasp over reality that came with it.

He didn't really believe anything he ever said. He didn't really believe in me, he just couldn't believe in something he forgets exists. . However, he did everything to motivate me, to guide me. And he did that to convince me, but also himself, that we were worthy of something, that in the end, it would all be alright. He could use his talent in speech in malicious ways but used it to help people around him, even though he wouldn't even remember it, knowing that someday he'll disappear completely. I admired that, to be just a poor, kind, lost liar, fading with time in a mist of sorrows vanishing in the wind.

A few weeks passed after that day. I started questioning myself a lot, and had some dark realisations.

I was empty. We all were here. I smiled in front of the TV, but my joy disappeared the second I turned it off. A bad grade was a momentary sadness that vanished in less than a day. Nothing ever really remained.

Everything felt so artificial, so cold and gray. Empty. It was so depressing knowing that even if my dad was just a phantom of the past, not entirely here, just an ethereal figure, he was still way more real than everybody else.

This existential dread continued ravaging my newly-opened mind. Who was I ? The sum of everything everybody did to me. Why was I here ? Because my parents had a child before my mom died. What was I supposed to do with my life ? Well, that's the interesting part. Because even with all this, I didn't really feel sadness, sorrows, nothing. I realized I couldn't, nobody could, because we were incomplete. We could only see the flying embers of a fire, the snowflakes of a blizzard. We didn't feel, we pretended.



Except I had the Tree. With him I \*felt\* things. Sadness, joy, fear, anger, excitement, contentment. Each time was different. With the leaves, I could feel real emotions, and with the roots I could understand what was missing in me, in the world. It felt like a never ceasing explosion inside me, making me think of every futile sensation like it was a crucial heartbeat of my new life. The life of a traveler.

You see, I didn't have visions. When consuming a leaf or a root, I was transported to a place. It seemed like the two faces of a coin. Different in every shape or form, yet identical. I called it Kathreptis. I knew that something awaited me there. Something important.

I tried mixing things up, and lived many scenarios that taught me so much about everything that this world had lost.

I was, in order, a mermaid, a depressed teenager, a lazy cat, and a version of myself, sitting on a chair, telling my own future. That last one was really weird.

However, using the tree had consequences. Whispers in my head. Telling me undecipherable gibberish that made me feel worse and worse about myself. They knew I was empty, and used that void to take even more from me. But I held still. I needed to.

I started wandering around the gray world, my world. It was a thrilling experience, but truly disturbing. With my newfound knowledge, it was like seeing everything in diagonal.

Picture our lives like a long and gloomy tunnel that we go through eternally. It's a straight line, every action did not have consequences over your global path. That is, in my world of course. I suppose changes and unpredictability were too dangerous to be kept in this society. Well, I was able to see these tunnels like an ant gallery. With the light-leaves, I could imagine a path and see where it went with the shadow-roots.

This newfound aptitude made me realize how small I was, yet how big could my actions, my true acts, change a life we never had.

I needed to use my emptiness as a way to stay distant from everything, to control my inner explosion, to understand this secret world I was uncovering.

The great part of living in a fake world is that most people can't notice true things. They would always find an excuse, a way to reason with what they could not understand. That means that while I was in school, I could use the Tree to navigate Kathreptis. It was a good way to understand a bit more about everyone, and my newfound powers.

Because yeah, I had the realization I was the only one that the leaves or the roots seemed to affect, which left me with a bittersweet sensation. I hated being alone, but I was certain I was getting close to \*something\*.

The wisps weren't very noisy during the day, so I used this free time to rest a bit mentally. I found out by accident that I could sleep in Kathreptis. A dreamless, resting sleep that I didn't know I craved deeply until recently.

So when the classes were boring, or useless, I took an otherworldly nap. Sometimes I woke up to a deserted school, after all the classes were done.

One day I woke up in total darkness. I first thought I reached the sinister side of the Mirror world, but the ten roots were still in the potted tree, as were the leaves. It was actually the middle of the night, and a quick glimpse through a window let me see the full moon in a starry sky.

I started walking down the hallways, wondering how I overslept so much, when a weird sound came from behind me. A sort of mix between chanting and whistling that would have been beautiful if it wasn't as morbidly creepy. My instincts were shouting at me to run away

as fast as I could in the opposite direction of the sound, but I was attracted to it in a weird way.

A light flashed through my eyes and the halls, with a terrifyingly innocent giggle. I rushed to it and quickly reached a dead end. However, I knew dead ends didn't truly exist, and as I teared a leave from my vegetable partner, a luminous path awaited in front of me. I followed it carefully, never touching the darkness surrounding me, until I was outside, in the school's gardens. There, she awaited me.

She had a long and cristaline dress, ranging from deep blue to emerald green, golden hair that lighted her mother-of-pearl face, and some deep, transparent eyes that showed a web of dark thread knotting everlastingly. Her soul, I deduced.

She was lying on the ground, looking at the sky like I didn't exist, yet her smile felt so close and personal, inviting me to go with her. I accepted without perturbing the silence that installed itself, and in a matter of seconds, I was next to her, still having no clue over what was happening. She talked, but it didn't felt like it, like the question was just floating in the cold air of the night and decided to enter my ears almost by accident. "Aren't you afraid of what's to come on your journey ?". "No, I've never been good at being afraid of the right things," I answered as softly as I could.

Her smile widened, and she turned her head next to mine. " What's a star ?" she asked rapidly.

I took my time to answer, and just like my dad, took a deep breath before going for the less obvious thing to say. " It depends on what you want a star to be."

She looked back at the sky, her smile was gone. "A friend."

" Then give a bit of light to someone surrounded by darkness. That's where you'll find the brightest stars" I muttered.

She nodded slowly, then put her hand on my chest. "Thank you. It is true that shadowseekers are wise." She stopped, hesitant, then continued " I shouldn't be here"

"Neither should I " I smirked. "I should fully go through Kathreptis, and discover where it leads, but I'm scared. Scared to do everything and still fail, scared to not be able to help those who need me, scared to lose myself in all this shit."

She stared at me, her eyes piercing mine. " And I should be in another world, especially not one where it is possible to talk to you, doing everything to hide from a danger I do not understand. But you know what ? " She pointed to the sky " We've been watching some special dead sparks for a long time, and I think we should have five minutes of egoism." And so we kissed, because we shouldn't.

Her name was Selenn.

We spent all night talking, like we had known each other since forever. However, I couldn't tell you a word of what we said.

It was like sentences were fusing as our little bubbles merged together. We spoke because we felt understood, because we knew that, for this night only, there was someone in our lives that seemed to be able to care like we did, to feel what we felt, to see what we saw.

Our sentences didn't matter, it was the essence, the feelings, the dreams hidden inside of them that we conveyed. We were feeling complete.

As every dream, this all ended too soon and in the blink of an eye, when the first rays of the sun showed themselves, the last things I felt were the warmth on my lips and the cold

determination in my heart. She was gone like she appeared, and I just took a last look at the stars, feeling as lost as always, hoping she would find her.

I spent the rest of the day at home, thinking about her, about what we said, what we meant. I deeply hoped I'd see her again after my journey, but I knew that this night, where I lived, was a one-in-a-lifetime experience.

I tried to focus on the task that awaited me. If anything, this exchange had given me an answer in the sea of questions I drowned in. I needed to go through Kathreptis, something there awaited me.

Before I went, I decided to say a farewell to my father. He'd probably forget it of course, but I just couldn't leave like this, the whispers would destroy me.

I headed downstairs, to find him seated at the same table, the same burnt cigarette in his mouth, exactly the same as the day our world collapsed.

" Hey, how was school ? " he asked calmly, not too excited yet always visibly interested. It wasn't the first time I realised that he was stuck in this hellish cycle, but it hurt me each time a bit more. I turned sick seeing this ethereal aura, this putrid smoke and what my father had become. It was to help him that I kept going on, and so, without even looking at his lost eyes, I just muttered a goodbye and left.

I waited until 22h22. I never was superstitious, but my mom was and she made me promise that when I'd attempt something important to me, I should start at this hour so that luck would be granted. I had no idea what awaited me there, so I decided a bit of luck couldn't hurt.

When I took a leaf or a root, I didn't fully enter Kathreptis, it was more like sliding in it's edges. To fully exit my world and enter this realm, I needed to take both at the same time and open my mind to lights and shadows. Basically, lights and shadows were extremes, and I needed to become the middle ground.

I teared off the ten leaves and roots at the same time, and just felt my soul elevating in a grey corridor. I walked through it slowly, not letting my thoughts nor my body wander around. I needed to stay focused, keep heading forward. I knew that after each step, a truth about something or someone awaited me if I turned right. All my answers would be answered. If I turned left, I could dive into a pleasant dream, maybe see Selenn again. I would feel complete again, maybe forever.

But the time of questions and sweet dreams was over. I didn't need to know everything, I didn't need to feel everything, I needed to move forward where destiny awaited me.

END OF ACT TWO

" A shiver down your spine, a demon in your dreams, the tears of a loved one. We have many ways of being described, and no shape bounds us. But today is a special day, a day of celebration, a day where sadness can smile !

For the longest time, we were considered as black stains on a pure, white world. The Humans, they neglected us, rejected us ! And so we left those now empty shells, and by doing so, the whole world was divided ! The shadow realm formed itself, and with it our independence. This day was the Dissonance. Free from the lights and the human shackles, we now thrive as a society. Everyday, I can see bogeymen terrorizing those who didn't accept having dark thoughts. I see shadows and ghosts, I see sadness and anger, I see movement. So much so, that every night, some shadowseekers awake, searching for the

truth that has been taken from them. We are recreating the world ! I am proud of our nation and I am proud of you, my fellow subjects.``

The whole crowd cheered as the Queen of Shadows, seated herself back to her onyx throne. She was wearing a pristine grey dress, and clouds of black fog spiraled around her. And even from far away, I could see the madness in her ruby eyes.

Selenn was speechless.

We had spent the day visiting the carnival looking city, enjoying some sugar skulls, happy in our tranquil journey, until a group of cloaked men appeared in the streets. At first, I thought that they were the Ah-ka performers my soulbounded friend had talked to me about, but she gave me a concerned look.

Suddenly, a huge marquee formed itself from a black cloth, surrounding the entire city. The inhabitants seemed surprised, but mostly excited, like they knew what was coming, which made me think about how great that feeling is. Surely the only thing that I missed from my life in the human world. And even there, I still wondered about some things..

Selenn stayed silent, but I could sense her anxiety. Something was really wrong, we were in danger. Kal and their brother, who weren't far away from us, started running towards Selenia and I, shaking us so strong I was sure they were the ones that would make us fuse together.

" The-The lady ! She's there ! " Said Kal.

" She wasn't supposed to be here ! " added their brother.

" What do we do ? " they asked in unison, both equally panicked.

" I have no idea, this wasn't supposed to go that way. " responded Selenn.

"What wasn't supposed to go that way? " I asked, visibly frustrated that they had been hiding something from me.

But before she could answer, two cloaked women rushed towards us. They seemed to bend the shadows around them, like Selenn did with my body the night I was attacked. We tried to strike back, Kal tearing one of his arms and using it like a sword and Selenn losing physical form to enter my body, but we got knocked out in an instant.

We woke up in a cell, the Kalls weren't anywhere to be seen. In front of us was the performing ground of the merqueen, and on the tribunes we could see the Queen of shadows.

She continued her speech.

" But now, let's get to the fun part. The part you've all been waiting for ! A mixture of dance and murder, Ah-ka ! But not only that, because today, I have the privilege to say that the Rival of the Ah-ka, will be my own daughter !"

The crowd cheered again.

Before I could ask any of the thousands of questions bubbling in my head, the gates of our cell opened. Selenn gave me, for the first time since I knew her, an afraid look. She clearly had no control over what was about to happen, I could see the fear up in her eyes. And when a beeing of fear is terrified, you know bad stuff is coming up.

Nonetheless, she walked out, and so did I. We reached the center of the arena under the applause of the crowd, and she dissolved in a black fog that entered my shadow, and then my mind.

Around us came, one by one, five dark cloaked men and women, shadows. The performing ground was unusually bright, blinding even. The shadows revealed meter long metal staffs, and hold them firmly with both hands at the extremities. Silence slowly came.

"Now would be an excellent time to tell me what the hell is going on ! " I told Selenn.

" There's no time Axel. Just.. let me take control and observe. I promise I'll be more than glad to explain everything after, but I need to focus now. "

And just like that, I felt my conscience leave my body, and another one enters it. I saw myself take a deep breath, but didn't feel the fresh air in my lungs. Was that what being a shadow felt like ?

Was that what was awaiting me, once Selenn and I would be just one ?

She stood there, circled by the cloakers. At the ends of their staff, a black flame slowly grew but instead of producing light, it seemed to absorb it. The arena was ever so slowly getting darker, colder.

A slow music started playing from the ground itself, only to be interrupted by the huge slam of a drum. At this exact moment, the cloaked man at our left elegantly jumped towards me(us? However, you get the point), and tried a vertical slam with the burning staff. I wanted to dodge, but I couldn't move a muscle and was at the mercy of Selenn's actions. She waited until the last second before phasing through the strike. However, I could sense an intense burn in our left lung. Selenn didn't seem to notice, or at least care, and proceeded to quickly spin and high kick the chest of our assailant, who smiled and stepped back. The burn seemed to vanish.

The music continued, then was another big drum slam, then another attack. This time, a circular strike directed to our right ankle. Another dodge, another burn and another counter attack, at the exact same place where we felt the heat.

This dark ballet went on for a full circle, each strike having some beauty to it. It was starting to get hard to see clearly more than a few meters in front of us, the crowd had disappeared. After the last cloaked man had received a knee up his stomach and retreated, they seemed to start an ominous chanting as the music and their flames grew stronger. The only word I could recognise was Ah-ka , but the tone in their voice made it clear this was a war song. I also recognised the voice of the Queen, who seemed way too eager singing.

Selenn just took another deep breath, like she had been in apnea this whole time. However, both her arms seemed to extend, to grow surrounded by darkness, and when the chanting finished, two fully formed dark and razor-sharp sets of claws had replaced our hands.

The cloakers, spinning their staff then entering a combat position, seemed to also bend darkness, albeit in a smaller degree, and make it take various shapes.

One last drum slam, and the fight started.

We dodged the first blows, and the claws cut through most of the dark armour the cloakers wore. Soon however, they started to keep their distance, using the range of their burning staff. The claws became large spiked tentacles that we used as whips. "Ever changing". However, I could feel that we were starting to tire out, and our vision was almost irrelevant since we were now submerged by darkness. To make things even worse, it seemed like the more the environmental darkness grew, the weaker our strikes were, and the amount of obscenity we could bend grew shorter and shorter. The three remaining cloakers however didn't seem affected, and their attacks continued.

The Ah-ka continued, and through sheer will, Selenn knocked out one cloaker by grabbing his staff, and with some amazing finesse, making it go 180° directly to his head, in rhythm with the pace of the music that continued to play.

Only two remained, but we were now completely blind. There was only darkness, and our body was covered in bruises and burns.

Suddenly emerged from the dark the body of a teenager. Something felt strangely familiar in his smile, the excited look on his face, the pen he was holding. I noticed Selenn was crying, and I wanted to do the same. I felt like someone had ripped open a wound I had spent too much time closing, like a broken nostalgia.

So focused on trying to decipher this unexpected sadness, we almost didn't realise that the teen had left his place for a dancing cloaker, the smile had turned grin and the pen had turned spear. It fuzed only a few millimeters next to our head.

Selenn was shattered. I could feel her dread, her tiredness. Lost in this obscur place, she fell lost, alone. I tried to speak to her, without success. The glass wall she had put between our consciousnesses was too large.

But I continued.

I screamed, and as the drums of the Ah-ka played, I slammed every inch of my will against it. Again and again. I knew that both the cloakers were readying their final strike, but it didn't matter.

I continued, until I saw a crack, then another. In front of us I could barely see the onyx blade that was starting to take shape, formed by the darkness of our two foes.

After a final push, the wall broke and I could regain control of my body, but I didn't. It wasn't my duty, it wasn't my dance.

I just stood there, in this ethereal place we call the mind, and looked at Selenn still in shock, seated on the ground. I gently approached her and put my hand over hers. They phased through but I knew she could feel the warmth anyways. She looked at me in the eyes, I saw a spark and ,wiping away her tears, she smirked and wrenched herself up.

She regained possession of me and dodged with a graceful spin the blade that headed for our head. However, I knew she couldn't win like this. The cloakers were invisible in the darkness, their ritual movements almost making them merge with it, and we would tire out completely at some point. Our deaths were inevitable, there wasn't anything we could do. But I refused. I refused that something like this could happen. The mental wall had been broken and I was swimming in Selenn's mind. I could only glimpse through some quick visions, but her overwhelming determination resonated with my soul. She had dreams, passions, ideas. She had so much to do, and she believed it would happen. That will, it *\*inspired\** me.

All of a sudden, our right hand turned white and started to shine, illuminating our surroundings with radiance. The light grew faster and faster, repulsing the darkness and bliding the cloakers. The black flames seemed to die out, our wounds repaired themselves.

Selenn rushed to the cloakers and with two swift strikes, made them eat the dirt. She then looked directly at the Queen, pointing at her with our newfound shining limb and, out of breath, gave her a menacing grin. The music stopped.

I regained control over my body, but Selenn stayed in my mind, not taking physical form.

The crowd was silencious as the Queen of shadows stood up and started to speak, her cold voice echoing in every direction.

"Ah-ka. The art of telling a story through battle. The harder the fight, the more important the story. Today, we saw a shadow that could harness light. Today, we saw the creation of men. Truly marvelous, my dear."

The crowd cheered like never before, and we faint from tiredness.

I knew I was asleep and dreaming when I opened my eyes and saw a huge palace, with long spires and marble walls, just in front of me. I watched people entering and leaving, flowers blooming in the gardens on a sunny day and the face of a man that seemed strangely familiar.

However, in mere seconds, I saw the palace crumble, the ground quake and cries of panic from a mass of people with crystal clothes leaving in blinding rays of light.

What was more surprising was the fact that, when I woke up, the ruins of the palace, now made of obsidian, were shining in the moonlight. We were on a very precisely edged out steel chariot, in front of us the two skeletal brothers sat. Of course, I had no idea if they were awake or not, and decided not to bother. Way too many questions were wandering in a cluster inside my mind, and I really felt tired. Selenn was sleeping, her head on my shoulder. The road ahead of us seemed like a broken snake, the large curves we were crossing suddenly making sharp turns and making the grey steel our vehicle was made of squeak. I had no idea where we were but the dizziness in my head and the urge to go back to sleep confirmed to me that not much time had passed since the Ah-ka. I also realised that I felt more attached to my gloomy self.

I'd never realised the glass wall between us, the amount of distance between our supposedly mixed consciousness. It then came back to me that she had been hiding her royal blood, our royal blood, to me. How much did I really know?

To be fair, I did not tell her the small part of me was missing, just between my third and fourth back ribs. I could still feel it aching after my unexpected radiance, of which I still had no clue how it happened. What the hell was going on?

Interrupting me in my thoughts, the chariot abruptly stopped in a shriek. I then heard behind my back the terrifyingly imperious voice of the queen.

"Get them in her room, and if my daughter wakes up, tell her I'm fondly proud of her. We'll meet when she's fully restored, onyx slashes can be sooooo painful you know?" Her following laugh made me shiver, like a thousand ice needles struck my skin.

The Kals stood up, and I instantaneously closed my eyes. They took Selenn and me, and carried us for a long time. We then entered a room and they laid us in what seemed like a luxurious bed. When I was sure we were alone, I mustered the courage to open my eyes. Selenn was still deeply asleep, and was just left here, letting my ideas wander for a bit.

I kept moving forward. For hours, maybe days, I continuously walked towards the mysterious goal that I somehow knew awaited me. One good thing about Kathreptis is that when you're in it, there's no sensation of thirst or hunger, so that wasn't an issue, and the bag I carried wasn't too heavy. However, the whispers that I heard every time I used the Tree were crushing my mind with incoherent gibberish. Their words were indecipherable, but the message was crystal clear, I was doing this for nothing.

Nevertheless, I steadied my pace and kept advancing in the corridor until I reached what appeared to be a circular room. Contrary to the rest of the ethereal fabric of the world that made navigating through it almost impossible, the room seemed made of a gray, porous texture.

Inside, a simple mirror stood in the center, and two opposing paths branched right and left. The ground was made of huge tiles that somehow felt detached, like they weren't supposed to be placed this way. I walked slowly to the mirror and directly felt the wisps shut up, leaving

me with a sensation of freedom I didn't know I craved. I sat in front of it for a while, just letting my mind wander for a bit, looking at my reflection.

The mirror was made out of a dark crystal, cold to the touch and beautifully polished. It was at least twice as high as me, and quite large.

My hair had turned from dark to gray-ish, a consequence from using the leaves and after using the roots, my eyes harboured a deeper brown. Curiously, the Tree that I put on the ground to rest my arms had no reflection.

I looked afraid, exhausted, which seemed normal in the current circumstances, but the lack of determination in my smile made me realize I wasn't looking at myself.

My reflection stood up, waved at me with a nasty smile, and then left the mirror. I stood back in fear, trying to focus and ignore the wisps that took advantage of the situation to continue their assault.

" Hey ! I'm Kath ! " said my reflection in an eccentric and cheerful tone.

" Hi. " I answered fearfully, trying to comprehend the situation.

The room started to slowly move, like pieces of a puzzle rearranging themselves. I instinctively wrenched myself up to face the creature from the mirror after putting the tree in my bag.

" Looks like you're about to face a choice ! How exciting ! But you're not ready ... No ! Not enough yourself ! " Kath continued, materialising a glass sword.

" What are you even talking about ? Not enough yourself ? " I replied quickly, trying to keep my balance in the moving tiles of the ground.

Without another word, Kath rushed at me, sword first, and I can only thank my reflexes for dodging the strike that nearly cut my head off.

The platform I was on started moving left, circling around the mirror and making it hard to not fall on the ground. Kath who was now at the opposite side of the room, simply smirked while planting his blade in a wall. Slowly and without changing their pace, the tiles morphed themselves into what I could only describe as a carousel of mirrors.

Now, when the last time you took a look at a mirror -which was a few seconds ago- an entity materialised itself to try to kill you, you'd be careful not to look at another one in the same room right ? Well, you're smarter than me.

I peered right into the center of my tile, and saw my mom. Her simple smile and blue eyes were enough to make my heart ache, and if adrenaline wasn't rushing in my veins, I'm sure I would have sobbed. She had been an essential part of my life, and all the memories I can recall involving her were sparks of joy. Except one.

That's why I wasn't surprised when clouds of smoke emerged from under me, making me trip and land on another tile, closer to Kath.

" Hi, dad " I said with a hint of fear covered in fake confidence.

He looked younger, a bit more muscular, less beard, but way more broken. His eyes were pure blank, his cigarette seemed to just have been lit up. Seeing him, seeing my mom whose smile had disappeared, I definitely sobbed.

However, I couldn't focus on what I was feeling, because I knew what was coming. The tile in which he appeared stopped moving.

Now, I know I've never been precise about my father's condition, but he is a phantom. A human that, in pure shock, slowly loses himself and becomes an empty husk. However, they



can benefit from their ethereal condition. For example, stealing the vital forces of your child, consciously or not.

That's exactly what he did. Slowly lifting his hand, various fumes swirling around it, he closed it firmly and my vision directly felt like the resolution of an 80's computer. My respiration was painful and it was impossible for me to stand up. Like 12-years-old me, the first time it happened, I was panicked at the sensation of my energy depleting. But a glimpse at my bag, just in my hand reach made me realise I wasn't the same as my younger self.

Ignoring the pain, the bad memories and the cold stare of my dad that mimicked the icy grip I felt on my heart, I stood up. I could see his smile widening with the flow of energy he was vampiring from me, but I stood up and faced him.

The grip kept getting stronger, I now started to see flashing white dots as my vision got blurry. I smiled, I got used to seeing stars.

I reached my father's tile, trying not to get nauseous from the circular movements, his mist circled around me, the portrait of my mom was still on the other side of the mirror. I could see in his eyes how lost he was, and I hoped he could see in mine how sorry I was about to be. See, phantoms aren't meant to be, they're a phase some people go through before either dying or being reborn and continuing a new and happy life. And for that to happen, they need to face the reality they're exiting. God I hated myself.

I gently took my father's head, and made him look at the ground, where my mother stood, dead.

" She's gone... I know you want to help, but you can go join her, I promise I'll be fine. " I whispered softly.

I could describe to you how his eyes became a deep blue, how he seemed real again just an instant before he vanished completely into dust, how I'll never forget his " Thanks " that would haunt my mind forever, but I won't. He was gone, and I felt my energy entering back into my body, I couldn't let the rest matter.

Kath slowly clapped in the back, his laugh as sharp and cold as his sword.

" We are what hurt us the most " he said while jumping from one tile to another, closing the gap between us. " But I'll hurt you pretty bad too " he continued joyfully.

I grabbed my bag. My mental state was as stable as a Vietnam veteran in front of a firework festival. The whispers continued their usual assault, and as I was about to break, to just let Kath kill me like I killed my father's reflection, I stared at the room one last time, and I realised something.

Each time something good happened in my life, a hint of darkness appeared. But in this land of mirrors, where was the opposite, where was the light that would shine when surrounded by darkness ?

I was.

In my bag, a weird cristal that layed in my room, the whispers had made me take it.

Memories flowed in my mind. The Shard.

The whispers were now an obnoxious buzzing. I rushed to my bag and took the dagger like cristal that started radiating. Kath was getting dangerously close to me.

The dagger started elevating itself in the air, a dizzying sensation envelopping my body that was now heating up.

Silence as I took it back.

The whispers disappeared. I saw the world through a golden lense, and saw one, two, hundreds of fireflies swirling around me. The whisps. They blocked Kath's strike, the glass sword stuck in mid-air, and my now fully formed dagger stabbed him in the heart.

He simply smiled.

" Finally yourself... make the good choice " He whispered before shattering into a billion glass shards.

" I will, " I answered kindly.

In the room that got back to its initial position, the mirror was now broken, and both doors that lead to opposite corridors started to either shine so bright their shadow disappeared or absorb the surrounding light.

I stood in the center, trying to recover from what had just happened. I was breathing heavy spikes, my muscles were hardened steel, to put it simply, I wasn't really a sports guy and being chased to the death by your killer reflexion is quite tiring. However, I took that time of rest to think a bit.

The lights were the ones who saved me and they were linked to Selenn, in a way or another. I looked at the fireflies who seemed more than happy to use my short and dirty hair as their new nest. I could sense their magic, how they seemed weirdly off by being so beautiful and detached. They buzzed joyfully after that though, so they must have liked me calling them beautiful, and they could read my mind. They also were a product of the light, like the shard who summoned them.

They suddenly entered back in my dagger, which took its crystal-like appearance. Useful tricks when even a mirror can be a deadly enemy.

The mirror, Kath, had asked me to make a choice. I needed to choose between the two corridors. The light had made my life so much easier, it had given me answers and tools and Selenn, it seemed like the easy choice.

That's why I took my tree, put it back in my bag and walked calmly to the dark corridor. If what needed to be done, what awaited me, was easy to find, I wouldn't have been here. I walked for a small time in the black corridor, circled by stars. The night soothed me, so much so that before I could realise it, I fell asleep in a transparent ground.

I opened my eyes to the center of Ebenia, capital of the shadow world. At least, that was what the sign said. In front of me, a huge city that seemed like the perfect mix between a metropolis and a 14th century kingdom, with metros going through chapels and some skyscrapers that paled compared to the gigantic broken palace that was besieged in the middle of the town, circled by dark oak trees.

I was in the middle of a street, and at my right were what seemed like a gray aberration, looking like the unholy birthing of a praying mantis and a zombie (I somehow felt like I should not cross its gaze), that simply chilled, sitted in a bench, talking to what I could only assume was a shadow, with pure darkness flowing from her back, a long cloak covering almost every inch of her ethereal body.

They seemed excited, and I decided to pay closer attention to their chat.

" I tald ya mate, onyx shadows are the purest of 'em all. Don't need no light to use 'em, and they don't only hurt the flesh, but also the mind. That's why we Cloakers are the only ones that can use 'em, it's dangerous stuff ya know ? " Said the shadow while nonchalantly making a small pitch black toothpick appear from her hand and using it.

" You will still get your ass kicked by the Princess." Responding to the gray thing in a laugh. The shadow tried to respond, but her eyes met mine, and she simply smiled while standing up. " Well eh? Guess the Queen was right, the Seeker's here. Go get'em ! " She ordered her disgusting friend.

The thing stood up, and apart from being very tall, like at least twice my height, it was also very fast, and before I could even realise it, it's face was just in front of mine, eye to eye. I could sense in it's two red balls the huge amount of fear that it tried to send me, how I should feel cold, ashamed, shrieked in a ball, but I also saw in them my reflection, and my golden eyes. I simply grinned " Fear won't work I'm afraid".

" But that will ! " said the cloaker, which was now behind me before knocking me out in a fast jab to the neck with a steel rod.

I fell to the ground, unconscious.

I just layed in the bed for a long period of time, not really thinking about anything but still processing what had just happened. It was clear that I was missing something, and not just a body part, and the wall between Selenn and I, even though weaker, was back up.

She finally woke up, and looked at the room with a bemused face while standing up. She undressed herself, revealing nothing but an ink of darkness that was almost invisible next to the obsidian wall. She looked at me and gave me a half teasy half embarrassed smile before putting on a dark blue dress and tossing me a yellow one.

" Yeah, why bother maintaining a human-like body for the not normally visible parts ? Plus, bras are a pain in the ass. " she quickly said while I was dressing up, making sure not to show her my back. I could not argue with that, and the moment I was about to ask if shadows took showers, I realised we both seemed perfectly clean, even though I was certain dust from a dirty blood filled arena was a very bad shower gel. I actually did not recall the last time I took a shower. I shrugged that thought out, guessing the Shadowrealm was a weirdly hygienic Queendom.

" Care to explain to me where the hell we are ?" I grumbled, still saddened by the feeling of being lied to by myself.

" In Ebenia, the capital of the Shadowrealm. We're in the royal palace. My room, or ex-room, if you want the details. Now, the Queen is waiting, and unless you think staring at my non-existent boobs is worth more than answers, I think we should go talk to her. " answered back Selenn, the usual grin on her face, but with a new tint in her gray eyes.

" Let's go then ! " I shouted, impatient.

We exited the room and while walking through the halls that seemed to go on forever, I could always sense a weird feeling of familiarity inside this huge castle. Just thinking about it, I could feel the space between my third and fourth back ribs tingle.

We finally reached a huge circular room, with of course at its center the Queen, in an impetuous throne, waving at us. I had never realised how tall she truly was, the aura she emitted was enough to make everyone around her seem as small and insignificant as possible, but she was clearly more than two meters high.

The doors behind us close, leaving Selenn and I alone with her mother.

" I wanted to congratulate you for your performance, sweetly, truly amazing ! " Said the Queen with her ever so crazy voice that made my skin shiver from her dangerous softness.

" Thanks." retorted arshly Selenn, visibly uneasy.

" Oh, how rude of me. Your friend here still doesn't know the ins and outs of your cruel plans, care for me to explain ? " Added the terrifying monarch.

Before part-of-me could explain, she stood up and, in a single swift movement, made two tentacles emerge from her palms and pulled us to her while making a huge cage appear on top of us, attached to the ceiling, an imprisoned boy inside, clouded in mist.

" ALEX! " Screamed Selenn.

" You see, my daughter could have been marvelous. I trained her every day of her as insignificant as a hope life to be. But she refused. She never, never became who she was meant to be, who I wanted her to be. And when a shadowseeker crossed her gaze while she was doing one of my errands in the disgusting human world, SHE LEFT ME. " she shouted pure anger in her demonic voice.

Black flames were ranging in her eyes.

" But, but, when that bastard asked her to go find the light world with him and they found that damn Materialization, he fell right into my arms, and she came back crawling. " She spotted before adding horrendously calmly " Shadows need light to exist. Pilling up darkness leads to a fatal end and as a ruler, I can't have that. So I proposed, in exchange for the freedom of the Shadowseeker, that my dear successor found me a light source. And Axel did it, and here you are."

I swear I could hear my world shattering at the exact same frequency as the invisible wall breaking, and my true memories flowing back. Axel was a shadow, I had no part of me. I was Selenn, the broken Light.

A light. The sum of every dream, ambition and positive emotion someone could have, a personification of hopes and dreams. That was who I was meant to become, that was what I failed to be.

I was Selenn, the Princess of Lights. We all lived in the castle, and we made humans see the good in the world they created.

But then it shattered. Some people cannot hope, others suffer too much from dreaming and in the end, we never were enough to fight the darkness in every mind.

So it all shattered. In an instant, after seeing another human fall, another happy end disappear, the ultimate Separation, a part of me broke as the palace crumbled. Even under intensive healing, I lost the space between my 3rd and 4th back ribs and became incomplete.

I was unable to heal the slashes of the past, unable to open a way to the future of so many people. Darkness had escaped, but grayness, void, the lack of emotion, they all remained. What is a dream when there are no dreamers ? What happens to hopes in a hopeless world ?

What can a star do if there is no night ?

I lacked answers as much as I lacked meaning. The other lights had left, but I couldn't. I was alone. Alone and lost.

I tried, tried so many times to help, to enlighten, to be what I always wanted to be, what others needed me to be. But nobody fulfills a broken dream, and the pain they inflicted on them crystallized on me.

But one day, while roaming on earth, I sensed someone special. Someone as broken as me, but with a smile on his face. He used the feeling of void inside him to understand what was missing in his world, and even though he wasn't supposed to, he dreamed. He dreamed with

every part of his missing soul, and I realised the obvious. Broken dreams guide broken people.

I opened my eyes. The Queen was looking awfully satisfied, Axel to her left, the boy, which I now recognised was Alex, still in his cage.

" Now, now. I know you must be lost, but I really don't care. You're a broken light, someone that felt so much they could not give a sensible mistake. I'm going to rip. You. Open. Your vital forces, the ones you could never truly use, will finally serve something great, me."

Whispered the Queen, the sound of her voice piercing my heart.

" I did my part, give me Alex back first ! " screamed Axel.

The Queen, with a face of pure boredom, snapped her fingers. The cage was no more, and Alex now stood in front of his shadow in the middle of the room, next to me. But clouds of mist swirled around him, and his silhouette felt strangely pale.

"No.. How could you ?" Teared up Axel.

"What ? I told you I would give him back, never said I wouldn't make him become what he was meant to be in the meantime." Responded the queen with an amused tone while materializing a silver scythe out of nowhere.

Axel, who was shaking violently, looked at her mother, then turned her head towards me.

" Look, I know it's hard to believe but, I was planning on freeing you, I never intended any harm and-" She stopped, her throat sore from the cries and the guilt.

" I know, and I believe you. Alex wouldn't hide a genocidal side his shadow could take. You did your best, but you cannot save him. Please, buy me time, I think your mother won't let me do my job calmly. It was a pleasure knowing you. " I muttered softly.

"No, please, the.. " Axel started coughing, but stood up and faced her mother. " Good luck " she finally said, a grin on her face.

I looked at Alex. His eyes were pure white, like his hair. He did not smile, nor seem particularly angry. He was just lost, and I knew what was about to happen when he raised his arm so I walked towards him.

There was a way to cure a phantom.

I stared at Alex's pure white eyes. Clouds of smoke spreaded around us, encircling me in a foggy arena and cutting us from the raging duel that Axel was about to have with her imperial mother. I needed to achieve Radiance, what I now remembered was the primal state of a light.

I took a deep, long breath and felt my mind elevate as my body started to radiate, crystallize. I could feel the usual pain in my back, like a voracious mouth biting my whole upper body, screaming at me to stop. I refused, I could not let another of my loved ones fall in the darkness, not anymore.

An icy grip over my now crystal heart made my remaining skin shiver. It felt like a thousand leeches vampired my vital forces, making me knee on the ground. But I smiled, and instead of fighting Alex's power, I gave in. I started to radiate even more, and I could feel a pair of wings, broken in half like shattered crystal but impetus nonetheless, growing in my back. I remembered who I was and what had always been my purpose, and let the Phantom continue to absorb my energy. However, with it came also memories, dreams, hope.

Alex started to shake violently, a nauseous purple smoke fuming from his mouth that made me cough painful. He closed his fist so firmly drops of blood fell to the ground, and the icy grip became a glacial claw.

Every single particle in my body was asking me to stop, telling me that the pain was unbearable, to which my mind responded that to bear the unbearable was the duty of a light. I wrenched myself up, and slowly walked to Alex. Each time he stole my energy, I gave him something else with it, a pleasant sensation or a happy thought, until I finally reached him.

" Stop it, I'm a lost cause and you know it. I'm worthless and in pain. You can't understand, even I can't understand. JUST STOP IT ! " He screamed while pushing me violently.

I grabbed his arms, and pulled him close to me. " You know I have an awful habit of doing what I shouldn't" I whispered softly before kissing him.

A small, almost invisible smile formed itself on his face but his eyes staid hollow. The smoke dissolves into thin air, revealing Axel, on the ground, her monstrous mother laughing while preparing a deadly blow.

For a second, I closed my eyes. I knew that what Alex needed was a spark, something to snap him out of where he was lost. When I saw that spark, I knew what had to be done. I gave Axel the look only a light can give to a shadow from which she needs the help and she responded with the look of a shadow that understood.

My eyes started to glow, I felt lighter and lighter. I waited until the very last second, and with the remains of my energy, I swapped places with Axel in a ray of light, just enough for the scythe to hit me in the back and for her to Resonate with him, giving him her spark. The last thing I saw was his smile, the best vision an incomplete light could have before her death. I felt my eyes close, my body heat up and stick to the scythe and the rage the Queen was feeling from my unexpected sacrifice. As I was fading out, my bare back, the part of me that sealed my fate, was exposed to everyone to see. Truly a pleasant death.

I felt colder and colder, and suddenly heard a voice. A mighty, powerful, soft voice. My father. " Dear.. you've come a long way " he whispered.

I tried saying something, how much I had missed him, how alone I felt, but I was crying way too much.

" You've grown a beautiful and powerful thing. It would be a happy end here. But you must hold on. Hold on. " He continued.

" Hold on to what ? " I managed to ask.

" Your stars' ' He responded in a smile. And like any true light, the moment he did what he thought was the best, he slowly vanished.

However, a voice remained.

" The shard, use the shard you dummy ! " .

Resonating was a lot like taking a shower in the sense it's even better after being held prisoner by a psycho Queen for weeks, maybe months. Another good thing with the Resonance is that both consciences can exchange memories almost instantaneously. That's how I knew what Axel had done to Selenn, and pretty much everything that happened to them. My shadow was a badass.

" I heard that, " She said. " And yeah, you're right, I'm badass. " she added. Even though she had no body, I could feel her smirk.

This moment was so wholesome, I almost forgot for a second that Selenn was dying and Axel's mother was very angry. Two things which were very, very bad. God, I was getting afraid. Without my shadow, I forgot what getting afraid felt like: the gears of my mind ticking faster and faster, my heart beating like a drummer from a rock band in the 70's, a weird sense of determination filling my now not-so-hollow body.

I opened my memories to Axel and she quickly inspected them all. I was certain that she felt sorry, but there was no time for that.

" The shard, use the shard you dummy ! " said my gloomy self.

I knew she wasn't talking about letting the fireflies emerge from the dagger-like cristal that I managed to keep hidden all this time. "Shard", a piece. We had found it, Axel and I, while looking for the light realm, in what seemed like a cemetery with only one tomb engraved to the name of Solaris the First, an anomaly hidden next to my school.

Everything made a bit more sense, just enough for me to understand what had to be done.

The Queen rushed to us with lightning speed, her two arms taking the shape of two long spiked balls. Thanks to Axel's reflexes, we dodged the blow and slid under the gigantic monarch. We ran to Selenn's fading body next to the scythe and, looking at her back, I saw the cavity. I pulled the shard out of my pocket and ever so delicately, placed it in the gaping hole. It fused right back, but nothing happened. Concentrated in this operation, we didn't have the time to dodge the two whip-like tentacles that blasted us in the nearest wall.

My arms were noodles, like, literally. Axel had decided to envelop my mind so that she was the only one falling unconscious after the blow, and our normally potent clawlike arms were now two sloppy black noodles. I was like cemented to the wall, unable to move, again prisoner to the Queen that walked slowly to us.

Then, I saw lighting pierce her right ankle in an outstandingly blinding ray of light. Note to self : do not mess with Selenn once she reaches pure Radiance.

She stood there, two wings like a crystal butterfly making her flutter elegantly towards us.

The Queen, visibly more angered than hurt, put her hands on the ground and the room became pitch black in an instant, freezing my bones so much I couldn't even shiver. I thought that was a pretty dumb move knowing that shadows need at least a bit of light to correctly bend the darkness, then I remembered the discussion one of the cloakers had with the bogeyman. I only had the time to shout her name before Selenn screamed in pain, probably struck by an onyx shadow.

However, she started to glow, bathing the room in a warm and peaceful light. I felt my wounds heal, my breath soothing. Soon, I was standing next to the Light. The Queen faced us from a distance, visibly displeased with the smile that had appeared on her face the second the light had touched her.

Axel, who regained consciousness, materialized herself next to us. I felt so empty when she left, boy had I missed her.

Selenn, who landed on the ground, started to speak.

" I'm not strong enough to beat her alone. " she said, visibly displeased with herself.

" She's not the ruler of an entire world for nothing, " responded Axel. " Now would be an amazing time for a very dumb yet perfect plan, dummy " she added towards me.

" Well... about that " I muttered with a smile.

The look of pure incomprehension in the face of Selenn was way too mythic for me not to laugh, even though that visibly displeased Alex.

" Guess you aren't used to Dummy's plans eh ? " I smirked.

" What you're saying, can it really work ? " She asked.

" Only one way to know " Responded Alex.

And so were we set. I saw Alex open his mind and jumped right in, my body become and ethereal cloak around his. We walked calmly to the Queen, waiting for her do the first

move, which she did by making a dozen spears appear from the part of the room still covered in shadows. They fuzed right for us, one after the other, and we dodged or destroyed them, one after the other. Selenn, behind us, sat concentrating. We needed to buy time.

My mother started whispering, and that's when I knew bad stuff was coming.

" Tomorrow, please come back! " Said the soft voice of the snake hidden in the shadows.

Tomorrow... I felt myself entering an illusion.

Shadows are fears, bad emotions, the sum of everything that could seem bad to someone.

That was the catch. Two people can be afraid or saddened of the same thing, yet their fear or sadness is different, personal.

What is a fear not attached to someone ? A concept. I was the concept of Tomorrow, of the uncertainty of the future. Before being Axel, that was the sum of my being. That's who I grew, who fought for the Queen, even becoming the head of the royal guard. Tomorrow was the one who fled her mother, who met Alex, who resonated. I shook off the illusion

I saw the last two spears coming from both sides, and just became ethereal as the two crashed into each other right where I stood.

" You've lost your Tomorrow, mother " I sighed, using Alex's mouth.

" And I've accepted mine," he added.

That's when a deflagration of heat came from behind us, alerting me that the plan was going as expected.

I taunted my mother with a cheeky smile, the same I had given her before leaving, and she came running, her imperial dress not making her any less fast than she was before, right to us.

I took a deep breath.

" This is all like Ah-ka" , I repeated to myself. " Just focus and tell your story".

My mother was a master tactician, she knew my skills, my habits, she knew me better than I did.

That's why, when she made her right arm a sharp blade and prepared to strike me down, she was certain I was going to make myself ethereal, and she could then punish me with an onyx shadow strike. I had always been the brave one that cared about everyone, because everybody has a tomorrow.

That's why my mother must have been so shook when I left Alex's body, who took the strike, and reached for her silver scythe, who now radiated a pure, white, light. Selenn had achieved Resonance.

The Queen tried to move, but Alex held the blade firmly, his hands bleeding but keeping her stuck.

I exhaled.

" The story of the shadow that realised she was irrelevant without a light, " I said while resonating with Alex, Selenn in my hand.

" TheStory of the light that believed in her stars. " She said, the voice coming from the weapon.

" The story of the man that filled his void " Said Alex, standing up.

" The story of Resonance" we all thought while two shadow arms sliced the Queen open with a shining strike.

She fell to the ground, starting to dissolve, but I knew she'd be back, just in another form, shadows always do.



But we weren't finished. Just like we had done with the shard, Alex and I started to resonate with Selenn.

A shadow, that made you move, a light, that gave you a goal, and a man, that was the path. Those were the 3 parts to make someone.

To make me.

To make us.

Hey. Yeah, I'm talking to you. It's me, Alex. The full Alex.

I know you must have hundreds of questions, and I'm afraid you'll have to find the answers on your own, but I wanted to thank you, really.

You see, writing is what started all of this, metaphorically and story-wise.

This whole story was just a way for me to find back my shadow and my light, to let my thoughts from a path for me, and to let me explore it, after I unfortunately Dissonated.

Through the text you're reading right now, I had the chance to ask myself questions.

I always thought that we were made of questions without answers and answers without questions, and thanks to this journey, I think I found my equilibrium, I filled my void.

You might be wondering who Salariel was, and to that I think the Queen answered truly. He is a Materialization of my past, before my Dissonance, that decided to help me, and I'll be forever thankful for that.

This whole book was just a gigantic introspection, and if I made you ask yourself some questions, then I'm the happiest of men.

Never, ever, forget that no matter the circumstances, you can always be a light to someone. You'll never be able to light their path forever, but you may be able to shine back the spark inside their eyes.

Never, ever, forget that we all have shadows. The reason Axel didn't hate Alex was because he was doing a good job of doing it himself. Shadows are a part of you, a part you must accept if you want to do cool things in life. You may not be able to transform your arms into claws or uppercut werewolves, but anything you do by being fully yourself is amazing in it's own way.

Never, ever, forget that we all get lost. Life's not an easy thing, it's so hard that I've even heard that no one made it out alive. So please, be gentle with yourself and let your shadows and your lights guide the ends of the path you'll draw. It won't be a straight line, but it'll be the best journey someone can have.

Thanks for reading through this, may you be able to achieve Resonance.

Alex.

(Rendre l'agent(e) entraîné(e), plan Machiavélique, acolyte du méchant.  
Bjorn Larbin.)

Camille, reine des abeilles, a une ruche dans le bras droit, les abeilles lui obéissent, si elles meurent, une larve apparaît dans la ruche qui se transforme en abeille 24h après, est limité à 150 abeilles, pour l'instant 😊 phobie insectes ; se bat avec une dague  
Considère tout le monde comme ses amis mais n'arrive pas à l'extérioriser donc on le considère comme froid  
Sait lire le langage des signes  
Lunettes, vêtements amples

Laura, super sens :

Vue : peut lire l'étiquette d'un t-shirt à 5 km, et voir 100x plus de couleurs qu'un humain normal y compris ultraviolet et infrarouge, peut voir dans un lieu à 99% obscur comme si c'était midi dans une plaine.

Odorat :

Ouïe :

Goût :

Toucher :

A toujours été muette utilise un arc

((Thomas, pyromane, peut contrôler les flammes, pas les créer, fait régulièrement des "crises" :

veut tout faire brûler, décuple son pouvoir, lui permettant de créer des flammes et de pouvoir les modifier à sa guise, doit être enchaîné puis jeté dans un lac pour éviter tout accident

Se bat avec c'est flammes et une epee pour le corps a corps))

Naël 5 ans ,demoniste, son ame est liée a un livre , qui invoque des demons , a ces services , sans avoir besoin de son accord

Chaque demon invoqué lui afflige une torture psychologique

Il peut en invoquer autant quil veut et ils ne disparaissent que s'ils sont mortellement blesses

Ne se bat pas

Sam au bar on apprend plus tard qu'elle les protège

Adam vole des trucs, égoïste, flemmard mais effrayé par le fait qu'il est un pouvoir de connard

Il a vécu dans la pauvreté donc il considère que c'est pas à lui de faire la charité

Miraleil , chef du camp , immortel et invincible , vielli quand meme , lui et son jumeaux on ete les premiers dans la machine

Angelis, frère jumeau de miraleil , a chaque fois qu'il est sur le point de mourrir , son ame se transphase dans un autre corps , tuant lhote , et son cadavre devien un portail vers l'éther , qui en apparaissent , le portail est gardé par un super demon , un gardien. Angelis vit isolé dans un chateau

Harmonie, vibe, son pouvoir et ses emotions dependent de la musique qu'elle ecoute  
Excellente epeiste , elle se calle parfaitement sur le rythme de son adversaire

Hyperactive

Blonde

Relation amoureuse possible avec Axel.

Keth : Anomalies statistiques tmtc

Nereb , personnage principal, a le pouvoir de téléportation instantanée, peut se téléporter a n'importe quel endroit qu'il a déjà vu . Son pouvoir n'a apparemment pas défaut.

Syllys: demon possesseur de nael, donnera des informations utiles sur les demons a nos héros

Le "camp" son en fait plusieurs endroits cachés dans plusieurs pays :

Canada

France

Etats-Unis

Australie

Le camp principal étant au Etats-Unis

Chaque camp est à proximité d'un portail , afin de protéger le monde des démons

Show not tell !

Lorsque les personnages voyagent vers un camp , un bout de l'histoire de la création du portail est expliqué

Différents types de bêtes d'Ether:

Les brutalus: tas de muscle ambulante ayant une forme vaguement animale

Les diabolins : se déplacent par groupe , petits et faible , jettent des boules de feu .

Les possesseurs: tout le contraire des brutalus, ils ont une apparence humaine et ressembleront tout le temps à quelqu'un de gentil et innocent , peuvent contrôler mentalement tout les êtres inférieurs, tels que les animaux , les autres démons etc Extrêmement intelligents et calculateurs, ils voyent les humains comme des pions

Les gardiens : immenses, ils possèdent de nombreux et puissants pouvoirs . Ils ont une puissance physique tout aussi extraordinaire

Grand final ou Nereb remonte dans le temps.

Méchant humain très intelligent cheveux fluffys coupe au bol

Négligé son enfance car enfant génie au collège, dirigé vers des études d'ingénieur dont il ne voulait pas

Angelis lui a promis de l'aider à être spécial magique éther  
Il aime les échecs et réfléchit toujours à tout comme une partie d'échec et à plein de  
plans et considère que les émissaire et tout c'est pas juste  
C'est pas un gentil : il va mourir et sur le point de mourir, il va arrêter de surréfléchir car  
pendant un court moment " échec et math " plus a réfléchi