

I grew up with Kepfu in Ocgithrek. Knew her my whole life. Our families' fields were right beside each other. We were best friends. The others, even axeman Nocam, shunned me sometimes--I'm not sure whether they were afraid, superstitious. They would say in hushed whispers that I was born with the flesh of demi-gods; manhood on a woman, pure white body, silver-taupe hair, and too strong for my appearance. Nothing like my parents, or anyone else in the hamlet. They were all hard-bitten, faces burned brown, black, and gray by the sun. I used to write about their knuckles and their skin. My hands have seen their fair share of toil, too, but I found theirs beautiful enough to scribble on the tablets that Lord Dotep gave me. We all worked so hard, even Dotep (especially Dotep), just to eat, to stay alive.

Kepfu never whispered about me, though. She didn't talk much at all--and neither did I, so it worked out for us. Sometimes I'd share my awful poetry with her, and she'd lie and say it was gorgeous, how she admired my philosophies and how they made her perceive things. Then I'd always ask how I could improve, but she couldn't even read, so how would she know?

We would lie down by the oak trees and stare too long at the sun. Or at least, she did. I was always glancing sideways. She'd turn, lock her orange eyes with my blue, and I'd just sit there and feel my mind wind its way out of my head and into hers. Every time, she'd turn away, look down, smile a little, and look back out at the fields.

Then one day, perhaps a year or so after Lord Dotep had called us into the militia, I didn't let her look away. Just grabbed her and kissed her. I was foolish then--yet she didn't back away. Kepfu has never left me, not once. I love her.

We patrolled the streets for a while, fending off bandits and criminals. An ettin took up a lair nearby, and I slew it with Kepfu and Nocam by my side.

1/4

We started ranging far and wide. Kepfu had her crossbow. Nocam his axe. I had my two-hander. At first we still worked solely for Dotep, but then for the whole local area. We put gangs of bandits, kobolds and goblins to death. We were heroes.

But during the course of these adventures, Kepfu was wounded. She had to use a stick to walk. I begged her to just retire, return to the hamlet. She had none of it, of course. When we ran into trouble, she'd just post up with her stick, steady her bow, and let loose.

Her condition worsened over time and with more battle scars. Sometimes she couldn't even use the stick and I had to carry her as we hiked. Hm, even in that, she made me stronger...

The Two Hand Band, as we named ourselves, picked up a bit of a reputation. We were hounded by our enemies, yet we triumphed. We gathered more worthy blades to our cause. Eventually,

the dwarven lady of Ishrautag (only a town over from Ocgiithrek) tasked us with the death of a mountain titan, the wicked Smespu Borndive, the Leafy Son of Owls. He was a ferocious wasp who had given the dwarven armies in the hillocks a terrible fight, and had hidden in the Islandrocks shrine.

Confident in our arms and headstrong as hell, we set off. We stopped through a few hamlets on our way to the far west for provisions, and found them pillaged by the murderous goblins. In righteous anger, we butchered them all. Every now and then I wonder how many artists I have beheaded in rage--how many poets, how many dancers? What could we all have done if we had not been so set on rape and war? I know I have never killed innocent people, but is it any less a crime if I have rid the universe of a soul, someone who could bring meaning in this darkness? I shudder to think of it. Kepfu is always there for me.

At last we found ourselves at the foot of the mountains, and set up camp for the night.

2/4

I heard Nocam yell first.

A rabid horde of huge dingoes descended from the hills, more than I had ever seen in one pack. We fought and fought. I cannot count the snarling heads I severed. I saw Kepfu get tackled, but she pulled her knife and went to work. Always good with her hands. Nocam--wonderful brute--must have killed even more than me. Serid sent arrows flying, Uhos and Emoth. Otir was wounded early, but he kept on struggling.

By the end, I was blood itself. Blood was on my blade. Blood dripped through my eye slits. Blood caked on my fancy clothes and pooled in the crevices of my armor. But I was laughing.

Of all my battles, that feeling of adrenaline and relief was never greater. We had conquered a force of pure nature. No evil magic, no gods, no demons or goblins. Just the world crushing man in her fist--and man prevailing.

3/4

But when I called the band together again, Kepfu was not there.

I looked. My friends, I looked, I-- I dropped my blade and my shield and ripped off my helmet to hunt for her in the snow.

But the storm was building up. I couldn't see. I couldn't see. I couldn't, my friends, I couldn't!

Then I saw her come out of the mist, carrying someone.

But I was wrong. She couldn't carry anyone. She was being carried. Nocam had her.

He said he was sorry. He said, Resmi, she took many of them with her, Resmi, it's okay, Resmi...

But I couldn't see that. I saw her blood, blood blood blood. Gods, her throat, her hands--

We burned her body, at the foot of the mountain.

I wrote a poem for her. And I left it in the fire.

And we trekked down to the lair, and the titan was surrounded by the corpses of the dwarven armada,

but it was injured, it was bleeding. Half my party abandoned the fight. It killed Otir, it tore up Emoth's ankle and she was bleeding so much, but I killed it, I fucking killed it, I cut its legs off with my two hander and I chopped its wing so it came down from the sky and I hammered through its chitin and I crushed its brain.

But I can't have her back. I can't see her orange eyes again. I can't feel her hair, her skin, her warmth,

I can never be inside her again, one with her again.

I can never tell her I love her again.

We never talked much.

It is so easy to make love, but so hard to say.

She is with me, I know that. Kepfu has never left. Yet she is gone. She is blood no more. She is ash in the wind. My friends, I don't know what to do now.

But Kepfu is with me. She is with me. Her eyes are in the sunset, her skin is beneath my feet, her hair is the snow on the mountaintops and her ashes are in the wind.

I love her.