



KINGDOM COME

The Return of Arielle Lamina

A short story by Danny_Zou
(† **Eclectic** Wanderer †#5423) for the
game World of Magic, soon to
become Arcane Odyssey

KINGDOM COME

PART ONE

RAPTURE



toneburg was as remarkable now as it had been the first time she'd seen it. Its gray walls seemed cheerful in the morning sun, while large hot-air balloons floated in the sky above. A marvelous sight, each balloon festooned with ribbons and streamers, each colored brightly as they floated in the sky, powered by slow-burning aurem. Once treated with a combination of pressure, heat, and chemicals, aurem could be induced to burn slowly with a steady heat, better than wood or coal. Arielle still remembered the time a tour guide had explained it to her.

She sighed. Autumn was nearly here, and yet she was still so far from Riverville. Another year perhaps.

Arielle joined the line of merchants and farmers waiting to be let into the city. Some toted bales of hay, some had large pumpkins in their wagons. One man carefully cradled a bundle of fine Keihatsu porcelain, while yet another showed off his stock of Alvarian alloy. A fair number of travelers and tourists also filled the line, holding guidebooks, pamphlets, and maps, while keeping an eye on an assorted bunch of children.

“The gates are opening!” a young boy called out, running back from the front of the crowd.

A murmur went down the line, as people shifted their bags, merchants picked up their goods, and others climbed back aboard their wagons and carriages.

The gates were indeed opening, twin massive doors made of oak and brass that slid quietly and smoothly backwards, gears hidden in the walls whirring as they strained to pull them apart.

The line picked up pace as people filed into the city, while sounds, scents, and sights of all kinds filled the air. Here, a musician played his mandolin, while there, an artist painted portraits for ten crowns apiece. Street vendors had set up shop along the busy sidewalks, selling skewers of meat and vegetables, stuffed peppers, stews and soups, bread and potatoes, fried dough twists, meat buns, pies filled with every sort of stuffing possible, and more, much more. Arielle’s mouth watered at the sight and smell of the food, a far call from the unappetizing fare of the road that she had dined on for quite some time.

“Hello Miss!” a cheerful seller of trinkets called out. “Mind a pretty necklace to go with that pretty face? They ward off bad luck too!”

Arielle shook her head and moved on. A woman tried to get her to buy a dress, a man attempted to sell her a feathered hat. So many people, so many sights. But she knew very well what she wanted.

“How much for that big one?” Arielle asked the meat bun vendor.

“Five crowns,” the hassled vendor responded, somehow answering the same question from a half-dozen people at once, while handing buns wrapped in napkins to another dozen. Arielle payed and had the bun she had pointed at shoved into her hand unceremoniously. She left the crowded throughfare and sat down in a relatively quiet corner, placing her bags to the side.

She took a bite. Delicious. The bun was soft white flour, faintly sweet, while the meat was savory and tender. Arielle devoured it in the matter of seconds, before wiping her hands and mouth with a napkin.

“You must’ve been starved,” a voice said laughingly.

Arielle turned. A young woman was sitting some three feet away, a book in her lap. “Just got here,” Arielle replied. “I’ve been living off of bread and cheese for far too long.”

“Ah. Well welcome to Stoneburg!” the woman smiled. “First time?”

“I’ve been here once before,” Arielle replied. “When I was six. The city’s changed a bit since then.”

“Six? And you still remember it?”

“I’ve always had a good memory,” Arielle replied.

“Is that so?” the woman asked. Her eyes flickered uneasily to the black flower in Arielle’s hair.

“Oh, don’t worry about that,” Arielle replied. “The flower doesn’t affect me like most people.”

The woman nodded. “Never seen one outside of the city gardens. Ghost flowers they call them, don’t they?”

“Yes.” Arielle touched the flower gently, feeling the familiar smooth petals. “Because they’re said to make you see ghosts.”

“I heard they’re an illegal substance,” the woman said.

“Very. Terribly addictive stuff, or so they say. Only healers are allowed to have and prescribe them.”

“Are you a healer?” the woman asked curiously.

“No, far from it. But I had a prescription for one.”

“How long do they last for anyways?”

“You mean the prescription?” Arielle said.

“No, I mean how long does the flower stay fresh?”

“Forever, if you keep drawing on it. They can live off your magic energy.”

“Drawing on it? What do you mean by that?”

“Well...” Arielle thought back for a moment. “It’s kind of like using magic. But

instead of magic you get a memory. Usually a happy one.”

“So you get to see your happy memories over and over again.” The woman had a wistful look in her eyes. “I can see why they’re considered addictive. Do you still... draw on yours?”

“Not anymore,” Arielle replied.

“Then why do you still wear it, if you don’t mind me asking?”

Arielle smiled. She reached up. “It’s actually gotten attached to me now,” she responded, lifting the flower up. The green stems had fused to her hair, becoming one and the same. “A bit weird, but I’ve become used to it.”

Arielle had the faint sense that she’d seen the woman somewhere before... but where? “How long have you lived in Stoneburg?”

The woman didn’t seem to mind the change of subject. “My entire life, really. Born here, raised here, found a job here.” She smiled. “Never really had the urge to go explore. You seem like you’ve been around. Got any stories to tell?”

Arielle thought for a moment. “Well... down South from here, on the Eastern Peninsula, there’s a town called Riverville.”

“Ah I’ve heard of it. A small town, isn’t it?”

“Yes. I was born there. Every year on the first day of autumn, there’s a celebration with a festival, food, songs... I was hoping to make it this year but it looks like I’m too late.” Arielle sighed. “Traveling a lot means sometimes things just happen that you can’t control.”

“One of the reasons I never left this city,” the woman laughed. “Here, everything is simple and happens in an orderly fashion.”

“Must be nice.”

“Yes, but you miss out on a lot. Tell me more about where you’ve been, will you?”

“Alright. East of here, there’s a massive canyon called the Great Rift. Well, one day I was journeying through it and...”



The rest of the day passed quickly and pleasantly. The two wandered the city, and Arielle was introduced to its beauties and eccentricities as seen by one of its citizens. They visited the machine forges, talked to the librarians, stared at the massive Grand Hall, and it was near twilight that they ventured onto the fields where the balloons were tethered.

“Want to take a ride?” asked a little girl, standing by the counter. Her father was messing about with the balloon’s engine. “Only ten crowns an hour!”

Arielle smiled. “What do you think?”

“Sure!” the woman replied. “It’s the city’s biggest attraction after all.”

The two of them sat down, Arielle slightly nervously, in the balloon’s carriage. Slowly, they were released, floating upwards into the sky, gently moving on the breeze.

“I never quite caught your name,” Arielle said.

“I’m Isabel Salore.”

“Arielle Lamina. It’s been real nice getting to know you.”

“Arielle Lamina?” Isabel asked. There was a strange look in her eyes.

“I’m afraid I have a bit of a reputation,” Arielle said with a sigh. “Everyone seems think I carry gold ingots around in my bags.”

“Ah, the legendary wealth of the Laminas,” Isabel laughed. “There’s something I think you’ll be interested in.”

“Really?” Arielle asked.

“You see that patch of grass over there?”

Arielle looked down. She could see a field somewhere off to a corner of the city. The grass seemed to be a dark green. “Yes.”

“There’s a statue there with the Lamina name on it. I’ve always wondered about it.”

“Alright. We can go check it out when we head down.” Arielle smiled.

The patch of grass, it turned out, was a graveyard. Arielle stared at the statue that Isabel had mentioned. *Owen Lamina*. She didn’t recall an Owen in her family history, so she bent down to examine the text. *Son of Xander Lamina and Rachel Clay*. Xander... now was there a Xander? If there was, it was

probably a dead branch. Then she needed to know when he had died.

Arielle scanned the rest of the statue. Aha! There it was. *Born February 19th, Y2954 in Stoneburg, Magius. Died July 3rd, Y2983 in Summer Hold, Magius.* Her blood chilled. July 3rd, Y2983. The exact day they had captured the smugglers. Summer Hold. Owen had died... because of her.

Isabel had disappeared. Arielle glanced around, suddenly afraid. The murmur of voices drew her towards an old crypt.

“I see you brought a friend,” a voice said.

“Be quiet. I’ve distracted her for now, but she’ll get bored eventually,” Isabel’s voice replied. “How long will this take?”

“Hardly any time. I’ve already gotten prepared.” The voice was pleasant, kind, caring even. “I just need you to step outside for a moment. Keep your friend busy. Better yet, tell her to go home.”

“I can’t. She has to be here.” Isabel’s voice was strangely flat. “It’s only fitting.”

“Fine then. Do whatever you want. Just step outside.”

Arielle flattened herself against the opposite side of the crypt. Isabel stood outside, tracing the edge of a grave with her fingers.

A green light erupted from the darkened crypt. It was a strange, sickly sweet, rough magic, like nothing she had ever felt before. The air seemed to have dropped to freezing. Arielle held back the urge to use her magic. There was a sense, an instinct really, that she had to stay hidden.

She peeked around the side of the crypt. Her eyes widened. *No way*. A combination of disbelief, terror, sadness, and hatred filled her heart like some poisonous cocktail.

Vance Salore stood there, speaking to Isabel, and his eyes were cold and cruel.



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PART TWO

TRIBULATION



rielle stared in shock. It couldn't be, *it couldn't be*. She had killed Vance. She had seen herself do it. She had seen it when the crystal of salt ripped through his throat, vaporizing him instantly. She had screamed inside the prison of her mind when it had happened. She had seen it in every one of her nightmares. Yet here he stood, alive as ever.

Every ounce of her rebelled at the thought. Every emotion she thought she had gotten over, had forgotten, had been freed of, tore through her mind like red-hot arrows.

She collapsed against the wall of the crypt. *It couldn't be*. Why? Why did this have to happen? Why was she so scared, so horrified? Shouldn't she be happy he was back?

"Are you satisfied?" the voice asked.

"Absolutely," came Isabel's voice. She sounded like she was crying. "Thank you. Thank you."

"Where is the girl?" came a third voice. *Vance*. Her heart twisted at hearing it, so similar and yet so different. Had it always

been this way? Had it always sounded so cruel? Why couldn't she remember?

"I don't know," Isabel replied. "I left her right here."

"I would take your brother and leave this city," the mysterious voice said. *Brother?* Of course. Isabel *Salore*. No wonder she had looked aghast when Arielle had revealed her name.

"Leave the city? Why?"

"It usually raises a bit of a commotion when a dead man rises," the voice replied dryly. "It's best if that doesn't happen."

"I've never been outside of the city."

"Don't worry sis. I have," Vance said.

Arielle shivered. *This was wrong*. She knew that now. *When a dead man rises*. Whatever magic brought Vance back wouldn't be good. She lifted her hand, staring at it. If it came down to it... could she kill Vance twice?

She knew the answer already. Vance couldn't be in his right mind. Such a magic would never result in that. Arielle remembered her own thoughts when her mind

had broken. She had wished, hoped that someone would stop her. That someone would kill her. It would be for the better of them all.

Arielle stood up, trembling. “Vance.”

“Arielle.” His eyes glowed as his magical energy charged. She waited, waited and hoped, until the last moment, right before the massive stone struck her.

She flew upwards, as fast as she possibly could, tears and crystals falling to the ground like rain.

“What’s this?” the voice asked. Arielle turned in midair. “A fight?” The owner of the voice was an aging woman wrapped in a shawl. Her face was indistinct in the darkness.

Isabel’s face twisted with anger. She too held up her hand. Coils of ice ripped into the air, thrusting up among boulders. Arielle dodged backwards, using shields sparingly. She landed lightly on the ground, flying fast and low on twin streams of liquid glass.

“Why?” Isabel yelled. “Why did you have to kill him?” A massive wall of ice formed in front of her. Arielle crashed through it, unable to stop at her speed. She felt a heavy

stone smash into her chest, and she was hurled backwards.

“You’ve killed far too many,” Vance said. “You’re a criminal as bad as the worst of them.”

Arielle stared and could only cry. Every word felt like it was a knife stabbing into her. She dodged a rain of stones, avoided a curling trap of ice. “I don’t know why!” she replied. “I don’t know!”

“That’s scarcely a reason.” Vance hurled another dozen rocks at her.

“Then die!” Isabel screamed. A beam of glistening ice exploded from her hands.

“*Rose!*” Arielle called out. A shining shield of ruby glass-and-crystal blocked the attacks, cracking and shattering as it did. She dropped to the ground. It was slick with ice, and she fell to her knees.

“DIE!” Isabel yelled again. “*Blizzard!*” Brilliant blue shards of ice slashed through the air. A boulder the size of a house fell out of the sky. Both crashed down on where Arielle had fallen.

The dust drifted away slowly. Three people watched, waiting. Finally, they could see Arielle. Safe and untouched, she sheltered underneath a thick crystal bubble, its outside layers webbed with a network of cracks, but still sound and whole.

Arielle leapt out of the bubble, rising high into the sky. She knew what she had to do, no matter how much it would hurt to do it. She landed on the ground, mere meters away from the siblings.

“I’m sorry Vance,” Arielle said. Tears ran down her cheeks as she lifted her hand. “*Thorn!*”

A spike of crystal, brutal and deadly, pale as ice, ripped through Vance’s chest, blood pouring out over it. Isabel’s agonized scream was lost in the shattering of the shard as Vance fell.

“*Dance!*” Arielle was not done yet. Petals of magic whipped through the air, locking Isabel to the ground.

“This won’t do,” the mysterious third person said. “*Mass Resurrection!*”

Arielle watched with horror as the entire graveyard awoke. The dead appeared

everywhere, smoky forms solidifying into flesh and blood.

“Do you know, this graveyard was reserved for all the people who died in the Summer Hold tragedy?” the mysterious woman laughed. It was a cold, humorless laugh. “Ironic isn’t it? That you’ll die to their hands?”

“Who are you?”

“Only a little flame of what once was,” the woman said with a grimace. “But still enough to crush a weakling like you.”

“Why?” Arielle watched as the undead stood up.

“Because I’m a good person! You’re a killer who has to be stopped!” The woman laughed maniacally. “Now, girl, you die!”

And the undead opened their eyes, each one recognizing the girl who had killed them. Dozens of magic circles lit up the night.



Arielle dodged blasts of every color, soaring high into the sky. She released a hundred shards of glowing glass-and-crystal from above. They crashed down into the undead, dealing terrible wounds wherever they struck... yet the undead simply rose again.

Under a barrage of lightning bolts, she flew fast and low, landing lightly on the ground.

A green beam crashed into her leg, sending her sprawling over the icy ground. Talons of bitter blue attempted to wrap around her. *Isabel*. Arielle leapt up, only to find herself face to face with Vance, his massive wound healed. A house-sized boulder exploded where she had been, but Arielle was high above the battlefield again.

Adrenaline blazed through her, as she struck again and again, creating enormous gashes and ripping apart flesh and bone, yet every time the undead would simply heal almost instantly. She was getting overwhelmed.

Perhaps it was best to end like this. Everything would come full circle; everything

would end as it had started. Those she had killed would kill her.

Arielle lifted her hands, drawing upon her reserves of power. A storm of crystal shards blazed through the undead, yet again they simply stood up after the strike, as strong as ever. This endless battle could only end in one way.

She had attempted to reach the necromancer over and over again, yet the woman always hid behind the swarm of undead. No matter how fast she moved, there was always someone there. There was a dull ache growing in her limbs, her throat was sore and raw, and yet she fought on, desperately, mechanically, every movement made without thinking, every spell cast without hope.

There was hardly any magic left in her now. Every spell simply taxed her more. She could not win this war of attrition. It felt like hours had passed. Arielle fought and waited, waited for herself to die.

“What’s going on?” a voice asked. Arielle turned, surprised. The town guards! They had arrived, no doubt drawn by the sounds of fighting.

“Kill them!” the necromancer snarled. The undead leapt at her words. Arielle watched in horror as half the tide lashed out at the guards, ripping through them, rampaging into the wall of the city. It came down within seconds. Flames were raging through the streets while screams rose in the air.

“No...” she managed. “This doesn’t have anything to do with them! Let them be!”

The necromancer didn’t even respond. A terrifying grin of madness was plastered on her face.

“Vance!” Arielle called out. “These are Council scouts and soldiers! Your friends!”

He turned. “Friends? Ha! Where were they when Summer Hold burned? Sitting here idle of course!” He turned, flying into the city.

Arielle stared. It was hopeless. She had nothing left. Nothing left but to die.

She lifted her hands. This would be it. Her last dregs of magic flowed into her, the last song of glass and crystal flowed through the air. “*Rose Garden*,” she whispered.

A brilliant wave of shining glass flowed through the city, forming a glowing wall, red

and silver, like the sea at sunset. Magic crashed into it to no avail. Arielle collapsed. There was an emptiness within her. This was it. The end of it all. Despair.

“Mother?” a little boy’s voice asked. He crouched next to a body, crushed and burnt under rubble. “Mother wake up!”

What little was left of her heart felt shredded. This was all her fault wasn’t it? She had wrecked Summer Hold, and now the echoes of that were crashing into Stoneburg.

Arielle stood up. She picked up the boy and pushed him behind a pile of stone rubble. It seemed stable enough, and would protect him should any of the nearby walls collapse. She forced herself to make every motion.

“Stay here,” she told him. “Lie down and stay safe.”

“But my mother is over there!” he protested.

“I’ll get her out,” Arielle lied. “But she can’t hide here with you because she can’t fit. You’ll have to stay here until this is over.”

The boy nodded. Arielle turned away, and ran back into the battlefield, dodging the

blasts of the undead who spotted her. She felt leaden and empty, her movements mechanical and dull.

Arielle pulled her knife from her satchel. She didn't have a chance of making it, but at least she would die fighting.

A brilliant green blast crashed before her feet.

"Don't you dare, foolish girl." The necromancer's grin spread wider. "Let me enjoy my revenge."

"Revenge? Then I'm right here!"

"Ha! Did you think I was as stupid as your traitorous friend? To go to such ends only to get revenge on one person? No, I simply needed her to let me through the city gates." The necromancer laughed. "This is my revenge! The city that banished me! Well now look at them and look at me!"

Arielle looked. She saw the town guards, the Council soldiers, the citizens, every one of them united, fighting, defending, protecting, healing, against an endless wave of undead, never losing hope, never giving up.

She looked. She saw the necromancer, standing there, her smile pale white and cruel in the light of the fires, a smile like a grimace, a smile like that of a shark. Smiling, as the city burnt.

Anger ignited her magic again. She hated the woman. Absolute, undeniable hatred. The hatred of an angel confronted with a demon. It was a catharsis of sorts, this hate. It swept away her sorrow, swept away her fear, swept away her dreams and nightmares in the face of its reality. And in her anger, she found hope. The hope to go on, the knowledge that she could do, would do more.

“This ends now!” Arielle yelled. “Never again! I will not stand still!”

“You? What could you do?” the necromancer laughed. “Vance! Finish her!”

Arielle watched as Vance flew towards her. She felt no pity, felt no sorrow, nothing but that blazing righteous anger, that undying hope.

“IMAGINARIUM!”



KINGDOM COME

PART THREE

JUDGEMENT



he music of the spheres, a celestial song that never ended, a roar of pure beautiful magic, was the first thing Arielle heard as she opened her eyes. A magnificent light, brighter than all the sun and stars combined, danced around her. A massive magic circle had blossomed beneath her feet. Glowing runes floated in the air, as seemingly boundless amounts of energy flowed through her. It was like something in her mind had opened, there was something she understood now she hadn't before. Something that had little to do with her magic, but meant far more to herself.

The necromancer cowered behind her arms, blinded by the light. Arielle lifted her arm.

“Lucid Blade!” A million petals crashed together, forming a beam of pure glowing magical energy, rosy pink and brilliant white, which fell like the rays of the sun upon the necromancer. She screamed, once. When the light had faded, all that was left was a crystal statue, a perfect replica of the necromancer rendered in silver and red. Arielle turned. Yet the undead still fought on, despite the death of their master.

“Did you really think we would stop once you killed her?” Vance asked. “Of course not. You always think that killing solves everything, but it won’t stop us!”

His words felt harsh and crude against the backdrop of that beautiful music. She finally understood, finally realized what she should’ve known all along.

“You are not Vance,” Arielle said after a moment’s pause. “You’re the Vance that appears in my nightmares. But I’ve never hated you.” She lifted her hand. “You’re the Vance that lost hope. In the world. In the future. In yourself.”

“What is there to hope for?” he asked. “All everyone does is kill and fight! All that’s left for everyone else is to die!”

“Hope springs eternal,” she replied. “And where there’s hope, there’s healing. Because not all spells were made to kill, and not all deaths are wrong. Goodbye Vance. Perhaps you’ll find hope somewhere else.” She took a breath. “*Seraphic Magnificence!*”

A brilliant star rose in the night. Six enormous wings of pure light and magic erupted from her, a halo of shining power

surrounded her, all the power of the Imaginarium combining into a single spell. The sheer force of it vaporized the ground and rubble around her, turning the undead into petals of glowing light, drifting away into the night.

The circle closed then, its rings of light collapsing into her. Arielle felt her magic ebb away. She felt exhausted. All she wanted to do was sleep.

Isabel appeared out of the shadows with a glistening ice dagger clenched tightly in her hand. Yet just before she struck, a town guard knocked her aside with his shield.

“Are you alright?” he asked.

“I’ve been better,” Arielle replied. She smiled. “But I’ll be fine tomorrow.”

With that, she closed her eyes.



She was not fine tomorrow.

“No, she isn’t ready for visitors,” the healer grumbled. “And I wouldn’t let you in even if you were the Volcano.”

Cayden Percy sighed and sat back down as the viewport slid shut. The girl was always getting herself into trouble. He’d been called up from the Silent Tower in the middle of the night, ordered to Stoneburg. It was only until they’d gotten halfway there that he learned the purpose of the journey. Someone from the Council had to question Arielle about what had happened, and he was the one best suited to doing it.

He’d been waiting for three days now. So much for the rush. Apparently, she’d somehow managed to overuse her magical resources to the point that her body couldn’t handle it. He didn’t envy healers their job.

Opening the door, Cayden stepped outside again. The air was fresh and chilly. It seemed fall was nearly upon them. The city was already being rebuilt, and in true Stoneburg fashion, machines of all kinds were being utilized to complete the job faster. He watched one move along the side of a wall, while the man standing on top of it lay cement

atop the bricks, the two working together as a team.

He wandered the streets for a few hours, exploring the famous Vistarian city. His mind wasn't on it however. Isabel Salore had been arrested for attempted murder and conspiracy against the town. He suspected the second charge would be dropped, but the first would land her a harsh jail sentence. She hadn't quite seemed in her right mind when he'd visited her. He'd been slightly afraid she'd look like Arielle after the incident, scared, sad, and alone. He hadn't been sure he could deal with that twice. But the woman had been completely different. Like a wild animal really. He'd hardly managed to have a word with her.

“Captain!” Penny called out. “Healer’s letting people visit now!”

“How did you know?” Cayden asked surprised.

“The good old grapevine,” she said, her eyes twinkling. “Was having a drink in the tavern with the others, and they voted to send me to tell you.”

“Thanks then,” Cayden replied. “You can go back now.”

“Yessir!” she laughed before walking off haphazardly. He could see the signs of inebriation. Well it was their day off. Not his of course.

He walked back to the healer’s house. The healer popped open the viewport. “Oh, it’s you again,” she grumbled. “What do you want?”

“To see her, of course,” he replied.

“Didn’t I tell you she wasn’t accepting visitors?” the old woman snapped.

Cayden took a step back. Damn Penny and her drunkenness. “Well I’ll be going then...”

The healer laughed. “Ah the look on your face. Come on in, she’s doing much better.” She opened the door.

Hesitantly, he walked through the door. Arielle was sitting in bed, a cup of tea at her side, and a stack of papers in front of her. She turned when he entered. “Hey,” she said, her silver eyes bright in the sunlight.

“How are you feeling?” he asked.

“Better.” She put the papers aside. He noticed that her arm trembled as she did. That level of weakness was probably why she was still confined to bed, as he couldn’t see any severe external injuries that would cause that.

“If you need anything call me,” the healer said. “Especially if you need to kick this guy out.” She glared at him. Cayden tried to look meek and obedient.

Arielle laughed. He was slightly surprised at it. She rarely laughed, if ever. “I’ll be fine. Thank you though.”

The healer smiled back and bustled out of the room.

“She’s so nice,” Arielle said, resting atop a pile of pillows.

“Nice?” Cayden asked. “I’m honestly quite terrified of her.”

She laughed again. “Then I won’t be calling her out on you anytime soon.”

He looked askance at her. Then he sighed. “Ah well. I assume she’s necessary for your continued improvement.”

“I believe so,” she responded cheerfully.

“It suits you,” Cayden said.

“What suits me?”

“Smiling.”

“Am I normally that dreary?” Arielle asked, smiling again.

“Well not really... but kind of?”

“Well done, you’ve managed to answer the question without answering it,” she laughed.

He shrugged. She was really quite cheerful. He suspected sedatives. “And I see you have not done your own hair this morning.”

It was now her turn to shrug. “If someone offers to do my hair for me, who am I to refuse?” It had been braided neatly, as opposed to the usual mess of knots and tangles.

“I suppose.” It really was a change, seeing her so happy, sedatives or not. She had, in his opinion, never looked more beautiful. But she had enough troubles of her own. His own opinions would only burden her.

“You probably have an official purpose for coming this far, right?” Arielle asked with a sigh.

“Yes, the Council sent me.”

“Well what do they have to say?” she asked impatiently. “If I’m going to be spending the rest of my days in the Silent Tower, I want to know beforehand so I can pack some warm clothes. And maybe a broom, the place needs a deep cleaning.”

Cayden laughed. “I’ll have you know I live there.”

“All the more reason to bring one.”

He sighed. “Jokes aside, I do have official business.”

She waited. He dragged it out for a moment, before breaking into a smile. “You’ve been pardoned for all past crimes, in full.”

“All of them?” Arielle asked.

“Yes, this means that if you wanted to... you could be a greencloak again.”

She seemed to think for a moment. Then she sighed. “I don’t think I’ll ever be a greencloak again.”

“I expected as much.”

“Is that all?”

“Yes.” He smiled. “I should be ge—”

The sound of a magic circle crackling into existence interrupted whatever he was going to say. The two jumped as it did, startled. A brilliant white and gold light shone from the circle, which hovered slightly above Arielle.

The circle hissed, a swirling sphere of magic blazing in it for a moment, before a small brown object dropped out of it, landing in Arielle’s lap. It was a leather pouch. The circle snapped shut.

Arielle opened the pouch cautiously. Inside was a small ring and a single sheet of paper, neatly rolled up. She unraveled it. Across its front was written a long message in runes unlike any the two had ever seen before. To their astonishment, the runes began to shift, transforming into long lines of text, and the paper grew longer to accommodate them.

“I can read this,” Arielle said after a moment.

“Go on then,” Cayden responded, intensely curious. “Read it.”

“To whom it may concern,” she read out loud. “Many years ago, in a land no doubt

far away from where you are now, there were seven brothers. Their names were Samael, Jophiel, Uriel, Raphael, Gabriel, Michael, and Lucifer.” She paused. “I’ve heard this story before.”

“I haven’t,” Cayden replied. She turned back to the page.

“The seven lived in peace and harmony, spreading light and joy to all the land. Yet one day, the eldest and most powerful, Lucifer, turned against the others, and he and Samael began a war to claim their brothers’ power. In their final battle, all seven were slain. All they left were books, dozens of books. A scholar found them, in the year 440. That scholar was me.

At first, I released the texts to the public, as I could not read them. Yet despite the efforts of several translators, we could not understand the meaning of the texts. One day, however, I realized that these texts were not, as we thought, books of magic and spells, but rather stories. A diary of sorts. It described their journeys and adventures, from the start of their lives.

The seven, it turned out, were born cursed. Or so they thought. With the benefit

of hindsight and modern reasoning, it's evident that they suffered from some sort of sickness.

Its symptoms were curious indeed. Most of the time, they would seem normal, kind and reasonable people. Yet every now and then, one of them would seemingly go mad, their mind blank but for an incessant destructive urge, their eyes would change color, and they would become impossible to reason with. During this time, the afflicted person would be able to see and comprehend everything as normal, but would be completely unable to control themselves.”

Arielle paused. The paper trembled in her fingers for a moment.

“That’s exactly how you felt during... the incident, isn’t it?” Cayden asked gently.

“Yes.” There was a mixture of fear and sadness in her eyes as she seemed to see the memory of that time again. Cayden watched helplessly. After a moment, it seemed to fade. “I’ll go on now then.”

Cayden nodded. Arielle returned to the paper.

“During these times, or ‘fits’, as they called them, their magical power would greatly increase, and the others would have to restrain them by force. However, the destruction resulting from these fits drove them from their home, exiled.

They journeyed then, far and wide. Their texts recall that one day, they met a man. At first, they found him utterly ridiculous. He seemed to believe that he was destined to become a bird, and tried all he could to do so. He wore thousands of feathers, had woven crude wings out of cast-off feathers and whale bones, and used Wind Magic to fly around. But he was willing to put them up for the night, and eventually, they asked him about his life. He told them his story willingly.

To their surprise, he had the exact same condition they had. Yet somehow, he had cured his. He claimed that discovering he was meant to be a bird healed him.

Naturally enough, they took him for a fool and went on their way. But they mulled over his words for some time. Eventually, they decided to try it, if in a more logical fashion.

They took it upon themselves to find an ideal, a concept or word that they wished to live up to. Lucifer sought for Light and wished to steal that of his brothers. Michael wished for Order, and looked to impose it wherever he went. Gabriel was Truth. Raphael wanted to Heal. Uriel looked for Justice. Jophiel dreamed of Wisdom. Samael reached for Power. To their relief, it succeeded.

It is from this 'cure' that I began to realize that the sickness that had so long afflicted them was mental in nature, not a physical problem. But this concept that one should live up to an ideal caught my heart and set my mind afire. I too, decided to follow that creed, despite not being afflicted myself.

At first, it was only me, searching the land for any afflicted children and trying to live up to my ideal. I believe I fairly succeeded in the second goal. To my surprise, others had decided to join me. We formed the Order Angelic, after the name the people of the land had given the brothers, the title of *Angel*. It was our good luck that brought to us three of the cursed children. Their names were Zadkiel, Selaphiel, and Camael, and they took for their ideals Freedom, Purity, and Courage.

Those were good days. The Order created a long peace in the land, and darkness was far from the mind of any citizen.

But in the year 1051, tragedy struck.

A cataclysm far from our land disrupted the very core of the earth, shattering the world. Darkness descended everywhere, and all hope was extinguished beneath it. As I write this, strange powers rage like a storm around our final citadel, and most of my fellow angels have died.

All things must come to an end eventually. But some things need not die. That is how it is with the Order. In our early days, I realized that if the few members we had then died, the Order would be finished. Thus, my friends and I created a ring, in which we imbued powerful magics so as to store all the information we could gather. This ring, the Seal of Solomon, I have included in this pouch. We built an underground array of equipment designed to find the first person born with the affliction the day they discover their ideal—after all, there isn't much benefit to sending it to a newborn child—and the moment those conditions are met it shall be sent with a modified *Summon Elemental* spell,

along with this letter, written on paper designed to be readable in all languages and tongues.

If this letter reaches you, we have fallen. Yet should you choose to put on the ring, our dream may yet be restored. You will then become the sole member of the Order Angelic, the last living angel on earth.

No matter what you choose, I pray good luck shines upon you forever, and that you will never face the darkness alone.

Farewell,

Metatron, Angel of Knowledge.”

Cayden tried to digest the information for a while. “This letter is three thousand years old,” he said at last.

Arielle nodded, and picked up the ring. She flipped it over, and held it up to the light.

“So, what are you going to do?” Cayden asked.

“Go on another adventure,” she responded, slipping the ring onto her finger.



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