



PRINCE OF PERSIA

CHAIN OF DARKNESS

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Elika ran from an endless roiling darkness into an ever-deepening shadow, and the darkness followed.

She might have wept if she'd had the time. She might have cried out if it would have changed anything, but she knew it would not. She remembered the stupid handsome face of her Prince, his smirk.

I am one grain of sand in the desert, she'd told him, and for one grain of sand you've killed the desert.

The desert without you is not worth any of the treasure in it, he'd said.

It was flattering. It was infuriating. She'd been born to die and she'd died twice, betrayed by two men that claimed to love her so much that they'd kill the world to prove it.

And now...

Now she was the only source of light in a world of darkness. Ahriman had been let loose from his prison and the first thing the God of Darkness had done was swallow the sun. Plants were already withering, the world turning cold as every physical law was warped and bent to better suit the new God that ruled over Creation.

The Temples to Ormazd had fallen, twisted to ruin, the fertile lands turned sick with a spreading corruption. They loomed like mountains in the desert storms behind her, the bottom half of an unknowable maw, a single eye of Ahriman endarkening the skies and swirling clouds.

Drought, ruin, and chaos, she thought, running. That is what my Prince brought me.

She ran and ran through the desert, ran until her legs ached and her lungs burned, ran until her vision swam and she could no longer say where she was running to, only where and what she was running from.

Behind her, loping through the dark, persistent as death, the Hunter came for her.

In life he'd been a prince who loved to hunt, all the birds and animals that Ormazd had decorated Creation with. When he'd lamented that there were no more birds or beasts to hunt, Ahriman had come to him, promising to grant him power and new chances to hunt. The prince had accepted and Ahriman had twisted him, broken him, remade him into a monster than good men hunted – and so he hunted down and killed them in turn. He'd been unstoppable, the ultimate apex predator until she and her Prince had stopped him. She'd cleansed the corruption from his soul and he'd found peace, but that had been in a sunlit world, a world now lost.

The Hunter was coming for her and there was nothing she could do but run.



The Prey moved savage quick, heedless of the trail she left in her wake. Why would she worry

about her trail? Her skin was the only light in a world of darkness. The Hunter could see her burning ahead of him, scrambling through the desert winds, over sand and stone. He could see her, smell her, her scent driving him to chase, chase, *chase*.

He'd almost caught her a half dozen times.

He was almost on her again.

“Get away from me!”

Her words a meaningless challenge, she looking over her shoulder, seeing him. He could hear her blood quicken, smell the sweat and panic on her skin. Her legs were supple, quick, her light painful to look upon. Her weapon the prince was nowhere to be found – it had taken the two of them to send him off the hunt before, the two of them working together to try and force the power from him. The prince was gone now and she was alone.

She was his.

When the Ahura peoples spoke of the Hunter, they described him as a king who had loved to stalk and kill, stalk and kill, *stalk and kill*. They described him as a man who slaughtered and took pleasure in the slaughter, in domination. Their stories were too small to encompass the pleasures that coursed through him when he snuffed the life and light from something rare or worthy or both.

This, the last light in the world, she was rare and she was worthy and she was his.

YOU CANNOT KILL HER, Ahriman whispered in his many voices. *YOU MUST BRING HER BACK ALIVE*.

The Hunter had given up speaking to anyone when he'd sold his soul and embraced what Ahriman had made him.

The Prey was climbing up over rocks to get away with him, like she had with her weapon the prince, but her weapon the prince was gone from here now and Ahriman was ascendant in the world. When he reached into the shadows that trailed him he found the weighted lines that some called a bola and threw, a lunging toss with one arm. His aim was perfect. She scrambled away and failed, her ankles caught as she tried to climb and failed because of him.

She fell.

She fell so far.

She fell so far and so close to him.

The Prey struck the ground and he was on her, over her. She raised her hands to defend herself and he grabbed both her wrists with one hand and pinned them over her head, using his qatar to keep them there. His hand travelled down her arm, her pretty face, her breasts her belly as she screamed and she kicked.

YOU CANNOT HAVE HER, Ahriman said, *NOT THAT WAY. SHE IS PROMISED TO ANOTHER*.

The Hunter nodded.

The Prey did not know that and he was no Enkidu, to take his pleasure in such a way. Her terror that he might be the first to taste the pleasures of her flesh was delectable. Straddling her hips, he tore at her fine shirt, his sharp talons ripping strips from it and revealing more of herself to him. He skin shook with fear and ragged breathes and he leaned closer to her, licking her cheek, biting her throat without breaking the skin.

Still she fought to free herself.

He could admire that.

There was no hurry in anything he might want to do for her – the Mourning King and the First Tyrant's court would wait for him to return the Prey to them. He could take his time with this pretty piece of flesh. He would take his time with this pretty piece of flesh. He growled against her neck and she yelped like a wounded beast, yelped against as he shimmied down her legs, pinning them and freeing her hips.

He was licking her face, leaving black saliva on her cheeks, over her eyes. His hand traced the muscles of her abdomen, looping up to circle her breasts, pulling at the faint strips of covering he'd let her keep and then tearing them off entirely. More flesh exposed, more of her to lick, to taste, hidden parts of her that had never been seen since she'd been old enough for it to matter. He smiled as his tongue and teeth pressed against her cheek, her throat, her shoulder. She was struggling, screaming again as his tongue and lips and teeth circled the tight mounds on her chest, the soft undersides, the silky tops.

This was just another kind of hunt.

He worked at her until her screams and her disgust turned to somewhat else, until she was panting and disgusted with herself for feeling this, for wanting him to continue. He could taste the disgust and longing in her sweat, feel it in the tremors of her body.

The Hunter may not have been able to complete his hunt as he may have wanted, but he could prepare her for the the First Tyrant. The Mourning King might even thank him for the service.

He reached for her pants, pulling at the tin blue line as she whimpered and whined and fought, rubbing her thighs together. Her hands were still bound by his katar, her ankles by his bola. He moved off of her, using one breast for leverage, playing with that too-sensitive skin with his fingers while he licked and nibbled at her sides, her waist, her hips.

With his other hand, he cut her pants into ribbons, his talon not drawing blood as it ran down her outer and then inner thighs, until there was more flesh than cloth. By the time he pulled what was left of her pants off her hips wre circling, her inexperienced body drawn by protracted pleasure and denial. He could hear it in her voice, the self-hatred, the weakness.

She gasped and pleaded as his teeth and tongue moved down to the crown of her, just above her core. He circle the hairless borderlands of her lower holes, not touching the slickness that dribbled out of her. She was crying now, above him, the moans of her pleasure mingling with her sobbing, her loss, her utter defeat.

By the time he let her up she was shaking, fighting the urge to fall into her arms. He did not let her, let her stumble after him. It was pathetic, the way her mouth opened and closed, the way she trembled and then covered herself. She tried to run again and he was on her, pushing her to the ground, straddling her and toying with her until she was panting again, proving to her again and again and again how weak she truly was.

By the time he dragged her back to the ruins of her fallen kingdom she was sobbing and over-stimulated, every slight brush against her skin causing her to cry out with need. He was tempted to bend her over and rut with her, but sex offered him no satisfaction – only the hunt, the chase, the domination. He dominated her and she hated herself for it and it was everything he could have ever wanted.

When he bound her wrists and hauled her naked form up a gallows made by dead trees, she was sobbing, staring at him, trying so hard to keep her thighs closed. He spanked her ass and let her cry out, bringing out the Court, and he bowed deeply as the doors opened, as the rest of Ahriman's chosen nobility came to witness his offering.

The last scion of their God's enemy, left bound and waiting.



It was disgusting. It was humiliating.

The Hunter had stripped her and played her body like an instrument. Erika had spent her life in seclusion, among a dying civilization, studying the world without ever really being a part of it. She'd always known that her purpose in life was to die and she'd purposely kept herself aloof to make the dying easier. She'd never taken a lover, never indulged in more than simple pleasures, never even thought about-

Her prince came into her mind's eye, briefly. His crooked smile, his easy wit and grace. His ass.

Not Farrah, she thought, and managed to smile.

Her eyes were closed. She was trying to bring her body under control, pressing her thighs together. Her wrists were bound above her head and she was dangling, pointed feet touching nothing but cold air, and it was so hard to breathe. The Hunter had left her, slapping her ass – *not Farrah* – as he abandoned her to the fate that awaited her.

The city of the Ahura people had crumbled with Ahriman's return, but his power had twisted it into something horrible, something terrible. The twisting towers of forlorn gates opened and a menagerie of atrocities trickled out into the dark, walking towards her. She shivered as she heard the Concubine giggle, as she heard the Alchemist considering her, as she heard the Warrior express curiosity.

“She is beautiful, is she not?”

She opened her eyes, dared to look. Her father, his nobility devolved into a profane shadow, walked beside a figure that led the others, a figure she had never met but had heard stories of. She felt herself choking, her eyes going wide in horror as Ahriman's first corrupted, the Tyrant, walked towards her.

Ahzi Dahāka.

Ahzi Dahāka, whose rule ushers in drought, ruin, chaos.

Taller than her father but not so tall as the Warrior, Ahzi Dahāka was powerful and well-shaped, dressed in swirling robes of shadow decorated with the death of stars. His skin was punctuated with his glistening scales along his fingers, his forearms and shoulders. From the top of his torso three crowned serpents rose, each as thick as her neck, sinuous and blackened, their eyes staring at her, their tongues tasting her on the wind.

“*SHE WILL DO,*” the serpents spoke in unison, a discordant hissing chorus.



Her father nodded and came towards her, cutting her down.

“Father, please,” she said.

“You will live,” he whispered. “You will live and you will be honored in this damned world. I am sorry. Do not ask me to let you die I will not, I will not, I can not let you die...” Her father pushed her towards the waiting Tyrant and she stumbled, feeling revulsion as the serpents extending, catching her, lifting her up. She felt six eyes boring into her soul, felt cold scales press against flesh made warm by the Hunter.

Long hard muscle wrapped around her, pulling her arms away from her chest and wrapping around them, below them, above them, impossible lengths without end. He held with with effort, bringing her closer to his hands. She felt them, long thing fingers grasping her calves, tickling their way along her naked thighs as the serpents brought her lower, closer, as something long and hard teased the entrance of her body.

“I FEEL YOU QUICKEN, PRINCESSS,” three three serpents hissed. *“YOU WILL LEARN TO SSSERVICE ME, TO PLEASSSE ME, AND YOU WILL FORGET ALL ELSSSE IN THE ETERNITY WE SSSHARE.”*

“No,” she whimpered, struggling to free herself. “No.”

Serpentine tongues lashed out against her cheek, against her lips and eyes. He was too cold and too smooth but he knew where and how to touch her, how to apply pressure to warm her, to shake her. She turned her eyes to her father, begging for his aid, but he turned his face from her and abandoned her to a fate so much worse than death.

Ahzi Dahāka teased her in front of his court. He toyed with her inexperienced body, a being thousands of years old, a being that had made love to thousands of women and raped thousands more. He seethed around her, making her gasp, making her shake her quiver, making her long for the cock head that was just teasing the surface of her, cool precum decorating her lower lips.

“DO YOU WANT THISSS?” he taunted.

“No,” whimpered Elika.

She had not known that snakes could smile.

“LIAR.”

His cock met no resistance as she was lowered onto him, as the serpents rose her up til she was almost free of him and lowered her back down until she was gasping from the fullness, until she felt like she would split from the size of him. She whimpered. She cried. She gasped in a mind-shattering pleasure, screaming as he used her to masturbate himself, as he made her legs quake and quiver as she came and came and came, as he thoroughly mastered her.

When he finally let her fall to the sands she was shaking, cold inside and out. His cock was another serpent hovering above her as she lay in the sand, humiliated, still thrumming from cold orgasms, yearning for touch from anyone other than the monsters surrounding her. She felt defiled, profane.

It was not until Ahzi Dahāka shot his black cum on her prone body that she started to cry.



Ahriman descended upon the world and the world suffered.

The caliphs and kings of the world were forced to march to the Ruined Temple, to bow before Ahzi Dahāka, to bend their knees and pledge obedience. To prove themselves true they were forced to degrade themselves and one another, to engage in all manners of wickedness. Ahzi Dahāka peered into their souls – all of their souls – and found the best ways to corrupt them, to weaken them, to make monsters out of men and put those monsters in a position to do the most damage.

Elika was forced to watch.

Ahzi Dahāka dressed the princess in rags left over by her people, a mockery of everything she had been. She wore blackened chains and bangles on her wrists and her ankles, but the worst was a blackened collar around her neck that tightened, choking her whenever she tried to speak, or call upon her magic, or stand without permission.

The collar was leashed and lashed to Ahzi Dahāka's throne. Sometimes, to shame her or his audience, he would pull her up. Most often he pulled her onto his lap when he entertained the caliphs and kings, but his three serpentine heads watched for their reactions. Sometimes, she was made to kiss feet, Ahzi Dahāka's or his guests', made to prostrate herself.

“SSSHE WASSS A PRINCCCESSS,” he would tell them, in discordant choir with himself.
“WOULD YOU SSSEE YOUR DAUGHTERSSS BROUGHT SSSO LOW?”

All of them were horrified by the thought at first, but by the time they left the Ahriman's Court they would have done anything, committed any crime. As often as she suckled Ahzi Dahāka's black seed during these meetings, he would have her crawl to suckle at the manhood of his guests, swallowing them down to the root.

To show his power he sometimes had her sit on his lap so that he could feel her, toy with her, molest her. Kings and caliphs leered at her, were happy to accept her when she was passed on to them like a treasure to be admired and then defiled. They pawed at her, ran their hands through her hair and over her breasts, fingered her between the hips and took their pleasure from any hole that suited them.

Ahzi Dahāka had his guests take her two, then three, then five, at a time.

He showed her off, preening on his throne, having her dance, taking his pleasure from her, making them want a turn with her. He used her like a drug, making people addicted to her flesh, her moans, her suffering. They whipped her, bound her, made her scream in pain and in pleasure, and when they left her to cry and whimper in the cold sands of court it was not because they cared about her pain.

She lost count of the times she awoke with a cock in her mouth or her cunt, lost count of the times she awoke to find herself in Ahzi Dahāka's lap or in his bed.

“YOU WERE ALL THAT HE FEARED,” the snakes hissed at her, biting her. She screamed and cried as they infected shadow in her veins, as she felt a vile cold seep through her body that left her shivering. *“WITH YOU HERE, LIKE THISSS, HE FEARSSS NOTHING.”*

Twitching at his feet, hugging herself and desperate for warmth, she almost welcomed it when the next king and caliph was given the chance to use her.

At least, she thought, they're warm.



Alone in the dark, Erika thought.

Ormazd had a son named Sharevar, had a son whose name meant Control.

Control was a virtue.

Although she was lost in a world of wickedness, of evil, although she could do nothing as the men around her were weakened and corrupted, she could keep herself under Control.

They did not defile her; they defiled themselves.

They did not degrade her; they degraded themselves.

They did not corrupt her; they corrupted themselves.

She thought back to her Prince, as the two of them had fought Ahriman together. He had told her that Ahriman rejoiced after she had died for the second time, that he had celebrated her passing.

“Where are you?” she whispered, quiet enough that not even the Hunter, that not even Ahzi Dahāka, could hear her. She curled onto her side in her sleep, untouched and sanctified. She thought of his grin, his grace, his ass, and she found herself – in spite of everything – smiling. “Where are you?”

She hoped he was safe.

She hoped, but she knew safety, like all things of Ormazd's world, was a thing of the past.



It happened while Ahzi Dahāka was dealing with matters of court. They had all forgotten her, were not looking at her, not one of them paying attention to her. She was wearing rags but she had worn rags in the past. The darkness binding her was weakened, not watching her, not holding her nearly so well as it could have.

A soft application of light severed her bonds, freeing her.

Careful, careful, she slipped away into the dark, holding the light tightly within herself.



Where in the world could she flee? The neighbouring nations that might have known her had all bowed their heads and bent their knees to the tyrant behind her. She had studied the world but knew so little of it, had never thought that she'd be able to see it: the purpose of her life, she had been told, was to die.

And yet.

And yet.

South, she knew, were the Saso and Mali. Cordoba and Tahert were far to the west, the former across a great body of water. To the eventual north lay the Byzantines, and to the far

east the Abbasid Caliphate. The last had a political structure she could somewhat understand and the cultural understanding to best recognize the threat that loomed over them all – that would be the way to travel.

But, looking to the sun for guidance, she stumbled and fell to her knees. There was no sun. An unending void met her eyes, stars blinking out one by one as Ahriman's hunger devoured each of them in turn. There was no moon, no light aside from what lay weak and faltering within her.

No tides, she thought, and no winds save those which Ahriman wills.

How was she to find her way to any place, to anywhere?

Ahriman's chosen would find their way through his guidance, but she was on her own.



She expected the Hunter to come for her, quick and monstrous.

Instead, Ahzi Dahāka sent the Warrior.

“I DO NOT WANT TO HURT YOU,” the Warrior bellowed. He was leagues behind her but his voice carried. There was nothing between the two of them but distance. She was quicker than him but he was tireless, driven by a terrible endurance that could not be stopped or reasoned with.

He was close to ten feet tall and made of blasted rock, thick and powerful, animated by a blue-black glow that held his mountainous body together and animated it. He was powerful, unstoppable, invincible. His thighs were thicker than her torso. The sharpest blade could not cut him. The largest ballistia could not scratch him. A fall from the top of the tallest parapet could only slow him down.

There was no way to measure time, not really. In the however long it was her legs started to shake and her breathing became shallow, troubled. She was coated in sweat, slowing down and stumbling, but the Warrior lumbered ever closer. Closer. Closer. Close as peril, as heartbreak, as panic.

Reaching out and grasping her.

She fought, but even her Prince had struggled against this monster, the two of them exhausting themselves just to slow him down or trick him, and now there was nothing in the empty desert dark save the two of them.

Elika's kicks and strikes did nothing.

“STOP,” the Warrior rumbled. “YOU WILL ONLY HURT YOURSELF. YOU CANNOT HURT ME.”

I can try, she thought, but he shook her until her head rattled and she fell limp in his hands.

“FORGIVE ME,” the Warrior said, “BUT THE CALIPH WISHED FOR YOU TO SUFFER ON YOUR RETURN.”

With his free hand the Warrior groped the monstrous limb between his legs until it rose, slapping against his belly. It was thicker still than her forearm, the bulbous head thicker than

her fist.

“What are you doing?” she asked, looking at him in fear.

“I AM SORRY,” the Warrior said. “I CAN GIVE YOU TIME TO PREPARE YOURSELF.”

In days past she would not have known what he meant, but her captivity had taught her many terrible things. She couldn't take her eyes off it, the horrible size of it, knowing what he must do and what she must suffer. She couldn't escape, she knew – she could only endure. She spit in her hand and reached down to rub between her legs, trying to quicken herself through the terror and panic of what was waiting.

“I CAN GIVE YOU NO LONGER.”

“Wait, I-”

He moved her, steadied himself, forced the massive girth between her legs, pushed. She screamed, her whole body tensing to fend off the intrusion. He moved her back and forth, up and down, until she had settled past the head. She couldn't scream with her teeth clenched, her head tilted back on his shoulder, her breasts bouncing as he lumbered back the way they had come.

Tendrils of darkness wrapped around her wrists, spreading her arms. He wore her like jewelry, gravity conspiring with his every step to shake her up and down, up and down, up and down. She felt entirely full. She felt like she would split in two, her belly distended, her vision blurry with tears. Her legs dangled uselessly as she tried to find purchase, to kick off of the Warrior and free herself, but her efforts resulted only in failure. She pushed up and fell down, down, deeper, until she was weeping, shaking, barely able to understand through the terrible pain that was raping her into repeated desperate cummings.

By the time her cunt had devoured all of them she was a trembling mass of pain and pleading, the words not making sense even to her. She could barely understand what was happening, where she was, why she was suffering. This was a hell not meant for mortals, an agony no soul was ever meant to endure, but Ahriman would not let her die. They were not even back at the court, not yet.

Even the idea of time lost all meaning. She passed out and came to and she was still being bounced up and down on a weapon that ruined her, stretched her into gaping agony.

Finally, finally, they entered the ruined gates of what had once been her kingdom, crossed the court towards the throne. The three hissing snakes of Ahzi Dahāka stretched out and licked her, tasting her.

“*WELCOME HOME, ELIKA,*” Ahzi Dahāka hissed. “*WILL YOU EVER TRY TO LEAVE AGAIN?*”

She shook her head, no.”

“*GOOD GIRL,*” Ahzi Dahāka hissed, then: “*YOU MAY RELEASE YOURSELF, WARRIOR.*”

There was a rumbling behind her, inside of her.

The Warrior's eruption slammed into Erika's hole like a thousand hammers, lifting her off of him completely, sending her flying into the air. She tumbled, struck the ground, fell limp and loose. Her eyes were open but she could make sense of nothing. She felt the ache between her legs stay open, the normally elastic skin trying to remember how to close. Greying cum drooled out of her, then splattered down over her. Air filled her, cool and soothing.

“*TAKE YOUR PLACCCE AT MY SSSIDE,*” Ahzi Dahāka commanded. She knew the price of

defiance.

She tried to drag herself to him, she really did. The dark court laughed at her failure. The Warrior came for and in her once more.



Covered on cooling seed, Erika prayed.

Ormazd has a son named Vohu Manah, had a son whose name meant Good Mind.

Possessing a Good Mind was a virtue.

Ignoring the wickedness around her would not free her and would make matters worse. She needed to understand her circumstances, to acknowledge what was happening so that when the time came she could best take advantage of it.

Clinging to the past would trap her in the past.

Dreading the moment would trap her in the moment.

Ignoring what was wrong would strengthen what was wrong.

Dwelling on what was wrong would strengthen what was wrong.

She thought back to her Prince, as the two of them had fought Ahriman together. She had told him about the theater, about the the plays she had read. He hadn't understood the attraction of pretending passions and putting them aside.

“How are you supposed to see real life that way?” he'd asked her, and her answer had been something pithy. She knew more, now. She knew that playing different roles could let someone live a thousand lifetimes in the passing of one. She still ached, her body trembling and sore, but she huddled at Ahzi Dahāka's feet and recovered in her mind, in her soul. She imagined her Prince standing defiant in the dark court, and she standing with him.

He would come for her.

He would come for her and the two of them would wash the darkness away.



Erika sat at the foot of her people's throne, blackened by the powers that her life had unleashed.

A horror sat upon it, holding court and collecting tribute, showing to her all the failings of her crumbling world. Kings and sultans and more came from all over the world to make offerings and lost their souls in the process. Erika watched it and felt her own resolve crumble – all dreams of resistance seemed foolish when there was no one left to resist for.

If she was the only one left to take a stand, perhaps she was the one who was wrong.

Perhaps she had been left behind as the world moved on.

She bit her lip, bowed her head. She was a remnant. A ghost of a bygone world. The last flicker of light that had not been extinguished.

Ahzi Dahāka pulled on her chain, made her stand. Paraded her around his court, offering her light and her warmth to those that pleased him. He took her to his bed when it suited him, or made her service him with her tongue or her lips or her ass. He rarely toyed with her cunt, so rarely that she sometimes forgot that he was raping her when he gave her that little treat.

She cried after he let her cum for him and his court, realizing that she was as lost as the rest of them.

But mostly she was ignored. A pretty bauble like all the other treasures in the dark court, by the black throne, there to prove the power and mastery of Ahzi Dahāka. The three crowned serpents flowed and writhed, shocking sinuous crimson in a world of darkness.

The most powerful agents in the court remained Ahriman's four generals. The Hunter no longer cared about her and ignored her. The Warrior pitied her, would not look at her. The Alchemist attended only rarely.

And the Concubine...

The Concubine hated her.

All of the generals played their part as Ahriman's power solidified. The Warrior led conquering armies. The Hunter tracked down and slew heroes that might have challenged Ahzi Dahāka's reign. The Alchemist built his wonders and his terrors. And the Concubine moved among nations, corrupting them from within, turning them against one another, weakening them until they were begging for Ahzi Dahāka's rule.

"Timur has fallen," the Concubine crooned. "The mighty Khan rides towards disaster. The Black and White Sheep Turks crumble and falter. Oman and Arabia both falter in your name. Mamluq is shattered."

"YOU HAVE DONE USSS A KINDESSS," Ahzi Dahāka hissed, leaning forward on his throne. *"WE WOULD SSSEE YOU REWARDED. WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE, DARLING?"*

Even behind her veil, Erika could see her smile.

The Concubine raised a single hand, extended a single finger.

Pointed.

"Her."

Ahzi Dahāka stood. He was taller than the Warrior, more graceful than the Concubine, wiser than the Alchemmist, more savage than the Hunter. He detached the chained leash from his throne and pulled, yanking Erika to her feet. He walked down and circled around the Concubine.

A flick of his wrist sent Erika tumbling to the ground, on hands and knees at the Concubine's feet. Ahzi Dahāka handed her the chain.

"ASSS A LOAN, YOU UNDERSSSTAND."

"I understand. Would you care to watch?"



“Dance for me,” the Concubine demanded, tugging on the leash. She lashed at Erika's thighs, at her back, hauled her to her feet and held her close. “I will be your Prince, whore, and you will dance.”

The music that washes over them came from the shadows, a low thrumming beat that settled in Erika's hips and shook her. The Concubine twined their fingers together and moved, pulled, and Erika found herself spinning. She shivered as a cold darkness seared over her limbs, making them twitch.

The Concubine's palm spasmed against her own and the former-woman laughed low in her throat, mocking, miserly. Erika's hips swayed, her legs bounding underneath her, and she felt the eyes of everyone on her, a host of demons and corrupt men wanting her, imagining how she might feel.

She blushed. So many already knew what her insides felt like.

“Pretty little whore,” the Concubine whispered, voice low and husky, and Erika felt her hips shake. The movement made her chest move just so, the scant coverings that Ahzi Dahāka used to entice others to look at her barely holding onto her trim fit body. She heard groans. The shadows were groping themselves watching her.

She didn't understand what it was the Concubine was making her do. She didn't understand the motions or how any of it worked, but the music and slim lines of shadow crawled down the leash and made her saunter like a sex toy, flaunt her body like a whore. She was flushing and felt herself warm, her netherlips slicken and thighs wet and wanton. She opened her mouth, licked her lips, moaned.

The Concubine was behind her, talons on her hips, mimicking the motions, nuzzling Erika's slim neck. The captive princess whined, feeling tears settle in her eyes.

“Do you want it so badly, whore?” the Concubine whispered, and the words carried throughout the shadows of court.

And she did, she realized. Erika suddenly needed to feel herself, to touch herself, but her hands were caught by the music and she couldn't get them near enough.

“Please,” Erika whimpered, and the Concubine laughed.

Talons drummed down her belly, across the hemline of the skirt-slip that just barely covered the space between her legs and swirled down to her ankles. They followed the line of her moving hips, along her inner thighs before moving up, up, up along her ribs, circling around the tops of her breasts, cupping her.

“Do you want it so badly, whore?” the Concubine asked again.

Erika bit her lip, flushed, closed her eyes, nodded.

A slight pressure was pulled off of her, the slip of fabric covering her chest pulled away.

There were jeers, cheers all around them both. The court had seen all of her before but this was something new, the Concubine forcing Erika to make herself an enticing victim for them. She whimpered, she begged. She danced as the Concubine's talons moved under the slip skirt, teasing the heavy tender flesh between her legs.

Elika moaned, low and loud, bowing her head, her hands swaying above her head, her breasts and hips swaying as the tip of a talon brushed her wetness and brought it up, brushing her lips with it.

“That is what you taste like,” the Concubine whispered. Elika lapped at the talon, chased the wetness with her tongue, tilting her head up. She tasted like warmth, like cool strawberries on a warm day.

She licked the Concubine's finger until the only thing left was her own saliva.

“Do you want more, little whore?” the Concubine asked, and Elika nodded.

The Concubine grasped her wrists, guided her hands down, made her knead her breasts, brush down her flat belly, let her touch the fabric that protected the last of her modesty.

“You know what you have to do,” the Concubine said, and Elika whimpered.

She didn't want to. She kept trying to get her fingers to touch her waiting flesh, to bring herself some comfort, but some trick of the Concubine's kept her from herself, kept her aching and empty and waiting. She strained. She struggled. She moaned. She looked towards the Concubine and let the tears fall.

“Please,” begged Elika. “You do it. You did this to me. Please.”

The Concubine laughed, stepping back and letting Elika dance, her fingers hooked into the hemline, her hips swaying, her breasts tilting, shoulders shaking in time with the music. Her core felt heavy, warm, flushed. She could see the eyes of so many in the dark court watching her every move, her every breath, and the hunger she felt from them paled compared to the hunger the Concubine had placed in her.

“Please...”

The Concubine shook her head.

Elika whimpered, shook her head, cried as her fingers unwrapped her only protection from her hips, let it fall away. She danced away from the slip of nothing, preening, shaking her ass, presenting herself to every rapist there, and still the Concubine would not let her play with herself.

Instead, the Concubine sauntered behind her, wrapped her in a seductive embrace, talons cupping a breast, her cunt, fanged kisses trailing up her neck, to her cheek.

“You want her?” the Concubine asked, turning to the crowd, to a tide of darkness.

All around them were howls, screams, cries, demands, threats.

The Concubine merely smiled against Elika's cheek.

“Too bad,” the Concubine teased. “Our Majesty's little trinket is mine.”



There is an ocean and Elika is not drowning.

Skies black above and waters black below. There are no stars, no moon, no phosphorescence. There is only the lapping of the water for thousands of miles in every direction, swaying on

into forever.

Elika is not in danger of drowning. She floats, naked. The water cool but not cold and she is floating, floating, carried by the tide. She does not know where she's going and she does not care – why would she?

There is no light.

There is no light.

She sways and her whole body hurts. The cool water seeps into her muscles, soothing. It seeps inside her and she shivers, hungry, thirsty, but there is nothing and no one and what would be the point? What would be the point to anything? The water seeps inside and through and it soothes, soothes. She is so tired.

Darkness above.

Darkness below.

Darkness all around.

There are drops of water on the top of her body, dripping down the muscles and contours, her every curve and crevice. She doesn't care until she does.

There's something dark in the ocean. There is only darkness in the sky. Something massive above and below. The smallest part of it reaches out through the liquid, wraps around her ankle, pulls her under.

She screams. She is pulled under and she hold her breath and it lets her swim to the surface, holding her. It lets her sputter and then pulls her under again. A third time. It wraps like serpents, like strands of hair around her body.

She is light. She is the only light left in anything and she lights the waters as the dark gropes her, molests her, rapes her. Tentacles of darkness hold her limbs and pull them out, wrap around her torso, brush and then squeeze along the base of her breasts. She tastes the dark as it brushes her lips and lingers on her tongue.

It bends her knees, spreads her legs. She screams and whimpers and cries as it enters her, thrusting in and pulling out, filling her like water, as if she were a pot.

The dark toys with her, teases her, plays her like a fine instrument. It makes her moan. It forces her to enjoy the sensation of her own rape. It suffuses her with pressure, pleasure, makes her whimper.

Her first orgasm is simple, soft, gentle, but it builds on that and keeps going, forcing her to cry out, her muscles to strain, her eyes to see nothing as she lights up the dark with every scream.

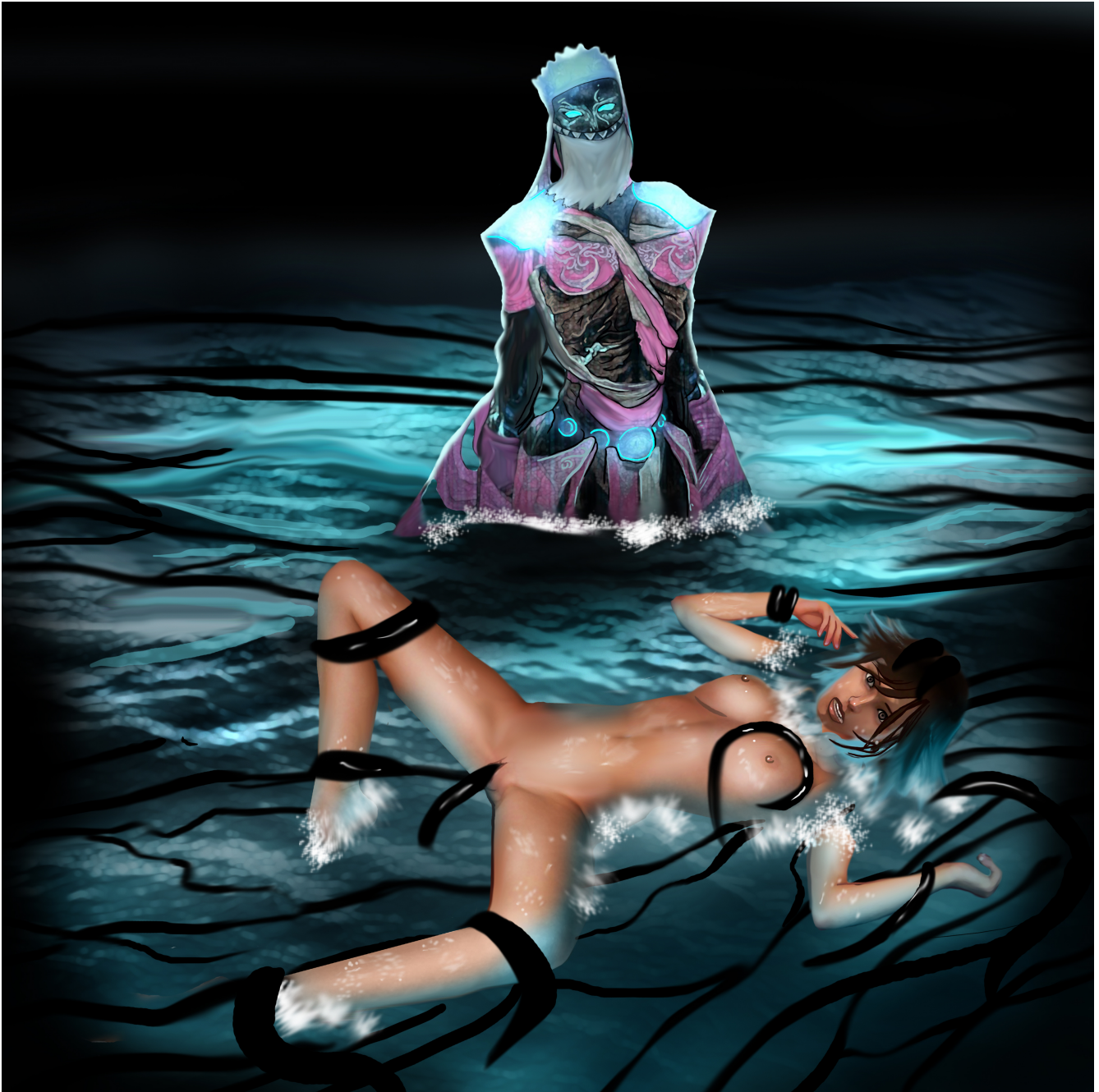
The ocean lights in pools around her as she thrashes and writhes, held to the surface, toyed and tricked until she can think of nothing at all but the pressure, the pleasure, craving more with every breath.

The Concubine hovers above her, looking down on her.

“This is all you were ever meant for, princess,” the Concubine croons. “This is the best part of the rest of your life.”

The words cut into Elika's soul as another orgasm overtakes her, shatters her, carves her.

This is the best part of the rest of my life, Elika echoes, and she does not know that the



Concubine is inside her, in her cunt, in her mind, in her soul. *This is the best part of the rest of my life.*

The ocean had her, twisting, writhing, cumming.

It was not a bad way to spend every last breath.



Floating in darkness, Erika dreamed.

Ormazd has a daughter named Aramaiti, has a daughter whose name meant Devotion.

Being possessed of Devotion is a virtue.

Devotion keeps one alive through hardship. Devotion binds people together in love, in hatred, in joy, in suffering, in celebration. Devotion to a cause, to a purpose, to a person can make a soul flourish in ways thought impossible.

The trick is to not be blind.

Blind devotion is a sickness, a death.

Questioning and testing one's own faith makes it stronger.

What was it her Prince had said, when they fought the Alchemist? He had looked at the machines the Alchemist had wrought and told her that sometimes good things could come from bad places. She hadn't understood then.

“Evil begets only evil,” she told him, and he scoffed and smiled in that way of his, that way that made her heart quicken and her belly flutter. And that was true, maybe, when it came to Ahriman. He had been created to be absolute evil, as Orzamand had been created to be absolute good. Mortals could veer between the two, and it was never too late to turn from darkness to light, never too late – though it could be difficult.

Hadn't she said she was Devoted to Orzamand?

And hadn't her Prince, in every way that mattered, been completely Devoted to her?



Everything ached.

She was naked, lying on a hard surface, and everything ached. Her eyes fluttered and her hands spasmed, palms flattening on something that felt like cool stone or metal.

“You are awake,” a cultured voice noted. “Excellent. We may begin.”

Tilting her head hurt. There had been a time that she had scaled buildings and run along walls, when she had jumped impossible distances with her Prince. She had been the pinnacle of grace then, moving with the light and the wind, but now it hurt to do so little as lift her head off the alter she'd been placed on.

Her vision swam. She closed her eyes, shook her head slowly. She felt like her tongue and teeth had been soaked in pools of decaying honey. When she opened her eyes her vision slowly came into focus.

Standing above her was the Alchemist.

He had a quill and a tablet and was jotting down notes, looking at her and then turning away to look at mechanical structures wrought of stone, metal, and sinew. It was a horror. It was horrible, and she moved her eyes away.

“What are you doing?” asked Erika, swallowing heavy between each word. Her mouth tasted like bile.

“Science,” he answered, and then turned and glided towards her. “So many questions. Physics and chemistry remain similar but are changed in the world of Ahriman ascendant. I had time to study biology during my time imprisoned, but this...” His eyes widened as he turned to look at the sunless, moonless, starless sky.

His hands reached between her legs and she whimpered, closing her thighs.

To her shock, he withdrew.

“Apologies,” he said. “I assumed that after all my associate did to you that you may have become an addict. If you do not require my touch, I would rather not touch you.”

“You might be the only one,” she said, pushing herself up on her elbows. He rested a hand between her breasts.

“Please stay where you are,” he said, and when she didn't move he took his hand away. “I assume you do not need to eat or drink given all you have consumed?”

“What do you-” she asked, then paused.

Half remembered visions haunted her like faltering dreams, the designs of the Concubine making her a wreckage.

... Elika on her knees, cocks in her hand, in her mouth, in her hair...

... the Hunter pushing her head down and forcing himself in her ass as she cried...

... on all fours, a monster below her and in her cunt, another in her mouth, another in her ass...

... the Warrior parading her around, buried deep in her ass as other demons held onto her breasts and stood on his knees so they could fuck her cunt...

... she straddling one man, riding him, while another raped her mouth, while another two forced their cocks into her soft silky hands until they exploded all over her face...

... Elika standing, one man holding her right leg up and spreading her, sawing in and out of her body while she hung onto the Warrior's hips, her tongue riding the underside of his manhood...

... Azhi Dahaka lifting her up and...

She screamed, shuddered, curled into an agonized ball and cried. The Alchemist patted her thigh.

“There, there,” he said, bored, then pushed down on her thigh and uncurled her, slapping her face, pushing down on her throat. “You had your moment. Now, stay.”

“What are you going to do to me?”

“You are the only reliable source of light left in Ahriman's eternal darkness,” the Alchemist said. “If your light could be harnessed by science for the greater glory of Ahriman, we could use a unique and finite resource to empower various mechanisms of my design. The Concubine also believes we could use your little sparkling baubles as a point of bribery for political gain, but I do not care about that. Stay still.”

Holding her down by her left breast, he pushed down and she felt her heart flutter. She gasped and a little bit of light fluttered between them. He seemed pleased, placed his other hand down near the bottom of her belly. Studying her, he brushed his long fingers up towards her chest, drawing a long line of light after his touch.

Elika's leg twitched, knee pulled up. She felt so tired as he lifted his hands off her and started drawing lines of light in the air above her, a miasma. The tangling lines tingled along her flesh, made her feel dizzy, warm. Her vision swam again, her head aching but her body feeling good, weightless.

“This is a good start,” he said, sounding pleased as she gasped below him. “how does that feel?”

“Good,” she moaned, “warm.”

“Curious,” he said, and pulled more light from her.



In Orzamd's world, every light had carried a shadow.

In Ahriman's world, every darkness possessed a shimmering.

The Alchemist proved this, and proved that she could heighten that shimmer, turn it into light. He spent days pulling light out of and around her, finding ways to bottle it, weaken it, make it grow. He told her how light was like an ocean, moving in waves, and how light was like a sandstorm, fine debris held in the air all around them.

He didn't speak to her. He didn't care about her, not really.

But he spoke aloud as he worked and she was there to listen inbetween moans and gasps.

Every time he pulled the light from her and moved it about she felt it, little tickles along her flesh, deep teases. He didn't care about the effects on her, didn't care as she writhed on his altar, didn't care if she came or pleaded. The only time he cared was when she moved and then he'd push her back down on the altar, one strong hand between her breasts.

She moved when she wanted him to touch her and he didn't care until he found that he could pull light from various parts of her, and that the light seemed different depending upon where he pulled it from. He started counting them, marking them.

“The light is of finer quality when you feel pleasure,” he said, “and it is pleasureable to have it drawn from you. Light taken from you when you are in pain is harsher, sharper, more brittle.”

She shivered.

He had hurt her, badly.

The Concubine wanted to degrade her, her make her a whore, but the Alchemist was indifferent to her – when he wanted to hurt her, he worked off a slow increase of pains.

“Hot, cold, sharp, blunt, loud,” he had said. “We will use these five broad categories as the basis of your hurts.”

He had made her scream. He had hurt her in ways she didn't know she could hurt. He healed her so that he could hurt her again, but as bad as the pain was it could have been worse, he told her it could have been worse if only she was not his sole subject.



“Perhaps,” he sighed, “If I can create or capture a duplicate source of light, we can revisit this. For now..”

He pulled light out of her and her back arched and her nipples hardened and her breasts felt so soft, so tender, and he slapped her hands down by her side. He wove the light in patterns and when she opened her eyes she wasn't seeing from her head, no, the two of them were seeing from the sky, where the sun had been.

“Fascinating.”

He pulled the light and her hip twitched, her legs spread, her lower lips spasmed. They could look through the echoes of where the stars had been, the sky turned into a haunted graveyard. She saw worlds, whole worlds, an infinite train of moving planets suffering in the new dark, trapped in the world she had failed to stop. She tried to care but all she could feel

was pleasure seeping through her, suffusing her. She could see all of it, trace all of it, the lines of light marking where the stars had been. Her mouth opened and she gasped.

The Alchemist twisted her light, called forth creatures from the dark and sent ribbons of her light into their eyes. She could feel them, the cold of them, the pain of them, but they could feel her warmth. She could feel them shiver and she shivered, so they shivered more, both of them caught in a trap of increasing pleasure. The Alchemist did it with multiple creatures, monsters, moving what they thought and felt from the light in their eyes, and Erika felt all of it, the pleasure building as she experienced more and more ways to live, to feel, to be.

She bit her lip, closed her eyes, tilted her head back. There were so many things he could do with her light, so many different ways it could be used without or without his machines. There was powerful magic in her and he plumbed it, seeking deep inside her, and it felt good and great and better. He didn't care when she moaned, when she splayed her legs, when she screamed, when she came. He didn't care about any of it and that only made her more wanton, giving herself over to these feelings she could not stop.

When he was done he patted her hip.

"I have enough data for now," he told her. "Rest."

"But..."

"What?"

She lay on the altar, looking up at him, trembling and covered in sweat.

"We," she bit her lip, shook sweat from her face, stared up at this creature. "We could do more... science."

"We will," he assured her, "but not right now."



In the aftermath, Erika wondered if she was broken.

Ormazd has a daughter named Haurvatat, has a daughter whose name meant Wholeness.

Being a Whole person is a virtue.

Every living being is a Whole being in and of themselves. They may change, they may alter, but they are merely becoming more Whole, more themselves in the process of life. As a Whole, a person joins a greater Whole.

What is more important, heart or brain?

The question is a trick. Without either, you die.

As with your body, so with yourself, with your culture.

Her Prince had found her running. He had been fleeing some grave he had robbed, loaded with treasure. They could not have been more different, but they were two wholes that, combined, became greater than either of them could have been.

Ahriman had wanted to break not only her but her line. The Prince had said that, that Ahriman had been pleased when she was dead. The light would have died with her. The light

would have died with her. What was another thousand years of imprisonment to an immortal? He could wait and the light would be a thousand years dead. Her father, in his grief, had only delayed the inevitable. She and her father had both played into Ahriman's hands, all unknowing.

She understood, now. She understood the tie between herself and her Prince.

Together, they would make the world whole.



“Get up.”

The tone was harsh. Erika moaned, had trouble opening her eyes. Everything in her body felt tired – every last wire of sinew, every strip of muscle and marrow had been worked and stretched. She felt withered, weakened, her breathing slow and laboured. She tried to move and only twitched.

A hand grabbed her wrist.

“Erika.” The voice was insistent. “You need to get up.”

She managed to roll her head in the vague direction of the sound. She couldn't make her eyes focus, but that was okay – her father was still too gentle when he touched her, abused her. His tone too full of concern even now that he was fully Ahriman's creature.

She mumbled something to him, something even she didn't understand.

“What are you trying to say?” he asked, leaning in close so she could whisper in his ear.

Is this everything you wanted, father?

He recoiled. He stalked around the room, furious. He said nothing, came back, tilted her head up and poured cool water down her dry lips, down her throat. She sputtered, swallowed, choked. He held her, hugged her, helped her drink more. He wrapped her in strips of clothe around the shoulders, let her hug herself, helped her drink.

Erika's lips felt chapped and her throat hurt, but the water helped. She could feel it thrive through her muscles, strengthening her, bringing her back to life. Her whole body was pins and needles, pins and needles.

Is this everything you wanted, father?

“Yes,” he said, pulling her to her feet, helping her stand. “You can be mad at me. You can be angry with me. You can hate me, if you want. You're still here. *You're still here.* That's all I want, is you still here, the rest is details.”

“They tortured me,” Erika said. “They raped me. You let them.”

“You're still alive.”

“Life isn't enough,” she said. He helped her stand. She pushed him away. “Dignity. A life with dignity, father.”

She didn't try to run – where would she go? He walked and she followed. When she stumbled he caught her. When she might have fallen he held her steady and let her catch her breath,

find her footing.

“I never wanted...”

“Your grief blinded and blinds you,” she said. “You should have let me go.”

“Your mother was dead,” he answered. “I was alone. I couldn't, I couldn't bear it.”

“So you damned the world.”

“Yes,” he admitted, looking at her. “And I would do it. A thousand times for you. Your Prince did the same.”

My Prince believes you can be defeated, she sniffed, thinking but not speaking. My Prince believed that my sacrifice was a tragedy for the world, and he was right in a way you never could be.

They walked in silence towards the dark court, and Elika found her resolve crumbling. She could hear them beyond the ruined doors, the screams and begging, and she found she was trembling, blinking back tears, her feet refusing to take another single step forward.

“Don't make me do this,” she whispered, pleading.

“Where is Ormazd now?” her father spat. “Where? You devoted your life to him. We both did. And he has abandoned you.”

No, she thought but did not say, You abandoned him. The rest of us are left to correct your failure. I pray we are enough.

Her father gripped her, pushed her against a wall, lifted her wrists above her head.

“What are you doing?” Elika asked, meeting his eyes.

“Surely you know by now,” the thing her father had become growled. “I have watched demons take you. The Hunter Ride you. The Warrior present you like a trophy. The Concubine pass you around like a toy. No one knows what the Alchemist did to you, but we have all seen the proof of it. And now, daughter, I want a taste.”

“You are not my father,” Elika said, tilting her head up. “He would never have done this.”

“I lacked the courage before,” the Vizier said. “But through Ahriman, all things are possible.”

He leaned in, kissed her. She bit his tongue and he didn't care, laughing at the pain as his free hand groped her breast, grasped her throat. She could feel the power in him, the coldness. He was using his knee to force her legs apart.

“You look so much like your mother,” the Vizier said. “I miss her. I miss her so much.”

“Don't do this,” Elika whispered, not taking his eyes off him.

“She was fierce, too,” the Vizier's voice was husky. “So fierce. I loved that about her. Her intelligence, her wisdom, her grace. I watched you run, watched you leap in the world before. I celebrated you still being a live but I think I couldn't admit how much I wanted you to ride me, or how badly I wanted to ride you. In her name.”

She didn't feel ashamed. She didn't even feel anger, not really – just a simmering contempt for what her father had chosen to become and what Ahriman had brought out in him.

“They know me because you told them,” she said, as his cockhead slid between her legs, braising her core. She felt her eyes teat up, felt them narrow.

“Every little secret,” he confirmed. “Every detail. Every thing you have ever done since you came screaming out of the womb and into the world. How I held you. How proud I was of you. How~”

She kicked him away from her.

For the first time since the Hunter had taken her, she called the light to her hand and she fought – striking him to the ground, staring over him.

“Cling on to those memories,” she snarled, feeling courageous. “They are the only thing you have left of me.”

Folding the blanket over her shoulders, head held high, she walked towards the ruined doors, pushed them open.

“When he's done with you,” the Vizier said, “I will lift you out of the dirt. Little by little, your dignity will be reduced to tatters and scraps. And then, darling, daughter, I will fuck you senseless in the dark.”

She didn't bother granting him a response.

They would speak only once more.



Elika walked into the dark court, her quiet dignity silencing the horror.

Ormazd has a daughter named Asha, has a daughter whose name meant Truth.

Truth is not always a virtue.

Too many focus on hard truths, on brutal truths. Where are the beautiful Truths, the kind Truths? If one focuses on hurting others, one abdicates actual Truth in favor of pain and becomes both the victim and perpetrator of lies.

By favoring brutality, one becomes a mere bully.

A bully cannot face the truth of what they are without crumbling.

By embracing kindness and brutality, one commits to finding Truth in all actions.

The Truth is that there are very few Absolutes in the world of mortals, that all living things are both good and bad. Life comes from death, and death needs life to have meaning. All things in moderation, in balance, all things by necessity.

And how should one know necessity without Truth? Mortals must lie to themselves to justify their suffering, to give it meaning. Pain does not make one harder, does not make one stronger. Pain endured is pain survived, but it is kindness that gives mortals a reason to move on, to survive, to heal, to matter. Truth unspoken festers into lies, allows evil to flourish, allows one to destroy everything they hold dear while chasing away phantom fears, while pursuing phantom rewards that sicken, wither, weaken. To be Truth requires courage, unblinking, unfaltering. Truth demands kindness.

She lets the blanket fall from her shoulders and leaves the past behind.

Elika sees the truth of horror and she does not falter.



Elika sees the truth of horror and she does not falter.

Head held high, blanket around her shoulders, she strides among the shadows and the demons, souls infested by Ahriman's foul corruption. They are not used to seeing her strong, not used to seeing her confident. She withers those that get close to her with a look, with the set of her shoulders. She is mostly naked but they are the ones that are bare, their sins carved onto their bodies. She has nothing to hide and they have no way to hide what they are.

Steady, her strong legs carry her forward. Her strength offends their weaknesses. She hears them respond, hears their simmering hatred of her and she does not care. The Hunter is frustrated, the Warrior shamed. The Concubine seemed forlorn, unable to understand how she has not broken. The Alchemist simply stares, for once uncertain.

The creature that had been her father slinks in after her, hurries through the court towards the throne.

She sees him get to Ahzi Dahāka, sees him prostrate himself, sees him warn the tyrant king that she is coming. She does not care. When Ahzi Dahāka stands he brushes her father aside. He towers over the court like a mountain, three crowned serpents wavering from his shoulders, staring at her without blinking.

She stops before the throne, wrapped in her blanket, surrounded by darkness, staring down an immortal tyrant.

She is not sure what to say.

“GLORIOUSSS.” Ahzi Dahāka's serpents seem to smile, sadistic. *“I HAD HOPED THERE WASSSSOMETHING LEFT TO YOU.”*

The left serpent lashes out, crossing the impossible distance between them. It should not have been able to be that long, to stretch that long, and it caught her off guard, biting her on the shoulder. A blackness crackled along inside her skin and she screamed, staggering in agony. She called upon the light within her, pushing the darkness out, the serpent releasing her.

The right serpent lashed out, faster than darkness filling a lightless room. It bit her breast and she screamed, faltering as black agony crinkled inside her body. She felt her heart strumming inside her, aching. Her breathing turned ragged as a sickening warmth spread through her body, settling heavy in her belly. Her light drove the snake away, fought the corruption infecting her.

The central serpent curled around and bit her thigh.

She came instantly, body quivering.

“YOUR WORLD OF LIGHT ISSS DONE,” Ahzi Dahāka snarled. *“LET USSS REMIND YOU OF WHO RULESSS THISSS NEW WORLD.”*

Curling and slithering up her thigh, cold scales brushing along her skin, the central serpent bit her lower lips before forcing itself inside her. She screamed and fell but it lifted her, lifted her high above Ahzi Dahāka's body, presented her violation to the whole of the court. The serpent inside her wavered, rippled in girth and she screamed, panted, moaned, forced up

and down the shaft of it, up and down, scales catching on her sensitive insides, the corruption seeping inside her, settling, settling as she screamed.

The right serpent curled around her torso, around her breasts, squeezing, slithering, crushing. She felt the air forced out of her lungs, felt fangs drawn like razors across her face, pressing in just enough to cut, to bleed. When she screamed the head seethed into her lips, pushing her teeth open, savaging down her throat. She tried to bite and it wavered, squishy like decayed meat that would not break, the taste of the tyrant filling her mouth, coating her teeth, inescapable, her every breath now a gift from a tyrant that filled her.

Elika could not see the left serpent, the first to attack her, the sinister snake. Its scales felt like sand along her breasts, down her belly, across her hips. Her eyes went wide and she flailed, kicking with her legs and grasping with her hands, but what was her sad mortal strength compared to Ahzi Dahāka?

Her strength was as nothing.

Ahzi Dahāka pried her legs open as the center snake penetrated her core.

Held her legs open as the left snake dove into her rear.

She fought. Cried. Shook her head. Tightened herself. For a time she thought her strength was keeping him out of her, but then he pushed in, inch after agonizing inch, and she realized: he was taking her slowly to make the whole thing worse.

It felt like she was being ripped apart. She could feel the serpents in her cunt and her ass brushing against one another, pressing against one another, only thin skin keeping them apart, skin that was never meant for this sort of abuse. She was weeping, crying, her vision turning red as a haze settled over her, a terrible red haze. Everything hurt so badly as she was buffeted back and forth, up and down, the serpents expanding and contracting within her, pulling her where they willed, puppeting her in the crudest way imaginable.

This was a nightmare.

She was living a nightmare.

And she came. She came and came and not from pleasure, her body desperate to deal with the sensations being inflicted on her. Agonized cumming, orgasms erupting along her in an effort to keep her mind from shattering.

She heard the low chuckling, the lust, the hatred – the demons that had feared her only moments ago recognizing her weakness and hungering for her once more, seeing her as nothing more than a sheath for a thousand thousand corrupted cocks, her mouth as nothing more than a means for the Concubine and all those like her to steal their pleasure from her face.

He released her legs and let her quiver in ecstatic agony, suspended and held by her mouth and lower holes. He kept fucking her until her legs and arms went limp, until she sagged onto him, no longer fighting him, lost in the throes of a pleasure she would never want. Her cum and tears trailed down on him, seeping along his shoulders.

“ORMAZZZD'SSS WORLD ISSS PASSST.” The words came from inside her, making her breasts bounce and distending her belly. Vaguely, she could see the serpents thrusting in and out of her, pushing her belly out from the inside, the words spoken inside her sending tremors along her body. She felt boneless, weightless, lifeless, every spoken word shattering her with a masochistic cum. *“THISSS ISSS ALL THAT ISSS LEFT OF THE LIGHT.”*

Ahzi Dahāka ruled her. He was her master, the master of this new world.

When he pulled out of her she lay gaping open, spasming in the sand at his feet. Sizzling black goo seeped out of her, staining the sand around her body.

“BEHOLD, THE LIGHT,” Ahzi Dahāka laughed, and the court laughed with him.

His hands curled in her hair, lifting her limp body up, shoving her legs open so that he could sheath his cock inside her. A hand grasped her torso, lifting her and dropping her, making her little more than a masturbatory aid. His serpent heads kissed her, bit her, all along her shoulders and face and breasts as he made her ride him, ride him, letting her scream out her confused agony, her wretched ecstasy.

When he let her go she fell to his feet, kissing them by instinct, praying to him – praying that he wouldn't hurt her anymore. She shuddered as he finished himself off, black sizzling cum coating her prone body, burning her skin.

“FIND EVERY RESSERVE OF YOUR DIGNITY,” Ahzi Dahāka told her. *“FIND EVERY SSSCRAP OF COURAGE. EVERY REMNANT OF HOPE. I WILL TAKE IT ALL FROM YOU, AGAIN AND AGAIN, UNTIL YOU FINALLY KNOW YOUR PLACCCE. AND THEN I WILL RETURN IT TO YOU AND MAKE YOU FORGET SO WE CAN DO IT ALL OVER AGAIN.”*

She lay beneath him and she could not sob, could not weep, and

Hey.

What? she thought.

Guess.

What?

Guess.

Are you still playing that stupid game?

You remember the rules, right? her Prince asked.

You see a thing and I have to guess that it is, she thought. It's a stupid game.

It passes the time, he said. So?

What?

Guess.

What's the first letter?

You do remember! he said, and they both laughed. P.

Prince?

“Hey, Princess,” her Prince said. “Miss me?”



Her Prince stood over her, carrying two swords blazing with pure white light. The dark court recoiled, surprised. The light in them ignited the light in her and she felt her skin knit, her mind heal. He looked at her with that stupid infectious grin of his.

“Sorry it took so long, but you you kind of ran out on me,” he said.

“I was trying to keep you safe,” she said.

“I figure the safest place is with the know-it-all magical princess,” he said. “Took a while to find you, had to find some things, you know how it is.”

“The two of us against a god?” she asked. She could stand. She did, hovering a few inches above the ground. She was glowing like the sun, revealing every ugly corrupt crevice living around the two of them.

“I brought some friends,” her Prince said.

The ruined doors burst open.

She recognized some of them – people she had grown up with that had fled their home for other places, now returned to fight Ahriman and Ahzi Dahāka and all the darkneses of the world.

Above them all, Ahriman roared.

“*HE'SSS COMING,*” Ahzi Dahāka said, standing. His serpents lashed out but her Prince danced in the sand, the light of his sabers knocking the serpents aside.

“I figure we're a pretty decent distraction,” her Prince said, “but if you can think of some way to end this before big bad Ahriman comes back, that would be great.”

“GET BACK,” the god hissed. “THIS IS MY WORLD NOW. WHERE WOULD YOU BE THAT I AM NOT ALSO THERE?”

Elika stared up at the God of Darkness, the source of every last nightmare, and felt the light in her flare.



And staring down nightmare, Elika felt touched by divinity.

Ormazd has a child named Ameretat, has a child whose name can mean Healing but can also mean Immortality.

And what is Immortality if it is not a chance to Heal?

So many people strive to live forever, but it is only the pain they remember – scars in the soul. Without happiness, their immortality would make only monsters. Without light, without darkness, both become blinding, painful, a horror.

To Heal Immortality is to die.

Life comes from death, death feeds life.

This is how creation continues, finite and unbounded.

Her Prince's idiot game forced the player to take in the world, to marvel at each individual

miracle. All living things ride an explosion of light and darkness and have the arrogance to grow bored with the sheer impossibility of it all.

The gods were no better. How could they be? They had forever to heal but could not, were trapped as they were. Change requires death by degrees and immortality keeps that from happening. Did Ormazd realize the trap of it and die? Could a god die? What would that look like? How would a god change, thrive, heal, live on? Could divinity wait in a tree, in blood, in light? Could divinity continue to live breath, change, and grow? There is a way.

Immortality is death suspended, but death always takes its due.

Death is the only way that life can continue.



“I know what I have to do,” Elika said, flying above her Prince.

“I’ve got you,” he said, but what he really meant was *I love you*.

“I know.”

Below her, her Prince dueled Ahzi Dahāka. She looked down on the tyrant – how small he seemed now! She stared up, and up, and up at Ahriman.

“Your brother is dead,” she said, and Ahriman howled in triumph at her words.

“HOW WILL YOU STAND?” he demanded. “HOW WILL ANY OF YOU STAND AGAINST ME?”

“We couldn’t,” Elika soothed, rising like the dawn. “None of us could until things changed.”

And she saw it: the god that rose unchanging, the monster had had been created to be a single thing.

“You were made to stand against the light, but now that light is gone,” she said, staring up unblinking. “What are you?”

She heard Ahriman’s triumph turn to confusion, to horror.

Everything he thought he was abandoning him.

“It’s okay,” she said. She saw him falling and reached how, reaching towards infinity, weaving his light into the darkness, cradling it. “It’s okay. You don’t have to fight anymore.”

He tried.

Of course he tried.

He had been created to be evil but there was no need for that anymore. The world moved on. She kissed his forehead and held him as he healed, as he died.

The world shuddered.

Far away, over vast distances, stars rekindled in the night sky. The moon found light.

Over distant eastern mountains, the sun rose.



Ahzi Dahāka fell, just a man.

All the monsters were nothing more than men.

“Forgive me,” her father pleaded.

“No,” she said, looking down at him. “I don't owe you that.”

Her hands were empty and she fell. Her Prince was waiting, held out his hand and offered her his scarf as clothing.

“I never got your name,” she said.

“Thraitauna,” he said.

“That's a bit of a mouthful.”

“You can see why I never gave it.”

“I think I want to marry you.”

“If that's an actual proposal, I accept.”

“He's not a prince!” her father said, and she shot him a withering glare.

“Actually,” her Prince said. “Turns out my parents died fighting in a war that *was* theirs. I was hidden away to keep me safe. You ever hear of a place called Kavis?”

“I believe that's near the ocean?” Erika asked.

“It is,” her Prince said, grinning. “And we can travel in style. I brought two donkeys this time.”

He moved ahead of her, his hips swaying, his ass the most beautiful thing she had ever seen.

“I think I would like that,” she said, and followed, and left the past behind.

