



Kevin

Focke

THE
REFLECTION
COLLECTION

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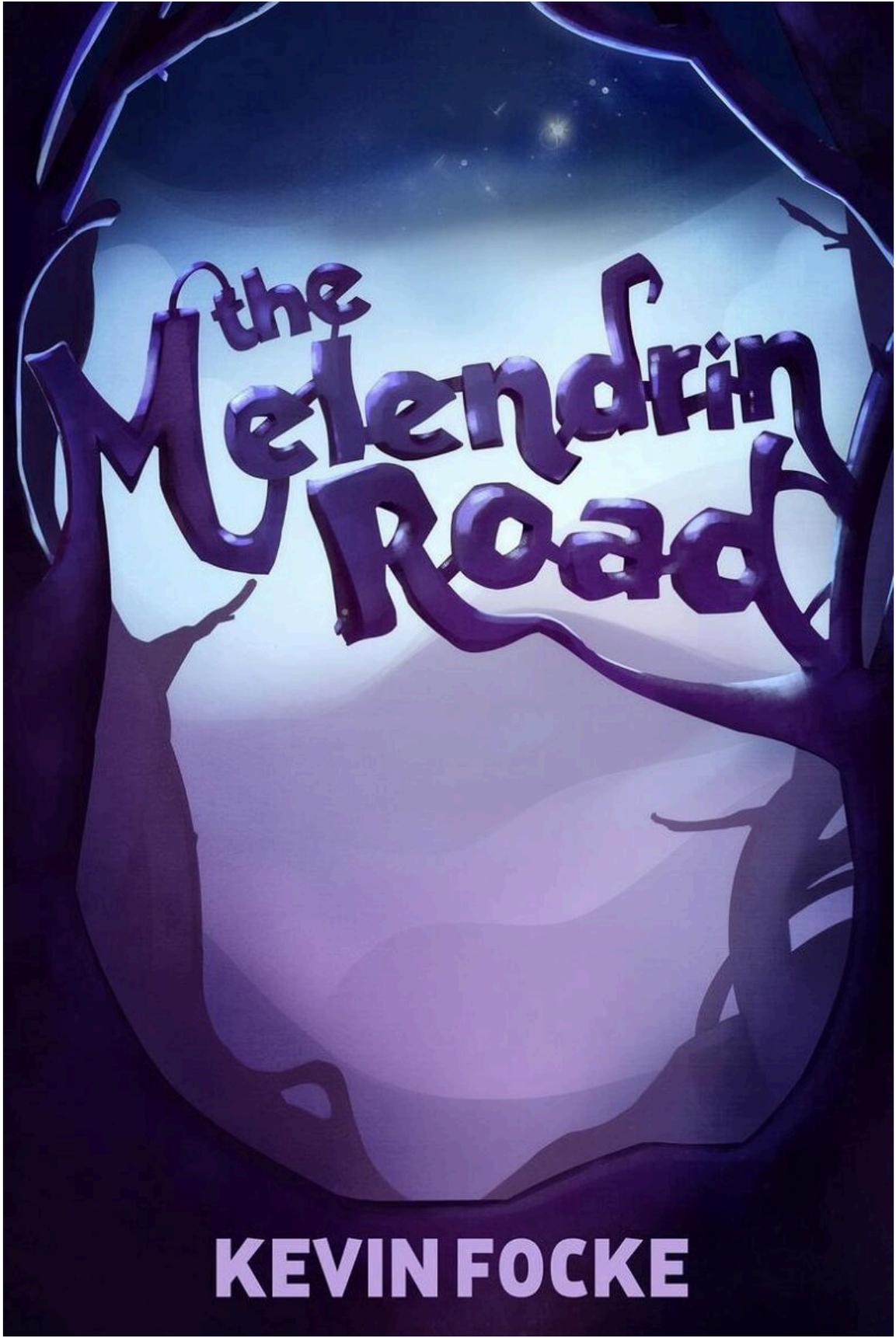
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THE BEGINNING OF MY CREATIVE JOURNEY. A tree needs a solid base to grow from, exploring widely in search of nutrition—and so does a storyteller. This omnibus chronicles my search for a creative voice.

.....

The book is composed of four parts:

1. The Reflection Collection (The Elemental Series + The Jane Pinkerton Chronicles)
2. The Tales Untold Collection
3. The Zoobadoo Zoo Short Story
4. The Seasons Of Love Collection



the
**Melendrin
Road**

KEVIN FOCKE

THE ELEMENTAL SERIES PART 1:

THE MELENDRIN ROAD

(The Harengé Universe)

.....

PROLOGUE: THE PROPHECY

Under lost starlight an heirloom will be found
A companion will guide her from past rebound
To light the way where darkness grounds
To escape the moon of obscure doubt
With one word to guide them
The Flash binds them

CHAPTER 1: THE ROCK AND THE HEW

By Leonard J. Roseburg

My life began in a puddle on the cobblestone street, my size and weight that of three small stones. My birth was merely an uncomfortable distraction, the side effect of meeting too many men down the blanket and drinking too much ale. I was underfed, cold, and lonely laying on the cobblestone.

One by one, people passed me by, denying my basic existence, up until an ordinary Sculptor, with a heart as big as the stones he worked on, took me to his house. All he had was all he gave me thus I became all he had. He raised me to be greater than the tools I was given, to excel and exceed at what I do—as was his personal mantra.

‘Life hits you hard,’ he said, ‘but life's gusto holds sway.’ These are the words I still treasure most.

.....

Every morning, father kissed me gently on the forehead. Afterward, he walked up the Winding Road all the way to the Pearl Gate. Standing proudly before it, he said his name in a strong and courteous manner:

‘Leonard H. Roseburg, eighth member of the High Council’s Sculptors.’

Next, father showed his engraved coin, the guard held it up against the sky inspecting the reflection and then, with a bold swing, the Gate went open.

What happened after he entered, I am not entirely sure of. Father

claimed he was a Sculptor and I wanted to believe him, but something always irked me. When I asked him what he did, he always gave me the exact same answer:

‘I work on bringing the stairs all the way down to the ground.’

Back then, it didn’t make much sense, and it still doesn’t now.

One such time father had a bunch of vials in his backpack, I asked him why he needed those. He promptly grabbed a piece of paper and a pencil, sketching random shapes while brewing up his thought. Eventually, the answer arrived as a smooth convenience; he laid his hand on my shoulder:

‘You see, Leonard, it’s actually quite simple: When I am in the tower, I sometimes get really thirsty, but the big people don’t allow me to bring water. You have to know towers and water don’t get along very well; every time a flood comes by a couple of towers get destroyed. Because of that, towers get really angsty near water—except when it rains. Just like us, they don’t mind a welcome reprieve from the Blazing Sun. Once the towers are comforted, I then take out my vials, put them on the window, and have some nice, fresh water to lessen the thirst. It’s a win-win situation; the towers don’t get scared and I don’t have to carry the water up the stairs.’

Father meticulously burrowed a tunnel where my doubt could not follow; only he could convince of me such a lie.

.....

Seemingly in the blink of an eye, I grew from a boy to a man. Unbeknownst to the High Council, I even became the youngest man to be a rightful Omexian.

‘Leonard is a man born without sin and is granted the name of his closest kin,’ they said. ‘May he, too, be determined to walk the right path.’

In full battle gear, armed with the best intentions, I took my first steps towards that fabled goal; I was ready to be an adult. Life concurred and promptly spat me in the face.

.....

It happened on a morning just like any other; the clouds were white and the Birds and the Bees flew happily in the breeze. Amidst it all, a little rascal in an unwieldy body followed his father. He was wading through the bushes and fording through the brook as it briefly kissed his path; I loved the thrill of pursuit; it invigorated my adventurous spirit—and so did eavesdropping.

‘Leonard H. Roseburg, eighth member of the High Council’s Sculptors,’ father declared with grace.

‘Welcome, Mr. Headstrong,’ the guard said sardonically, ‘show me your verification; I need to ascertain your assertion; what is your claim to this presumed criminal’s name?’

Father fumed with a huff, he fumbled to his pocket, lifted the burdensome coin, and smashed it into the guard’s hand.

‘Keep it,’ he said with a mortified contempt.

‘My sincerest apologies for the ostensible umbrage, Mr. Headstrong. Pardon me for my forthrighteousness, I cannot help but notice you harbour some acrimonious animosity towards me, wherefore then—I ask pertinently—walk you so freely into me, a liaison of the law?’

‘A misplaced sense of righteousness, I presume,’ father said dripping of acid.

‘Should I view this... accost as an act of aggression?’

‘Would that please you, Ruffus?’

‘No, it certainly would not, Mr. Headstrong; as a liaison of the law, an affront on my being would incommode my impartiality; I must ensure—for fairness’ sake—an honest trial.’

‘Honest,’ father scoffed, ‘honest is the fool who believes in his own lies.’

‘And yet—may I remark—in the right hands, the fool is a powerful tool...’ Ruffus sneered, his sleazy smile hitting father harder than a fist ever could. Father lunged back with words.

‘Revel in your smugness while it lasts; the fear of change and the comforts of stability will never stall the progress of Human ingenuity!’

‘Quite so, Mr. Headstrong, quite so... Pardon me once again for my forthrighteousness, while this chit-chat was a profound pleasure, I fear we’ve been diverging from protocol for far too long. Chop chop now, please tag along.’

The Gate opened and father walked in, head held high, never to be seen again. Back home, I found his farewell letter.

‘My dear son,

You are not of my blood, of that I am certain; but I hope you felt the love I gave you, like a real father would. A chance to gaze upon your innocent face every morning was the biggest gift I’ve ever received. It reminded me that in everyone’s heart there is a child with curious gusto, yearning for answers.

I dearly hope you do not limit your worldview to the confined corners of a claustrophobic room; the world is out there, Leonard, ready for you to explore.

Experience the disappointment of failure, the triumph of success, the sadness of death, the melancholy of loneliness, the fullness of

company, and the ecstasy of the moment.

Hear the sound of the waves and the whispers of the Shells, the deep wailing of the endless wells, the wind rushing through eternal peaks, the Birds chirping for harmony, love, and peace. Smell the Lotus at its bloom, feel the earth beneath your feet. Breathe in the frigid winter air and the fresh smell of spring. Take in the scent of wet wood in the forest, of the coals in the fire under the searing meat.

Run your fingers over the bark of the tallest Tree, feel the tickle of the soft Sponges in the sea, touch the cold marble in the caverns, and the silk in the light-caressed taverns.

I hope you absorb all there is to this world instead of bottling up who you are. I know you learned it from the best, but sometimes... you know how the frivolous saying goes: "When the fee fees come, don't let them go; embrace the moment, let them flow; bathe in the knowledge of being Human too."

*Best of luck in love and life,
Leonard H. Roseburg'*

Scribbled vertically in the margins, I noticed he left me another message:

'In books close and far away my legacy remains.'

.....

A couple of weeks later, I heard four loud knocks on the front door. I was familiar with the knocking system: One is for taxes; two is for mail

delivery; three is for family and friends; and four... four, I didn't know. I opened the door and saw a man with a frown and a face turned low, holding a ruffled letter in hand.

'The...' He sighed. 'The High Council would like to invite you to...' His eyes nearly touched the paper '...to become a part of the Sculptors Guild in a way toooo... what's the word... oh... compensate for the unforu... unfortunnn... unfortunate death of your father.' The man gave the most compassionate look he could muster before presenting me another piece of paper.

'Sign here,' he said. I immediately declined the offer. The guard bargained. I declined again; one should never bargain with murderers.

'So it will be, then.' The man grinned. 'So it will be, then.'

.....

The next night above the din of the hailing storm I heard three soft knocks. It was more of a thump than a knock, come to think of it. It's a wonder I even heard it. Out of reflex I walked closer, but I didn't quite trust the knock.

Who would visit me this early in the morning? It couldn't be family; it couldn't be friends; I was a stranger broken free from society.

Still, I had to open the door. What if a great opportunity came by? What if I missed it by assuming the worst? That wouldn't be right—it wouldn't be what father wanted. So I opened the door and before it floated an orb. It was bright as daylight yet unclear; it was a haze with a vivid sense to the touch.

I called it a Wisp yet I didn't entertain the possibility it actually was one; Wisps have enough to worry about caring for the Children of the

Rinse. Besides, the Light of Ellim doesn't even mourn the dead; it celebrates renewal.

The Wisp and I soon became acquainted with one another; we shared our stories, the good and the bad. I shared my stories with words, the Wisp did it with light drawings in the sky like stars brushed into wide strokes to form an image. I was surprised by the struggles of the Wisp; they were abstract as were its drawings.

.....

Since the passing of my father, I had felt like a singularity; a Human that need not sleep. Then, at noon, in the wake of my vigil, exhaustion caught up to me, and I drifted off to Slumberland.

.....

The next morning, I thought the Sun were shining brightly on me. In reality, it was the middle of the night and the Wisp was floating erratically around me. It conveyed a sense of pure panic through its movement. I stood up, eyes adapting the black into colour. The Wisp now flew to the door, revolving around the door knob. I went outside into the dormant street and focused on the sound of silence. Naught but leaves brushed in the wind stemming from the forest behind my house. Oh, and of course, the wildlife seized every chance to tell the stars who they were: They hooted, howled, and growled. And deep under the roots of Trees in little holes lived Rabbits cuddling next to their young. All the while Mr. Ant and his colony were dragging a once boisterous Nocturnal Cicada to the nest; a feast for days! I suppose my daydreaming occasionally *did* extend

into the night. I've spent countless hours I'll never regain, but for the off-chance I was right just once, it was worth every second.

A twig broke through my imagination as a trample scurried towards me. Naturally, I cowered against the wall, trying to suppress my breath. And yet, in an instant's regret, grasped by insatiable curiosity, my head swung around the corner and I stared straight into a grin. My heart was pounding out of my chest. I ran and ran, the Wisp floating before me, illuminating my path in the dark of night. My feet were no match for the ground as I rushed away from my personal demons, the world now left behind me.

A filthy breath pierced through the illusion; the guards were close, and the Wisp disappeared out of sight. One of the men jumped on me, grabbed me by my legs, and I fell face first into the ground. I was still conscious, and turned around only to see the guards gloating as if they had caught a prize winning Deer.

The guards grabbed me by the neck before the Wisp reappeared, going straight for the heads of my captors. One by one, their eyes burned, melting in their skulls, screaming for a divine intervention.

Again, I ran away from trouble, moving from one cobblestone road to another, down the Melendrin Road.

CHAPTER 2: THE LAMOURUS

By Luna Estafaria

'Once upon a time, not too long ago, a statue rose in the nexus of Western trade. With sword struck in solid marble it stood and the world marvelled. Alleor or Stone King's Hill it was dubbed.

A ginormous city prospering in the northern tip of Khamora, backed by an unpassable Mountain range, enclosed by a wild yet wealthy sea, and overlooking vast rich grounds.

Life in Alleor was fair and square: Humble in speech and hard at work you either fished, traded, or farmed. Each profession was granted with adequate tools: A trader received a wagon and a trusty steed for venturing the world; a fisher received a boat, nets, and rods to carefully haul the sea's gold; a farmer cultivated a plot by principle of the trinal pauper, received a Taurallian, and access to advanced machinery.'

My choice would have been easy; I would trade all that shines mellow and bold for a taste of this world.

'Yet great times went to pass when glory of day was met with claws of night. For trouble didn't strike from sea nor land; it struck from the Mountain.

The rise of dawn revealed bodies plastered on the crown of the king; a visible omen; the work of an aficionado, both artistic and lugubrious, looming in the limelight. Blither occupied the streets before fear took its place. Soon taboo turned ritual and where pits

came the graves rose and left a city rid of mirth.'

So goes the abrupt downfall of Torran's Kingdom, ending the Epoch of Serenity.

The tale feeds my hunger as the sea quenches the thirst: My Mountain of hope is ever decaying, so where are you staying, my Lamourus?

CHAPTER 3: VALOUR

(A few years later)

*Rain fiercely pouring on the murky grounds around me
In front of me, marching soldiers with weapon in hand
Behind me, people fleeing with children in hand
Above me, the brown winter skies*

‘You two,’ a voice rumbled, ‘quit your slacking and get over here now. War waits for no one.’ A small, elderly figure oak-brown of skin, cloaked in filthy rags beneath iron armour, closed in. Leonard tried to clear up the confusion.

‘There appears to be a slight misunderstanding. We’re not from around he—’

‘Yes, you are. You’re one of the Olmoks sent by Kifaran. Said the Intari wouldn’t attack us in less than a month. I said it wouldn’t take ‘em more than two weeks. Darned it may be, but darned I was right; wish those long-haired sea-slackers would be late for once. Always got to pick a fight with me over things I dinnit do. Long time ago their corals burned, but that wasn’t me. By now I figured them dimwits would realise Mori can’t lit water, we can’t even lit torches.’

‘Light; it’s light,’ Luna corrected.

‘Indeed, my dear, always raining with light.’ The duo hadn’t been this baffled since the Green Mosstocity invited them over for tea. The figure continued, looking gnarly at Leonard. ‘First the lightning then the thunder, that’s how the weather does when the Intari attack.’

‘I fear we’re not on the same level—’

‘Muddy grounds, not solid grounds, you mopple,’ the figure snapped, ‘enough blabbering now! Zannis’ Keep is waiting for you; time to kiss the lady goodbye; we’re going to the Mire.’

‘I am with the lady,’ Leonard replied firmly.

‘Spare me the love and all that. A woman and a man irreversibly bonded for a lifetime and beyond, lovely at the start, not so much at the end...’

‘Not *that* kind of bond; I’m her guard.’

‘Guard? Now that’s just ridiculous! Look, look with your oogleholes! You’re a man!’

The small figure’s hood revealed an old lady with skin worn away by time and warfare.

‘You simply can’t know what it is to protect if you can’t even bear a child, that’s the simple Truth,’ the lady explained.

Leonard looked over to the soldiers in an attempt to hide his loss of words. He now noticed the gaze of a man sticking out above the rest. The man’s bellowing voice overtook the sound of squelching footsteps in the marsh:

‘Menji, my old wag, scaring the Olmoks away again? We could use every hand in war!’

‘All hands but yours,’ the old lady grumbled, ‘come with me, name’s Menji Bomdroliwan.’

‘Luna Estafaria, nice to meet you. This is Leonard.’

‘Leonard who?’ Menji asked.

‘Leonard suffices,’ he replied curtly.

‘Olmoks with their silly names,’ Menji muttered, shaking her head.

‘I beg pardon, Menji,’ Leonard began, ‘I think we got off on the wrong foot; I expected women in war to wear armour adapted to their... bosom.’

‘You must be joking,’ Menji said. She gave him a good long look, let loose a breath, rolled her eyes, and focused her attention on Luna.

‘Luna, sweetheart, could you introduce your *guard* to the basic concepts of effective armour?’

Menji now took a solid lead on the two with her eagerly big steps. ‘What an odd little bugger,’ Leonard said.

‘Indubitably,’ Luna mimicked his deep voice, catching Leonard up in a chuckle.

‘So... about armour,’ Luna started, ‘if you’d read books, other than *Fables, Legends and Prophecies of Times Past* and *The Endelonian Encyclopaedia to the Animal Kingdom*, you might notice a common misconception in that women are supposed to wear breast armour. Now you’d think the explanation is hard. But from *A Simple Guide to Armour and Weapons for Men, Women and the Like* written by Errinul Untagan, I quote:

‘The misconception about breast armour is hard to crack. Breast armour itself, however, is easy to crack.’

‘Bookworm,’ Leonard said, raising his nose, before he tripped and fell into the marsh. As he looked up, mud dripped down his chin.

‘Seems like you got the wrong footing,’ Luna remarked jokingly.

‘Enough of this forsaken swamp!’ Leonard flared in anger. ‘Light of Ellim, bring me home!’

Thus it happened; the Light revolved around them, returning them to Luna’s temple in a flash.

CHAPTER 4: LETHARGY

Under me, a wooden bridge hanging over a roaring river.

In front of me, a faraway inn with three tear-shaped windows.

Next to it, one door, neatly fitting in with the sign above.

On the sign, old Crypton lettering. It spells “Padral del Lamoru.”

Left, right, and behind me, long-leaved Sproggywood.

‘Where do you think we are, Leonard?’ Luna asked, looking over his shoulder.

Leonard bypassed Luna, took careful steps toward the Trees and reached out to touch the rough texture of the bark. He breathed in the humidity of the leaves and the sweetness of the young summer breeze.

‘The climate seems to be rather mild with lots of thick green vegetation,’ he observed, ‘presuming we are in the Midland, we should be either in the north of Expedia or in the west of Wildrandir.’

‘I can always count on you, can’t I?’ Luna’s smile made Leonard nod vigorously in contentment, she had not often seen a glimpse of pure joy escaping from his stoic façade. Leonard regained his composure.

‘What does the mission entail today?’

Luna raised her eyebrows. ‘In the Flash I heard the word Lethargy.’

‘Hmm, not an impalpable word, but rather curious still.’

‘Yes... Yes, it is. Do you think we need to go into that inn?’

‘Most probable, I reckon. If not, we could also head into the woods, but...’ Leonard took a deep breath. ‘I’m not a big proponent of that idea.’

‘The inn it is, then.’

They started walking at a slow pace, Leonard frantically scouting while Luna gazed at the stars.

‘Isn’t it beautiful, Leonard?’

‘Not a fan of forests, I’m afraid.’

‘The sky, I mean.’

‘Oh yeah, the sky; of course it’s the sky.’

Every night, Luna dreamed of floating aimlessly on a course to nowhere, lonely among uncharted stars. The same dream gave Leonard nightmares.

‘So, what do you think of it?’ She asked.

‘I’ve been told the vast majority of the twinkles are now deceased stars. And... I don’t have a morbid fascination for the macabre.’

‘That’s one way of putting it, I suppose. Yet isn’t fascinating how some stars pulsate as if they’re trying to communicate—trying to tell you something important?’ She pointed to a particular cluster of stars with a bright, twinkling star near its centre.

‘You’re the Princess of the Moon, not the Princess of Pulsating Stars,’ Leonard quipped. Luna was unfazed; ever since, and every second, she was allowed outside those damned walls, she looked at the sky in total awe. She could not believe how the black stretches endlessly and how the twinkles keep rallying against the coming of darkness. They could only be a sign of hope, she concluded, however desperate the situation, the twinkles maintained their brilliant shine. She would keep shining too.

.....

The two now arrived at the open inn door, the room beyond emanated warmth and cheer.

‘Ladies first?’ Luna said joyfully.

‘But first we knock—’ Luna took Leonard by the arm and dragged him

over the threshold. The innkeeper roared at their arrival:

‘Welcome to the Belly of the Beast. May your hunger be killed and your drinks be filled.’

‘Whey!’ The inn roared back, raising their drinks.

The innkeeper led them through his buoyant establishment and presented the two a seat near the windows, close to the comfy hearth.

‘How may I help you today?’ The innkeeper asked.

‘I’ll take the same as Leonard,’ Luna averred.

‘Well, in that case, I would like to have a Wirrenstout.’ He glanced over to Luna. ‘Or wait, no... I think I’d rather have an Old Keg, or a Nefarin Nag, or maybe an Allior Kogg. Nevermind, horrible choices, night’s too young. Hmm... I think an exquisite Romara would go in, but the occasion doesn’t call for it. We could, of course, go for the safe option: A pint of this Season’s Newbrew, but I’d rather have the insides of my stomach still inside of me by the end of this evening.’ Leonard paused for a second. ‘Which reminds me—why does anyone ever drink Ceynalinn? Sounds like poison and is not far from it. I’d like to share my condolences to the brewing industry for that unhappy accident. And to think people actually pay money for that sweetened excuse of a drink. What a disgrace. Question still remains: What will I drink?’

‘The ale won’t run away,’ Luna said, drumming her fingers on the table.

‘That much is true; I shouldn’t ponder much longer... Oh, I know just the perfect thing! Do you, by any chance, have a pint of roaring black silk-winded Oak-ripened Lintim with a touch of Bromfley Vlan and a hint of Vlindernut?’

‘Well, that’s a very specific request,’ the innkeeper said thoughtfully. ‘Let me check the stock; a lot of ale has already been spilled.’

Luna drew closer to Leonard and whispered in his ear.

‘This place is booming. Why are we here?’

‘I view it as a diversion to our usual lifestyle; a change of energy, one could say.’

‘Anything’s better than those dull springs back home,’ Luna said.

‘On that, I agree. Now where’s my ale?’

‘Eager to drink, are we?’

‘A taste of fine ale in infancy formed the permanent foundation of my fondness for fermented wheats. I have tried once. Then I tried twice. Soon, a third time came. A fourth, a fifth, and a sixth. Then a period of serenity after a lifetime of ailments, followed by the imminent relapse. Whether people see me or not, I begrudge every sip, drifting slowly down the all too familiar stream on the waterfall to a premature death.’

‘I... I didn’t mean it that way.’

‘It is not your fault; on every stream there are rocks you can hold on to. If you lack that little power, maybe you deserve to fall down the end.’

A swirl engulfed the two as Luna spun four dimbles to pay for the drinks. When they fell, the innkeeper returned to an empty table.

CHAPTER 5: HOME

‘What’s wrong, Leonard?’ her voice was mellow, soft and tender like a flower in spring.

‘My problems are my own.’

‘Leonard... Lenny. You know we can share this burden. You and me.’

‘You want this life?!’ The words echoed loud and clear before he could catch them.

‘No... No, I...’ Her eyes fell down to the ground, going over every possible answer, before she took a deep look into Leonard’s eyes.

‘Neither do I want you to live that life.’

Leonard frantically scouted the room looking for support, but not the star-studded roof, the countless books on the shelves, nor the paintings on the wall could provide it.

‘I... I’m sorry, Luna. I don’t want you to share my burden.’

‘It is a bigger burden for me not to share your load; I am the rock you can hold on to.’

Leonard fell into her arms, tears forming a healing mirror. Dazed by emotion he looked into the reflection and uttered:

‘The Light shines on the rock and oh does it glimmer. Time for you to see.’



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